Posing the Phallus*

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Art objects as part objects, then.
—Annette Michelson

Why was the phallus posed (as a question, as an object, for a picture)? Why, between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s, was the phallus posed so often and so insistently: by Jasper Johns in 1955, with the inclusion of a green penis among the bodily fragments ranged in the shuttered compartments of his Target with Plaster Casts; by Yayoi Kusama, beginning in 1961, with her Accumulations, articles of furniture and clothing covered with dense fields of fabric-stuffed phalli; by Eva Hesse in the mid-1960s, with such works as Ingeminate, a pair of tubular balloons, twinned phalli, bound and stiffened with cord and connected by a length of rubber hose; by Louise Bourgeois in the late 1960s, with Fillette, a two-foot-long latex phallus hung from a hook (and, in 1982, tucked snugly under the artist’s arm in a photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe)?

These parodies of the phallus (for parodies they are) had potential political effects: made literal, the phallus might be undermined as a patriarchal symbol. Indeed, rendered literal enough, it might be turned into an explicitly counter-patriarchal object, or rather part-object. For to parody the phallus by posing it was, in these and many other instances, also to propose it as part-object.

This phallus-as-part-object—or target of the drives, as desublimated, literal body part—was, to be sure, a proposition of its time. In the New York of the 1950s

* For Annette Michelson and Georges Didi-Huberman—and, especially, for Rosalind Krauss. My work on this essay and the study of which it forms a part has been supported by a Getty Postdoctoral Fellowship.

1. Annette Michelson, “Where Is Your Rupture?: Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk,” October 56 (Spring 1991), p. 48. The passage reads in full: “There is a dominant trend toward this representation of a body-in-pieces, of what is in Kleinian theory termed the part object, that runs, like an insistent thread, a sustained subtext, through much of American artistic production (and through its painting and sculpture in particular) in the decades of the 1950s and ’60s. Art objects as part objects, then.”

Louise Bourgeois. Fillette. 1968. (Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA, New York.)
and '60s where these works were made, the phallus might have carried the implication of phallic symbol, or fetish, but not phallic signifier. The Lacanian reading of the phallus as signifier-of-desire, so deftly distinguished from a body part, would—for feminist art of the late 1970s through the '80s in particular—prove more theoretically powerful and more politically incisive than the phallus-as-part-object, so resolutely reduced to a body part. In postmodernism, it once seemed, the phallus-as-signifier would supersede the phallus-as-part-object not only as a theoretical proposition, but as a logic of artistic practice and political resistance.

And yet, the part-object survives. It is, I would like to argue, more precisely the survival of the part-object that is at stake—in, to mention only some of the

2. If Michelson's "art objects as part objects" is the first proposition of my argument, Georges Didi-Huberman's current work on Aby Warburg subtends its second: that the part-object survives. The term "survival" (Nachleben) is, as Didi-Huberman has demonstrated, pivotal to Warburg's development of a historical model to encompass the "unconscious of time." The reduction of "survival" to "revival" in later interpretations of Warburg has, he argues, masked the radicality of Warburg's proposition by making it punctual, and so keyed to periodization and to a progressive logic of historical change. For
more prominent examples, work by Bourgeois, Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, Robert Gober, and Rona Pondick—than its return. For if the part-object appears to return as a logic for bodily art, it returns having always been, at some level, in effect (in, for example, work produced by Bourgeois, Johns, and Nauman in the 1970s and ’80s, at the very moment of postmodernism’s turn to the signifier). I


The relevance of this analysis to my argument here is twofold. First, I wish to disrupt a convention of periodization that would distinguish practices of the 1950s and early ’60s from those of the late 1960s through the 1990s as belonging respectively to modernism and postmodernism. Cutting across (post)modernism, which is the term I will use to designate the historical formation encompassed by my analysis, the role of the part-object has not been susceptible to detailed study. Second, I wish to invoke a psychoanalytic model, Kleinian object-relations theory, for which the persistence, or survival, of early experience (and in particular fantasies of the part-object) throughout life is a defining characteristic—producing, at the level of subjectivity, an experience that might be described as anachronistic.
would like to suggest that the level at which the part-object has remained in effect in postwar art is that of the drives, and that it is in its enactment of the drives that a part-object logic is structural to (post)modernism.

The more recent deployment of the part-object, with its recourse to an infantile register of experience, functions critically and self-consciously in relation to the phallic signifier of Lacanian theory. A perceived inadequacy of the phallus-as-signifier-of-desire to the aggression of the drives might, for example, be seen to motivate some recent work in which the body is riven and scattered: in which the scopic drive is displaced by the oral and anal drives, and libidinal desire by the death drive. And to the extent that the part-object is invoked as a counter-term to the phallic signifier, it now does somewhat different work than it did in the 1950s and '60s, when, as in Target with Plaster Casts, or Fillette, a principal effect was to send up the phallic symbol as an emblem of patriarchal authority, and the fetish as its perverse substitute.

3. This is the argument of my "Bad Enough Mother," October 71 (Winter 1995), pp. 71–92.
But I would say that the part-object survives to do this new work, rather than that it returns to do it. For the tenacity of the part-object in postwar art might be compared, in psychoanalytic terms, to the persistence of the infantile drives, which, at least in one account, survive the Oedipus complex.

