

The recoiling relation to space undermines the humanist individual who ruled over objective knowledge, the knowledge that effectively had an “object.” This negativity is visually and spatially embodied in the rift between visibility and stability in Janssens’ work. In this context, Yeats’s famous line of epistemic anxiety, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” can be read as synonymous with Attie’s *Scene of the Crime*, as “How can we tell the shadow from the man, but also, from his victim?” or as synonymous with “How can we tell the reflection from the figures?” in Janssens’ *Le corps noir*. This possibility represents the contribution of these contemporary artists to a thinking-through of the relations between disciplines that does not proceed at the expense of the separate disciplines. Rather, these ideas benefit each of the disciplines involved. Through key metaphors, such as “to key to” and “to key in,” Silverman (1996) unwittingly provides a model for interdisciplinary relations which, through a local and almost incidental but crucially important keying-in, locks linguistics, philosophy, and by implication, film studies, to semiotics. Semiotics is not a master-discipline in this concatenation, but a gearshift or keyboard that negotiates the connections. And while it helps to do this, it also “takes” or “gets” from these other disciplines. Here, semiotics gets out of the exchange the enriching need to qualify a type of index as deixis, so as to articulate a visual semiotics in which two- and three-dimensionality merge.

The “Medusa effect” spells out the ambiguities, and even contradictions, of concrete space. We are, each of us, in the picture. But perhaps we should be worried, for the shadows we cast on space may get back at us, as Attie’s work intimates. In either case, though, the relation between subjectivity and space can neither be ignored and divorced from the body nor reduced to incorporation. The spooky, uncanny seriality of reversal in Janssens’ work can be seen as an allegory of a relation to space that both incorporates the subject and checks the subject’s tendency to incorporation.

Where space meets body, time is involved. Both the wavering on the edges explored in this chapter and the communicating through signs offered here for understanding are temporal processes. Whether negotiating subjectivity and space, exteriority and interiority, convexity and concavity, or traveling from sign to sign producing interpretants, the folds and curves of baroque matter engage an interactivity that can never be construed on the basis of stillness. In this respect, baroque materialism may be at its most radical when it does what *Medusa* does—holds the viewer in a temporality by dint of its spatial stickiness. It may, therefore, seem paradoxical that it is the antinarrative stance of baroque and contemporary baroque art that enforces such an inescapable sense of time. The following chapter is aligned with this one in that it further probes the consequences of such stickiness.

## SECOND-PERSON NARRATIVE

And the moment the story is elaborated, the boredom sets in; the story talks louder than the paint.

FRANCIS BACON

### Sticky Images

There is a way in which the double binary opposition between space and time, image and language oddly manages to stick around, to persist in our thinking about visual images. Although it is obvious that images can *evoke* or *represent* time—the past, the future, two or more moments simultaneously—it is more difficult to see how they can *be* in time, how they can unfold in time in the way that film and literature do: in a sequential development, a time axis whose continuity moves forward, even if different rhythms can bring temporal variations into play, as in fact they routinely do in those media. The difficulty of imagining the still image’s temporality beyond the obvious tricks is not surprising. Tricks, such as sequential seriality, the condensing of various moments into what is aptly called a “pregnant moment,” for example, as in the annunciation scenes where the Virgin is already pregnant, or temporal composites, have a long tradition and present no particular difficulty to interpretation. They are mostly narrative in content, thus spanning a stretch of time, although this does not make them less “still,” temporally stable, in material status and form. They leave the viewer free to either take them in, in one *Augenblick*, a glance, or to dwell on them for any length of time. That is, until Caravaggio challenged the idea of narrative time in painting altogether.

Many artists today seem to wish to challenge this stillness on a level that is neither related to content—or to narrative as content—nor rhythmic. Rather, their art, which is



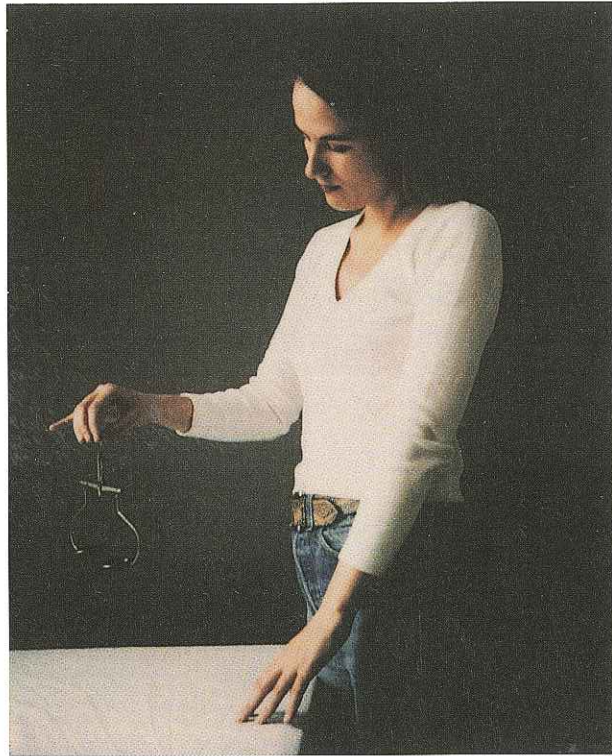


Figure 6.1. Jeannette Christensen, *The Passing of Time (Woman Holding a Balance)*, 1994. Polaroid, approx. 3 1/2 x 3 in.

the art I will discuss in this chapter, makes time its business, on a level that simultaneously acknowledges and challenges the fixity of the visual image: the fixity of process in “real” time. Paradoxically, these artists all “quote,” refer to, lean on, or recycle, Caravaggio, the painter who allegedly “destroyed painting” by disrupting narrative. Specifically, they quote the narrative dimension of his work, which is its appeal to an interaction with the viewer, to its own processing in time. This processing is evoked, represented, and simultaneously “enforced” in what I would like to call “sticky images”: images that *hold* the viewer, enforcing an experience of temporal variation.

According to Marin, *Medusa* held two incompatible moments. But the challenge to the image’s stillness stems not from there but from the movement through space that sets the snakes in motion and induces the time-consuming hesitation between spatial attitudes in the viewer. Norwegian artist Jeannette Christensen, of whom I spoke briefly earlier, makes time her primary concern. Some of her works are literally sticky. On a primary level, she appeals to our cultural memory, imposing associations, not only with Rembrandt, Vermeer, Caravaggio and

other Old Masters, up to Mapplethorpe, but also with the old stories these masters put before us as if they were the substance of history: Lucretia, the Last Judgment, the Doubting Thomas (see chap. 1, fig. 1.2). It is only through such collective, cultural memories that we can look at the images surrounding us today. Roughly half of her *Ostentatio* (1994) installation, in which *Ostentatio Vulnerum* was exhibited, consists of frames filled with different colored Jell-O, while the remainder consists of polaroids after and laser copies of Old Masters. Christensen’s 1994 polaroid series of Vermeer poses is called *The Passing of Time* (fig. 6.1).

David Reed’s painting #275 (1989) is a horizontal strip measuring 26" x 102", divided horizontally into a thin strip at the top, and two more or less equal halves at the bottom, the lower half being distinguished by an additional layer of color; the whole is covered with waves, folds, perhaps representing brush strokes (fig. 6.2). It is quite characteristic of Reed’s work. It “agrees” with Francis Bacon’s suspicion of narrative in painting, as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, and explores a narrative that whispers instead of talking too loud; the narrative that *is* the paint, instead of its rival. Christensen’s emphasis on matter-with-a-memory and Reed’s antinarrative both illuminate, redirect, and then probe further Caravaggio’s narrative-in-the-flesh. They do so by changing our perception of temporality, by binding it to and in space. Reed is a fundamentally baroque painter. It is in the baroque tradition that he finds the kind of “second-personhood” that enables him to narrate outside of the realm of figuration, but in a more intensely narra-

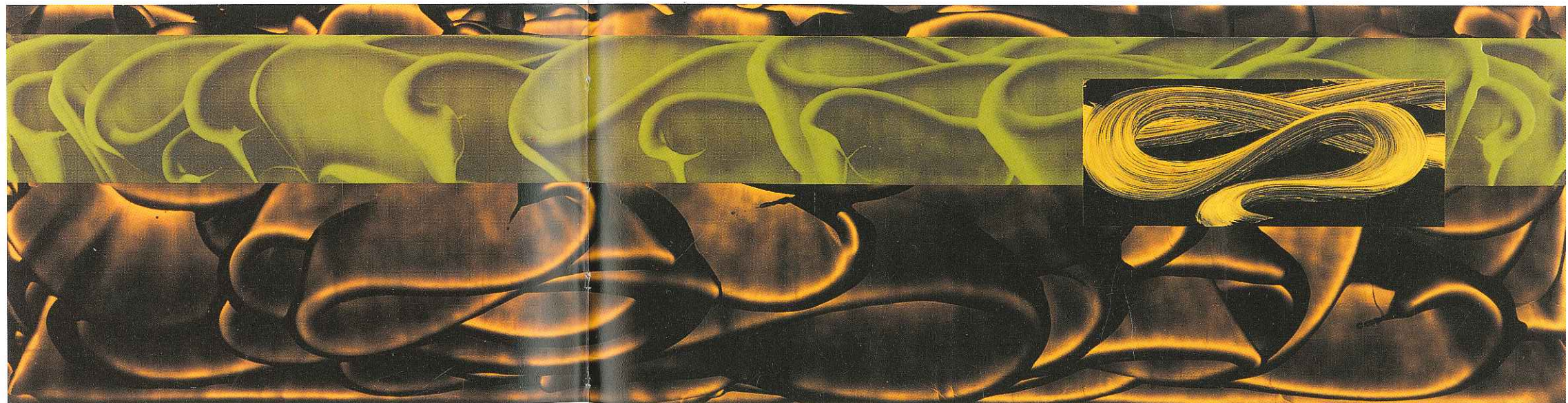


Figure 6.2. David Reed, #275, 1989. Oil and alkyd on linen, 26 x 102 in. Collection of Ronald and Linda Daitz, New York. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley.



tive way. This baroque narrativity comes about by means of an erotic engagement of the eye which, after initially bouncing away, then glues itself to the surface, like Marcel Proust's narrator to the cheek of his beloved grandmother. These two totally different artists are the principal characters in this chapter. They both engage Caravaggio's "second-person" mode of narration by way of a kind of glue; they make, each in totally different ways, "sticky images."

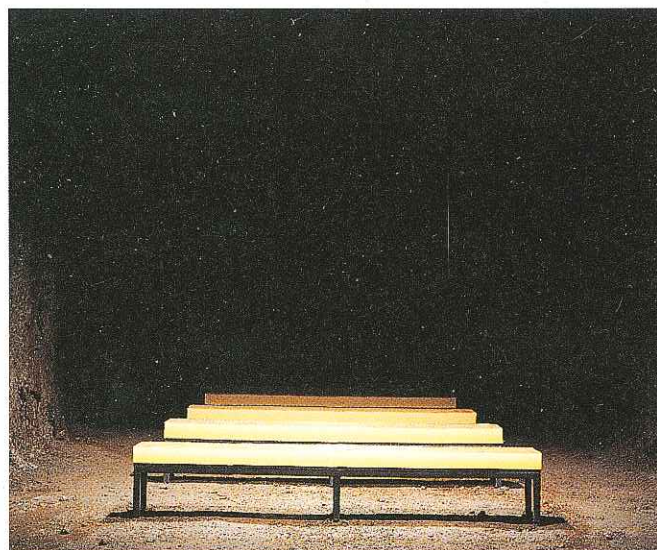
#### Time Out

Christensen's 1993 work *Horizontal Vertical* consists of two gigantic ladders of Jell-O resting on marble chips. The ladders form a whole made of a substance we know of only as an instant dessert that we eat and forget, and that big whole lies upon chips, bits, small pieces, of the very material which stands for eternal art, classical sculpture, and such universal beauties as the Venus of Milo and Greek male bodies. Monumental works, allegedly chipped into pieces, here replaced by monumental pieces of gelatine but remaining as the base, as the background on which the contemporary sculpture of transience lies (fig. 6.3).

Since they are subject to change over time, these Jell-O works inscribe time and thus inscribe the installation itself in time, as an intervention in the present, in a culture whose long past makes the present frightfully hasty and time-ridden. Christensen's installation *Every Day Is a Miracle*, which was included in a group show in Kotka (Fin-

Figure 6.3. Jeannette Christensen, *Horizontal Vertical*, 1993. Installation of two Jell-O ladders on marble. P.S. 1 Museum, New York.

Figure 6.4. Jeannette Christensen, *Every Day Is a Miracle*, 1995, Kotka, Finland. Installation of seven benches covered with gelatine. Each bench is approx. 98 1/2 x 13 7/8 x 15 3/4 in.



land) in the summer of 1995, consisted of seven golden-yellow, gelatine-covered benches placed in a bomb shelter. It was very hot outside, and very cold inside the shelter. The clear and precisely cut gelatine contrasted with the rough stone and dripping walls of the shelter. The contrast pushed the shelter back in time, turning it into a prehistoric grotto as much as a historic souvenir of human violence in the twentieth century. (Pre)historic and transient spoke to each other through light. One lamp, a single bulb, illuminated the first two of the seven benches, so that the others receded into the background, as into time's darkness (fig. 6.4).

The yellow gelatine caught the light, whatever bit of light there was, absorbed it, and gave it life. Thus it became the embodiment of Christensen's relationship with history: she absorbs the past, the light that shines from it, and sends it back out, from the innermost core of her artistic self. The light changed according to the angle of vision, the time of day, the moment during the exhibition when the gelatine began to mold, to become opaque, to emphasize its own transience, and to stink, which took its toll on the guard on duty. The eye's struggle to see the light became more fierce as time went by. Light is not a given but a live being, a friend or an enemy, an ally or an opponent, an aid or an impediment, that lives in time (fig. 6.5).

Like the Jell-O sculptures, the polaroids of Vermeer poses are also images of time. The medium of the polaroid is the very opposite to that of the lasting work of art. But it is also the medium of the snapshot. In this capacity it grasps momentaneous existence by fixing time. By grasping time through light and fixing time by underscoring the differ-



Figure 6.5. Jeannette Christensen, *Every Day Is a Miracle*, 1995, Kotka, Finland. Installation of seven benches covered with gelatine: after four weeks.



