By

Tara Cooke McDowell

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Committee in charge:

Professor Emerita Anne M. Wagner, Chair

Professor Emeritus T.J. Clark

Professor Emerita Kaja Silverman

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Abstract

House Work: Domesticity, Belonging, and Salvage in the Art of Jess, 1955-1991

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This dissertation examines the work of the San Francisco-based artist Jess (1923-2004). Jess's multimedia and cross-disciplinary practice, which takes the form of collage, assemblage, drawing, painting, film, illustration, and poetry, offers a perspective from which to consider a matrix of issues integral to the American postwar period. These include domestic space and labor; alternative family structures; myth, rationalism, and excess; and the salvage and use of images in the atomic age. The dissertation has a second protagonist, Robert Duncan (1919-1988), preeminent American poet and Jess's partner and primary interlocutor for nearly forty years. Duncan and Jess built a household and a world together that transgressed boundaries between poetry and painting, past and present, and acknowledged the limits and possibilities of living and making daily.

This study begins by addressing the household shared by Jess and Duncan, which was a physical place but also a multivalent site that is imaginary, collective, and political. For these two men, the household was the primary condition of production, which revalues domestic work, or house work, and destabilizes its gendered status. Collaboration is also taken up here, as a concrete act between individuals, but also as leading to an essentially unbridgeable artistic difference. A close reading of one work, *Narkissos*, a collage that evolved around the mythical figure of its title and that occupied Jess for over three decades, permits the appropriative nature of collage as a model of self-generated myth and belonging to emerge. Salvage is Jess's primary operative mode, and is read with and against his formation as a wartime chemist serving on the Manhattan Project monitoring plutonium production. Jess abandoned science soon after World War II and moved to San Francisco, where he shed his last name, Collins, and pursued a career in art. Yet the scientific method and the threats of the atomic age are wrestled with throughout his body of work.

What follows is a monographic treatment, but one that moves through a life and a body of work to raise and analyze problems and issues apposite to current scholarship. Difference is the fabric of this work, and this study considers its concrete and metaphorical manifestations, from the construction of the queer household to the salvage of outmoded or marginal historical material.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Boris Portnoy, with whom I have made a household.

Introduction: The Thread that Binds

I. Dialogue of Presences

O! is a slim pamphlet of collages and poems by the San Francisco artist Jess (1923-2004), published in 1960 by New York City's Hawk's Well Press and sold for 50 cents (fig. 1). Each of the dozen pages within its two covers presents a different image world, the tenor of which is proposed by the particular constellation of image and text on that page. In the center spread appears "That Sly Old Gobbler, or the Orange," a children's story in which a girl swallows an orange seed, and fears that it may grow into a tree inside her. The titular O! is a malleable sign that recurs throughout the book: it can be an exclamation, a letter, an orange, or a menagerie of round objects. The cover of O!, when opened and flattened out, reveals a single collage. The composite image is antic and cacophonous: not only are there many figures deployed across its surface, but they all seem to be speaking. Jumbled together on one surface are Gustav Doré's bonneted wolf, Laocoön and his sons, the body of Mona Lisa ignominiously given the head of W.C. Fields, and a cascade of male faces at right and chopped foreheads at bottom. Each member of this motley assembly has something to say, in the form of typed quotations, roughly cut into speech bubbles, assigned to the various figures, and usually given attribution. The most suggestive is a quote from the sixteenth century French essayist Michel de Montaigne that unspools across the top of the book's front cover: "I have gathered a posie of other men's flowers, and nothing but the thread that binds them is mine own" (fig. 2). 1

It is hard to imagine a better summation of Jess's life and work than this. That the words are not his own is fitting, since Jess was above all else a collector of images and words, a practice our present moment terms appropriation. *Derivative* would be the word preferred by Robert Duncan (1919-1988), preeminent American poet and Jess's partner and primary interlocutor for nearly forty years. In the preface to O!, Duncan essentially restates the Montaigne quote when he writes of Jess, "What he has achieved is totally his, but in every detail derivative." Duncan means the book at hand, a series of set pieces made from found images and quotations, but he could just as well be describing Jess's practice as a whole. Jess spent a lifetime gathering "other men's flowers," an everyday labor of searching out and collecting images and refashioning them into new configurations. He called this process salvage. But the rhetoric of salvation is compromised by the confession embedded in the second part of Montaigne's quote: "nothing but the thread that binds them is mine own." The metaphor transforms Jess's artistic practice into a mere thread, a thin and fragile wisp of a thing, easily broken or tossed aside, and suitable only to bind a bouquet of flowers. The thread may be mere, but it is also mighty, as it attests in a contradictory way to the power of the artist's "mine own"—a thread, but sufficient to hold and recombine the originality of others.

Jess rarely spoke about his art. The public record consists of a mere single published interview and a handful of statements from a practice spanning fifty years.³ But

¹ Jess, O! (New York: Hawk's Well Press, 1960): npg.

² Robert Duncan, "Pre-Face," in Jess, O!, npg.

³ The interview is with curator Michael Auping, and appears in the retrospective catalogue *Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993* (Buffalo, New York: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1993).

because he is such an appropriative artist, a multitude of voices are present in his work, not only at the level of the image, but also because Jess appended quotations to so many of his works. The cover of O!, with its protagonists jostling for our attention, emblematizes this method of allowing images to speak for him with words that are not his own. O! also performs the desired effect of such a cacophonous collection, what Jess described as "a dialogue of presences." As he explained, "Everything in the world has a certain quality or spiritual presence, any simple object or image. And when you put them together, a kind of dialogue or story develops. Not a narrative, but more of a dialogue of presences."4

This abundance of voices is conjured in the pages below by allowing a number of speakers into the text as primary sources. First and foremost, these sources take the form of letters. Although public statements from Jess are uncommon, he was a gifted and prodigious letter writer. Missives cited here include those written from the artist to his longtime dealer Federico Quadrani, whose Odyssia Gallery in New York mounted Jess shows regularly beginning in 1971; Jess's letters to Quadrani are now part of The Jess Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California. These letters, which have only recently been made available to scholars now that The Jess Papers have been processed, reveal much about process and sources from a verbally circumscribed artist, and for this alone they are valuable. Sources also include letters between Jess and Duncan written while Duncan crisscrossed the country for poetry readings—these are housed at the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo—and letters between Jess and a range of individuals with whom he came into contact over the years. Other sources include writings by Jess and, especially, Duncan; interviews I conducted between 2009 and 2012 with intimates of the couple, such as Lawrence Jordan, George Herms, Hilde and David Burton, and Christopher Wagstaff; and published recollections by friends or individuals who encountered the pair, such as Robert J. Bertholf, Robin Blaser, Stan Brakhage, Lisa Jarnot, Kevin Killian, R.B. Kitaj, Michael McClure, Tom Field, Thom Gunn, Michael Rumaker, and Rebecca Solnit. Much of this material is located in two major archives: The Jess Papers, 1941-2004, at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and the Robert Duncan Collection at the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

Jess withholds his own voice, but offers us a surplus of others. Such plenitude takes visual form in his extravagant collages and thickly impastoed canvases, and is an extreme, excessive form of image making that masks an authorial disappearing act. If not quite authorial disappearance, then a deflecting, muffling, or even delegating the role of the self to other speakers—to Duncan, most notably. Jess images himself in his work, but only indirectly, employing a stand-in for the artist's self: Olympic track star Bob Mathias watching the destruction of a painting's world from the sidelines; the textual scrap "Our Little Cut-Up" in a word collage; Narcissus, surely, but also the tiny snail (a reference to Jess's slowness) in the lower right corner of his great work *Narkissos*. Jess even signed at least one letter to Duncan as "O," so he may be O! himself, or he came to identify with

Christopher Wagstaff, Jess's caretaker later in life and trustee of The Jess Estate, has published excerpts from his conversations with the artist over the last decade and a half of Jess's life. "Conversations with Jess," An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan, and Their Circle

⁴ Ibid, 19.

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⁽Portland, OR: Pomegranate Communications, 2013): 267-271.