In Melanie Klein's object-relations theory, the infantile experience of somatic fragmentation in the grip of the drives is the ground of subjectivity itself. And the part-object is pivotal to this subjectivity-of-the-drives because it is itself produced by the drives—so that, for example, biting produces in the infant a fantasy of destroying the breast, while sucking enacts its incorporation, each action producing a distinct part-object: the bad and the good breast. The range of part-objects—breast, penis, mouth, feces, urine, baby—generated through the drives is put into play phantasmatically, and these fantasies in turn position the subject. Paranoid fantasies of being attacked (as by chewed-up fragments of the breast damaged by biting), for example, lock the subject into what Klein terms the paranoid-schizoid position, while anxieties about the destructive effects of aggressive impulses conversely precipitate the so-called depressive position.4

The part-object's claim on the subject crucially is not confined to an infantile phase; endlessly perpetuated, its demands define an infantile level of experience throughout life. And so, dissolved in the drives, the Oedipus complex as Klein describes it is not a punctual event, marking the subject's entry into the symbolic order, but a murky awareness that trails backward and downward to seek what is, in Freudian terms, the inarticulate prehistory of the subject (the pre-Oedipal stage). By a similar revision, the Freudian concept of regression, figured as a return—a retracing or doubling back to a distant object or stage—is recast as an incessant repositioning, or capture, of the subject by the drives.5 And perhaps most important, in Klein the rigorous logic of libidinal development is chronically thwarted by the aggressive drives trained on the subject itself—by the death drive.

My proposal, therefore, is this: in its very resistance to the Oedipal logic of renunciation and radical break, and in its enactment instead of a perpetual fissuring, the part-object marks the operation of a self-destructive imperative that one might think of as a death drive in (post)modernism.

4. See Melanie Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (1935), in The Selected Melanie Klein, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 115-45. In her introductory note to this essay, Mitchell makes the point that this interplay of positions marks a shift from a developmental logic of stages (oral, anal, phallic, genital) to a structural one—a position being "an always available state, not something one passes through" (p. 116).
5. Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict" (1928), in Selected Klein, pp. 69–83. Mitchell notes that "Klein's contribution is to chart an area where past and present are one, and time is spatial, not temporal," (Introduction, p. 28).
He drew a swastika which extended over the whole page and which he changed into a Union Jack.

—Melanie Klein⁶

In historical terms, the fate of the part-object in postwar art is bound up with the complex historical receptions of Surrealism and Marcel Duchamp. For the period of the mid-1950s through the 1960s, from which my opening examples are drawn, Surrealism and Duchamp represented a disclaimed subhistory of modernism; today, in the reversal of these positions, it is the aesthetic autonomy of high modernism that is disavowed. One explanation, then, for the reiteration of the part-object in so much recent artistic production might be that it is redeemed as a marker of Surrealist and Duchampian representations of the body-in-pieces, and in repudiation of the modernist gestalt.

That would be one possible analysis, but an inadequate one. For the part-object is disprivileged not only in modernist discourse, but also in postmodernist receptions of Surrealism and Duchamp. In Surrealism, the part-object is subsumed by the fetish. And in postmodernist receptions of Surrealism, it is even


Duchamp. Feuille de vigne femelle. 1951.
more emphatically the fetish that signifies bodily fragmentation and the shattering of aesthetic autonomy, rather than the part-object. As deployed by Duchamp, the part-object has historically been superseded by the readymade, and its potential to critique, but also to compound, the effects of the fetish. And even now, despite a critical and artistic reorientation toward the phantasmatic dimension of Duchamp’s practice, the status of the malic molds in the Large Glass—or of Prière de toucher (Please Touch) (1947), Feuille de vigne femelle (Female Fig Leaf) (1950), Objet-Dard (1951), or the Coin de chasteté (Wedge of Chastity) (1954)—as part-objects is often ignored. More important for me here than the significance of the part-object to Duchamp’s own production, however, is the role his work has played in its reiteration across the field of twentieth-century art.

For what binds the part-object to the history of (post)modernism is not only its insistent repetition in diverse contexts, but its survival in the work of a few artists, Duchamp significant among them, over long periods of time. This is not to suggest that the logic of the part-object is continuous across this history: it would

be more accurate to say that its function is disruptive, and that these interruptions are repeatedly staged. In Duchamp's own production, distinct ruptures, or punctures, mark points where modernism is made porous to the drives (Cubism, to take the first instance, being brought into contact with the drives in the *Large Glass*). And where the drives break through in Duchamp's work, the logic of the part-object is often triggered.9

One such puncture occurred in the early 1950s. Privately at work on the *Etant donnés*, Duchamp revealed, and allowed to be reproduced in small editions, a series of small, enigmatic objects, including *Feuille de vigne femelle* and *Objet-Dard*, that would turn out to be generated from the body of that work. The first is a negative cast of the rough vaginal slit—the anatomically incorrect and damaged genital—of the inert doll whose splayed legs would form the focal point of the *Etant donnés*. The second is a plaster cast excised from a mold of the same figure's breast.10 And even without the possibility of correlating these objects to the fabrication of the *Etant donnés*—and so of identifying them as by-products of that body (as the part-object is a by-product of the bodily drives)—the genital crease of the one and the phallic/fecal doubling of the other nevertheless mark them as not only "erotic objects," but more particularly part-objects.

It was around this time, in 1955, that Jasper Johns, having destroyed his old work the previous autumn, began from scratch with *Flag* and *Target with Plaster*.

9. It is not my claim that Duchamp is behind every reiteration of the part-object, but rather that one effect of the—strategic—recursiveness of the part-object in Duchamp's work is firmly to inscribe that term in (post)modernism.