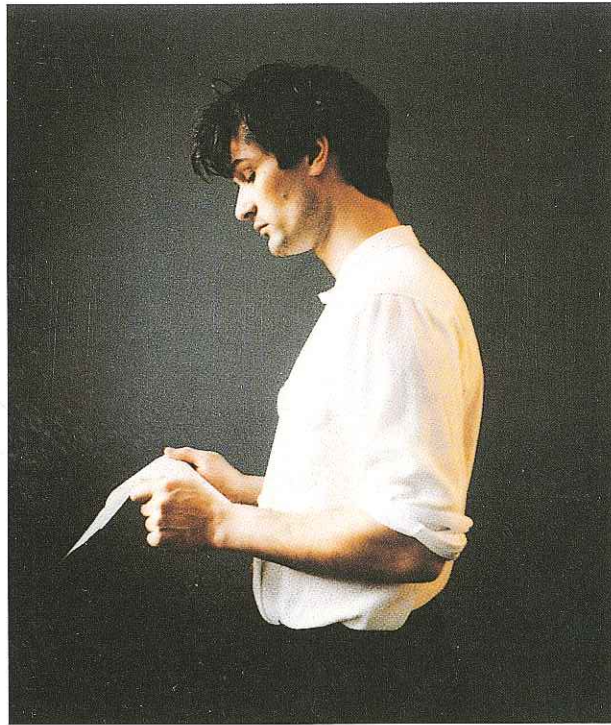


Figure 6.6. Jeannette Christensen, *The Passing of Time (Girl Reading a Letter)*, 1995. Polaroid, approx. 3 1/2 x 3 in.

ence, Christensen reaches over four centuries, boldly appropriating the Old Master pieces. Using polaroid, she simultaneously undermines the grasp; as soon as the polaroids are made, the process of fading begins, and the Old Master piece is revealed as a live creature subject to decay (fig. 6.6).

*Différance*, detour and deferral, detour through deferral, time in and through space, is staged here. *Différance* is also the answer to the quandary of meaning-production over time in Christensen's *Sculpture* that was displayed in the window of the Steen & Strøm department store in Oslo in 1995. Here, she installed a white silk slip, and illuminated it from above, with a fan underneath connected to a timer. The fan went on and off every other minute. The slip rose slowly, stood up quivering (especially the shoulder strips tried to get up without quite managing), then slowly collapsed in a pose of prayer, imploring, like a woman fallen to her knees in despair, or an animal, a living being, succumbing, giving up, submitting. The merciless rhythm of the timer transformed the flimsy slip, that slight silky tube of light, into a continuing cycle of life (fig. 6.7).

Time tends to infuse narrativity into the objects it holds. Christensen's 1996 installation has an untranslatable title: *Tiden lager alle sår*, a pun on "tiden leger alle sår": "Time heals all wounds" becomes "time makes all wounds." Different, but just as ambiguous and ambivalent as the English expression "killing time." This installation, especially in terms of its temporality, can be seen within the framework of cultural memory (fig. 6.8).

Seven benches again, this time the size of human bodies and covered with bright red gelatine. The walls were painted, three quarters up, in a very clinical light green color; a "withdrawn" color, unfortunately not conveyed by the photograph. You wouldn't have noticed it if it had not been interrupted; you would have simply thought it had something to do with the light. The green held the room together and turned it into a kind of *waiting* room—a room of empty time. The benches in all their splendor, one after another, filled the room with

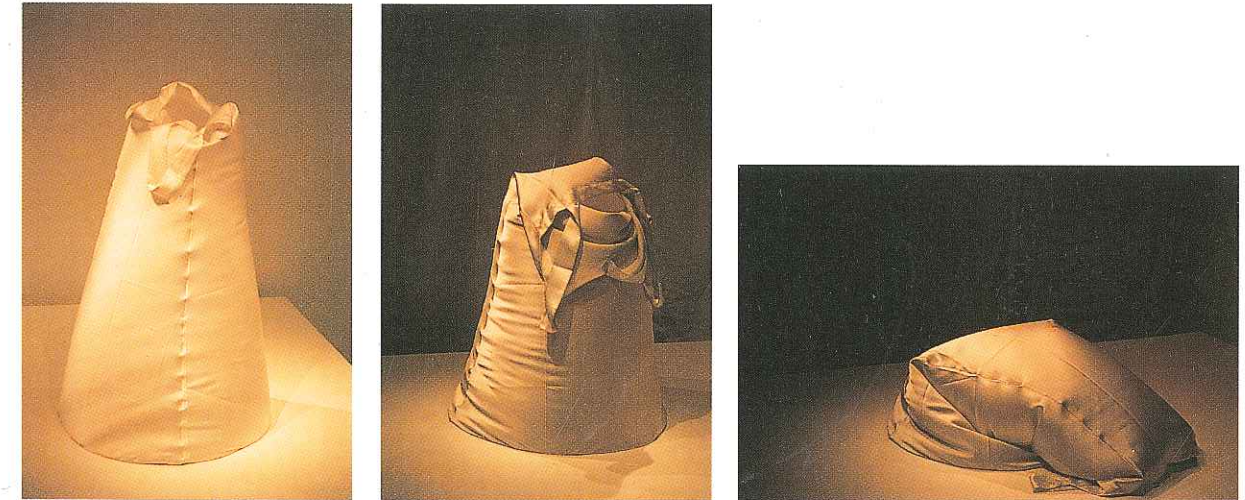


Figure 6.7. Jeannette Christensen, *Sculpture*, 1995, Steen & Strøm storefront window exhibition, Oslo. Installation of white silk slip, fan, and timer.



Figure 6.8. Jeannette Christensen, *Tiden lager alle sår*, 1996. Installation of seven benches covered with red gelatine. Courtesy Atle Gerhardson Gallery, Oslo.



brightness, translucent optimism, beauty. Precise and monumental, the benches were also unpretentious, informal. They suggested indulgence, eating disorders, the flipping of scale between small and gigantic that also evokes the grotesque body. Feminine, in a way the earlier works are not, they seem to represent the substance and shapes of desire.

Yet, human-sized as they are, blood-red in a clinical green room, they also evoked wounded bodies, fallen soldiers. During one moment, at the beginning of the show, when they were still fresh and brilliant, the enigma of sexual and temporal difference came into being and the ambiguity remained: desire, deadly wounds, feminine voluptuousness built on happy, slightly nostalgic childhood memories of Sunday desserts, and already future altars in honor of scarred, disintegrating bodies, sacrificed. Humorous and hyperbolic, deeply serious and mournful. The sweet smell of the dessert soon turns into a sickly smell evocative of blood.

One of the tools of this construction of a complex temporality that is both material and bodily is the mobilization of other senses than vision alone. Visitors touch the Jell-O; they want to taste it, and some do. The smell attracts and then repulses. In a different way but similar mode, these works are like Jackie Brookner's gigantic tongue, which literally licks the pollution out of the water as the mosses and plants lick nourishment from the tongue. The memory of matter involves the senses of taste and smell rather than vision: senses that rightfully incorporate instead of colonizing, senses of intimacy rather than distancing and mapping.

Both Christensen and Brookner insist that matter has a memory, just as a culture does. Cultural memory is a function of the subject in time. As I suggested in chapter 2, this notion provides a basis that is subject-oriented, for connecting the subject and object of historical knowledge. Memory in the form of history is filled with nostalgic longing as much as with horror. At the basis of the generalized cultural preoccupation with history lies a desire to escape the past that an ideology of progress keeps instilling in us all, a desire to keep it at arm's length. Cultural memory must bridge this gap. Works such as this installation, with the warm light that infuses our memories, restore the bond with the past without which we cannot live.<sup>1</sup>

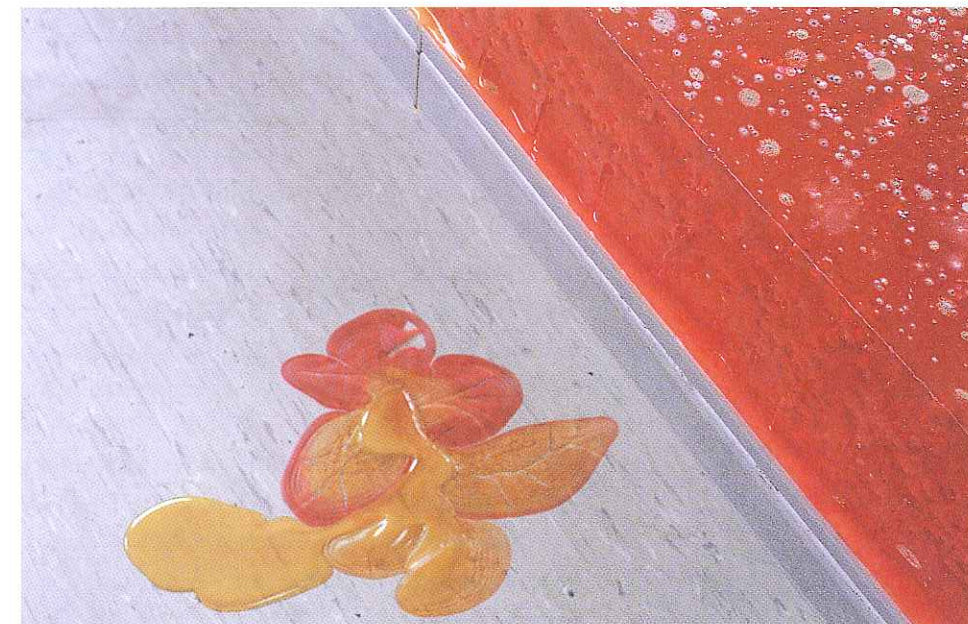
But then, time came in to do its work. "Risking who she is," to recycle Susan Suleiman's beautiful book title (1996), Christensen yields to time, abandons her power over her own creations, lets time be (fig. 6.9). In *Tiden*, the benches started to grow mold, dry, harden in some places, liquefy in others. Decay became part of the play. Something totally unpredictable and unforeseen happened as well. Some of the benches started to drip and bleed, making gorgeous pools on the floor in suggestive shapes. The unexpected

1. On the longing for a bond with the past, see Ankersmit (in press).



Figure 6.9. Jeannette Christensen, *Tiden lager alle sår*, 1996. Installation of seven benches covered with red gelatin. Detail: benches molding (after three weeks).

Figure 6.10. Jeannette Christensen, *Tiden lager alle sår*, 1996. Installation of seven benches covered with red gelatin. Detail: colors separating (after three weeks).





effect of “the passing of time” was the separation of colors (fig. 6.10). Whereas the entire process was a matter of merging and blurring boundaries, the colors, all on their own, moved in the opposite direction. They split again into red and yellow. A golden yellow overlaid and espoused the red, to create erotic shapes that became strong metaphors for erotic desire as imagined inside the body. Red and yellow playing together, blood and urine, voluptuous golden desire. Time’s work performed here to produce a perfect convergence of the work of the artist, the public, and matter, over time.

Temporality, then, is an important, if not the major, instrument for the production of the kind of “correlative” engagement that this art explores. Christensen’s benches and the work of time upon them are to be emphatically distinguished from two approaches to time in relation to images. The first is the formalist analysis of the “morphological problems of duration in series and sequence” (Kubler 1962, viii), which is an attempt to describe how “they [desirable things] fill time with shapes of a limited variety” (1).

In spite of its promising title and its insistent return to the theme of duration, Kubler’s book is more focused on sequential order than on duration proper. The difficulty of defining and analyzing duration, of which Kubler speaks repeatedly, keeps displacing his attention from the shape *of* time to shape *in* time. This shift results from its comparative approach even more than from its other obvious limitation, of formalism.<sup>2</sup> This inherent formalism paradoxically prevents Kubler from taking the art itself seriously as a form of thought *on* duration.<sup>3</sup> Christensen’s Jell-O works, in contrast, are neither limited to their status of thing, since they involve the viewer (or eater, grabber, sniffer) in the construction of embodied time, nor to being autonomous shapes placed within duration. Instead, they *are*, they embody, both duration and a theory of its importance to all the senses. They give body to a concept like *compimento del tempo*, perhaps best rendered as achievement or fulfillment of time (Perniola 1983).

The second approach from which this work must be distinguished is probably best, if not irreverently, indicated as the “paranoid” approach. It is based on an indictment of the concurrence of visual imagery and speed that dates back to Walter Benjamin. I am referring to notions, briefly discussed in chapter 2, of speed and endless images, which characterized modernity for Walter Benjamin (1969). Indeed, that distinction is their primary effect. These dripping benches are postmodern precisely because they acknowledge their inevitable existence in modernity yet refuse the fleeting pace of modernity that generates indifference. In fact, they appear critical of this negative view of images-in-time. In opposition to it, Christensen’s benches, fundamentally inscribed in short duration, still draw the viewer into an experience of time that also happens in extreme slow-motion. The decay of the Jell-O is a process: it can be followed from day to

2. The paradigmatic status that Kubler attributes to the Mexican conquest (1962, 59) as a process of mutual influence looks different when viewed through Appadurai’s book (1986), which is not on the “history of things” but on the “social life of things.”

3. Kubler, clearly a student of Focillon, whose *Vie des formes* (1958) he helped promote in the English-speaking world, defines his project of writing the “history of things” as follows: “But the ‘history of things’ is intended to reunite ideas and objects under the rubric of visual forms: the term includes both artifacts and works of art, both replicas and unique examples, both tools and expressions—in short all materials worked by human hands under the guidance of connected ideas developed in temporal sequence. From all these things a shape in time emerges (1962, 9; emphasis added).”

day, it affects the object through tiny differences whose temporality is emphatic at each given moment. But the desire to witness these changes enforces slowing down the very pace so deplored by Benjaminians.

This intervention cannot be understood in terms of visibility only. Nor can it be realized as long as “art” remains theory’s other—or history’s other, for that matter. It is through the most important defining aspect of the sculptures that its most important insight into cultural history is articulated. By the double move of integrating multisensual attraction and disgusting decay into one work, one thing, the bench sculptures challenge the paranoid view of contemporary culture. On the one hand, they “say” that visual culture today is not locked up in speed and that continuing to believe this deprives us of the ability to slow down and intensify the experience of time. The negative characterization of our time as a visual overload is a rather nostalgic paranoia that is essentially modernist and harks back to the fifties and the early days of television. On the other hand, in an altogether different mood, the benches also intensify our experience of duration in the face of its irremediable link with disease and death. To see how this double effect is achieved, it is useful to reinsert these benches into a context—cultural memory—that makes explicit their relationship to the past.

*Tiden lager alle sår* is, also, a work of materialist history in a specific sense; it is history according to Leibniz’s view of matter: “[N]o two things can be alike, but in a material thing there is always something that bears the traces of its earlier state, so that its cause can be discovered in it.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, matter has a memory; today, at a time when the AIDS epidemic is just barely, perhaps, beginning to subside in the West, this is a painfully important insight. Works of art also have a memory. And so does a culture. In a temporality that integrates history and repetition, the later state, the memory of the previous states, is part of the identity of the material object, of the culture. Christensen’s work releases the story of matter’s memory.