O!. 5 Jess's career was one of rewriting, reusing, and recycling, often with an eye to alternative meanings, and his authorial deflection was purposeful, a strategy to allow space for these alternative meanings to emerge. This study attunes itself to this strategy of authorial deflection by following a methodology of collage and accretion. Collage occurs by means of quotation: introducing such a range of voices into the text allows the writing to become a form of collection and collage. Accretion develops through reuse and recycle, and certain key phrases and quotes recur throughout the dissertation, such as Montaigne's line. This recursive strategy foregrounds key through-lines of the dissertation, but allows them to be multivalent, always approached through and pressured by new contexts.

II. Chapters and Literature

The themes of the individual chapters constitute an approach that takes its distance from interpretative paradigms thus far used to assess postwar art. The point of departure for the first chapter, "Householders," is the household shared by Jess and Robert Duncan from 1951 until Duncan's death in 1988: a physical place but also a multivalent site that is imaginary, generative, collective, and political. "We have had the medium of a life together," Duncan once wrote, capturing the radicalism of this position in contrast to traditional paradigms of individual authorship. This chapter argues that the household was the single most important condition of production for these two men. It was a space of permission in which a range of maneuvers not allowed elsewhere could occur: the baldly citational, the embarrassingly romantic, the unprofaned homoerotic, the seclusion of the housewaif, the hoarding of the collector. Domestic space as a site of production is not typically part of postwar art history narratives, and writing it into the discipline allows for a reconsideration of the nature of creative production. The chapter on the household is foundational, the ground upon which all that follows stands.

The literature on Jess is best described as scant and sporadic. The curator Michael Auping is one of Jess's most longstanding and sensitive interlocutors, having organized a 1983 exhibition of Jess's work with accompanying publication and, more importantly, the only retrospective to date, *Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993*. The invaluable retrospective catalogue contains the most significant scholarship on Jess, including the aforementioned interview. Curiously, in the interview Duncan is mentioned not at all by Auping and only once by Jess. ⁸ This silencing of Duncan was almost certainly

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⁵ Jess, letter to Robert Duncan, 1 February 1973. Robert Duncan Collection, The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York (subsequently "PC").

⁶ Notebook 37, 27 April 1966, PC.

⁷ Jess wrote that his work *Narkissos*, the subject of the next chapter, was an attempt to "maintain intense homoeros unprofaned." See Jess, "*Narkissos* taking form," in the *Narkissos* notebook, Registration Department, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, npg. "Housewaif" is how Jess refers to himself in a letter to Duncan, cited in the previous chapter. Jess, Letter to Robert Duncan, 18 May 1967, PC.

⁸ The interview is compiled from Auping's conversations with the artist between February to October 1983 and April 1992 to January 1993. Jess mentioned Robert when discussing his collages, which he called paste-ups: "I think the 'Paste-Ups' might also relate to Robert's ideas about poetry and rhythms and the mixing of themes. None of this was conscious, but we often

purposeful. During the interviews, Duncan was a constant and voluble presence, and it required some effort to push him aside, so to speak, in order for Jess to be the main event. Instead, Auping assigned the task of bringing Duncan into the conversation to Robert J. Bertholf, who was then curator of the Poetry Collection at Buffalo and had something of a monopoly on Duncan scholarship for many years. Bertholf's essay for the retrospective catalogue, "The Concert: Robert Duncan Writing Out of Painting," is the only other published instance in which Jess and Duncan have been considered together. But his account is centered squarely on Duncan: it recounts Duncan's early years when, upon leaving Berkeley for New York, he was drawn into the orbit of Anaïs Nin, Andre Breton, Roberto Matta, and Henry Miller, and his subsequent encounter with Jess after returning to Berkeley in the late 1940s. 10 Bertholf then charts a chronology that deals mostly with Duncan's life and poetic achievements, including Jess when the artist had participated in the work in question. The household is evoked as an emblem of romanticism rather than analyzed in terms of how the structure functioned for both men.¹¹ Lisa Jarnot, in her thoroughly researched 2012 biography *Robert Duncan: The* Ambassador from Venus, takes a more balanced (less romanticized) view of Duncan and his relationship with Jess, warts and all. But hers is a biographical account, and centered squarely on Duncan. 12

This dissertation is the first study to bring these two men together through the prism of their household as a site of collection and production, and is well timed given the University of California Press's long-anticipated publication of Duncan's collected works, which began in 2011. ¹³ The omission of such an analysis from the literature to

talked about the element of surprise and disjunction in forming an image." Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 24.

⁹ Michael Auping in conversation with the author, April 17, 2012.

¹⁰ Duncan was born in Oakland, California in 1919, and adopted as an infant by theosophist parents who chose him based on the predictions of an astrologer. Duncan's parents ingrained in him that in a past life he was an inventor of Atlantis, evidence that mythology and genealogy were central to his own conception of self from a very young age. Duncan enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley in 1936, but left for the East Coast in December 1938. For more on Duncan's early life, see Lisa Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

To give one example, Bertholf claims that Jess and Duncan "immediately established a domestic household based on the insistent power of love to generate forms in poetry and art." Robert J. Bertholf, "The Concert," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 72.

¹² Critical analysis is beyond the purview of Jarnot's project, which does not detract from the value of this resource. She writes, "I have refrained from deeper interpretations of the work in my interest to shape the book as biography rather than criticism." Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, xxviii.

¹³ Two other articles exist that address the Jess and Duncan household. The first is James Boaden, "Keeping House: Jess, Stan Brakhage, and the Outmoded Interior," in *The Avant-Garde as Swain: A Critical American Pastoral*, diss. Courtauld Institute, 2008. Boaden adopts a surrealist lens, reading the Duncan and Jess household as uncanny (*unheimlich* literally translates as "unhomely"), first through examining the household and the work of Max Ernst and then by considering the uncanny effects and strange interiors of Brakhage's early films as imaging a self alienated from traditional familial bonds. Also useful is Eric Keenaghan's reading of Duncan's approach to the household as disrupting Cold War containment ideology through a number of

date is partly due to a disciplinary separation. Duncan is a poet, and has been treated by poetry and literary scholars, while Jess is an artist, and is a subject of art history and gallery and museum exhibitions. As an art historian, my interest lies principally in the artist, but two weighty countervailing forces pressure this predilection. First, the literature on Duncan and Jess is vastly imbalanced, with scholarship on Duncan outweighing that on Jess. Second, Duncan was much more outspoken than Jess. To speak, whether aloud or on the page, was his vocation, and he did it with an often unbridled, performative relish. The reader of this dissertation will encounter Duncan's voice with some regularity. His handful of writings on Jess are the most substantive on record, and his copious poetry, essays, and interviews often illuminate a subject with which Jess was also concerned: the household, the field, collecting, mythology, painting, genealogy, salvage. Duncan is drawn upon judiciously in these pages: he is not pushed aside, but neither is he allowed to speak exclusively or egregiously for Jess's art and intention. Another factor contributing to the lack of scholarship on Jess and Duncan is the open secret of their homosexuality and partnership, which may have been a deterrent to writing about them together. Studies of couples of any kind are a fairly recent line of inquiry, and are still uncommon. Scholarship in this field ranges from works from the 1990s like Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron's Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership (1996) and Anne M. Wagner's Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe (1998) to more recent efforts such as Joachim Pissarro's Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg: Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art, or Don't Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun & Marcel *Moore*, edited by Louise Downey, both published in 2006.

Collaboration is the subject of chapter two, "The Gate and the Field." This chapter begins with a focused discussion of the collaborative artist book Jess and Duncan produced in Majorca, Spain in 1955 titled *Caesar's Gate*, in which Jess's images—astonishing collages made from *Life* magazine—and Duncan's poems speak across each page in playful and complex ways. Jess had two interlocutors in producing this book: Duncan and *Life* magazine, and maintaining the tension between the two meant the images remained dynamic and in flux, and also prevented Duncan from dominating the endeavor. The couple's labor in Majorca did not lead to a lifelong production of collaborative works, but rather evolved into a spatial imaginary termed the field, which is both the field of the image and the field of the poem. Like the household, the field is a place of permission motivated by collected correspondences and jointly generated genealogies.