10. In her careful analysis of these objects, Amelia Jones makes clear the emphasis that Duchamp's methods of fabrication placed on properties of reversibility and dedifferentiation, noting, for example,
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Casts, two works whose historical significance would reside not only in their claim to be Johns's first, but also in the Museum of Modern Art's failure to acquire them. The Museum's initial rejection of these two pieces from Johns's 1958 show at Leo Castelli's new gallery, in favor of ostensibly more abstract alternatives, signals a discomfort with, among other things, phallic symbols made literal. To repeat the well-known tale of Target, as told most recently by MoMA itself in the catalogue of the recent Johns retrospective:

On this Saturday morning [January 25, 1958], Alfred H. Barr, Jr. of the Museum of Modern Art, visits the Leo Castelli Gallery. From there he calls curator Dorothy Miller, asking her to come down right away. They spend an hour discussing which paintings to buy for the museum, settling on Flag, 1954–55, Target with Four Faces, 1955, Green Target, 1955, and White Numbers, 1957. . . . Barr is also interested in Target with Plaster Casts, but is worried about the possible reaction to a box containing a cast of a penis. He asks Johns, who happens to be at the gallery, if the work can be displayed with the box closed. Johns replies that the lid can be closed "some of the time, but not all of the time."}

that the Feuille de vigne femelle is "a reverse mold of the nude figure's (lack of) pudendum." Amelia Jones, Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 90–92.

11. Both Flag and Target with Plaster Casts were among the five works Leo Castelli sent on approval to the Museum of Modern Art at Alfred Barr's request. Unable to secure Flag due to concerns within the Museum that it might be deemed unpatriotic, Barr arranged for it to be purchased by Philip Johnson, who presented it to MoMA on Barr's retirement in 1973. Target with Plaster Casts was refused on account of "certain graphic details that would prevent its exhibition." For a detailed account of these events, see Fred Orton, Figuring Jasper Johns (London: Reaktion, 1994). The above quote appears on p. 221, note 58.

If the graphic rendering of the penis-as-fragment in Target with Plaster Casts prevented it from being read as a (phallic) symbol, the symbolism of Flag was similarly undermined by the literalness of its representation, which made it appear unpatriotic. This was an objection that all Barr's assurances to the Board of Trustees about Mr. Johns being "an elegantly dressed Southerner" could not remove.\textsuperscript{13} For in Flag, with a particular economy of means, the symbolic effect of the symbol is blocked by the symbol itself.

Within the extensive literature devoted to it, Flag has often been read as a kind of readymade—a pregiven and, by Duchampian definition, an arbitrary—image. In other interpretations, the specificity of this image as the U.S. flag, within the repressive cold war context of its careful making (and not only choosing), and in relation to Johns's own suggestion that he dreamed the work, incurs political, aesthetic, and personal significance. By situating Flag where it may seem least to belong—within the history of the part-object—I would like to suggest that it targets not just a symbol, or the idea of symbolism, but the very logic of the symbolic—and that it does so from the level of the drives, or rather, by grounding the symbolic in the drives.

The material ground that Flag establishes for the ensuing series of flags, targets, alphabets, and numbers of his early production—that dense gluey matrix of torn, stained, smeared, wax-dipped, and re-fused newspaper—itself, of course, evokes a libidinal, vaguely infantile, corporeal surface. Or so it might seem, except that this ground that is so tactile as to be called "touching," but also so meticulously pieced together, or fused, respects the conventions of the Stars and Stripes in most particulars.\textsuperscript{14} The tension, at ground level, between a libidinal surface that has consistently inspired its critics to speak in terms of a loving touch, and an impersonal symbol that alienates the subject from touch, positioning him or her in relation to the law of the father, is pivotal to any reading of Flag.

As compelling as the tension between these two grounds, however, is their adhesion, which defeats any attempt to see difference between them.\textsuperscript{15} This is the violence of Flag: to ground representation in the destruction of difference (the symbolic in the drives). And if a current critical preoccupation is the sexual identity that is inscribed in Flag—in subversion of the masculinist, militarist, heterosexist, racist predicament of postwar American culture—it may be necessary to recast

\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Orton, Figuring Jasper Johns, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{14} Both these points are developed by Orton in the chapter "A Different Kind of Beginning," in Figuring Jasper Johns, including the suggestion that "after Cézanne, Johns is the most touching of artists," p. 118.
\textsuperscript{15} On a formal level, Flag blocks difference by fusing figure and ground, inside and outside, form and content, and so confounds, as in the title itself, the subject of the work and the work itself. But Flag also, and by the same means, cancels social and psychic differences, levels high/low, masculine/feminine, gay/straight—and symbolic/drives.
identity in this work as precisely not difference, but its disavowal. It may be useful, that is, to think less in terms of an identity in Flag than of a principle by which the identity of each term to its conventional opposite (figure-to-ground, symbolic-to-drives) puts identity-as-difference at risk.

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In Melanie Klein’s psychoanalysis of children, a common feature of fantasy and play is the incorporation of objects by other objects so that differences—as, for example, between the breast and the penis or between the mother and the father—perpetually collapse. Klein’s Narrative of a Child Analysis is a diurnal record of the analysis of Richard, a ten-year-old boy Klein analyzed in the spring and summer of 1941, when both she and Richard’s family took up temporary residence in a Scottish village to escape the German bombing of Britain. In the twelfth session of the analysis, Richard, who closely followed the war news and whose play was keyed to its events, made his first drawings, featuring a naval battle between German and British ships. Even as Klein delivered her interpretation of this battle as staging the anxiety of Richard’s own aggression toward his parents’ insides, and his fear that they would retaliate by putting their “periscope genitals” into him, Richard “drew a swastika and showed her how easily it could be turned into a Union Jack.” The conversion of the swastika into the Union Jack recurred periodically in the analysis, offering one demonstration of the volatility of Richard’s fantasies, the rapidity with which one object could turn into another, and the extent to which the bombing, fears of invasion, and the suspicions aroused by an Austrian-born analyst impinged upon the treatment. In Richard’s analysis with Klein, flags, maps, and numbers played a particularly significant role in staging the interplay between anxieties about the war and the “disasters” unfolding in fantasy. Interpreting Richard’s play, Klein was attuned to the infantile experience, to fantasies of the part-object that survived in his fears of Hitler (whom he hoped could be offered psychoanalysis after the war) and of the Hitler-Daddy and the Hitler-Mummy inside himself.