This is how “time matters” in a work that is self-consciously “presentist,” contemporary, not historical in the traditional sense. As I mentioned in chapter 2, rather than being present in the form of “influence,” the past is present in the present in the form of traces, precise but fractured and therefore seemingly diffuse memories, traces that are material but that also, in their bond with realism, signify and are relevant to semiotic theory.<sup>5</sup> Traces such as Caravaggio’s dirty nails, which recall to the viewer the appeal to the touch of the fleshy figures, the muscular shoulders, and the soft fabrics of baroque folds, but also the stench of decay that made Caravaggio’s *Death of the Virgin* so inappropriate, because too dead.<sup>6</sup> Christensen’s decaying Jell-O—what could be a less appropriate matter for art?—opens our senses to the experience of “just seeing” Caravaggio.

4. See Russell 1967, 424.

5. “Une telle pensée, réaliste et—hypothétiquement—baroque, est naturellement orientée vers le temps, la temporalité de toute chose, puisque le travail figuratif des forces est temporel” (Brandt 1996, 98).

6. On this painting, see Pamela Askew’s detailed study (1990).



### Nonfigurative Narrative

Time is made present in a different way by David Reed, although the mobilization of the different senses is also part of his arsenal. Usually his work is called *abstract*, and if that term is opposed to *figurative*, then it certainly is. But if *abstract* is used in the sense assigned to that term in other contexts, that is, to mean the opposite of *concrete*, *tangible*, then I would argue that it emphatically is not. It is neither disembodied nor rationalistic; it is extremely sensuous. Nor is Reed's work expressionist; on the contrary, Reed appears to oppose the whole idea of abstract expressionism, most emphatically in the work of two of its major exponents, Pollock and de Kooning. His work has nothing of the tangible layering of brush strokes that is the most distinctive mark of a certain brand of abstract expressionism. Nowhere is there the mark of the artist's hand.

The main reason why the label *abstract* sits uneasily on Reed's work is that his work is somehow, multivalently, and innovatively, *narrative*. I mean this quite specifically and literally. I would like to propose a category or "genre" of nonfigurative narrative painting, and I see Reed's painting #275 as a prototypical example of that genre, if not a "theoretical" elaboration and creative invention of it (figs. 6.2, 6.11). It is in this specific sense that Reed's work quotes Caravaggio.<sup>7</sup>

As I have proposed elsewhere, a narrative can be defined as an account—in whatever medium—of a *fabula* presented in a certain manner (*Narratology*, 1997c). The medium can be film, language, or painting. The *fabula* is usually considered as a temporally and logically connected sequence of events. It comes across as a *story* by means of the semantization of characters, the concretization and subjectification of space into place, the "thickening" of a sense of time through a variety of devices, and, most important of all, through *focalization*. This term indicates the connection between the events that make up the *fabula* and the one or more subjects whose "perspective" or "point of view" on—or whose subjective engagement with—the events is represented in the narrative. Focalization is crucial to the meaning of a story, including its affective meaning or emotional effect, and to the ontological status of what is represented, to its status as fiction. The term indicates one of the essential ideas that contemporary baroque art, and especially literature, has derived from Leibniz. In this regard Ruth Ronen wrote, "[S]ince in a fictional world focalizers are inseparable from other world-components (every fictional object is presented from a point of view), the ontological implications invested in focal-differentiations are crucial to any description of fictional worlds" (1994, 179). As this passage suggests, focalization makes fictional events, even the most daringly imaginative ones, plausible to real-world participants. Thus, it helps *fabulas* be accepted that would

7. The following account of Reed's work is more "theoretical," in the sense of the kind of visual theorizing that is central to this study, than Carrier's account of the way Reed "learned from" Caravaggio (1994, 219–44). Much of Carrier's account is compatible with mine. Carrier juxtaposes explicit narratives of Old Master painting with implicit narrative in Reed's work. I focus more on the specific narrativity of Caravaggio as being not only taken up but also illuminated by Reed. See also Tiffany Bell 1987 on the baroque quality of Reed's work.

otherwise cease to make sense. They become plausible, not real, but so plausible that they can make you happy or sick, as we know now from "entering" virtual reality.

The difficulty in defining—constructing or "re"-constructing—the *fabula* in no way disqualifies a work as narrative, or qualifies what kind of narrative it is. But, ultimately, at least two related events must be involved for a work to be called narrative in more than just metaphorical terms.

In literature, narratives as accounts have a "speaker," a voice that utters the account, called the narrator.<sup>8</sup> This voice may be either "invisible" or "imperceptible," because uttering sentences only "in the third person," or emphatically audible, as in "first-person" narrative. In painting, the abstract expressionism of artists like Pollock and de Kooning, by virtue of the emphatic inscription of the hand of the artist, comes close to being "first-person" narrative. This tells the story of its making, and the various layers or splashes of paint "tell" about the temporally distinct phases of that making. In contrast, images that eliminate references to the painting process present their objects, or contents, in a "third-person" mode.

David Carrier (1994) described this distinction as being the one between "deictic" and "diegystic" painting. The first term is based on the linguistic category of deixis, those elements which, as I mentioned earlier, have no reference but only make sense in relation to the person—in the grammatical sense—the place, and the moment of utterance—here, the moment of making. The second term focuses all attention on content; it is based on the Greek-derived term *diegesis*, which was given new currency by Gérard Genette (1972). In both cases, if content can be described in terms of a sequence of events, we can use the terminology of narrative.

### First Person, Second Person, Same Person<sup>9</sup>

Carrier's distinction, although quite common, omits a third possibility, the one I want to focus on in this section. My interpretation of Reed's #275 is based on a particular genre or mode of narrative, a seldom used one that is perceived as artificial or experimental—that of narrative in the second person. This is a particularly difficult mode of writing.

In literature, Michel Butor's novel *La modification* (1957) is one of the few examples of a novel written consistently in the second person. In the beginning, this grammatical form hampers the smooth narrative reading commonly associated with the genre. But, fortunately for a compulsive reader of novels like myself, it soon becomes almost inevitable that the narrative takes over, and one is able to sit back and follow the adventures of the protagonist on his train ride between Paris and Rome, between his wife and his lover.

8. It must be borne in mind that this concept of voice is metaphorical in literature as well; see Bal 1994c.

9. Under this title, but followed by a question mark, I wrote an analysis of the play with second-personhood as an epistemological device in two contemporary works of scholarship, one of which is Damisch's *Origin of Perspective* (1994). This use will become more directly relevant in the concluding section of this chapter. See chapter 5 of my *Double Exposures* (1996a).



The narrative nature of this novel seems to be dependent on the fact that the second person cannot be sustained; without much effort, the reader “translates” it into first-person format, which enables her to read on and process the text into a story. The “you” cannot be subsumed by the reader’s position, nor can it be construed as the addressee of apostrophe, as in lyrical poetry.<sup>10</sup> The “you” is simply an “I” in disguise, a “first-person” narrator talking to himself; the novel is a “first-person” narrative with a formal twist to it that does not engage the entire narrative situation, as one expects it should. Christensen’s voluntary yielding to time and the visitors that pass along as time, too, passes show by contrast how formalistic Butor’s device is.<sup>11</sup>

Although the normalizing effect of narrative reading at the expense of second-personhood cannot be sensed in a short quotation, I submit that the following passage from *La modification* in all its brevity already fails to sustain the second-personhood which is its overt narrative mode:

If you were afraid of missing the train to whose movement and sound you are now already accustomed again, it is not because you woke up later than you planned this morning, since, to the contrary, your first movement upon opening your eyes was to extend your arm to prevent the alarm from going off, while dawn was beginning to sculpt the disordered sheets of your bed, the sheets which emerged from the dark like defeated phantoms trampled on that soft and warm floor from which you tried to tear yourself away.<sup>12</sup>

This passage has the appearance of a so-called interior monologue, that equally artificial mode of narration in the first person which seeks to eliminate reference to the first-person voice in favor of a silent first-person focalizer. It is the focalizer who is “afraid,” who has the memory of what happened “upon opening [his] eyes,” and saw the effect of light. *You* might just as well be replaced by *I*.

There is a precise reason for this easing back into the very traditional narrative from which the author sought to estrange his readers. The relapse is a consequence of the “essence” of Butor’s failure to take seriously the purpose of the second person, which is to be, to act out, the essence of language. As we have already seen, according to Benveniste’s theory of the importance of deixis, the “essence” of language lies in deixis, not reference, because what matters in language is not the world “about” which subjects communicate, but the constitution of the subjectivity required to communicate in the first place. The pronouns *I* and *you*, as opposed to *she*, *he*, *they* and the like, are totally empty in themselves. They do not refer outside of the situation in which they are uttered. Each utterance is performed by an *I* and addressed to a *you*. This second person is crucial, for it is that subject which confirms the *I* as a speaker. Conversely, the *you* becomes

10. On the poetics of apostrophe, see Culler 1981; on the political implications, see Johnson 1987.

11. The most important study of Butor’s text is Rossum-Guyon’s (1970).

12. “Si vous aviez peur de le manquer, ce train au mouvement et au bruit duquel vous êtes maintenant déjà réhabitué, ce n’est pas que vous vous soyez réveillé ce matin plus tard que vous l’aviez prévu, puisque, bien au contraire, votre premier mouvement, comme vous ouvriez les yeux, c’a été d’étendre le bras pour empêcher que ne se déclenche la sonnerie, tandis que l’aube commençait à sculpter les draps en désordre de votre lit, les draps qui émergeaient de l’obscurité semblables à des fantômes vaincus, écrasés au ras de ce sol mou et chaud dont vous cherchiez à vous arracher” (Butor 1957, 16; my translation).

an *I* as soon as the perspective shifts. It is only as (a potential) *I* that the *you* has the subjectivity to act, and hence, to confirm the subjectivity of the previous *I*.<sup>13</sup>

What is lacking in *La modification* is that very essential feature of deixis: the reversibility, the exchange, of the first and second person. Not only is the *you* a clearly distinct, even semantically dense, individual doing certain things, but the other people in his life, hence, in the fabula, are consistently described in the third person. The *you* is cut off from the others, or cuts them off, so that rather than mutually confirming one another’s subjectivity, the figure of this *you* lapses into an autistic monologism. The pronoun *you* becomes a reminder of the alienation, that recession of subjectivity rather than fulfillment of it. As a consequence, the *you* can never be identified with the reader, nor is the reader the *you*’s symmetrical counterpart, the *I*. There is simply no *you* whose turn-taking will make the written *you* into an *I*. I contend, therefore, that Butor has based his novel on a misconception of deixis.<sup>14</sup>

Butor’s novel is an exception that seems to prove the rule that narrative’s most appropriate modes are first- and third-person narration. When we oppose, together with Carrier (1994), Cézanne and Morandi to Chardin, or abstract expressionism to neorealism, the distinction seems to fit.<sup>15</sup> But Reed’s work demonstrates, in a way that none of these examples do, that a more adequate understanding of deixis, as the essence of language or, broader, of communication, can inform a mode of painting that succeeds better than Butor’s narrative in foregrounding the second person in its essential relation of exchange with the first. Conversely, I also want to demonstrate how narratology can inform our reading of painting, including nonfigurative painting. Thus, while Reed’s work, like that of the other artists discussed in this study, will be engaged here as “theoretically” rich, narratology will be offered as visually pertinent. I will argue that the ontological question, whether #275—or any second-person narrative—can be “properly” qualified as narrative, is an ill-fated one by definition.

### Time, in Two Episodes

Time has such a self-evidence about it that it is mostly neglected both in semiotic theory and in the study of visual art.<sup>16</sup> In this section I emphasize the temporality of Reed’s painting in order to break this habit, and then explore the consequences of such a break. As has often been noticed, most of Reed’s work, including #275, emphatically counters the expressionism of his abstract predecessors, so much so that one can read a meta-statement, a theoretical position, into it. As McEvilley puts it, “Past styles, already so constructed, would themselves be used as building blocks for constructing new metastyles. . . .

13. An abstract expressionism of the deictic kind does exist; see Krauss 1993.

14. Irene Kacandes (1993, 1994) is much more positive about Butor’s novel as second-person narrative. For some important implications of second-person narrative, see also Richardson 1991.

15. I would take issue with Chardin as a “diegystic” painter; whereas Carrier is right to claim that Chardin does not display self-reference, the tactility of his works as well as the instability of focus that force the eye to rove about their surfaces make it deictic in the sense of “second person” as well as narrative; see Bryson 1989.

16. Even when no time is perceptible, it is still logically consistent to reckon with it. See Lubbe and Zoest 1997a.



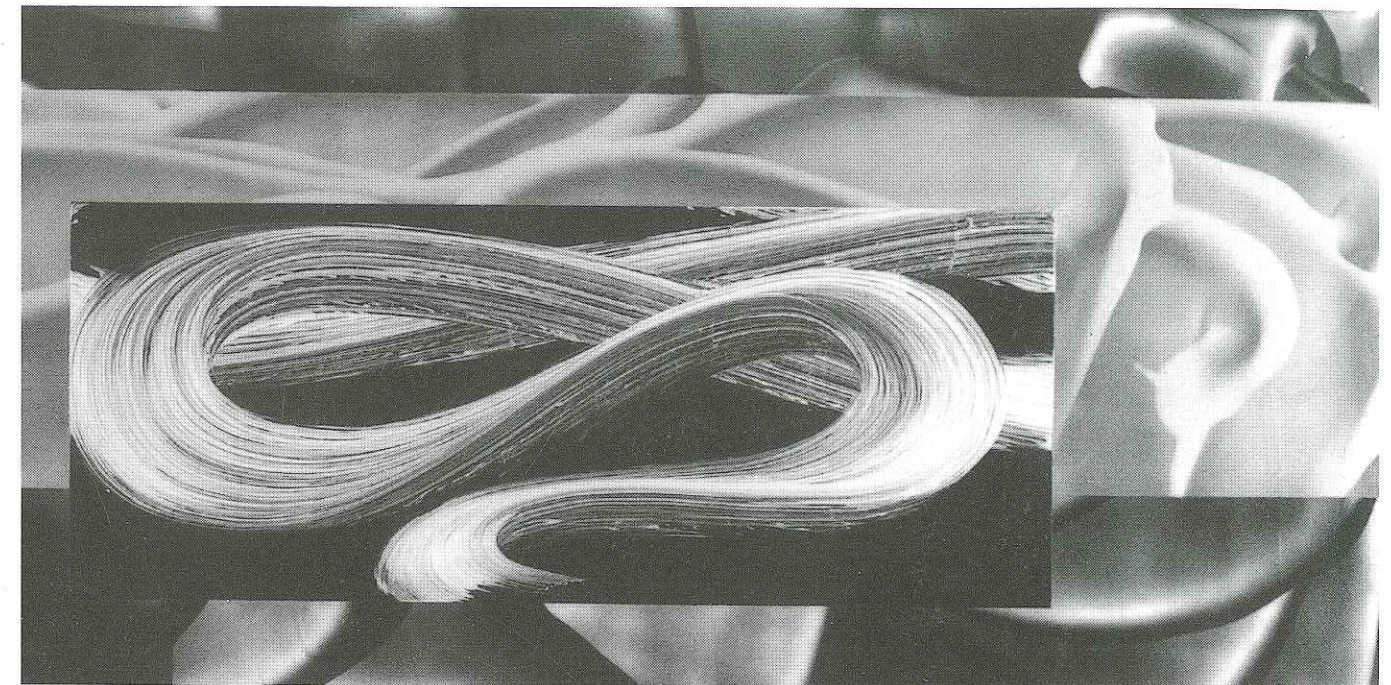
A classic art historical style became a brush stroke, so to speak. Or past cultural icons became found objects" (1993, 171). Instead of marking the canvas with visible traces of paint and paint handling, he offers a surface so smooth and shiny that the eye, as Hanne Loreck puts it, "bounces off it."<sup>17</sup> Thus, the two events required to make up a minimal narrative are already in place even in so simple and primary a reading: the eye goes to the canvas, then bounces back.