"Narkissos and Translation," chapter three, is structured through a close reading of one work. Narkissos, a collage that evolved around the mythical figure of its title and that occupied Jess for over three decades, is a composition filled with appropriated images from a remarkably wide range of sources. It is usually read iconographically, but this chapter focuses instead on process. Jess's process extends decades into the past, to his first sketch of the Narkissos subject in 1959 and his subsequent decision to begin a self-directed apprenticeship to teach himself how to paint. This apprenticeship became the Translations, a set of thirty-two paintings based on found images and spanning 1959 to 1976. The chapter begins with the Translations, which are the precursor to Narkissos.

queering strategies. See Keenaghan, "Vulnerable Households: Cold War Containment and Robert Duncan's Queered Nation," *Journal of Modern Literature* 28 (Summer 2005): 57-90.

This long view of process reveals a practice in which dwelling or being in the world is constituted by belonging, and the temporal dimension of process, Jess's slowness and inclination to live with certain images for years or even decades, is required for belonging to occur. Home is embedded in Jess's term for this extended, accumulative, archival process, which he called *indwelling*.

The fourth and final chapter, "Salvage: A Life's Work," opens with a collage from 1974 titled *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, an allegorical, highly theatrical image of a moment of devastation and madness. It then turns to Jess's remarkable, self-conscious origin myth, which haunts his work and which I am the first to interrogate. Trained as a radiochemist, Jess was drafted into the United States Army Corps of Engineers in 1943 and served on the Manhattan Project monitoring plutonium production. Later he worked in Hanford, Washington to mitigate toxic airborne emissions from the plutonium production facilities there. Jess left Hanford in 1949 and moved to San Francisco, where he pursued an art career and eventually shed his last name, Collins. It comes as no surprise that despite renouncing science for art, science generally and the threats of the atomic age more specifically are wrestled with throughout his body of work. This chapter asks a not-unfamiliar question: how does a maker of images, in the wake of the invention and implementation of the atomic bomb, put forward an image of the world? In Jess's case, the answer was salvage, or a rescue operation that reaches back into history to form a relationship with the present. Notable in this regard are the retrospective series of paintings called the *Salvages*, for which Jess painted new scenes over and within previous works of his own or anonymous paintings found in secondhand shops. Jess's formation appears in the final chapter in part because it would be too tempting to let its intensity and singularity—for art history—overly influence a study of his artistic output in the subsequent five decades. It is also the result of tethering an account of this formation to the Salvages, which he produced later in his life.

Jess intended his art to offer its viewer "a million paths and a million stories," but this degree of excess and accumulation tends to frustrate or at least intimidate interpretation. ¹⁴ This dissertation attends to the paths and stories of only a handful of artworks, well aware that they appear here at the expense of a multitude of others. ¹⁵ The approach is selective because the themes of domestic space, collaboration and the field, belonging as process, and salvage as a life's work are among the most important to emerge from this practice. These themes are also especially instructive for art history and contemporary art's current interests in collage and assemblage, the archive, appropriation, collaboration, and the ongoing projects of feminist and queer art histories. This study resists strict chronology, instead attending to the stakes of artistic practice in a given moment or period, but it does roughly sketch the arc of a life: the forming of the household; the early attempt at collaboration on foreign soil; the multi-decade preparation, labor, and ultimate abandonment of an ideal image; and the retrospective

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¹⁴ Auping, "An Interview with Jess," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 12.

¹⁵ I do not, for example, focus on a single time period, such as the 1950s, or one body of work, such as the paste-ups. And with regret I pass over or only nod to the "nonobjective and romantic paintings" (so named by the retrospective catalogue); the word collages; the *Tricky Cad* cases; the profusion of classical references and imagery; the incredible *détourned* advertisements for Modess sanitary napkins and Lord Calvert whiskey; connections to Max Ernst and Joseph Cornell; and subjects such as the occult, romanticism, and nineteenth century Victoriana.

mood of the Salvages, a series undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s. The chronological range given in the dissertation's title is 1955 to 1991, and refers to the date of the earliest work discussed, *Caesar's Gate*, and the date of completion usually assigned to *Narkissos*. A brief coda on the medium of collage serves as a conclusion, the title of which—"Collage: Philosophy of Put Togethers"—is taken from a 1975 essay by Harold Rosenberg.

III. Formation and Family

Jess was born Burgess Franklin Collins, though we know him simply as Jess. The Jess literature often claims that he dropped his surname upon moving to San Francisco in 1949, so that so that his rejection of the patronymic is bound up with his break with science. But the process was slower and more uneven than this. For example, in 1954 he signed a note "Jess Collins," but crossed out "Collins," and he is named Jess Collins in reviews published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner* as late as 1959 and 1961. While Jess did not discard his surname in one fell swoop, he soon became very clear about what its omission signified: "I know it gives supercilious distress sometimes to reviewers and pedants," he wrote to Federico Quadrani, "but I mean all that the elision implies." In a 1969 letter to Stephen Prokopoff, then director of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Jess elaborated by citing the earlier example of the poet H.D., born Hilda Doolittle (H.D. was a major influence on Duncan, who titled his lengthy treatise on his poetics, *The H.D. Book*, for her). Jess writes:

Freud got H.D. to see hers as an imperious sigil. There was also its accusation that the masculine world was too circumscribing for the high art of the female. Perhaps my signature also signifies that I discourage the societal dynamic of Family—which projects the competitive surname, and overpopulates in the process.¹⁹

It is his signature—that imprint of authorship and authenticity—with which Jess disavows "Family" with a capital "F," as he forms an analogy between the abbreviated, gender-neutral names adopted by him and H.D. and the now-twinned institutions of the

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¹⁶ See, for example, Mario Naves, "Struck by Conscience," *New York Observer*, July 15, 2008. http://www.observer.com/2008/arts-culture/struck-conscience. Accessed October 2, 2011. Ken Johnson, "Jess: Paintings and Paste-Ups," *The New York Times*, June 6, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/06/arts/design/06gall.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0. Accessed January 9, 2013. Michael Duncan, "Maverick Modernist," *Art in America* 82 (November 1994): 94. Peter Selz, "Jess: Paintings, Paste-ups, Translations, Salvages," in *Jess: Painting and Paste-Ups*, exh. Cat (New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 2008): npg.

¹⁷ Jess, handwritten entry in a notebook given the title page, "A Skeptic Milieu Medallion," 1954-1975, The Jess Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (subsequently "BL"). The reviews include Dean Wallace, "The Galleries—Romanticism Is a State of Mind," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 25, 1959; Alexander Fried, "A Roundup of Varied Styles," *San Francisco Examiner*, January 18, 1959, p. 8; and Alfred Frankenstein, "The Art Galleries," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 12, 1961, p. 22.

¹⁸ Letter to Federico Ouadrani, 15 February 1968, BL.

¹⁹ Letter to Stephen Prokopoff, 7 July 1969, BL.

"masculine world" and "Family." Jess refuses the biological and institutional forms of family, and instead crafts his own genealogy of love and influence through the labors of collecting and appropriation: salvage does reparative work for the artist himself as well as for his salvaged images. Duncan's description of Jess's collages in O! as "derivative" takes on new meaning by these lights. Duncan considered himself to be a derivative poet. in that his work was derivative of those poets who came before him: thus the title *The* H.D. Book is a pointed misdirection. Duncan claims this pejorative descriptor and remakes it into a signifier of his place within a self-made genealogy. ²⁰ Several queer theorists have attended to the ways in which historically and contemporarily gay men and women have constructed their own genealogies, and the queer archive has been theorized and excavated by authors such as Ann Cyetovich and Judith Halberstam. Whitney Davis extends Freud's concept of family romance into "queer family romance," writing, "Family romance, as Freud saw it, is a conscious remaking of one's lineage—a conscious imaging of a natal culture more satisfying than one's own." Thus queer family romance becomes "a romance that might make such family socially possible," although this is as true for the myriad of others for whom birth families need imaginative replacement as it is for queer families.²¹ The formation of a collection allows such an alternative family to emerge, and collage, as the medium with which the collection is curated, visualized, and displayed, becomes the site at which family resemblances are staged, reinforced, and enjoyed. Jess may disdain the overpopulating impulse of family, which may be read in biological terms, as sexual reproduction, but a materialist overpopulation is his very method: the tireless work of collecting leads to a profusion of images and voices. It is not only an individual's genealogy that the collection constitutes, but rather an entire world is populated by the cultural materials of the collection (artistic, pop cultural, scientific), a world Jess terms his "Image Nation," punning on imagination. 22

IV. The Exceptionality of the Everyday

In 1992, the poet Robin Blaser, a close friend of Jess and Duncan, contributed an "Afterword" for a pamphlet accompanying the exhibition *A Symposium of the Imagination: Robert Duncan in Word and Image*, organized by Bertholf for the Poetry Collection at Buffalo. Blaser wrote about the couple on a few occasions, each time with insight, and his afterword is no exception. To explain the nature of Duncan's romanticism, Blaser draws on Stanley Cavell, who writes, "both the wish for the

²⁰ A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews with Robert Duncan, 1960-1985, ed. Christopher Wagstaff (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012): 4-5. Elsewhere Duncan writes, "I am ambitious only to emulate, imitate, reconstrue, approximate, duplicate," then lists the names of some forty artists and writers. See "Pages from a Notebook," in Robert Duncan: A Selected Prose, ed. Robert J. Bertholf (New York: New Directions, 1995): 18.