16. The most complex reading is offered by Orton, who suggests that “the kind of physical and emotional intimacy associated with Johns’s handling and touch surfaces as an allegory of homosexuality made at a moment when there was no space available in avant-garde art practice for its self-representation or identification” (Figuring Jasper Johns, p. 124). I would suggest that Flag moves even beyond—or below—allegory, in the direction of the subsymbolic.


I believe that the question of what is a part and what is a whole is a very interesting problem, on the infantile level, yes, on the psychological level, but also in ordinary, objective space.

—Jasper Johns

If, in the work of a number of artists working in New York in the late 1950s and 1960s, the phallic symbol was recast as part-object, this move turns out to coincide rather closely with psychoanalytic debates of the time, Lacan’s “The Meaning of the Phallus” having been first presented in May 1958 at the Max Planck Institute in Munich. And it is here, in Lacan’s rereading of Freud, that the term phallus becomes pivotal, Freud himself having used the term relatively seldom. Making his own claim to the Freudian legacy through his model of the phallus-as-signifier, Lacan is particularly scathing as to the theoretical status of the part-object, “uncriticized since Karl Abraham first introduced it, which is more the pity in view of the easy option which it provides today.” What Lacan particularly derides is the reduction of the phallus to the condition of part-object—to, that is, “an object of primitive oral aggression, belonging to the realm of the instinct.”

An early criticism of Target with Plaster Casts, forwarded by Leo Steinberg, was that the use of cast fragments—purplish foot, white face cut off at the eyes, red hand, pink breast, orange ear, green penis, yellow heel, greenish-black bone—was a device “too pitilessly unsentimental to acquit the work of morbidity.” In this analysis, the aggressive treatment of the body parts, “derogated” by a fragmentation that is, as Steinberg observes, further intensified by the parts themselves being “not whole” but “clipped to size” to fit the boxes, “indicates that the human body is not the ostensible subject. The subject remains the bull’s eye in its wholeness.”

More recent criticism has conversely argued that the plaster casts, and specifically the inclusion of a penis among these bodily fragments, powerfully thematizes a specific subjective experience of fragmentation. Yet Steinberg’s reading of the work’s morbidity is somehow more telling. For it asserts that the fragmentation and discontinuity of the parts is implacable and literal, not symbolic. So when

Steinberg invokes the wholeness of the target as redeeming this fracture, that claim marks a blind spot, a resistance to the possibility that the target actually concentrates the drive. But he does not—indeed refuses to—posit a specific body or subject in the work. And this refusal, which permits the work to position, rather than be positioned by, the viewer, accords the part-object its field of operation, its violence.

That one of the parts displayed in Target with Plaster Casts is a penis therefore need not be taken as a cue to restabilize the work at the level of sex. But if, from the beginning, the penis has assumed a certain primacy in the critical reception of this work, that seems entirely proper—not for what that particular cast might signify about the sexual identity of the artist, or the work, but for how it might pose the problem of the phallus. Thus, one reading of Target with Plaster Casts might be that it risks what Lacan warns against: the loss of the phallus in the part-object. And Johns was not alone in taking that risk.

Kusama is interested in obsessive repetition, which is a single interest.

—Donald Judd

Yayoi Kusama arrived in New York from Japan, via Seattle, in 1958, aged twenty-nine. Writing from Japan to Georgia O’Keeffe, out of the blue, in 1955, she asked for advice on emigrating to New York and making a living as a painter. By 1959, she had realized the aim expressed to O’Keeffe, “that my paintings be criticized in New York.” In October 1959, in a solo show at the cooperative Brata Gallery, she exhibited five large-scale white paintings inscribed with an intricate webbed pattern, called Infinity Nets.

A 1961 photograph of Kusama posed, wearing a fur-trimmed suit and high heels, before the largest of these, a thirty-foot-long white mural installed at the Stephen Radich Gallery that year, stages her trumping of Jackson Pollock.
Parodying the excesses of Pollock’s achievement, Kusama unveils a bigger painting, and announces an equally capacious ambition. Playing the woman in a masculine art world was to be as pivotal to Kusama’s practice as the performance of masculinity had been to Pollock’s. It was not only that she acted the parts, posing at openings in a decorous kimono, or later having herself photographed reclining nude in a pinup pose on a phallus-encrusted couch. She played these feminine parts against the hard-living masculinity of the Pollock-type, but also (and this is an index of her ambition) against the very phallocentrism of modern art.29

In 1961, Kusama began to make her Accumulation and Compulsion pieces, found objects blanketed by dense fields of lumpy protuberances fashioned by stuffing small cloth sacks with cotton batting.30 The repertory of objects submitted to this labor-intensive procedure was extremely varied—encompassing, for example, an armchair, a sofa, a ladder, a baby carriage, shoes and coats. As in the Infinity Nets, the effect of this process might be described as exhaustive—both manically all-encompassing and depressively all-obliterating; it was a condition Kusama

29. M. Catherine de Zegher, in the exhibition catalog Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), offers a complex reading of the interplay of, among other kinds of parts, feminine roles and part-objects, in disrupting phallic ideals of coherence and unity. See in particular de Zegher’s introduction and the essays in Part I, “Parts of/for.”