But narrative, as Bakhtin has taught us, is not simply an account of events. The discourse of narrative is a heterogeneous collection of quotations of interdiscursive provenance. Here, the narrative is immediately complicated by the implied "discussion" with expressionism, and, as I will argue, the narrative sets expressionism off against Caravaggio.

For this is not a matter of a simple opposition. Reed's relation to the history of art, his position within the texture of that history, is much more complex than that. The artist actually attaches great importance to this historical attitude. In an article he wrote together with David Carrier, this point is made quite explicitly. Reflecting on influence, and the anxiety about it, the authors state the importance of such self-reflection: "Seeking the source for an image, some art historians conceive of it as a design that an artist borrows without considering the implications of the act of borrowing." This view implies a critique of mechanical iconography similar to the one I formulated in the introduction. The authors continue by stating the reason why such source studies remain unsatisfactory: "[T]his generational struggle in which an individual finds his identity by struggling with his father figures is a patriarchal vision of history. We seek a history of art less concerned with struggle against the past than learning from it" (Carrier and Reed 1991, 44). This explicit anti-oedipal statement is confirmed by the complex, and basically constructive, yet dialogic and relatively autonomous play with predecessors' art in his #275.

Clearly, one "selfish" reason to shun oedipal antagonism is that it hampers one's own possibilities. One can only take a position against something else if one speaks, at least partially, the same language. Reed's relation to abstract expressionism of the "I"-oriented kind is part of a development in viewing time that helps the painting become narrative. The eye bounces off but then returns right away, for there is something so emphatically "tugging" in the surface that after having been kicked off it because one came with the wrong—expressionist, tactile—assumption, one is drawn back into the surface on new terms. Then, the second "episode" of looking takes place, the one that engages the eye in a different kind of tactility. This time, the eye stays longer, thus subjectively modifying the quality of time.

17. The sentence continues: "... as if off a mirror that produces an image by giving it back" (Loreck 1993, 77). I take issue with this interpretation later on.



The painting asks that the viewer at first "think" abstract expressionism, that he step back, then return; without the false start, the effect that replaces it would not so easily take hold. This is one of the reasons why, here and there, the waves are made to "look like" brush strokes, to represent these, so as to emphasize that they only evoke them, without *being* them (fig. 6.11). Representation replaces expression; the brush strokes are evoked as in a "third-person," not a "first-person" narrative. It is only then that the new, alternative kind of tactility can be offered. For lack of a better word, we can call this tactility "erotic." I use that word in the same sense as Christensen's red Jell-O benches were called erotic. Let me now qualify this notion further.

Visual erotics, as distinct from expressionism, is not based on the inscription of the *I* in the work, but on the inscription of the strongest possible dynamic between the *I* and the *you* grounded in a sense-based attraction that is not limited to vision. Instead of imagining tactile roughness as a trace of the maker's hand, one wants to caress or lick the surfaces. But, while leaving self-expression behind, Reed's work holds on to the passionate abstraction that is characteristic of the preceding generation. For a partial engagement with, and distancing from, a narrative outside of figuration, he has to look elsewhere.

Figure 6.11. David Reed, #275, 1989. Oil and alkyd on linen. Detail: represented brush stroke. Collection of Ronald and Linda Daitz, New York. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley.



This erotic tactility joins and then breaks away from yet another predecessor: Francis Bacon. In his totally different mode, both figurative and pastose, Bacon also locates narrativity in the contact between painting and viewer rather than in the image. Ernst van Alphen develops a pragmatics of vision as a narratology of Bacon's painting: "I have proposed a narrative reading in which Bacon's works represent a pragmatics of vision as the narrative of perception." And he aptly describes the resulting narrative as follows:

This narrative would then have a double status. On the one hand, it would be diegetic: the events acted out by the figures in the representations are events of perception. On the other hand this diegetic narrative *about* perception would be doubled in relation to the viewer. The narrative could be called apostrophic and metonymic: it touches the viewer.<sup>18</sup>

Whereas Reed's #275, with its nonfigurative forms and nonpastose mode, has nothing visibly in common with Bacon's work, the essence of Bacon's engagement with the viewer through a pragmatic narrativity is the most important feature of the work of both painters. There is even a comparable temporal shift at work in both painters' narrative modes: just as Reed's surface kicks the eye back, then attracts it again, so Bacon insisted on having his paintings framed behind glass, thus hampering the visibility of their impasto. As Alphen contends, this is Bacon's way of forcing the viewers, who are bounced back by the glass's reflections, to come closer and *then* to see better.<sup>19</sup> I have argued something similar about Aptekar's glass-covered paintings. Yet, whereas Bacon's narrative, as Alphen explains, tells a story of eroticism as the loss of self, Reed's, in contrast, promotes an embrace of the self, not in self-absorption but in the exchange of *I* and *you*.<sup>20</sup>

This, then, is a story of art's itinerary through time which differs totally from the old story of one generation rivaling the preceding one, of fathers and sons. Reed's emphatic opposition to abstract expressionism need not—at least not primarily—be seen as an oedipal distancing from great predecessors, as Harold Bloom (1973) would have it.<sup>21</sup> I see Reed's engagement over/against expressionism primarily in temporal terms, as "preposterous." It is, then, not as rivalry but as one element in an exploration of the possibilities of painting itself that his painting traverses abstract expressionism, adopts the traces of that traversal, but then moves on to Caravaggio. There, it finds, enters, and expands from the inside, as a specific integration of representation as visual engagement, intertextual allusion, and, most importantly, address.

Instead of letting myself be diverted from this address by projecting on Reed the focused, if not obsessive, attempt to outclass a fatherly rival that an oedipal interpretation would emphasize, I prefer to examine the way Reed borrows his visual language and his "philosophy" from whatever source he can, which may or may not *also* be informed

18. Alphen 1992, 56. I suppose that Carrier's coined term *diegystic* is synonymous with the more established term *diegetic*.

19. Ernst van Alphen, personal communication, 27 July 1995.

20. This conception of eroticism as loss of self, developed by Alphen, is partly based on Leo Bersani's groundbreaking article on the subject (1989).

21. I am not concerned here whether such an oedipal posture informed the psyche of the artist when he was making the image. I consider Bloom's contribution relevant only as a heuristic "code," what Bois and Krauss call a "user's guide" (1997). The psychoanalytic shade of Bloom's argument would concern the reader's eagerness to project oedipal desire and rivalry, not its possible but untraceable influence on the genesis of the painting.

by rivalry. In other words, Reed's moves are not necessarily as benign as his writing suggests, but in an attempt to step out of what would otherwise become a set of blinkers, I elect to set this question aside.<sup>22</sup> And if abstract expressionism has demonstrated the enriching possibilities of painting beyond figuration, Reed positions himself as working "after" that movement—in memory of it—so as to be able to further exploit those possibilities as a new frame with which to isolate specific meanings and effects. He evokes expressionism as a narrator who first "tells about" a possible first-person position and then rejects it. But he is not obsessed, hence, not oedipally entangled with it; if he is obsessed with anything, it is a much more positive, almost enamored, obsession with something altogether different. In this exploration he is engaging not so much the immediate predecessor as a more distant past, and he is not rejecting but radicalizing what he finds there.

The means by which this erotic effect is achieved is light, the least material of the painter's means, and again, also the most emphatically different compared with the heaviness of paint as substance; light, parading as substance. In spite of all the differences between Reed's coloristic paintings and Janssens' immaterial and colorless sculptures, they meet in this abduction of light for the engagement of the senses.

#### Engaging Caravaggio

Reed quotes differently, or perhaps more formally, than Christensen, who, in addition to her literal quotation in *Ostentatio Vulnerum*, quoted Caravaggio obliquely in her Jell-O sculptures, in an interdiscursive engagement with his sensuousness, his interest in flesh and decay. In Reed's work, Caravaggio is present at every turn—and there are many of those. One way to enter Reed's baroque mode of painting and its specific eroticism is to read his waves as folds. In his translator's introduction to Deleuze's book (1993), Tom Conley sums up what makes baroque forms so enticing: There is

an intense taste for life that grows and pullulates, and a fragility of infinitely varied patterns of movement; . . . in the protracted fascination we experience in watching waves heave, tumble, and atomize when they crack along an unfolding line being traced along the expanse of a shoreline; in following the curls and wisps of color that move on the surface and in the infinite depths of a tile of marble. (x-xi)

The vocabulary here is mostly formal and aesthetic, describing the forms and their infinite expandability. But the aesthetic itself is based on terms that underscore the second person, terms like "fascination" and phrases like "we experience." There is the suggestion

22. The danger of the exclusive focus on rivalry is obvious: it privileges male authority and a straight interpretation of the eroticism I am about to foreground.



of an intimate link between the forms that fascinate and the “intense taste for life that grows and pullulates.” If that pullulating life is situated on the side of the canvas, the initial “first person,” and if the “experience” of forms is situated on the side of the viewer, the initial “second person,” then the deictic exchange that occurs when this aesthetic “happens” is itself what initiates and structures the aesthetic. From Christensen’s passings of time we gathered that an aesthetic, indeed, *happens*. The aesthetic of the Baroque can thus absorb the paradox which says that it gave birth to the literary genre of the novel, whereas its painting is considered non-narrative.

Seen through this formulation, baroque aesthetics is present in Reed’s #275 on various levels. The waves or folds “heave, tumble, and atomize when they crack along an unfolding line being traced along the expanse of a shoreline.” The emphatically horizontal format of the work underscores just that. Like the waves reaching the shoreline, the waves that constitute this painting solicit the protracted fascination that immerses us viewers in the passing of time, as we are seduced to lazily follow their pointless shapes, their lines that lead nowhere. Like a film, the image scrolls by, revealing a live seascape. But the idea of a horizontal scroll, in addition to evoking film and the narrative which is that medium’s privileged mode, also suggests the traditional Japanese and Chinese scroll paintings that literally have to be unrolled in front of you; these, too, are basically narrative. Moreover, the extreme length or width makes it impossible to take the painting in at a glance; no single *Augenblick* can embrace it.

Waves and film complement each other. Waves come forward as we stand at the shoreline; film scrolls by. “Life pullulates” in the waves, and, in a different way, waves are like a film if the waves are seen as folds. The folds are also “pullulating” into a third dimension, in a way that literally attracts the viewer to travel up and down the folds’ hills, inside and out. And it is this represented three-dimensionality that is specifically to be interpreted as the dance of eroticism (fig. 6.12).

Any number of Caravaggio paintings can further substantiate this pull and its converse, this address that is qualified as neither primarily intellectual nor lyrical, but sensual; or rather, that overcomes those artificial distinctions altogether.<sup>23</sup> But there is one painting in this oeuvre that resonates with Reed’s #275 in particularly illuminating ways. Like most Caravaggio paintings, this work is not narrative in the classical use of that term when applied to painting, although it is, of course, figurative. I’m thinking of one of the paintings of *Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 6.13).<sup>24</sup> It is also quite emphatically erotic, although perhaps less obviously sexual than, for example, the 1601–2 *Amor* in Berlin, but this makes the case for the erotic quality of the work even more compelling.<sup>25</sup> Here, too, pullulating is taking place, by means of “a fragility of infinitely varied patterns of move-

23. In chapter 3 of *Double Exposures* (1996a), I have analyzed Caravaggio’s *Amor*, in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, in these terms. But that painting, I argue there, is more specifically homoerotic than the *Saint John* I will discuss here, while, like it, engaging viewers of any gender and sexual orientation.

24. For some background on this painting, see Gilbert 1995, esp. 33, 99–110. For a Brunian analysis, see Panzera 1994, 120.

25. As Gilbert remarks, the Berlin *Amor* and the painting in the Museo Capitolino which Bersani discusses (Bersani and Dutoit 1997) and which Gilbert retitles *Pastor Priso* and identifies as Paris, are the only two nudes, the only two full-length male figures, and the only two figures laughing (1995, 5–7). Gilbert seems to be attempting to express a sense of “camp” when he writes the following about the latter: “Rather than represent allegory, he would represent a person who plays at enacting allegory” (7).

Although Caravaggio is rightly claimed as a star in the gay canon, I feel compelled here to use the more general word *erotic*, rather than *homoerotic*. There is no general reason for qualifying attractive depictions of bodies as either straight or gay, whether the bodies are feminine or masculine.