²¹ See Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); and Whitney Davis, "Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17:2-3: 315.

²² Jess, handwritten entry in a notebook given the title page, "A Skeptic Milieu Medallion," 1954-1975, BL.

exceptional and for the everyday are foci of romanticism. One can think of romanticism as the discovery that the everyday is an exceptional achievement. Call it the achievement of the human."²³ The achievement of the Duncan and Jess household is precisely this: to live the everyday as exceptional. To understand this household is to understand its necessity and exceptionality. This dissertation aims to make vivid the exceptional achievement of everyday life, or housework, undertaken by these two men by analyzing their specific conditions of production. This is an account of an artistic practice whose operations are collection, appropriation, translation, and salvage; an artistic practice that approaches the image as a playing field; and an artistic practice that insists on its labor as domestic, slow, unending, and inadequate. Make time for work every day, Jess taught the filmmaker Lawrence Jordan, and never make a masterpiece.²⁴

Jess called his collages "paste-ups," a graphic design term referring to artwork awaiting reproduction, and one that suspends Jess's collages in a perpetual state of incompletion while distancing them from the more art historical lineage of the medium and term collage.²⁵ In some respects completing a work runs counter to Jess's ethos of art making as an everyday, domestic labor of collecting, sorting, and refashioning images acquired at the many Bay Area secondhand shops, bookstores, and salvage warehouses he frequented. Domestic, but also, economically speaking, distinctly down market—a gleaning is practiced in such sorting through of remainders and leftovers to be found on the market's edges. This paradigm of the domestic daily work of salvage provides a corrective to how we understand the image world and its flow, and Jess offers a useful counter-definition of what it means to be in one's historical moment: to feel both in and out of it, to fit and not fit, to remake and reimagine its institutions by occupying, misusing, or misrepresenting them. Doing so exposes the very structures of these same institutions: their absurdities, their non-natural limits, and what they permit as sayable or dismiss as unsayable. These institutions include marriage, the home, the nation, popular culture, the world of goods, the image, the art world, and the artist himself. In essence, all the sites at which Jess's otherness or difference would register and be negotiated. "The problem is," Duncan put it, "how do you live inside an environment that is not simply spiritually vacant...but polluted."²⁶ This was the challenge the two men faced anew each day, although Duncan's quote also elides the pleasure and fascination that Jess found in his gleanings—they may be polluted, but nourish him even so.

V. The San Francisco Scene

"I envy every bird that flies into the blue and boundless west."

--Unattributed quotations from $O!^{27}$

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[&]quot;Everything was enveloped in one of the ordinary fogs of that region."

²³ Robin Blaser, "Afterword," in *A Symposium of the Imagination: Robert Duncan in Word and Image* (Buffalo: The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1993): 43.

²⁴ Interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

²⁵ Ingrid Schaffner, "Found in Translation," in *Jess: To and From the Printed Page* (New York: ICI, 2007): 40.

²⁶ Wagstaff, ed., A Poet's Mind, 339.

²⁷ Jess, *O!*, npg.

In San Francisco in the 1950s, before the Beat boom was launched by Allen Ginsberg's reading of "Howl" at the 6 Gallery and the "San Francisco Scene" issue of *Evergreen Review* hit the stands in 1957, artists and poets alike struggled to find an audience or market or, according to some, the poets soon came to have the upper hand. The lack of audience, collectors, critics, and success led to artistic practices that were ephemeral, hybrid, and multiple, made with inexpensive materials and tools that had been salvaged and recycled. Meanwhile Wallace Berman's *Semina* magazine, *The Artist's View, Open Space*, Black Sparrow Press, and White Rabbit Press—all of which Jess contributed to—fostered a low-level democratic dissemination of printed matter and ephemera like chapbooks, brochures, and broadsides. Jess worked in these media as much as in painting, collage, and assemblage.

The San Francisco artists Jess felt closest to were Berman, Conner, Herms, and Harry Jacobus, but he parted ways with many of his San Francisco cohort by turning again and again to history. As Jacobus, an artist with whom Jess and Duncan founded King Ubu Gallery in 1952, described the trio: "Of all the people in San Francisco we were trying to make a connection with the past, whereas everyone else was breaking with it." The primary coordinates in Jess's relationship with the past include Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté*, James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, nineteenth century issues of *Scientific American*, Frank L. Baum's Oz books, Victorian engravings, classical mythology, and *Life* magazine from the 1930s onward.

Over the years Jess increasingly turned to the material culture in his home, and was often described as a recluse, especially later in life. ³⁰ His letters and notebooks are littered with punning jibes directed at art movements ("Comix-Pop-Think-Art" and the "Beat bicycle-built-for-two"), places ("New Yorkery" and the "hipworld" of London), and contemporary critics ("contemptuary crickets"). ³¹ The artist's scoffs at the art world notwithstanding, his work has been collected by most major museums in the United States, and he exhibited nationally and with some regularity during his lifetime (this exhibition history is listed below). This argues that one great fact of twentieth century American poetic and visual art culture has been the capacious vitality of its "margins." In the United States, one need not have been safely in the mainstream (or part of the canonical avant-garde) to pursue a career with real consistency and seriousness through a lifetime, and to build a reliable patron-base outside the dictates of New York fashion. The untidy continental diversity of American culture is surely partly what marks it off from

²⁸ Rebecca Solnit describes the situation of postwar San Francisco artists this way: "Between the looming cold war and the lack of an audience, there was little evident future for their work, which was made, like music, for the moment and their fellow artists. The artists were remarkable for an integrity, a commitment to working for its own sake, and their history is littered not only with acts of sabotage, but with abandoned and destroyed works, ephemeral gestures, and unstable materials." See Solnit, "Heretical Constellations," in *Beat Culture and the New America*, 1950-1965, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995): 72.

²⁹ Lyn Brockway, Harry Jacobus, and Jess: The Romantic Paintings (Palo Alto: Palo Alto Cultural Center, 1990): npg.

³⁰ Michael Auping, "Solar Systems," Artforum 42 (April 2004): 25.

³¹ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 10 March 1973; Letter to Serge Fauchereau, 8 August 1992; Letter to Federico Quadrani 12 February 1971 and May 1971, BL.

that of the European centralized nation-states. There is a need for an art history in the United States that fully admits this capaciousness, as a salutary fact, and works with a model that frees itself of "center-and-periphery," or at least builds in a continual sense of the fragility of the U.S. center (in terms of cultural hegemony) and the advantages of the wide, well-furnished margins. Indeed what is most conspicuous throughout Duncan's writing is a lack of constraint by location, geographically or symbolically, and a strong, constant sense of constant engagement with a network of peers. Such access and immediacy to one's elected family was surely informed by the medium of poetry, so easily tucked inside a letter, and Duncan's constant travel throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Jess did not travel, but his work certainly did. It was included in William C. Seitz's landmark exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, which was held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961 and also featured fellow San Franciscans Bruce Conner and George Herms. He had one-man shows at historic San Francisco galleries such as King Ubu, Dilexi and Borregaard's Museum as well as at museums such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1968), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1972-1973); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1974); the Wadsworth Atheneum (1975); the Dallas Museum of Art (1977); the Berkeley Art Museum (1980); the Cleveland Museum of Art (1987); and the San Jose Museum of Art (1989). His work has been the subject of three major touring exhibitions with catalogues: the first originated at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in 1983 and the second, the artist's retrospective, opened at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in 1993 (Auping curated both). Ingrid Schaffner organized the most recent, *Jess: To and From the Printed Page*, for Independent Curators International (ICI) in 2007.