30. Kusama had recently moved to a building on East Nineteenth Street, where Donald Judd also had his studio. “Raw materials for one of the first such objects, a rowboat, were salvaged from the street by Kusama and Judd, who helped her stuff the sacks” (Karia, Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective, p. 79).
described, apropos of the physical work of fabrication, as like "being carried on a conveyor belt without ending to my death" or "continuing to drink thousands of cups of coffee or eating thousands of feet of macaroni."31

To critique phallocentrism by compounding it, to parody the phallic symbol by its compulsive repetition, was one strategy of these works. Another, as demonstrated in Kusama's 1965 installation *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli's Field (or Floor Show)*, was to make phantasmatic reduplication the means by which the phallus could be *lost*. By *lost*, I do not intend here the loss that fetishism defends against, nor does the anxiety Kusama invokes seem to me to be principally of the castration type (although clearly the phalli-fields do parody fetishism as a kind of

phallus-fixation). I mean something more literal: that the phallus as a singular, discrete entity is lost in its proliferation and dispersal across these fields.

The photographs Kusama made of the Accumulations, typically posing herself in the pictures, underscore this effect by overlaying patterns—a polka-dot field, a macaroni field, a phalli-field—so that the effect is one of compulsive repetition, certainly, but also of dedifferentiation, as the fields merge into a kind of “infinity net” of space. In the picture of Kusama-as-pinup, reclining on the Accumulation sofa, for example, photographs are spliced together to produce a field so full, and at the same time so flat, that the body, for all its phallic smoothness and wholeness, is not anchored but seems to float in space, lost to the gaze. And in Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show, Kusama’s 1963 installation at the Gertrude Stein Gallery, the photographic image was again used to exaggerate the splitting effect of the phalli-field. A phalli-studded rowboat and oars, positioned so as to emphasize the phallic contour of the boat’s prow, formed the centerpiece of the installation, while oversized black-and-white photographs of the rowboat accumulation papered the gallery walls. Here it was in the infinity-effect of the mise-en-abyme that the phallus was lost.

32. For an argument that Kusama’s deployment of the phallus is structured fetishistically, see Lynn Zelevansky, “Driving Image: Yayoi Kusama in New York,” in Love Forever, pp. 11–41.
33. The point that the photographs produce the effect of a mise-en-abyme is made by J. F. Rodenbeck in “Yayoi Kusama: Surface Stitch Skin,” in Inside the Visible, p. 151.
Combining the serial multiple (the photograph) with the obsessional multiple (the part-object), Kusama demonstrated that photographic modes of production were permeable to the drives. The part-object was not, then, only a kind of fragment—like a green penis—but increasingly a logic of production, and reproduction.

*Do more. More nonsensical more crazy more machines, more breasts, penises, cunts, whatever.*

—Sol LeWitt

So Sol LeWitt exhorted Eva Hesse in April 1965, in response to a letter in which she wrote of working on “a dumb thing which is three-dimensional . . . like breast and penis.” In February, Hesse had begun making a series of pen-and-ink drawings in which erotic and machinic parts were conjoined by a deadpan mechanical line. And from these diagrams were produced a type of relief sculpture, including *Ringaround Arosie*, the piece she had described to LeWitt. Hesse’s

34. This is a point that Michelson makes in “Where Is Your Rupture?” and that is developed in different terms by Hal Foster, apropos of Warhol, in chapter 5, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).
36. Ibid., p. 34.
description of a breast and penis was, as Lucy Lippard observed, initially somewhat puzzling, for what was immediately perceivable were two breast-like forms: protuberant nipple-bound demispheres, a small stacked above a large, modeled in papier mâché, and tightly bound in concentric loops of cloth-covered wire, the chalky surface overpainted in gradated aureoles of orange and pink. It took the twinning of *Ingeminate*, perhaps, to make sense of the breast-penis, to grasp the significance of compounding the two, to realize that Hesse's work had moved into the register of the part-object.

"Doubled, redoubled," or, "to emphasize through repetition," notes Lippard, are the meanings of *ingeminate*. One of those esoteric words Hesse combed from dictionary and thesaurus, to be saved for titles, *ingeminate*—punning on inseminate, diseminate, germinate—is a word that sounds obscurely reproductive, pinned to an object that looks absurdly sexual, and that turns out to encapsulate "a concept that would become fundamental to Hesse's art." If something is absurd, Hesse explained, "it's much more exaggerated, more absurd if it's repeated." Especially absurd is any repetition of the necessarily singular. Doubled, or split, then, as in *Ingeminate*—and hooked together by a length of hose—the phallus becomes something as absurd as a malic mold, or a bachelor apparatus (for how better to describe the effect of a bachelor apparatus, its rigid malic molds interconnected by capillary tubing, than as something all the more absurd for being repeated)?