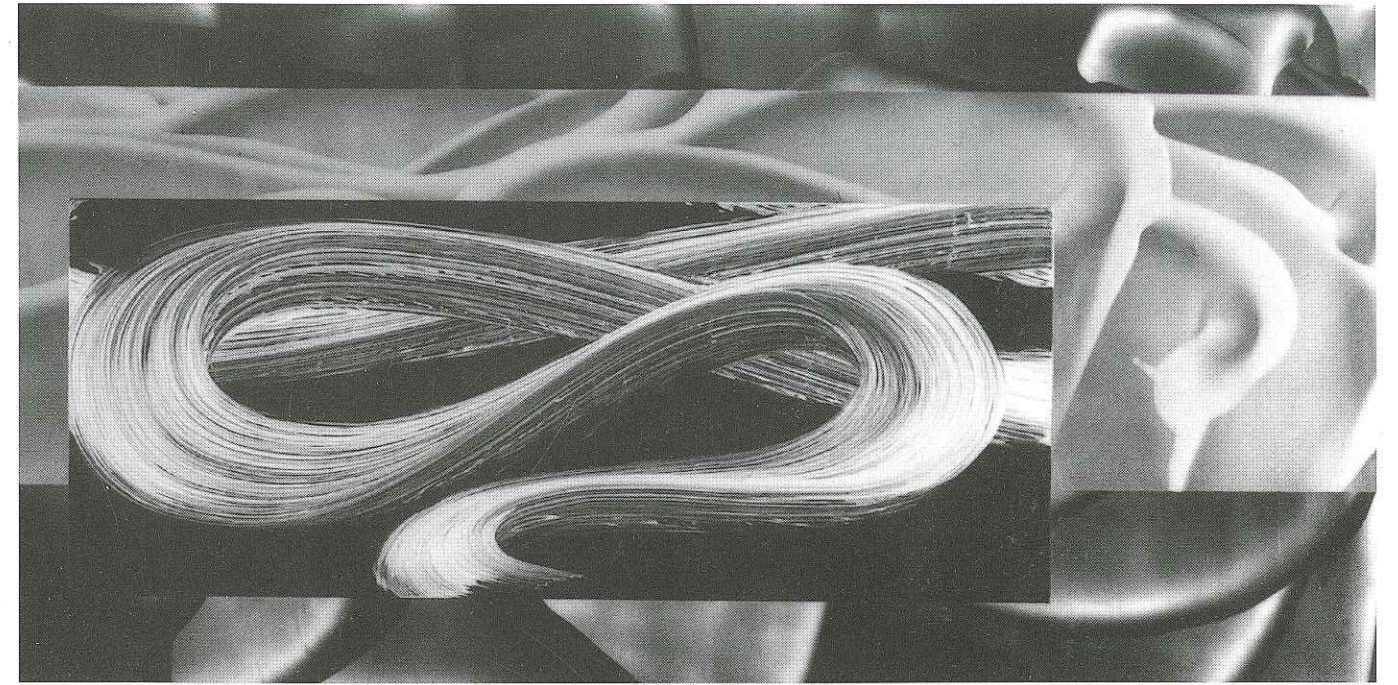


Figure 6.12. David Reed, #275, 1989. Oil and alkyd on linen. Detail: “the dance of eroticism” (“figure eight”). Collection of Ronald and Linda Daitz, New York. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley.





Figure 6.13. Caravaggio, *Saint John the Baptist*, 1603–1604. Oil on canvas, 68 1/4 x 52 in. W. Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

ment.” The attraction of the figure in the painting, erotic as it is, is accomplished by means of an effect of waves, and folds, and texture that totally lacks the inscription of the artist’s hand, whereby the figure comes forward to invite and accommodate the fantastic touch.

The effect of both Reed’s #275 and Caravaggio’s *Saint John the Baptist* is largely dependent on their being reproduced in color. For color is characteristic of both Caravaggio and Reed, who relate differently to their respective artistic contexts.<sup>26</sup> Both painters juxtapose hues for shaping volume, and both make use of value gradations. Carrier (1994) argues that especially the juxtaposing of hues characterizes Reed’s relationship to baroque painting as well as to his own visual environment:

Juxtaposing hues is a technique suggestive for the abstract painter, if only because it provides a way to use different types, even levels, of color relations. Value gradations suggest descriptions of volumes in the physical world, while complementary hues suggest video and movie images, which usually provide a more unnatural or artificial description of what they depict. . . . On a motion-picture or television screen, things that are near and far away appear as if they are all at the same distance, projected onto that surface. (233)

Carrier sees Reed’s relationship to baroque art in terms of a specific “influence”—a picture by Andrea del Sarto (1994, 234), while he views his relationship with Caravaggio as a more general one involving narrativity. He relates this quality, as I will too, to the erotic quality of Reed’s paintings. But, while reversing the perspective implied in the notion of “influence,” I prefer not to make such a separation. As a result of this reluctance, I will not dwell on the opposition between explicit and implicit narratives. I find this too obvious, and hence uninteresting, and, on the level where it might become interesting, unconvincing.

Reed emphatically foregrounds both hues and value gradations of color as well as the capacity of both to model volume and create surface. In doing so, he illuminates, and enhances, Caravaggio’s narrativity as being *different* from straight, “explicit” narrativity, which Carrier would oppose to Reed’s implicit narrativity.

The green and orange-on-green areas in Reed’s work, as well as the straight line that arbitrarily separates them, make a statement about the constitutive importance of color in painting in this diverse sense. Similarly, Caravaggio’s work sets the tones of the boy’s flesh against, on the one hand, the almost identical hue of the different texture of the animal skin that traditionally identifies the Baptist, and, on the other, the contrasting value of the overwhelmingly rich, deep crimson cloth, the oversized mantle that takes up more visual space than the boy’s body does.

26. Again, see Bell (1993, 1995) on Caravaggio’s original use of color. For an entirely different theory of color, applied to a different context (France) yet relevant in its theoretical underpinnings, see Lichtenstein 1988.



The most obvious areas in which the eroticism of this work takes hold consist, naturally, of the body and its appealingly young, firm skin, of muscles just well enough defined to denote masculine vigor yet not overdone, as in some contemporary male nudes that come close to resembling anatomical drawings overlaid with painted skin.<sup>27</sup> As is usually the case in Caravaggio, one is never adequately prepared for the shock that total fantasy is so bound up with the almost excessive, illusionistic mode of painting, with its subtle iconographic touches of realism. I can only come up with one term for this combination: *transcendent corporeality* (Bollas 1987, 82).

Thus, the veins near the elbow, the slightly rough elbow itself, and the dirty toenails tell us that this is a real boy, as real as the plants at his feet, and hence, that the erotic pull is emanating from an actually touchable body. But this body and its touchability attract viewers regardless of their own sexual interests. To use Bollas's description of the "trisexual," "This body of desire no longer signifies sexuality but *the memory of gratification*" (1987, 84; emphasis added). The attraction thereby exceeds vision and implicates the other senses, specifically touch, but also smell. Eroticism is further "icono-graphed" through the flesh of the inner thigh that comes forward due to the seated position of the figure, an almost classical sign of homoerotic realism.<sup>28</sup> But the "memory of gratification" evoked by this transcendent corporeality is not specified according to sex, gender, or sexual orientation.

The folds in the animal skin that alternate between fur and leather are cleverly disposed so as to suggest, just barely, an icon of the boy's penis parallel to the soft flesh of the inner thigh, a penis which is thus tantalizingly signified but not shown. And whereas the boy's right leg displays its elegance so as to foreground the muscled calf, which due to the raised foot is stretched out to look longer, the left knee, isolated from the leg left behind, in the dark, when seen in a flash, could almost be mistaken for an oversized penis.<sup>29</sup> A flash, that is, of the kind that Lacan describes in *Four Fundamental Concepts* as the glance that seizes death in the anamorphic skull in the foreground of Holbein's *Ambassadors*; a baroque anamorphosis. The allusion to the Holbein/Lacan case is meant quite specifically. Both the aggrandizing vision of sexuality here and the insight into mortality there are solicited in a specific temporal mode that is set off against the main line of the story. The deviating pictorial mode—anamorphosis over/against illusionism—sets these elements off as proleptic, as narrated in the future tense. This is one example of how painting is able to inscribe time otherwise than as an artificially constructed diegetic chronology (Lacan 1977).

But if this iconography *alludes* to a sexual attraction that may be especially homoerotic, the play with folds, substance, texture, and light *performs* erotic work, work that does not just inspire fantasy in the viewer as in a third-person novel that strongly

encourages identification, but that engages *with* the viewer in an erotic play.<sup>30</sup> The boy is not the agent of this eroticism; he is one of its parties. The handsome face with the casual curls casting shadows on the forehead, the face into whose eyes, teasingly, we cannot look, may serve as a reminder that eroticism happens between people, and is based on teasing before yielding. But it is the combined, intricately commingled ensemble of surfaces that turns the look cast upon it into a caress. As tyrannical as love itself, the painted surface dictates how the "second person" must confirm the first person's subjectivity, the kind of subjectivity it wishes to be produced and hence how the viewer must be engaged: not as a bare, abstract, theoretical, disembodied retina, but as a full participant in a visual event in which the body takes effect. The second-personhood I am elaborating here, then, is qualified as erotic so as to insure this bodily participation. This bodily participation takes time, and the subject performing it changes through time. This is a definition of an event.<sup>31</sup>

### Light-Writing

This effect of surface as second-personhood is bound up not with material paint but with the lightest of materials: light. The firm yet tender skin, the fluffy animal fur and the smooth sheepskin, the soft, smooth crimson fabric, the soft curls, the finely articulated plants at Saint John's feet, even the smooth bamboo staff he is holding as if it were an elegant wineglass, all these surfaces are produced by different shades of light. Light and shade together thus become the very substance of a painting that is neither "first-person" in that it does not inscribe the hand of the maker, nor "third-person" in that it does not eliminate deixis. Instead, it becomes the very tool of deixis, the optical version of the exchange of touches in erotic contact.

Light complements white; white is its substance in paint. Between the historical, mirroring effect of white discussed in chapter 2 and the second-personhood of light at stake here, the continuity is fluid. Two paintings by Dutch painter Stijn Peeters demonstrate the carry-over between white and light. First, his #741, also called *Narco-State*, "after" Adriaen Brouwer's *Inn with Drunken Peasants* at the Mauritshuis and Felix Timmermans' story "after" that painting, although painted in a mode closer to Bacon's than to Caravaggio's—or Brouwer's, for that matter—makes a motif out of that connection (fig. 6.14). While quoting Brouwer's iconography of stupor, this work also includes an explicit iconographic reference to the mirroring implicitly suggested by white. The only quoting of Caravaggio here is the extremely focused light coming from a narrow, invisible source. The white outline of the man standing on the left foregrounds the artificiality of his representation. In a different mode, the middle figure on the right is, literally, as white

27. The erotic pull that this image exerts on viewers of both sexes and of all sexual orientations can perhaps be understood—although emphatically not *explained*—through reference to what Christopher Bollas calls the "trisexual" (1987, 82–96). If, for a moment, we see the image as being analogous to the result of what Bollas calls the "dramaturgy" of the dream, then the youth in this painting appeals to viewers through "a state of desire [trisexuality] characterized by identification with and seduction of both sexes in order to appropriate genital sexuality by redirecting it into a three-some's love of one." A little further along on the same page he says, "If the bisexual stance allows identification with both sexes, the trisexual adds to this a libidinally desexualized body, its gender *suspended from the categories of sexual difference* in order to be converted into a vessel for a *transcendent corporeality* (82; emphasis added).

28. The boy's pose can be read as a nod to Michelangelo, whose *Victory* sculpture of 1527–30(?) and *Saint Bartholomew* in the Sistine Chapel (1534–41) not only have the same pose but also show the effect of that pose on the flesh of the inner thigh.

29. This knee—increasingly strange as time passes—resembles the bizarre, isolated knee in Caravaggio's *Narcissus*. See chapter 8.

30. For an interesting homoerotic iconography of Caravaggio, see Sternweiler 1993. On the issue of homosexuality in Caravaggio's biography, see Gilbert 1995.

31. This view slightly complicates Christine Buci-Glucksmann's description of what I call here "second-personhood" as an effect in Rainer and Kiefer. She wrote, "[T]he aesthetic of the palimpsest would be the narrative of that look, which is only pictorial at the cost of losing its narrative potency, a narrative which draws [the viewer] to this 'unlookable absolute' [this absolute that no look can sustain]" (1986, 231–32). I read this as another case of second-personhood, but, precisely for that reason, I would argue that the narrativity does not get lost but abducted. On the disembodied look and its alternative, see Norman Bryson's distinction between the gaze and the look (1983; 1989). See also *Reading "Rembrandt"* (1991), especially chapter 3, for more thoughts on this distinction.



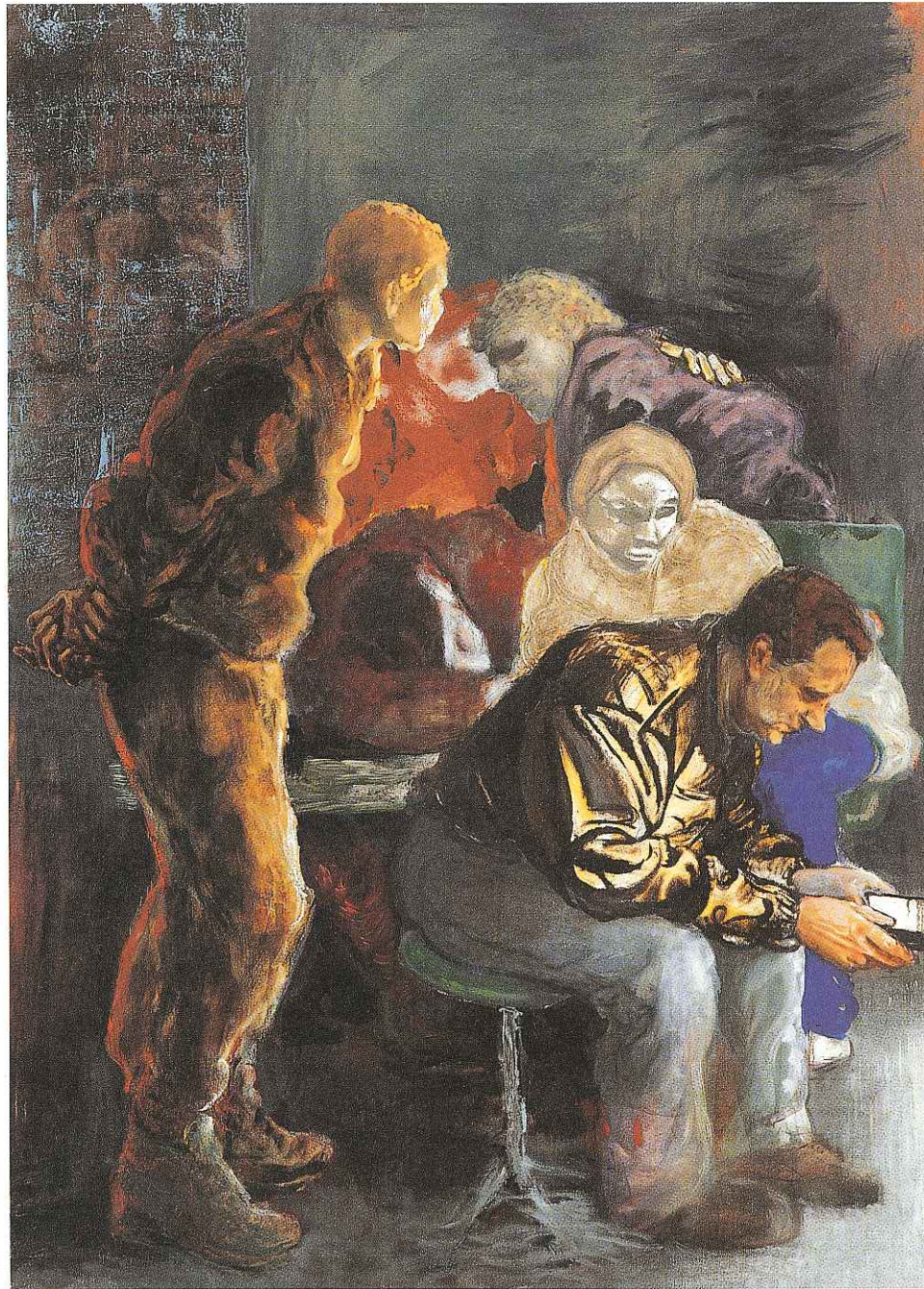


Figure 6.14. Stijn Peeters, #741, or *Narco-State*, 1997. Oil on canvas, approx. 70 7/8 x 51 in. Courtesy Galerie Oele, Amsterdam. Photo by Peter Cox, Eindhoven.

as a ghost. The strange, unidentifiable blot of white behind this figure further enhances the effect of artificial “light-writing.”