This institutional history demonstrates that Jess was far from an outsider artist. True enough, after the 1960s he did not leave the Bay Area, but he participated in the art world through exhibitions, gallery sales, correspondence with many of its players, and hosting visitors from near and far, including, to give one prominent example, John Cage and Jasper Johns, who stopped by in April 1964. But Jess is not a canonical artist, and will almost certainly never be, notwithstanding the present effort and the constant state of revision that is the discipline of art history. That said, his practice offers a significant counterweight to how we understand postwar art, a missing element that troubles and amplifies existing paradigms for negotiating the world of images in this historical moment, and one that is all the more valuable given the total success of the image regime in our present moment.

This is the first art historical study on Jess, but it was undertaken during a period in which several other related projects have emerged, and with which it is allied. They include Elizabeth Ferrell's 2012 dissertation, *The Ring around* The Rose: *Jay DeFeo and her Circle* (also completed at the University of California, Berkeley), which considers the collaborative practices of Jay DeFeo, Wally Hedrick, Bruce Conner, and Wallace

³² In an interview with fellow poet Michael McClure, Duncan recalls disapproving of his inclusion in the "San Francisco" section of a poetry anthology: "But the feeling of identity was a little intense in that period. If you remember, not only was I objecting to being in the wrong categories, but I saw absolutely no meaning at all to being in something called San Francisco." Robert Duncan with Michael McClure, "Nematodes! Nematodes!" in *A Poet's Mind*, 385.

Berman, all of whom lived and worked in San Francisco's Fillmore neighborhood in the 1950s and 1960s. Kevin Hatch's *Looking for Bruce Conner*, published by The MIT Press in 2012, emerged from his doctoral dissertation and is the first art historical study of the peripatetic and genre-bending work of Conner. In England, two young scholars have contributed to this small but growing literature: Lucy Bradnock's dissertation focuses in part on Wallace Berman's appropriation of Antonin Artaud, and James Boaden's dissertation considers the legacy of surrealism through the filmmaker Stan Brakhage's collaborations with several artists, including Jess and Robert Duncan. All of these projects are very recent (there are several more underway, mostly on the East Coast), are the efforts of a younger generation of art historians, and take Bay Area artists from the postwar era as their subjects.³³ They constitute a burgeoning movement in art history, one that also participates in the undoing of the center and periphery model discussed above, and provide an intellectual context to my own present effort.

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³³ See Elizabeth Ferrell, *Collaborated Lives: Individualism and Collectivity in the San Francisco Avant-Garde*, diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2012; Kevin Hatch, *Looking for Bruce Conner* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012); James Boaden, "Keeping House: Jess, Stan Brakhage, and the Outmoded Interior," *The Avant-Garde as Swain: A Critical American Pastoral*, diss. Courtauld Institute, 2008; and Lucy Bradnock, *After Artaud: Art in America*, 1949-1965, diss. University of Essex, 2010.

Chapter One: Householders

I. Introduction

The household Jess and I have made I have seen as a lone holding in an alien forest-world, as a campfire about which we gatherd [*sic*] in an era of cold and night—a made-up thing in which participating we have had the medium of a life together. –Robert Duncan³⁴

The painter R.B. Kitaj once wrote of the "safe-household" that Jess shared with Robert Duncan.³⁵ This curious neologism is a slight mutation of the safe house, a refuge for those individuals in active conflict with the state, or engaged in acts of espionage or terrorism. Duncan and Jess's household *was* a refuge, a made place in which they imagined and inhabited the terms of their lives. These terms took the shape of a household, which was both a physical place and an imaginary site, and this household became the precondition for artistic production for both men. Safeness lay in its ability to make this production possible. Safety is also found in the boundaries offered by the household: it becomes a medium through which the image flows of the everyday are managed and bracketed, but also rescued and protected. Medium is meant here, as in Duncan's epigraph above, with the full force of its artistic connotations: the household is the vehicle actively used by the two men to make a life together, but also to make work.

Yet to characterize this household as safe is also to get it wrong. The safe house is meant to provide safety—privacy, anonymity—but no safe house is ever truly safe. Duncan and Jess established and openly lived in a queer household. Their co-opting and queering of a social structure long considered to be hopelessly bourgeois, one dismissed by modernism even as its narrowest form would be re-entrenched at the very moment the two men decided to build lives together—the 1950s—was far from safe. Though familiarly domestic, this was an alternative household. It was by nature disruptive—at every moment, on every given day—to legible forms and functions of the household. The radicalism of this position was in its laying claim to the daily routines and attributes of domestic space as it is traditionally conceived. Yet because the daily experience of the household is the norm rather than the exception, it can be easily dismissed or overlooked. It becomes an underlying ground whose comfort lies in its ability to be taken for granted, which is what most histories of postwar art have done. Sketching the terms of the Jess and Duncan household in the pages that follow suggests that this model of sociability and artistic production offers an alternative site of production; domestic space. Duncan and Jess are not the only modern artistic couple to make their home a space of production, but because they consciously formed an alternative household, they provide an especially compelling example of what it means to negotiate being and making within a social institution whose form pre-exists, but is appropriated and imitated with certain crucial variations.

In that household we find a pervasive continuity between work and home—no gap between art and life is allowed there. If work and home are spatially coextensive, then the materials of the two intermingle and are socially established. To demonstrate this is the concern of "Housework," the central section of this chapter. This section recounts

³⁴ Notebook 37, 27 April 1966, PC.

³⁵ R. B. Kitaj, "Foreword," in Michael Auping, *Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies) 1951-1983*, exh. cat. (Sarasota: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1983): 9.

Jess and Duncan's coming together and its symbolic meaning, and describes two of their houses with the aim of making vivid their nature as interiors. Here the conditions of production and sociability in this household, as well as their stakes, are limned to amplify and vary our understanding of artistic production. The chapter concludes with a coda, "Seven Deadly Virtues," which considers what the value of housework is for Jess and Duncan.

II. Housework

Jess and Duncan first met in the fall of 1949, at a poetry reading in Berkeley's Wheeler Hall at which Duncan read "The Venice Poem" while Jess was in the audience. The following year, Duncan encountered Jess again at the Ghost House, an old, decrepit Victorian at 1350 Franklin Street in San Francisco that had been converted into studios and illegally occupied by art students and young writers, among them Jess, artist Wally Hedrick, and poet Philip Lamantia (fig. 3). ³⁶ Duncan courted Jess vigorously, and in January 1951, the two men exchanged marriage vows and Duncan moved into Jess's studio in the renovated ballroom of the Ghost House.³⁷ Thus two fundamental principles of this household were put into place from the very beginning of the couple's life together: the misappropriation of a preexisting model—marriage—for their own use, and the cohabitation of life and work in the same space. Jess and Duncan shared several houses from that point onward. In 1952, they took up residence in James Broughton and Kermit Sheets's apartment at 1724 Baker Street when the latter couple embarked on a European sojourn. They inaugurated their new home with a housewarming that doubled as an opening reception for a show of their friend Lyn Brown's paintings, which had been installed throughout the house. Here again sites of domesticity, production, and display are collapsed, and while such a collapse is partly the result of scarce resources and opportunities, it is also the manifestation of a specific model of self that the two men soon come to consciously inhabit.

The interior of the Baker Street house had been painted by a former tenant, a ceramicist, and decorated by Pauline Kael, who lived there with Broughton.³⁸ But Jess soon began his own remodel, as Duncan wrote to Broughton in a formulation that shows how easily domestic space slips into painterly space (Collins is Jess's surname, which he dropped in the 1950s): "At Baker St. gradually the temper of the old manse is changed; last month the kitchen was transformed by Jess into a Collins painting: today he is at

³⁶ Ibid. Jess's account of meeting Robert is in Christopher Wagstaff, "Conversations with Jess," 271; see also Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 34.

³⁷ This biography is glossed from Lisa Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 118-120; and Michael Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 1951-1993, 38. Jess and Duncan did not have a license or contract. In a 1976 interview Duncan explained that his feelings about "marriage" were mixed, even as he recognized that he and Jess shared what he called "deep inner contracts." Robert Peters and Paul Tractenberg, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan," in *A Poet's Mind*, 198.