Thus, the twinning of *Ingeminate* feels like one more turn of the Duchampian screw, that throbbing rotary demisphere around which Hesse winds her production like, well, a ringaround arosie. Trace the spiral back to 1925 and *Precision Optics*, to the circular logic of the pun, *Rrose Sélaëry et moi*—from those pulsing machines, circle the rings of the wrapped and waxed *Targets*—*wrap* being the verb that, as Anne Wagner reminds us, Hesse's friend Mel Bochner placed at the nucleus of his 1966 *Portrait of Eva Hesse*. Threading through to Bochner's portrait,

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37. Ibid., p. 38.
38. The breast-penis combination has a particular significance in Kleinian theory: "One of the earliest phantasies relating to the sexuality of the parents is, I believe, built round part-objects: the father's penis intruding into the mother's breast. This may very soon lead to the feeling that the parents' genitals are always mingled" (Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis*, p. 118, n. 1). Producing a "combined parent figure," "so mixed up" that, as in the fantasies of Klein's patient Richard, "he could not distinguish between them," this conjunction is also threatening, and makes the penis a rival for the breast, establishing the early Oedipus complex that is a distinctive feature of Kleinian theory (p. 118).
42. In chapter 6 of *The Optical Unconscious*, Rosalind Krauss reads the relation of Hesse's production to Duchamp through the model of the bachelor machine. She also points out the dependence of the desiring machine (as theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) on the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid position (p. 316).
a concrete poem in concentric rings of verbs—gird and mummify, bind and blanket—wind back to Hesse’s own demispheres and spirals tightly bound, to gridded fields of circles pricked with cord—to the puncture that marks the irruption of the part-object in Minimalism.44

Hesse’s work as a sculptor begins literally, with breast and penis, and proceeds to ingeminate this beginning across the field of her diverse production.

44 Michelson enlarges this claim in “Where Is Your Rupture?”: “Our most compelling point of entry into the consideration of the role of the part object within the art of the mid-1950s through the ’60s is to be found in the work of Eva Hesse. It was the major achievement of a woman artist, through her obsessive constitution of a repertory of part objects (and this within the minimalist moment) to have produced the elements of a radical renewal of the sculptural enterprise, of its grammar and its materials,” p. 51.
The part-object does subside as a recognizable feature, but survives at the level of process: in, for example, the way a work like Area, a series of crumpled rubberized sheets sewn together, is a by-product of Repetition Nineteen III, produced from the “insides” of the cylindrical molds used to make that work.45 But I want to stick close to the beginning, to Hesse at her most literal.

To twin and bind the phallus is to make a joke at its expense, but also to muddle it up with the breasts, and the breasts with the testicles, and so to set off a spiral of identifications in which the body is both drawn close and lost track of—become ever more profoundly phantasmatic. Hesse would explain this partly with pictures. Like Kusama (but much more like Bourgeois), she made it a practice to pose with her work, to pose posing it, as if to demonstrate how it worked. Take, for example, the picture of the artist modeling Ingeminate, the sculpture’s umbilical hose looped around her neck as she balances the twin phalli in her outstretched arms. Almost twenty years before Bourgeois would pick up Fillette in range of a camera, there is Hesse, smilingly showing off hers, and showing that to put the object in play through the body is to demand for it a more literal level of attention.

45. Quoted in Briony Fer, “Treading Blindly, or, the Excessive Presence of the Object,” Art History 20, no. 2 (June 1997), p. 270. Fer observes that “Area recycles that disused mold, turned, as it were, inside-out,” so that “the mold is only used to destroy itself as a mold,” p. 271.
And if, in *Ingeminate*, the separation between body and object is compromised by touch, and the aesthetic autonomy of the work slips on a pun and a gag, in Bourgeois's hands, the fate of "art objects as part objects" would be to slide even further down to the drives.46

She slips—along the line of a symbolic equation, one might say—from a penis to a baby.

—J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis47

To begin one last time, but earlier, and so to reconnect the phallus-as-part-object of the 1950s and '60s to its Surrealist history: here is Louise Bourgeois in 1947, kneeling on the living-room carpet, hands clasped in mock worship of Joan Miró. He, clad in the banner from the 1947 Paris Surrealist exhibition, is ensconced in an armchair throne, hand raised to acknowledge her tribute, bare feet resting on stacks of books about Picasso. Her hair carefully coiffed in a chic forties style, Bourgeois wears a smart suit and stockings, the reinforced soles

clearly visible on her shoeless feet, as is a dark seam traveling up the back of her left calf. And in such details as this impress of stockinged knee on plush rug, as she crawls around on the carpet capering with Miró, something unexpected, or at least unrecollected, is disclosed about Bourgeois's social life in the New York art world of the 1940s. For contrary to art-historical myth, which has portrayed her mocking masculine authority from the margins, here is a modish, self-assured figure needling it Katharine Hepburn-style from within the confines of the art world’s Manhattan living room. Here is the Bourgeois who called Alfred Barr “my best friend at the time.”

Around this time, Bourgeois seems to have made a practice of photographing her artist friends, and sometimes of posing with them in arch scenarios. This is how the Miró pictures—for there are two that concern me here—came to be made. First acquainted in Paris in the 1930s, during Bourgeois’s student days, Bourgeois and Miró became friends in New York soon after his arrival in 1947, meeting at Stanley William Hayter’s engraving workshop, Atelier 17, or dining together at Pierre Matisse’s. For Bourgeois, the friendship that formed between them seems to have marked a turning point in her dealings with the father figures of Surrealism, as she called them, Breton and Duchamp, for

49. For Bourgeois’s account of her friendship with Miró, see “Natural Talent,” in “Miró at 100,” Artforum 32, no. 5 (January 1994), p. 74.
whom she was, as she has said, “just a girl,” and “women were not to be taken seriously anyway”: “Miró was different.”