The “main character” of this painting, the man on the right who has his back turned to the group at the table, forms the hinge between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Since he is painted much more realistically than the others, they become his ghosts, his immersion in history. He is sitting on an emphatically modern stool. His black shirt set off against blue jeans is given baroque shape through uncompromising white folds. Preoccupied elsewhere, in a different time, he holds an object in his hands with a clear black outline and a white surface. The object could be a computer game or a book, but with the white betraying nothing of its content, it inevitably becomes a mirror.

Second, Peeters’ #746 (fig. 6.15) quotes Caravaggio’s concentrated light coming from above in an even more extreme way. By contrast, the rest of the space is as dark as the inside of a tomb. The effect of light and darkness is quoted and commented on in a mode of painting and with an iconographic result that is very un-Caravaggesque. The space at the left, very dark, is filled with figures, whereas Caravaggio would have imprisoned single figures in a smaller tomb. But the mass of figures strengthens rather than weakens the historical quotation. For it suggests that this return to art’s past, during its

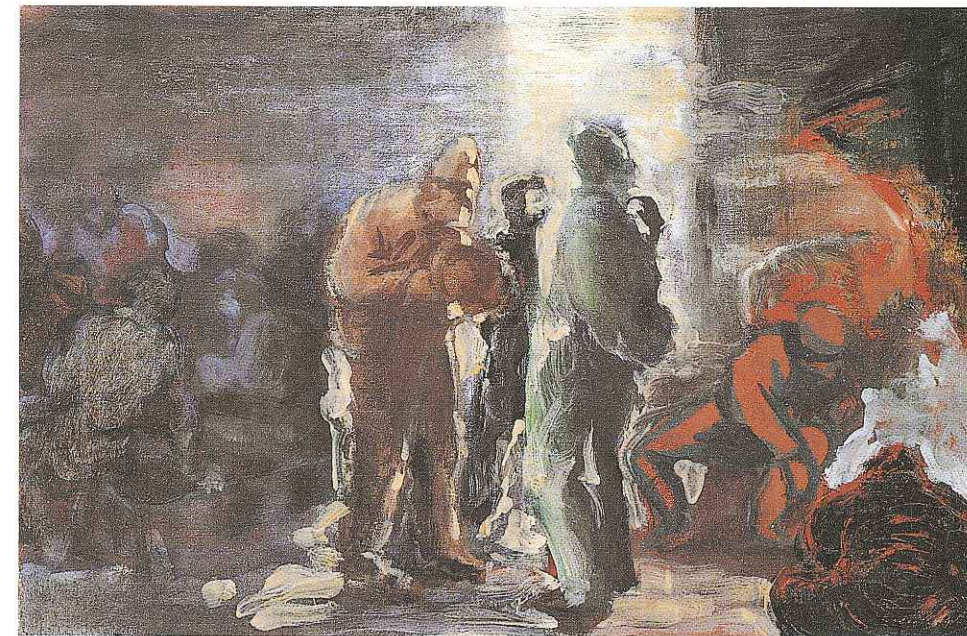


Figure 6.15. Stijn Peeters, #746, 1997. Oil on canvas, approx. 15 3/4 x 23 1/2 in. Courtesy Galerie Oele, Amsterdam. Photo by Peter Cox, Eindhoven.



reverse journey through time, had to pass through the nineteenth century and hence Manet's bar scenes. Instead of quoting Caravaggio's limitation of space, the *effect* not the *motif* of the single light beam is inscribed. The figures are multiplied, but by the same token their almost abstract representation comments in another way on the examination of light and darkness.<sup>32</sup>

This is a good example of quotation according to Derrida. The precedent referred to here, Caravaggio's light, is never the same; Peeters emphasizes the effect of *différance* by painting illusionism away. Yet, the citation cannot avoid being a repetition. Limited light, after Caravaggio, is held responsible for the darkness it produces. Peeters' insistence on difference in his mode of painting sets the quotation apart. His near-abstraction simultaneously alludes to abstract expressionism, as Reed's does, and, being emphatically *not* expressive—neither emotionally charged nor pastose in substance—Peeters' paint is emphatically thin. But it is precisely to the extent that Peeters' paint differs from Caravaggio's that it evokes it. This evocation inscribes temporal deferral to the quotation. The burden of history is as heavy as the mode of painting is light.

Peeters, then, sheds new light on Caravaggio in the same way as Reed engages with him. Caravaggio's extreme illusionism is not simply a tool in the service of a banal realistic ambition. Illusionism is part of the project of creating bodily contact with the means farthest removed from substance. This particular use of light, as found in Peeters' thin abstraction, is what Reed endorses and adopts, and what represents the most striking signal of his work's contemporariness. For Reed also isolates one element of Caravaggio's strategy: he takes Caravaggio's light-writing literally, and turns it over to the late twentieth century through the inscription of photo-graphy.

The dialectic between the presence and absence of light on the skin of painting replaces the pencil to create a design of the figure in the same mode and with the same substance as "gives body" to the figure. Light is used for both drawing and substantiating the image. It is in this respect that the baroque folds in the crimson cloth become so much more than just a theatrical ploy to emphasize art as artificial, and in Caravaggio, to emphasize the studio as the deictic "here and now" of painting. The "fragility of infinity" of folds, due to its simultaneous appropriation of two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional fullness, envelops Caravaggio's attractive boy as a metonymically motivated metaphor for the connection between visual attraction and the infinitely touchable body whose skin is its largest and most intensely feeling sense organ. Light signifies the most tender and slight, yet most thrilling, kind of touch, totally different in effect than Janssens' *Représentation d'un corps rond*—more erotic—but sharing its epistemological inquiry into the enigma of bodily perception.

32. On Manet's bar scenes, in addition to T. J. Clark's classic (1985), see especially Michael Fried's important book (1996).

That Caravaggio is a very erotic painter, and also a very plastic one, is easily observed. That light is his primary instrument is also well known. As we have seen in his superb analysis of Caravaggio's *Medusa*, Louis Marin (1995) made a case for the quintessential baroque painter as primarily deictic. Yet neither the baroque painter's deictic quality nor his special deployment of light as paint are easily noticed outside of the realm of figuration, which was the primary visual language of Caravaggio's time. The innovations Caravaggio introduced made him a forerunner, an avant-garde artist of his time. To be of your time, to make *con*-temporary work, is yet another way of signaling and enacting, "doing" deixis. Peeters' insistent difference from Caravaggio, iconographically represented in #741, and through his mode of painting in both #741 and #746, quotes Caravaggio through the contemporariness that is his version of temporal deixis. Reed's profound, "light" engagement with Caravaggio enables him to understand his need to do this, so that his #275 both reflects on what it takes to be a Caravaggio of this time, of the *hic et nunc* of the present, and at the same time as it proposes this presentness, illuminates Caravaggio's contemporariness for us.

This is where the reference to abstraction comes in. Compared to Peeters' wilfully unillusionistic, rough mode of painting, Reed's work is not abstract but totally illusionistic. The elimination of figuration enables Reed to draw and paint with light in the same way as Caravaggio did, without recourse to the attractive body of a handsome youth. His light-writing is photo-graphic. Photography, Roland Barthes told us, is not iconic, as the capturing on which it is based deceptively suggests, but primarily indexical. Its power is the inscription of the presence of the object in the photograph, like a signature, even if that very presentness also fatally inscribes the pastness, the *ça-a-été* (1981).

Reed's #275 makes its point about the photographic being contemporary Caravaggist light-writing by means of a double inscription. The surface displays an exceedingly realistic, illusionistic, mode of painting, as distinctive now as Caravaggio's illusionism was then, and foregrounds that mode through its very nonfigurativeness. This, the surface proclaims, is realism: just a mode, without an object. There is no object, for the work is "abstract," yet there is, for the painting is realistic. Although there are no figures, there is an iconicity of forms. The waves literally become folds under the influence of this mode of painting, as the section reproduced here as figure 6.12 clearly shows. Folds—the quintessential figure of the Baroque, hence, a theoretical figure—are the sole object of realism redefined as photography.

But this iconicity is, of course, only meaningful in polemical conjunction with that other aspect of photography: indexicality. The past—Caravaggio, painting, baroque folds, and the erotics of surface—is *in* this work as its *ça-a-été* (Barthes 1981). Thus,



Reed's painting *represents* not figures, as figurative painting including Caravaggio's does, but the theory of light-writing that it enacts; it thematizes what, in light-writing, *matters*.

On Reed's use of light, David Carrier wrote, "Reed is involved in using extreme darkness and bright piercing light which, now separated from any representational context, is thus disassociated from merely marking the edge of shapes" (1994, 32). There are no shapes to mark the edges; the light now *is* the shape, makes it, and constitutes its climactic point. This is how Reed's practice in #275, based on an exploration of the essence of deixis, differs from Butor's more formalist adoption of the second person. Toward the end of the passage previously quoted, Butor's narrator described light-writing as follows: "... while dawn was beginning to sculpt the disordered sheets of your bed, the sheets which emerged from the dark like defeated phantoms trampled on that soft and warm floor from which you tried to tear yourself away."<sup>33</sup> Light-writing is ascribed to nature, to incipient daylight, as a force coming in from outside which the figure of personification then turns into a life figure. But as a threat to the otherwise unsustained subjectivity of the "you," that figure is necessarily an antagonist, focalized by the outsider that Butor's "you" is condemned to remain.

By contrast, in #275 the light does more than just draw and sculpt the shapes. Hanne Loreck wrote:

[B]right spots ... arise, paradoxically, where color has been effaced with brush and scraper and the priming colors are laid bare. Here, the skin of paint has been peeled back, permitting a view of the "inward," which is revealed as nothing more than an added, external form—particularly since individual priming colors also push to the surface, depending upon the means of overpainting. As if through a filter, one looks at the flow of color that, like desire, circulates unfixably. (1995, 78)

The optical caressability of the surface attracts after initially bouncing off the look that comes on the wrong premise, now that we know what was wrong with it. Searching for the master's trace, leaving one's own body behind, thus reconfirming a form of mastery that linear perspective and the figurative painting that endorses it has made so overwhelming: this is what makes the premise wrong, at least for this painting.

In a constant, interdiscursive engagement with Caravaggio that is motivated neither by hostile rivalry nor by slavish submission, Reed draws, paints, and sculpts *from within* the body, a body that is not there to *see* but overwhelmingly there to *be*. The paint is not the skin but the blood pulsing underneath it; it is skin-deep. The light pushes up from within—like the pulsating blood in Saint John's elbow or in the sexual organ that is not represented but perhaps signified, or like the waves of the blood-red fabric that Chris-

33. "... l'aube commençait à sculpter les draps en désordre de votre lit, les draps qui émergeaient de l'obscurité semblables à des fantômes vaincus, écrasés au ras de ce sol mou et chaud dont vous cherchiez à vous arracher" (Butor 1957, 16; my translation).

tensen made so corporeal that it decayed before our very eyes. Thus the light defines the surface as moving toward the outside world where the viewer is, begging the latter to confirm its subjectivity so that the viewer, saying "you" to the surface, can come into his status as a bodily engaged "I."

A brief comparison with Gerhard Richter's nonfigurative paintings may help in assessing the second-person narrative mode that makes Reed's work concrete, not abstract, as in the effect of his pulsing paint that pushes from within, from underneath its surface, into the space of the viewer. In terms of the inner-outer movement, Richter's paintings, such as *January* (1989),<sup>34</sup> initially display a similar tension of layering. In this particular work, the paint hidden in the inner recesses of the surface, which bursts open to allow the paint to come forward beyond the surface that imprisoned it, appears congenial to Reed's. Like his earlier *Abstract Painting* (1979),<sup>35</sup> *January* offers a surface that remains flat yet layered, clearly three-dimensional in space, due to the layering, and in time, due to the effect of scraping one layer away to offer a view of the previous one.

Richter's abstract paintings, of which the 1979 work even emphasizes abstraction in its name, inscribe a narrative that is itself abstract. They tell about painting, about painting over and scraping away, thus revealing the process of making, together with a disillusioned commentary on that modernist narrative.<sup>36</sup> Reed does not scrape away the upper or outer layer of his paint. The inner substance of his paint is not visible and cannot be revealed. Yet it is there, even to the touch, to which the surface appeals so strongly.

#### The Sense of Not-Ending

A temporality that moves back and forth between present and past, occasionally including the future, but never in a straight line of progress: such a temporality has no end. There is one particular area in Reed's painting that emphasizes the sensual fullness of light (fig. 6.16). This is the area in the lower half, the third portion on the left side, where the waves or folds are broader and their edges closer to one another (see fig. 6.2). The overall erotic effect of the painting is enhanced here by an increased level of sensuality that is almost "metasensuous," enfolding the eye and holding it a bit longer so the experience of time surfaces into consciousness. One of the signs that makes this portion stand out is the small dot next to the curl that bleeds over into the lower, orange-toned band of the work. This dot looks like a comma.

It seems significant that this dot-comma, ending the single, largest, densest, and thickest set of folds in the painting, is the only place where any of the waves and folds seem to have an ending; yet, this ending takes the shape of a sign that, in writing, signi-

34. This painting is in the Saint Louis Art Museum.

35. This is painting #444 of the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; see Neff 1988, 118, for a reproduction.