³⁸ James Boaden, "Keeping House: Jess, Stan Brakhage, and the Outmoded Interior," 87. Later, Jess painted murals on the walls of Kael's Berkeley home, which were reproduced in the April 1989 issue of *Interview* magazine.

work on the bathroom." 39 No photographs of the remodeled kitchen survive, but Duncan describes what it is like to inhabit the domestic space of a Jess painting:

Intense, brilliant Collins paintings in the dimensions of four walls, ceiling and floor. Two walls in hot tangerine orange, one wall in soft orange-pink and one in white; ceiling in white; floor in what the paint company with poetic inspiration calls Bermuda blue; woodwork in white and gold; center medallion in gold; from which a large Japanese lantern. The walls crowded with canvases and smaller pieces; two Norris Embrys; the Virginia Admiral; three Lyn Browns; one Lili Fenichel; three Jess Collins.

Jess orchestrated the color scheme to maximize the effect of the light as it moved across the room throughout the course of a day, animating the space with a visual and atmospheric dynamism, as if one could live inside a painting. 40 This is no white cube, however: this painterly space already had a function as the kitchen of the house. The Collins painting the kitchen becomes is then filled with other artists' work, a domestic metaphor for Jess and Duncan's own appropriative collage-driven practices.

Artworks and people both populated the Baker Street house, which became a salon for their circle of artists and poets. 41 In 1953, a young Stan Brakhage arrived in San Francisco and promptly moved into Jess and Duncan's basement. 42 There he made his early films The Way to Shadow Garden (1954) and In Between (1955), a dream sequence starring Jess (and featuring a soundtrack composed by John Cage). Lawrence Jordan, who attended high school with Brakhage in Denver, shot his film *Trumpit* (1956) in the Baker Street basement, even more evidence that this home served as both site and subject of artistic production. 43 Later that year Jess and Duncan met Kenneth Anger, and Joanna and Michael McClure, who was a student in Duncan's San Francisco State Poetry Center workshop, also began to visit Baker Street. 44 These younger artists, filmmakers, and poets often recall the Jess and Duncan home as a magical, protected space: Brakhage later wistfully wrote to Duncan of "the nostalgia for those warm afternoons of wonderment reading between cups of Oolong Tea in the orange room...and the evenings, the artichoke suppers, curried rice, the long table talks which would often last till bedtime."⁴⁵

Jess studied at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute) during director Douglas MacAgy's tenure, and his teachers included Clyfford Still, Edward Corbett, Elmer Bischoff, David Park and Ad Reinhardt. 46 In December

³⁹ Letter from Robert Duncan to James Broughton, James Broughton Papers, Kent State University, Ohio (JBP, KSU), collection. 1, box. 6, folder. 111.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Jordan, interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

⁴¹ Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 122.

⁴² I am following James Boaden in dating Brakhage's arrival in San Francisco in 1953. Boaden cites a letter from Brakhage to Walt Newcomb dated 27 February 1953, in which he writes of having been in San Francisco for a month. Boaden, "Keeping House: Jess, Stan Brakhage, and the Outmoded Interior," 121, fn. 140.

⁴³ Jess and Duncan make a brief appearance in Jordan's film *Circus Savage* (2009).

⁴⁴ Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 129, 132.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 126.

⁴⁶ Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 37, and "Chronology," 234.

1952 Jess, Duncan, and fellow CSFA student Harry Jacobus founded the King Ubu Gallery at 3119 Fillmore Street. The gallery exhibited work of CFSA students and artist friends who simply had no place to show in San Francisco; in this way, it picked up where Metart, a student-run space encouraged by CFSA teacher Clyfford Still, had left off upon closing its doors in 1950. The appropriation of the anti-hero of Alfred Jarry's 1896 play *Ubu Roi* for the gallery's name lay the groundwork for an ethos founded in the absurd and irreverent; Dada and Surrealism; a dissident coterie; and a comingling of art, performance, and poetry. The space previously served as a mansion stable, a mechanic's garage, and a small theater, and the garage doors were backed with beveled glass doors scavenged from San Francisco's opulent Mark Hopkins Hotel. 47 The accretions of these past lives onto the new gallery space echoes the way in which recycled language and images in Duncan and Jess's work carry residue from their earlier contexts. Moreover, King Ubu evolved directly from the Baker Street house: "With the household salon bursting at the seams," Jarnot writes, "Duncan and Jess began a gallery venture." The trio only ever intended for King Ubu to run for twelve months, and its subsequent incarnation as the "6" Gallery is better known, mostly for Allan Ginsberg's reading of his Beat anthem *Howl* one October night in 1955. *Howl* was part of an evening of readings modeled after Duncan's staging of his comic masque, Faust Foutu (Faust Screwed), the previous year, with performances by Jess, Jordan, McClure, and friends and fellow poets Helen Adam and Jack Spicer.

Jess and Duncan were not at the "6" the night *Howl* was read, having sailed for Spain several months earlier. They spent about a year in Europe, with the majority of their stay in Majorca. In March 1956, Duncan returned to the United States to teach at Black Mountain College at the invitation of Charles Olson (the school closed its doors permanently the next year), and Jess followed some six weeks later, having remained in Lisbon to oversee a shipment of his paintings to the United States (fig. 4). ⁴⁹ That August, the couple moved to De Haro Street in the Potrero Hill neighborhood of San Francisco, where, Michael Rumaker tells us, "The walls were hung with paintings by Jess and others, and lined with bookshelves built by Jess." ⁵⁰ Around this time Michael McClure brought Jess and Duncan to meet Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who were living together in the public housing projects on the south slope of Potrero Hill. ⁵¹ In 1958 Jess and Duncan escaped the city to nearby Stinson Beach, on the Pacific Ocean just north of San Francisco (figs. 5, 6), and in January 1961 returned to San Francisco to live at 3735 20th Street, which was in the Mission District, a primarily Latino neighborhood far removed from the bars and clubs of a Beat North Beach. McClure recalls:

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⁴⁷ Christopher Wagstaff, "In Mondrian's Dance," in *An Art of Wondering: The King Ubu Gallery, 1952-1953* (Davis, California: Natsoulas Novelozo Gallery, 1989): 8; and Seymour Howard, "King Ubu: Gallery in a Theater," in *The Beat Generation Galleries and Beyond* (Davis, California: John Natsoulas Press, 1996): 23.

⁴⁸ Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 126.

⁴⁹ The poet Tom Field recalls being fascinated with Jess and Duncan at Black Mountain: "I was sort of observing these two people and their lifestyle, because one knew they were gay and a married couple." Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 152.

⁵⁰ Michael Rumaker, *Robert Duncan in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1996): 16. An earlier version was published in *Credences* 5/6, March 1978.

⁵¹ Robert Duncan with Gerald Nicosia, "The Closeness of Mind," in *A Poet's Mind*, 282.

"They actually set the style for us...their style of living and the community that grew from the earlier anarchist bohemian tradition....

We were all very poor. It was quite a different world. It was an enjoyable poverty too, because I recounted once...watching Robert and Jess make the first bouillabaisse I'd ever seen...to make such a thing was a big affair. I'd never dreamed that such a thing existed." ⁵²

Throughout the first decade of their marriage, the economy of the Jess and Duncan household was driven by what today might be called "income patching." Duncan typed thesis manuscripts and Jess worked as a part-time medical laboratory technician, but the income derived from these labors was supplemented by a monthly allowance of \$150 from Duncan's mother, Minnehaha Harris.⁵³ Additionally, Duncan taught at San Francisco's newly founded Poetry Center at San Francisco State University in 1954 and again, as Assistant Director, in 1956-57. Jess sold paintings throughout the 1950s to friends and admirers, such as Hilde and David Burton, for \$200 each. Their financial situation improved in the 1960s: after his mother's death in 1961, Duncan began to draw a stipend from a trust, though not more than a few hundred dollars each month, and with the publication of *The Opening of the Field* in 1960, Duncan received income from lectures and readings in the United States and Europe, which involved traveling for roughly half the year.⁵⁴ Jess's fortunes also changed for the better as his career progressed: in 1971 he entered into an agreement with Federico Quadrani, his New York dealer, in which Jess received an \$800 monthly allowance in exchange for paintings sent to New York on consignment. 55 In 1967 the couple purchased a different house on 20th Street, a Victorian built in the 1890s that had survived the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906 (fig. 7). ⁵⁶ They lived there together, at no. 3267, until Duncan's death in 1988, and Jess stayed on until his own death in 2004.⁵⁷

We know something about the décor and layout of the house through a documentary made by The Jess Collins Trust just after the artist died. The rooms were allocated with a nod to the nineteenth century origins of the building: the ground floor

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⁵² Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 162.