This difference is made plain in Miró’s self-mocking dinner-party pose. Acting the father (as compared to Duchamp, for example, who in his self-portraits as Rrose Sélavy acts the woman), he agreeably makes himself the butt of a joke. Admitting, as Bourgeois observes in a remembrance of her friend, that he liked to be told that he was greater than “his master,” Picasso, Miró burlesques the infantile excesses of phallic aggression to even greater effect in a second pose. There, with the Surrealist banner pulled up around his head like a blanket, fully draping his body but for the face, feet, and arms stuck out akimbo, he encapsulates swaddling and swaggering in a single, supreme gesture.

Travestying a prominent Surrealist in the banner of the movement itself, Bourgeois’s play-acting with Miró began to recast the father figure as an object of ridicule. Similar parodies, in which masculine bluster is in turn derided hyperbolically, were to become a signal feature of her later, self-consciously feminist work—as in, for example, her 1978 performance piece “A Banquet/Fashion Show of Body Parts,” in which the art historian Gert Shiff was dressed up in a theat-

encrusted gown and paraded down a catwalk. Already in the late 1940s, however, Bourgeois perceived the possibility that Surrealism might encompass the terms of its own, feminist critique—and that through the logic of the part-object.

Acquired by Alfred Barr for MoMA in 1951, Sleeping Figure burlesques the late-modernist sculptural trope of the phallic totem. To travesty the phallus it both feminizes the totem—encasing the armless figure in a cinched dress and precariously balancing it on legs tapered to points so narrow as to require buttressing from an external scaffold—and emphasizes its signal phallic feature: a cleft head, fitted like an oversized hat, and punctured at its tip by a small hole. Appearing at the time like a variation of so many Surrealist-based totemic figures produced by sculptors of the New York School, Sleeping Figure looks in retrospect more like a send-up of this type: a trussed phallic figure verging on collapse.

Making of the totem a wobbly phallus, it invokes (not only to rebut but also to rework) a Surrealist legacy, specifically Alberto Giacometti’s move, in the early 1930s, against the vertical posture of the figure. For the trussing and bolstering of Sleeping Figure—the crutch-like armature that both signals and forestalls its slide onto the horizontal—recapitulates Giacometti’s use of a similar scaffolding to support the figure in The Invisible Object of 1934. And in more general terms, if the disappearance of the base was a condition of Bourgeois’s early sculptures, which stood directly on the floor “like people,” in this detachment from bases her Personages occupied a terrain mapped out in the Surrealist sculptures of Giacometti, which were also displayed sans base, lowering the figure from the base or plinth to the table or floor. By positioning the object sans base, by buttressing it, by suspending it, Giacometti had demonstrated that the elimination of the sculpture’s support is, in itself, a move against the integrity of the phallus. And if Giacometti soon reverted to the upright figure, Bourgeois was to work through—to twist, to pun against, to compound—the implications of his Surrealist works for decades to come.

Take, as a final example, the signal case of Fillette, the work Bourgeois recommended to attention by posing with it on the occasion of her first retrospective, in 1982 at the Museum of Modern Art, for a portrait intended as the catalog’s frontispiece. Robert Mapplethorpe’s picture shows her wearing a tufted coat of monkey fur, and grinning broadly, a smile reported again and again in the widening crinkles of her face. Under her right arm she clasps Fillette, her fingers firmly cupping the tip, the big shiny balls nestled behind her elbow. The coarse, stubbled skin of the tip pushes through the V-shaped opening of a sleeve fitted over the shaft, the ridges formed by its raised seam mimicking, in the pristine limpidity of Mapplethorpe’s print, a crescent of skin traced out by the veins running across Bourgeois’s fixed hand below.

To commemorate the moment in which her work of four decades was to be assembled for the first time, Bourgeois and Mapplethorpe together produced an object lesson in the form of a portrait: a picture defiantly ironic in tone, which also neatly encapsulates the part-object logic of Bourgeois’s sculptural production.
That the photograph actually used as the catalog’s frontispiece was a cropped version of this now-famous portrait, reduced to a head shot, is symptomatic of anxieties that are elicited when the phallus is posed, especially when it is posed by a woman (and more particularly still when it is posed by a woman of seventy).

For the excision of Fillette from the photograph, displacing the grin from its gag, not only spoiled the joke, but ruined the picture.

Look at the bottom right-hand corner of the image, where the scabrous tip of Fillette presses itself into Bourgeois’s grasp, at the uncanny resemblance between the raised seam of the sculpture’s shaft and the hand’s tracery of veins.

52. For a discussion of the cropping of Fillette from the catalog portrait in relation to problems of fetishism, see my “Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois’s Fillette,” Parkett 27 (March 1991), pp. 48–53.
This formal nicety, the fillip of a minor pun within the frame of an image bristling with transgressive possibility, marks Mapplethorpe’s complicity in the joke. For if in brandishing *Fillette* Bourgeois alludes to his fetishizing representations of the male body, Mapplethorpe, in delicately picking out the rhyme of flesh, supplies the reference to his own artistry. And not only does he inscribe himself there, but also sticks the grin. For the sliver-smile that is cracked for the viewer (and, of course, first for Mapplethorpe) gains, when played against the Vs, unseen and unimagined by Bourgeois herself, a comic, inadvertent accuracy.

Bourgeois has said of her grinning address to the camera that it caricatures an anticipated viewer response: “everything Louise does is erotic.” She says this snifflly, to imply that the viewer might be missing the point. If this, then, is a defiant scenario for a picture: “since ‘everything Louise does is erotic anyway,’ present myself to *Mapplethorpe* clutching my big phallus”—he in turn glosses it by isolating an uncanny detail to which “erotic” is entirely insufficient as a description, by fingering, in a coincidence of form, the fleshly knot of cathexis. Bourgeois’s jest about *Fillette* being “a little Louise” clarifies: the object is not only by her, but of her. The gesture is not only a gag, a piece of political and sexual humor, but a claim placed on the object, making it a thing to be manipulated, an object of psychic use.