36. See Lauwaert 1996, 116–33 for an excellent interpretation of Richter's paintings, both figurative and abstract.



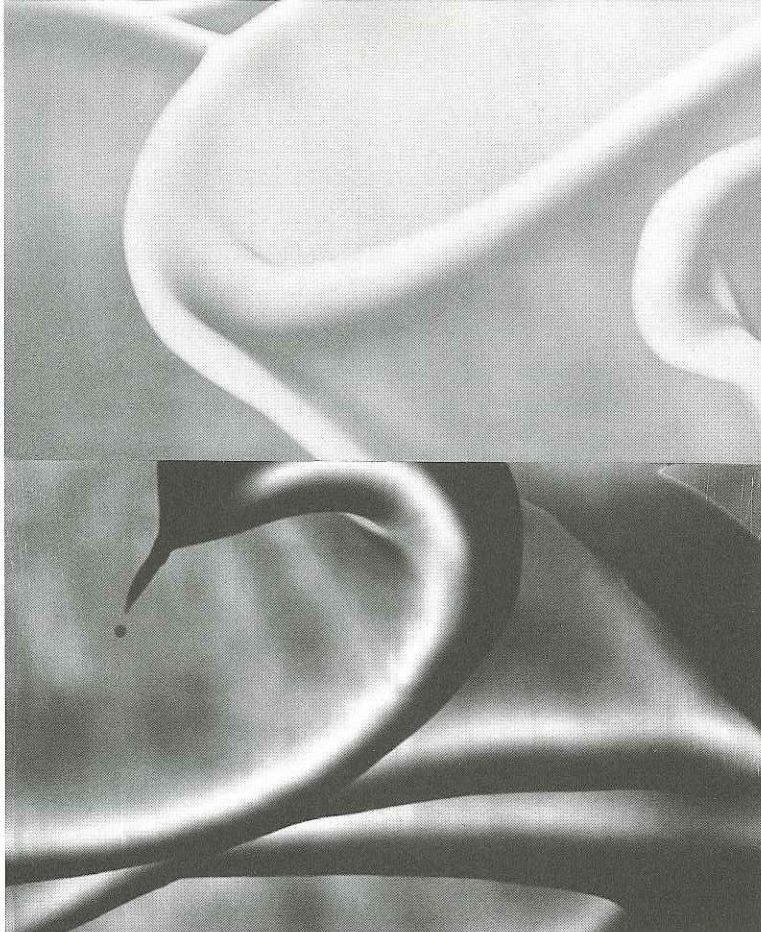


Figure 6.16. David Reed, #275, 1989. Oil and alkyd on linen, 26 x 102 in. Detail: dot that looks like comma. Collection of Ronald and Linda Daitz, New York. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley.

fies not-ending, a sign that there is more to come. And this linguistic non-ending is visually represented by the crossing of the line next to the comma. The line of colors, the line of the sentence, the line formed by the fold: the fragility of infinity is enacted here. In conjunction with the excessively horizontal format of the work, this larger and more plastic double curl, the dot that ends it, and the touching edges, comment on the “theoretical” meaning of the division into artificially delimited bands.

These bands cannot contain their distinct areas, the work seems to say, any more than the surface of this painting can contain its work within two-dimensional flatness. Like the screen on which that other light-writing, film, rolls along, the end of the bands signify that the end of the frame, the size of the canvas, is arbitrary and artificial, because the work is performed beyond its limits. The lines that separate the bands, then, signify two-dimensionality as artificial and conventional but also deceptive. The *work* of art, not as object but as effect, is not to be confined to the surface or skin, nor to one person or hand, but instead, initiates an interaction that comes to full deployment in this grander fold, where the work envelops the “you” that constitutes it. As the end that only underscores

endlessness, the dot-comma embodies the Barthesian punctum that pricks so that the viewer bleeds, leaving a stain on the subjectivity thus produced. This comma inscribes, then, yet another event in the encounter with the work, signaling narrativity in its wake.

Hanne Loreck wrote the following about Reed’s work:

Doubts about the picture’s flatness do arise, however, where something *optically feels* as if it has been injected under the surface. There, it is experienced as a “film,” a layer that must be removed: in order to see better, to perceive the “true” surface and, particularly, to get closer to what lies underneath, to the “real thing.” (1995, 78)

In the sentences following this passage, Loreck is quick to take this effect back into an expressionist reading, suggesting that the viewer wants to penetrate the skin to uncover the operation of the making, the irreducible origin and past of the work. Instead, I suggest the narrative that *takes place*, grounded as it is in deixis, must take place in the present. This is perhaps the most radical way of espousing the act of quoting Caravaggio.

Reed’s work on Caravaggio is retroactive: it draws Caravaggio into a present where the *hic et nunc* which gives deixis its meaning is irreducibly different yet equally intensely involved. The presentness, the contemporaneity of this work, is not distinct from but the very essence of the engagement with the past. This, then, is preposterous history caught in the act.

#### Narrativity Revisited

How, then, is this interaction narrative, yet so exclusively visual that it uses light almost as its sole medium? To understand the narrative nature of this process as well as the relevance of narrativity beyond its formalist limits, there are two directions in which to go, one psychoanalytical, the other epistemological. In discussing the first I will draw further on Silverman’s theory of love as developed in *The Threshold of the Visible World*; in discussing the second, which will lead us back to narratology, I will refer to Deleuze’s account of the Leibnizian revolution in the Baroque. Together, these two developments will further flesh out the narrative “theory” of Reed’s #275 as theoretically innovative, while also enabling us to read the story this work has to tell. For, undermining another commonplace binary opposition, this work is not only both tangibly concrete and non-figurative but also presenting and representing at the same time.

On the basis of the Lacanian model of looking, anchored in the misrecognition of the mirror stage, the looking subject has the tendency to ascribe to itself what belongs to others and to project onto others what belongs to the self but what it wishes to cast out.



In other words, the subject looks from within a constant misperception of the difference between self and other. If looking, then, according to Silverman's definition quoted earlier, consists of embedding or adapting that which is there to see outside of us into our stock of unconscious memories, then these are self-memories, and looking is self-looking; looking "through" or "with" self-images from the past that we carry with us, and which we have filled with illusory fulfillment.

Cultural images, such as films and paintings, can appeal to that tendency by satisfying it somewhat and "un-settling" it somewhat, taking advantage of the "ecology of vision." Images come to the subject from the outside but arrive in an environment of memories: "When a new perception is brought into the vicinity of those memories which matter most to us at an unconscious level, it too, is 'lit up' or irradiated, regardless of its status within normative representation" (Silverman 1996, 4). These metaphors of light and radiating recall the special status of a medium that consists almost solely of light, a medium that creates representations consisting of bundles of rays, sculptures made of luminous effects: film. Reed's well-known fascination with film, visible in the extreme verticality and horizontality of his formats, is most clearly visible in his extreme, exaggerated version of Caravaggist light-sculpture. Light, the substance of film, fascinates Reed most when it is itself thematized within film. Reed's favorite film, Hitchcock's 1958 *Vertigo*—all about illusionism, of course—has an effect of light-writing that Reed describes in the following terms:

[A] huge neon sign . . . hung outside the window of Judy's hotel room, and from inside one often saw its sharp turquoise light and a giant "P." This light is especially strong when Judy comes out of the bathroom dressed as "Madeleine." She is bathed in the lazy light which dissolves her form, turning her into a ghost. (1992, 4)

He goes on to connect the color turquoise with illusion and the repressed past. His essay on *Vertigo* is quite touching in its engagement with the sadness of illusions, even though it leads to Reed's ambition to become a "bedroom painter," not only because "then my paintings can be seen in reverie, where our most private narratives are created," but also because "all changes begin in the bedroom" (6).

But read through Silverman's analysis, the irresistible effect of Reed's light is also bound to its function of lighting up, evoking, both in itself and through the cultural unconscious as it is constantly fed by film, the images of our memories that have retained the capacity to thrill us. Reed's essay on his relation to *Vertigo* provides evidence of such a thrill, as well as of its source: the psychic effect of the *ça-a-été* of the cultural memory that light-writing, by way of indexicality, can make forever present (fig. 6.17).



Thus, these effects, now theoretical metaphors, also connect the interaction between inner and outer image with the *ideal* that underlies Silverman's (1996) theorization of "the active gift of love." A third effect of the metaphors of light is the suggestion of a form in which the possibility of action on the inert unconscious can be explored. All this accumulates, "thickening" the narrative layers that design the intricate sequence of events which occur between the painting and the viewer's involvement with it.

Reed's video installations work to make his abstract paintings readable through an explicit acknowledgment of their origin in popular culture's past. The intimacy of the

Figure 6.17. David Reed, "A Painting in Scottie's Bedroom," 1995. Installation with video insertion of #332, 1993-1994, oil and alkyd on linen, 26 x 110 in., into Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Courtesy Max Protetch Gallery, New York. Photo by Dennis Cowley.

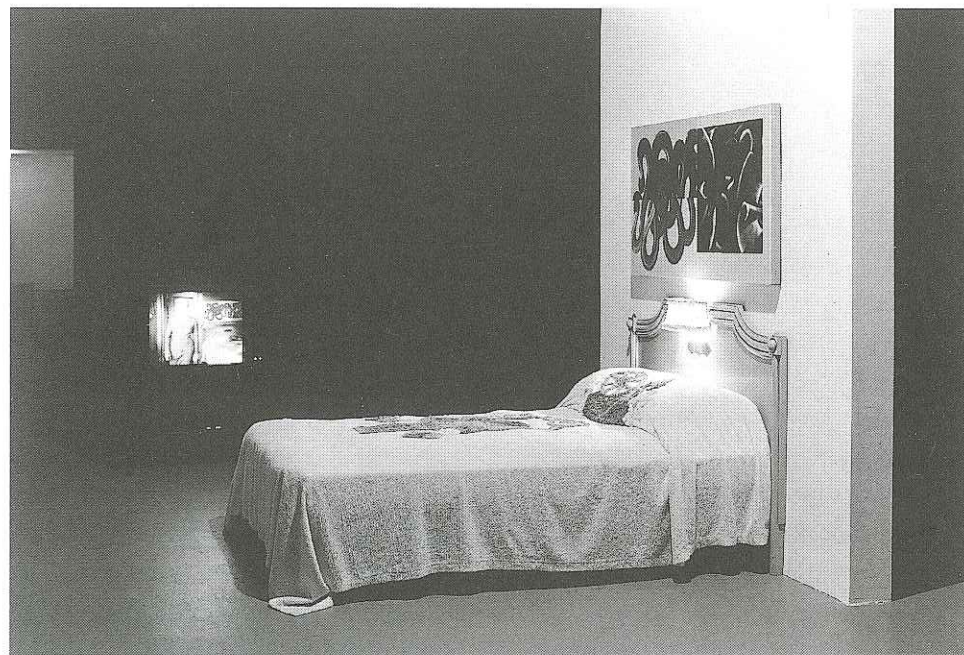




Figure 6.18. David Reed, "Film Still of Judy's Bedroom from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, with #271 inserted," 1993. Black and white photograph, 8 x 10 in. Courtesy Galerie Rolf Rieke, Cologne.

Figure 6.19. David Reed, "Judy's Bedroom," 1995. Installation with video insertion of #328, 1990-1993, oil and alkyd on linen, 29 x 56 in., into Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Painting: private collection, Cologne. Installation: courtesy Galerie Rolf Rieke, Cologne and Kölischer Kunstverein, Cologne. Photo by Boris Becker.

37. According to Buci-Glucksmann (1994), "This is precisely what theatre does by catalyzing an essence of time which cannot be reduced to the physical, mechanistic, empty time of chronology, or to its expression in the event" (88). She continues, "This flow of alienated time was what Benjamin sought to interrupt by practising a fierce hostility towards anything that lay on the side of the established filiations, names and identities, of ruling violence and of history subordinated to a vulgar concept of linear, continuous, empty time. To that he opposed the project of a different history as the *construction of now-times: an archaeology of modernity*" (88-89).



bedroom appealed to him precisely because of the way film has established a relation of nostalgic longing between him and a particular bedroom bathed in turquoise light. His installation helps us understand the concrete, actual operation of what Silverman theorized, whereas her writing gives Reed's work a profound and systematic status as cultural agency.

Reed's painting #271 was exhibited within the context of "Judy's bedroom" (fig. 6.18). By means of computerized image manipulation, the artist inserted this painting into the scene of Judy's bedroom in *Vertigo*. The installation consisted of the painting with a bed under it, and a video monitor showing the *Vertigo* clip with the painting in it. The video was like a gloss, explaining how the painting ought to be read, but also, retrospectively, why the film was important in terms of Benjamin's

concept of *Jetzt-zeit*, now-time.<sup>37</sup> In the context of the present study, the simultaneous presence of Kim Novak and James Stewart with a painting as *background*, which was made years after the film, can serve as a theoretical object that beautifully demonstrates the point on culture and history I am trying to make in this book (figs. 6.18, 6.19).

On the one hand, the painting, by virtue of its color scheme, its voluptuous light effects, and enticing forms, is a sexy painting. It also envelops the viewer as if in some kind of intimacy. On the other hand, the resonance with *Vertigo* also establishes the origin of that sentiment as being elsewhere, not in the work of high, abstract art, but in the popular culture that feeds it, or rather, the memory of that culture, whereby the intimacy and specific locatedness of the work is undermined. It is not intimate, because it is shared by a lot of people in a collective cultural memory. The private place becomes a kind of public place in which the accumulated time of cultural memory inscribes itself in the intimacy that grounds the subject's belief in subjectivity, like a cultural mirror-stage. Cultural memory, whose operations Reed, Christensen, and Peeters demonstrate so convincingly, becomes the site for an intervention in which time is the primary tool, or weapon.<sup>38</sup>

This links the affective quality of this light magic to the epistemological issues raised by Deleuze, and constitutes a third dimension of Reed's narrativity.<sup>39</sup> The most radical innovation of the Baroque that Deleuze (1993) traces through the work of Leibniz but whose visual aspect can be seen in Caravaggio is a different conception of perspective. This new conception is so alien to linear perspective, yet has been so pervasively present in painting ever since, that the persistence of the latter model in thinking about painting is actually quite astounding.

Baroque matter, as well as the objects consisting of it, has profoundly changed, become complicated, as matter is folded twice, once under elastic forces, and a second time under plastic forces, and "one is not able to move from the first to the second" (Deleuze 1993, 9). One way to imagine matter's double folding is through the allegory of marble: marble's "natural" veins—the result of a long process over time—and marble's use in representing folds of veils in sculpture.<sup>40</sup> But with that change in matter, the status of the subject has also changed. And so, inevitably, has looking. What Deleuze writes in his second chapter, "The Folds in the Soul," is a far cry from the masterful, disembodied, retinal gaze of linear perspective:

We move from inflection or from variable curvature to vectors of curvature that go in the direction of concavity. Moving from a branching of inflection, we distinguish a point that is no longer what runs along inflection, nor is it the point of inflection itself; it is the one in which the lines perpendicular to tangents meet in a state of variation. (19)

*Variation* is the key word here: variation not only in what we can see but also in where we are when we see it, in how, therefore, we can see it, as full participants in the event. Variation: the very notion inscribes more episodes, narrativizing, as it deflates mastery. Deleuze continues:

38. Of the many studies on the relationship of exchange and repression between "high art" and "popular culture," so problematically presented in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1990 (Varnedoe 1990), the book by Susan G. Josephson (1996) provides a good resonance with Reed's attempts to foreground that relationship.

39. This epistemological aspect gives an additional urgency to the primacy of "real" second-personhood instead of Butor's artificial and ultimately failed second-personhood, since contemporary attempts to *know* involve the tenuous existence of the objects of knowledge; see chapter 5 of *Double Exposures* (1996a).