⁵³ Lisa Jarnot, email to the author, March 26, 2013, and Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 28, 130. Duncan's parents had settled in Bakersfield, where his father, who received his degree from the University of California, Berkeley and helped design the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, had a successful career as a public works architect. In the 1950s, the buying power of \$150 would be roughly equivalent to \$1300 in 2013. It is worth noting that the Duncan and Jess household, and its "different world" of bouillabaisse and Oolong tea, was sustained by the wide thick spread of inherited wealth that is a striking fact of life in the United States.

⁵⁴ Duncan inherited his family's ranch in Soquel, California, which was sold and converted into a stock portfolio. Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 189, 205.

⁵⁵ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 13 April 1971, BL. Jess began working with Federico Quadrani and Odyssia Skouras, his wife, in 1968. Odyssia Skouras, email to the author, March 27, 2013.

⁵⁶ The couple borrowed the amount needed for the down payment from a friend, Barbara Joseph, who they repaid in monthly installments of \$144.76, according to Jess's financial ledger, BL. According to Christopher Wagstaff, the purchase price of the home was around \$70,000. Interview with the author, October 19, 2010.

⁵⁷ "Chronology," in Jess: A Grand Collage, 234-236.

entry hall, covered in dark wood molding and built-in bookshelves, led to a front parlor framed by a large, north-facing bay window, nearby which Jess and his visitors would work on half-completed puzzles. Moving towards the back of the house, one entered the music room, where the couple's extensive classical music collection was housed. Off to the left of this room was the downstairs library, stuffed floor to ceiling with leatherbound reference books. Beyond the music room was the kitchen, with a modest, round table—although he had a proper studio, Duncan preferred to write at this table—and four chairs and extensive spice rack hung on the exposed brick backing of the chimney. 58 Like the front parlor, the kitchen had a large bay window, this one facing the garden and customized with stained glass panels fabricated by Jess and Duncan.⁵⁹ A stairway led to the second floor, which included Jess's studio, a materials room, and the bedroom, where fairy tales and the couple's beloved Oz books were shelved. On the top floor one found Duncan's office; the guest room; the "French Room," which housed their French language book collection; and the "Gertrude Stein Room," named for the portrait of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas screen-printed onto a window shade that presided over the room (fig. 8).⁶⁰ Jess and Duncan's identification with this earlier model of an artistic, same-sex couple is notable, as is the two women's pictorial appearance on an object of daily life, one that may preside over the whole room or be rolled up and put away, rather than an objet d'art.

For decades the two men shared a home—a domestic space that was concrete and occupied every day, with food prepared, books read aloud, records played, and gardens tended. The house was the physical manifestation of the household, that imaginary site that was also carefully formed and maintained. For Duncan, the two sites were so deeply intertwined that it was natural to collapse them:

The Life we at once lead and follow, that has recognized itself in, illustrated itself, furnisht [sic] itself with chairs, tables, dressers, bedsteads, books, paintings, objects, mementos, dishes, utensils, and the tools and materials of our arts in life, expands now into terms of a house. A house to be "ours" or rather to be us, where the very floors and walls will be terms of our entering life. A thot [sic] may change them. 61

The domestic *is* the site of artistic production, for the mundane items that fill a house—chairs and tables and dressers—appear in the same list as artworks themselves, a verbal cohabitation which demonstrates that the artist's studio and living space are one and the same. More than this, the house that belongs to the two men, the space in which they dwell, becomes, in a few short words, their bodies, their lives: "a house to be 'ours' or rather to be us." Floors and walls, the most basic materials of what constitutes a house—its building blocks and foundational elements—are quickly transformed into imaginary boundaries whose configuration can be shifted with one thought. The made place is both

⁵⁹ Jarnot, 263.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Duncan called this top floor "the science fiction and Surrealism floor." Duncan, "Wonder Tales," with Michael Auping, in *A Poet's Mind*, 28.

⁶¹ Robert Duncan, "Evening notes, 1/1/67" in Notebook 33, 19 October 1962 through 12 June 1968, PC.

fiercely one's own—the householder can remake it in one fell swoop—and dangerously fragile.

Domestic space is a space of production. For Jess and Duncan, the household is the foundational structure that allows production to occur every day. "I'm a householder," Duncan proclaimed. "My whole idea of being able to work was to have a household."62 The domestic interior emerged in the nineteenth century and was figured, as Charles Rice has argued, as space and image at once. 63 Duncan and Jess understood this doubleness intuitively, and so it comes as no surprise that their occupation of domestic space, and their insistence on it as a space of productivity, involves a fair degree of mimicry of nineteenth century decoration and form—the San Francisco home in which they eventually settled, for example, was a late nineteenth century Victorian. Rice's study leans heavily on Walter Benjamin's exploration of the interior as the essential nineteenth century space of individuality, which is understandable given the latter critic's deep engagement with historicizing, as Rice explains, the "interior as the setting for bourgeois domesticity."⁶⁴ Such insistence on the interior as representative of a particularly nineteenth century sense of interiority (and, by extension, intimacy and individuality) has been examined by T.J. Clark in his 2009 A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts on "Picasso and Truth" at the National Gallery of Art. Clark argues that the interior, or "room space," is the truth of space for bohemians, and for Cubism, too, which "belongs to the modernity of the nineteenth century."65 For Picasso, above all else, "being is being in." Modernism is marked by a continual return to the space of the room, the domestic and private space, as a refuge from a dissolving world. Refuge, yes, but also, in Benjamin's terms, constriction and detection, or what we might today call surveillance.

Such instabilities of the interior, domestic space return us to the slipperiness of Kitaj's "safe-household," as both refuge and prone to detection and discovery by outside policing forces. These instabilities also link to the dialectical argument about the studio in postwar America made by Anne M. Wagner in her recent volume, *A House Divided: American Art Since 1955*. The space of the studio for artists like Bruce Nauman and Louise Bourgeois is "both laboratory and refuge," "a place of strategizing as well as retreat." Wagner's articulation of this peculiar positioning of self in relation to a larger domestic (national) space seems apropos of Jess and Duncan, too: "to pursue a thematics of isolation and not-quite-belonging," she writes, "has produced an art about the dissonance of identity, about alienation or internal exile (the studio, again)." Jess and Duncan insist on a permeability of studio and domestic space, and notably, insist on the productivity of the latter kind of space: "My whole idea of being able to work was to have a household," Duncan tells us.

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⁶⁷ Ibid, 7.

⁶² From *The Writer in America: Robert Duncan...A Life in Poetry* (1975), a film produced and directed by Richard O. Moore.

⁶³ Charles Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior: Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁵ T.J. Clark, "Picasso and Truth, Part 2: Room," The 58th A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, 2009.

⁶⁶ Anne M. Wagner, *A House Divided: American Art Since 1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012): 4, 178.