To say that Bourgeois’s pose displaces *Fillette* from the category of the sculptural to that of the psychical is to suggest that she pushes it—bodily—away from an aesthetic discourse and toward a psychoanalytic one. Her pose does do that, parading a suite of Freudian tropes: fetishism, penis envy, castration anxiety, femininity as the desire for a “little one,” humor itself. But if it invokes psychoanalysis, her pose also targets it, compounding a parody of modernist phallocentrism with a critique of Freudian psychoanalysis. Further—and this is the encapsulating effect of the image—her gesture points to a double revision performed in her work: of modernist abstraction on the one hand, and of Freudian theory (especially as it is deployed in Surrealism) on the other. And this double revision is, as it were, coarticulated by the part-object.

As sweeping a claim as this is for one photograph—even one produced expressly to sum up a history—it might be sustained by considering the picture alongside poses Bourgeois struck around the same time (even on the same day, in the session with Mapplethorpe), and especially by reading it with the work she used these pictures to demonstrate, to activate. And while I do not propose to make that case here, to be precipitated by this picture into the complex reworkings it serves to encapsulate, what can be said is that, with this picture, Bourgeois

54. The full set of contact sheets is reproduced in my “Pretty as a Picture: Louise Bourgeois and/as *Fillette*.”
carries the part-object, specifically the phallus-as-part-object, back into the discursive space of MoMA modernism.

For the Museum of Modern Art to have published in the show's catalog Mapplethorpe's portrait of a phallus-wielding seventy-year-old Bourgeois would have been to implicate the museum in a joke on itself: on its exclusion of female artists; on its phallocentric history of twentieth-century art; and on its account of modernism as preeminently a history of abstraction (read: sublimation) that would see all sculptural reductions of the body as distillations of form, premised, in Albert Elsen's phrase, on "the elimination of the distinguishing features of bodily parts." What is important, then, about MoMA's apparent uneasiness is not only the avoidance of that rare type of sexually explicit humor in which the phallus is made the butt of a joke. Equally significant is the effect of such discretion (or cropping and censoring) on the very history of modernism constructed within the uniquely privileged space of the Museum of Modern Art—a place where, it should be noted, Fillette can now sometimes be seen hanging, a gift of the artist in honor of her friend Alfred Barr, Jr.

_I have heard quite small children joke, for instance, about the idea that they once really wanted to eat their Mummy up or cut her into pieces._

—Melanie Klein

Within the artistic context of (post)modernism, the intensity with which, as psychoanalysis would have it, the drive isolates and pursues its object has been enacted not only by a certain emphasis on fragments, but also by an insistence on fragmentation (on, for example, such procedures as smearing, tearing, cutting, and stuffing). It is not, therefore, only the fact that the phallus recurs as a graphic sexual motif that is important; or that it is reduced to a fragment; or that this fragment is of the infantile type known as a part-object; or that, within the register of part-objects, the phallus is undermined as symbol (symbol, even, of the symbolic

55. Albert E. Elsen, "Notes on the Partial Figure," _Artforum_ 8 (November 1969), p. 41. Writing about Bourgeois's work in 1969, the year after Fillette was made, William Rubin cautioned that, "When themes of sexuality are pressed too literally, a set of emotions interposes itself between the viewer and the work in a manner unconducive to aesthetic contemplation" (Rubin, "Some Reflections Prompted by the Recent Work of Louise Bourgeois," _Art International_ 8 [April 20, 1969], p. 20).

56. In a 1991 interview, Bourgeois recalled the incident this way: "The glint in the eye refers to the thing I am carrying. But they cut it. They cut it because the museum was so prudish" (Carolyn Treat, "Louise Bourgeois: Art Is a Guarantee for Sanity," _Kunst & Museum Journal_ 2, no. 6 [1991], p. 57).

order itself). As important as any of this is the destructive means by which the phallus-as-part-object was produced.

For to reduce the body to an infantile level was to negate the sublimatory aesthetics of high modernism. And if the model of negation that defined the reiteration of the part-object in American art of the 1950s and '60s was perhaps less cynical in its address to modernism than some other artistic production of the period, it was as deeply pessimistic. In psychoanalytic terms, it enacted the Kleinian scenario, which is, in Michelson's apt phrase, "that of a horror feature." Its fantasy of the body undone at the level of sexual difference was not liberatory or utopian, and was not the "easy option" Lacan saw, in 1958, in the privileging of the part-object within psychoanalytic discourse. Rather, the survival of the part-object in postwar art marked the persistence, "on the infantile level, yes, on the psychological level, but also in ordinary, objective space," of something like a death instinct.

But the death instinct is not the place to end, by no means. For to pose the phallus in the 1950s and '60s (and to reiterate it off and on for almost half a century) was not only to propose it as part-object, but also to parody it, and so to target it with humor. Parody and irony, punning and play, fracture the affective register of the part-object in (post)modernism. And if this recourse to humor seems to split the part-object, to put a contradiction at the heart of its operations, such a split is also, as Freud argues, structural to humor itself. For humor is a defense by which, he contends, the superego makes trauma an excuse for pleasure, consoles the ego with the ingenious suggestion that "traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure." And this strategic, defensive splitting of humor, rather than the violent splitting of the death drive, is the better place to end: for what I want, after all, to emphasize is that the part-object survives.