40. On folds and veils in sculpture as an epistemological questioning of boundaries, see Derrida 1987b.



It [the state in which subject and object meet] is not exactly a point but a place, a position, a site, a "linear focus," a line emanating from lines. To the degree it represents variation or inflection, it can be called *point of view*. Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pregiven or defined subject; to the contrary, *a subject will be what comes to the point of view*, or rather what remains in the point of view. (19; emphasis added)

Deleuze's description of point of view concerns epistemology; he is elaborating a view of knowledge that is neither Cartesian in its objectivism nor subjectivist in its relativism. But the entanglement of subject and object—which yields an object that is itself entangled in its folds—embraces the reader within the narrative as a variable "you," who is fully dependent on, *and* constitutive of, its corollary, the "I." It is a view of knowledge that makes knowledge deictic, thereby involving it in the inexorable process of time. This mode of knowledge is so much more productive for today's world, and hence, so much in need of promotion over/against the objectifying mode of mastery, that its attraction for the "you" must be made obvious. This, then, is the epistemological importance of the erotic pull of Reed's #275.<sup>41</sup>

Visual embodiments of this model of knowledge abound. Think of anamorphosis, as, again, in Holbein's *Ambassadors*. If Lacan used this painting to theorize death and the gaze, it is because variation—and narrative—disrupt the illusion of stability that is embodied in both linear perspective and objectivism. Think of the place of clouds in painting, disruptive as they often are in relation to the very linear perspective they refer to and then undermine (Damisch 1972). Most typically, the folds that attract the eye and the touch, and then make them travel up and down their hills, and enter and exit their caves, represent this view of point of view, in which the subject is fully engaged in the knowledge that cannot be acquired but needs to be constructed.

This is when the effect of light and shade in a visual regime—the Baroque—comes to mind, that same regime that invented binary arithmetic. Here, Peeters' two semiabstract scenes have been cited as quotations of that regime. As Deleuze writes, "Things jump out of the background, colors spring from the common base that attests to their obscure nature, figures are defined by their covering more than their contour" (1993, 31–32). This remark fits squarely within Marin's theorizing about color and relief in Caravaggio, and represents what Marin (1995) considered enough of a reason for Caravaggio's contemporaries to claim with outrage that he had destroyed painting. What he had to destroy, perhaps, is not linear perspective per se but that mode's confining monopoly to narrative, not narrative painting but "third-person" narrative painting. The jumping that Deleuze refers to is the unsettling mobility that is not referential—not the result or object of representation—but the effect of representation. If paintings, painted shapes,

41. For an extensive discussion of alternative models of knowledge better suited to be socially productive today, see Code 1991.

don't sit still, it becomes more difficult to pretend not to hear what they have to say, and to refrain from talking back.

### Is That Narrative?

Is Reed's #275, clearly nonfigurative, a narrative painting, or does it replace narrative with a more dialogic mode of communication? If narrative at all, it is that peculiar kind of narrative that Butor attempted, unsuccessfully, to create in *La modification*, namely "second-person" narrative. But perhaps Butor's failure was inevitable; perhaps such narrative is a contradiction *in terminis*. The narrative is dependent on the deictic parameters of the painting; second-personhood is contingent upon the way these parameters inflate the second, rather than the first, person, so much so that it is no exaggeration to name the work and its genre after it. We have the events that form a fabula; we have the subjective fleshing out of time, space, and focalization that makes the fabula a story. The very thing that seems to be lacking is the *narrator*, the voice that offers the account of the story, for in the visual dialogue the voice constantly changes.

This lack is ultimately connected to the kind of events that are foregrounded. Reed's narrative alludes to "the rhythm of movement in the streets, the scale of people in relation to buildings, the quality of light. These shattered perceptions, reassembled in paintings, can create an image of this time and place" (Reed and Ellis 1990, 6). These events are perceptual, sensuous, and contemporary; they are fundamentally deictic. But in their appeal to focalization they short-circuit narratorial voice.

In this bypassing of the narrator, these events are situated in a fictional world as Leibniz theorized it. Ruth Ronen shows a keen awareness of the difference between narratorial voice and fiction-internal focalization when she writes, "[I]n fictional worlds, focalizers and other world-components are ontologically commensurable: they are of the same ontological level" (1994, 180). Reed's engagement with *Vertigo* gives visual shape to the great potential of this conception of fictionality. The historical importance of this film is underscored by the painter's homage to light-writing as a means of connecting.

The special status of fiction according to Leibniz, which also brings Caravaggio's Saint John the Baptist close enough to us to allow us to touch him, lies in the seductiveness of this obscuring of the narrator in favor of the focalizer. As Ronen writes, "In the fictional world model the source of authority generating a modal structure is itself fictional, which means that there are no a priori criteria of validation for fictional facts. The norm for determining authenticity is internal to the fictional world" (1994, 178). This is precisely what increases the heuristic potential of fiction—which is to explore possibilities that are neither impossible nor as yet real but utterly possible.



A final return to Silverman can further illuminate the possibility of the wavering and scarcely visible narrative voice that would be a baroque narrator. As we saw in the previous chapter, Silverman (1996) discusses the bodily basis of the ego in terms of proprioceptive sensations, coming from within the body, and exteroceptive images, sent to the ego from the outside. Strictly speaking, by placing deixis within, or on, or at, the body—at its boundary, on its skin—Silverman extends the meaning and importance of Benveniste's belief that deixis is the essence of language to include a bodily view of language as well as a semiotic that is not limited to language. This view makes space bodily, whereas the body, which exists within temporality, infuses space with a narrative dimension.

Expanding on the previous chapter, we now see that abstract space becomes concrete place within which the subject, delimited by its skin, is keyed in. The second person is keyed into the space she perceives and of which she is irrevocably a part as a focalizer of the story of her own bodily involvement. Silverman's term for the "keyed" subject—*postural function*—integrates space and temporality into a narrative that can genuinely be cast or told "in the second person."

While this interpretation of deixis opens space for a bodily and spatially grounded semiotics of vision, it can now be specified as a narratology of vision that takes the viewer's position seriously. This bodily posture of the viewer as second person is the visual-spatial equivalent of the narrator's voice.

This "sending back" of visual impulses in modified form—filled in with the second-person subject's "I"—makes the second person the primary narrator of the story of vision which, due to its bodily nature, unfolds in time, episodes, a fabula that the second person focalizes. Earlier on we saw how Loreck described the gaze Reed's work solicits—a gaze that bounces off the surface as off a mirror. Although not quite adequately rendered by the metaphor of the unqualified mirror, the effect I have in mind here clearly resembles that. It cannot be a coincidence that Reed installed his paintings in a rococo palace in Graz in a room filled with mirrors (fig. 6.20). But, as I have noted, this initial bouncing back is but the first step in this story of vision. It is a false start, a necessary rekeying of the subject whose cultural baggage has limited his range of visual possibilities. The erotic attraction makes for the second episode, where the subject cannot help but return to the beckoning light and the welcoming folds that offer to envelop "you" in their caress. The narrator, then, has to be the second person, who works under the solicitation of the first person. Instead of self-reference, this first person—the painting, not the artist—orchestrates the acts of narration of the second person, who is moved by the desire to say "Yes, you are" to it.

But then, this eroticism, powerful and indispensable as it is, is also just one episode, followed by others. For the power of eroticism is that it can teach us things that lie



Figure 6.20. David Reed, #350, 1996. Oil and alkyd on linen, 54 x 118 in. Collection of Sammlung Goetz, Munich. Installation of #350 and video by David Reed in the Mirror Room of the Neue Galerie, Landesmuseum, Graz, June 1996. Courtesy Galerie Rolf Rieke, Cologne. Photo by Johann Koinegg.

beyond itself. One such thing—one more episode that the second-person narrator further recounts—is the variation in the relation between what you are and what you see, a relation that is not stable but in process, keeping the narrative going. The urgency of that episode, or string of episodes, can be allegorically illuminated when we take the age-old *Arabian Nights* instead of Butor's novel as the model of a more dangerous kind of second-person narrative.

There, the powerful husband, who kills one wife each night after the erotic exchange, can only be enticed to let Scheherezade live—to let the process continue—as long as she, the second person, whose subjectivity is threatened with destruction, keeps narrating. Lili Dujourie's sculpture *Mille et une nuit* (1993) provides a visual narrative of this principle based on a mutual mirroring that emphasizes mutual independence (fig. 6.21). The morale of that narrative cycle is, then, that the most powerful subject's subjectivity is as much in need of confirmation as the weakest, most dependent subject's, and that narrative as process has just that confirmation to offer. The inextricable bond between eroticism and knowledge, knowledge and power, power and vision, and vision and narrative, is thus once again demonstrated.



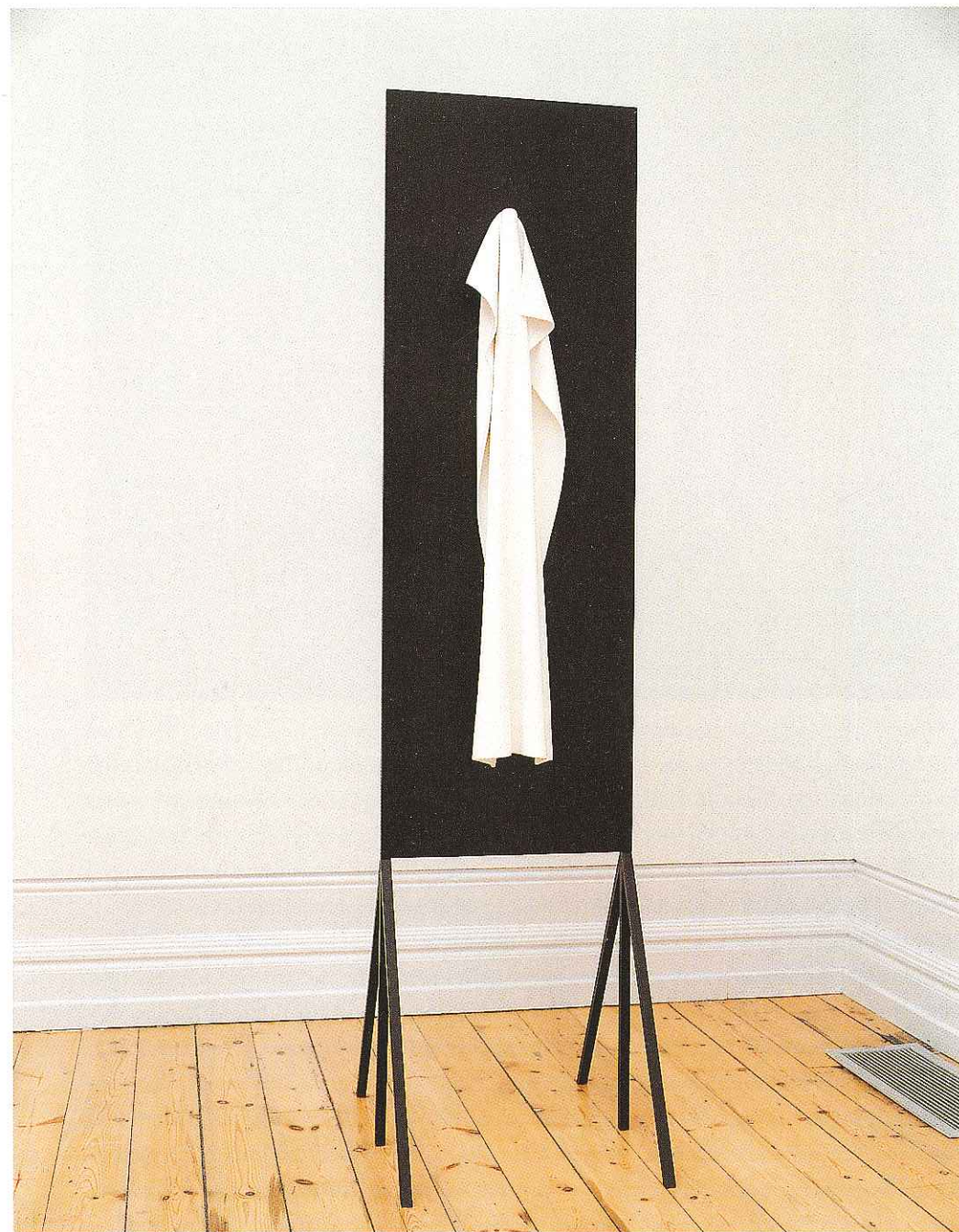


Figure 6.21. Lili Dujourie,  
*Mille et une nuit*, 1993.  
Plaster, iron, approx. 82 1/2  
x 20 1/2 in. Detail: one of  
two facing panels.

The narrator may be unstable, so much so that it might indeed be questionable for some readers whether this work can be labeled narrative. But while we hesitate and waver, producing more folds, the idea of narrative continues its epistemological work, and it has done more work than any “rightful” labeling can ever do. Thus, Reed’s #275 proposes a theory of theory: let it be neither master nor slave. Second-personhood is just that. Butor may have succeeded more convincingly in producing a narrative, but at the cost of second-personhood. Reed’s work demonstrates that second-personhood can and must be sustained, albeit at the cost of ontological certainty about narrativity. I contend that theoretical concepts are more powerful, heuristically, theoretically, epistemologically, and philosophically, when their ontological propriety can be held at bay, when they can be treated like elements of fictional worlds, which point of view, in the shape of a focalizer who moves along the theoretical object’s trajectory, makes plausible and hence productive. At the very least, this theoretical fold enables the cultural objects and subjects we study to speak back, or just to speak. This is, importantly, a consequence of baroque epistemology.

David Reed’s #275, with its little dot overflowing from its major fold into the realm of the other (color), can be seen as a visual embodiment of this and as a theoretical statement that takes sides in the cultural debates and fights over epistemology, modes of vision, and ways of being.

CHRISTENSEN, PEETERS, REED, AND DUJOURIE, despite the vast differences between them, have a common concern for the kind of visual narrativity that cannot be reduced to an illustrative or derivative quasi-linguistic function yet that need not be construed as visual essentialism. I would therefore like to propose that the figurativity at the heart of Reed’s nonfigurative shapes and curls, Peeters’ light-work, Christensen’s Jell-O temporality, and Dujourie’s second-personhood, resides in cultural memory, specifically, in a diffuse memory fed by popular culture. The private place of the bedroom becomes a kind of public place, as public as the bar in which Peeters staged his interrogation of light, or in which Christensen, as a present-day and second-person-oriented Proust, enticed anonymous visitors to taste the remembered flavor of childhood’s Jell-O. These are spaces in which the accumulated time of cultural memory inscribes itself in the intimacy of a narrative that grounds the subject’s belief in subjectivity itself, like a cultural mirror stage. This, ultimately, is the meaning that contemporary art reactivates in the Baroque’s favorite motif—the mirror.