Above I made glancing reference to the gap between art and life, and my reader may well be aware of the phrase's source. In 1959, Robert Rauschenberg wrote the now well-known lines, "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"68 Rauschenberg's iconoclastic insistence in the 1950s and 1960s on inserting materials from everyday life into his works and upsetting comforting divisions between painting and sculpture in his Combines has informed a vibrant literature on the stakes of postwar art practice. The foundational text here is Leo Steinberg's "Reflections on the State of Criticism," which argues for Rauschenberg's work as signaling a massive shift in pictorial orientation, from vertical fields to the flatbed picture plane, and as likewise marking a shift in art's subject matter from nature to culture. ⁶⁹ Rauschenberg's great achievement was to invent "a pictorial surface that let the world in again," but with a crucial caveat: this pictorial surface does not present a "worldspace," but rather "an image of an image." "Against Rauschenberg's picture plane," Steinberg writes, "you can pin or project any image because it will not work as the glimpse of a world, but as a scrap of printed material."71 With Steinberg's aid, we can understand Rauschenberg's claim to work in the gap between art and life as a need to prise open some distance, however immeasurable, between the two, or between his work and his appropriated materials and imagery, in order to have the former still read as "art" (and as art with something new to say). John Cage, for one, found this posture to be conservative: "I think there's a slight difference between Rauschenberg and me," Cage once explained. "I have the desire to just erase the difference between art and life, whereas Rauschenberg made that famous statement about working in the gap between the two. Which is a little Roman Catholic, from my point of view."⁷²

Jess and Duncan offer a third model, one that emerges through comparison with the positions taken by Rauschenberg and Cage. Rather than work in that poetic, inexact space between art and life, or relish an anarchic erasure of their boundaries, Jess and Duncan tighten the gap between the two terms. The model they propose allows for, even dictates, a commingling of art and home. Home, we recall from Duncan's quote above, is equated with life itself, or with the particular form of life that Duncan constructs and celebrates here: "The Life we at once lead and follow...expands now into terms of a house." Being a householder, being at home, is a precondition for artistic production, and within the space of the household, art and life cohabitate. Jess's domestic sculptures,

⁶⁸ Robert Rauschenberg, "Untitled Statement," 1959. In *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. Eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 321.

⁶⁹ Sometimes Jess literally worked horizontally, on a tabletop surface: "Since I compose pasteups on surfaces near horizontal on my studio worktable, I prop a wood panel at about a 5 to 10 degree tilt." Letter to Vic Keller, 25 June 1995, BL.

⁷⁰ Leo Steinberg, "Reflections on the State of Criticism," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972): 29.

⁷¹ For Steinberg this insistence on representation *qua* representation makes Rauschenberg a postmodern artist, and indeed Steinberg's phrase "image of an image" is echoed in Douglas Crimp's influential 1979 "Pictures" essay, a text central to then-current debates on postmodernism: "underneath each picture there is always another picture," Crimp writes. Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 87.

⁷² John Cage, *Conversing with Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994): 181.

which he called "Assemblies" and which were displayed throughout the home, make this point in visual, even material terms. These small sculptures were assembled from a variety of found objects—antlers, springs, light bulbs, walnuts, padlocks—and were occasionally transformed into functional tabletop lamps (fig. 9). Michael Auping, who exhibited a number of the Assemblies in 1983, described them as "almost camouflaged among the memorabilia filling each surface and niche" of the couple's house, an indication of just how seamlessly these sculptures integrated with the topography of their home ⁷³

Jess and Duncan pursued separate artistic paths—the former as a visual artist, the latter as a poet. Each man did, however, experiment with the other's chosen medium. Jess, who held a lifelong interest in the play inherent in language, wrote poetry and prose, and Duncan, who was drawn to the open form and movement he perceived in Abstract Expressionism, took up painting and drawing. 74 They collaborated rarely, which may seem surprising, especially given the length of their relationship. But they did have one constant, overarching collaboration: the joint labor of maintaining the household, a daily labor or housework that differs from that of producing in the home studio or office. Despite their different temperaments and prolonged engagement with different media, the worldviews of both men were quite similar, and part of what each stood to gain in keeping house together, in addition to intimacy and companionship, was the creation of a space to uphold these values: the domestic as a generative and protected space, which Jess would call indwelling (a term he takes from James Joyce) and Duncan would term the household; the formation of genealogies through accumulation of sources and acts of appropriation; a multiphasic or multivalent approach to meaning; an insistence on openended process (for Duncan) or images constantly in flux (for Jess); and an engagement with fantasy and romance—Duncan would call their life together "story living" and Jess would punningly term it an "image nation." 75

Not surprisingly, the house they shared in the Mission district of San Francisco, where most of their life together was spent, manifested these qualities. What is most immediately apparent about this house is its fullness: a material abundance engrained in an outdated Victorian aesthetic far removed from the clean techno-modernism advertised to housewives in the 1950s, or even the bare functionality of the Coenties Slip loft.⁷⁶

⁷³ Auping, Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies), 1951-1983, 16.

⁷⁴ Jess's poems are being collected by art historian Thomas Evans and will be published in a forthcoming volume by the University of California Press. In his lifetime Jess published two prose works, a translation of Christian Morgenstern's *Gallowsongs* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1970) and "Critical Dreams," which first appeared in *Open Space* 6 (1964). Christopher Wagstaff organized an exhibition of Robert Duncan's artworks, *Robert Duncan: Drawings and Decorated Books*, held at the Berkeley Art Museum and the Bancroft Library in 1992.

⁷⁵ Kevin Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," *Line* 7/8 (Spring/Fall 1986): 23.

Many artists moved into loft spaces in Lower Manhattan's Coenties Slip in the 1950s, including Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, James Rosenquist, and Robert Indiana. See also Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982): 61.

Bookshelves lined almost every room, and several rooms were used as libraries. Their collection contained over 5,000 volumes (not to mention over 5,300 LP records) and comprised in-depth holdings in fiction, art history (from all periods), poetry, literary theory, philosophy, classics, world religion, history, architectural history, biography, fairy tales, science fiction, magic and the occult, theosophy, drama, psychoanalysis, physics and biology. Collected authors ranged from Frank L. Baum, the author of the Oz books and a favorite of the couple, to Plato, William Blake, Charles Darwin, Rainer Maria Rilke, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, and so on. 77 Artworks covered walls and adorned tabletops: some of their makers are from the art historical past—Gova and Alphonse Mucha—while others are more contemporary, but also now familiar—Bruce Conner, Wallace Berman, Kitaj, and George Herms. But most—among them Harry Jacobus, Edward Corbett, Eloise Mixon, Paul Alexander, and Lyn Brockway—remain unknown beyond the Bay Area arts and poetry circles that formed in the 1950s and 1960s. 78 These collections of things used and displayed in the house are representative of the couple's social circle, and in this way the house becomes an allegory for the household. In other words, this repository for the material stuff of one's life allegorizes the couple's forming a household through careful acts of selection, accumulation, and salvage. Such acts are also integral to each artist's process.

Both men worked in this home: Jess in his studio on the second floor, Duncan in his office on the third. Each room contained constellations of material pinned to the walls—a visual scenario one need not be an artist to share. Here were photographs of interlocutors past and present as well as numerous found images and objects that formed highly affective, intimate collages of influence and reflection. The wall above Duncan's desk read like a visual catalog of the writers whose work preoccupied him and with whom he wrestled his entire life: Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Virginia Woolf, Sigmund Freud (fig. 8). In 1989, soon after Duncan's death, Jess made a series of fourteen *Emblems for Robert Duncan* to accompany the multi-volume publication of Duncan's collected works by the University of California Press. ⁷⁹ One of these emblems is chock

⁷⁷ The Duncan and Jess library was given intact to the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, and numbers over 5,000 volumes. In 1988, Jess detailed his "best effort at cataloguing and evaluating all the artwork in my and Robert's possession" and gives the value of the records as \$7,950, which, at his cited price of \$1.50 per record yields a total of 5,300 records. Letter to Thomas B. McGuire, 29 July 1988, Notebook 2, folder 48, PC.

⁷⁸ Jess and Duncan's milieu was extensive and eclectic, and included poets, artists, publishers, writers, and dear friends from other walks of life. To expand the current discussion to encompass this circle would be a worthwhile and even necessary undertaking, but is beyond the scope of the present study.

⁷⁹ John Yau, "Open Books," in *Jess: Emblems for Robert Duncan* (San Jose, CA: San Jose Museum of Art, 1990). This long delayed project is finally underway again, with the first volume's publication in early 2011. See Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, eds. Michael Boughn and Victor Coleman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). The frontispiece for this volume is Jess's eleventh emblem, discussed here. The emblem's title, *They were there for they are here*, is derived from a line from Duncan's poem "Variations on Two Dicta of William Blake," in *Roots and Branches*. The "they" in question refers to angels, and the full stanza reads: "They were there for they are here. / You overlook or, seeing them, / changed focus and dismisst them."

full of faces (fig. 11). A young Duncan is in the center. He looks upwards, and does not meet our gaze. Baudelaire is at his shoulder, or at his ear perhaps, his expression wary and severe. A group in the lower half of the image—Ezra Pound, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Gertrude Stein—forms a craggy Mount Rushmore monolith. And there are many others: Shakespeare, Joyce, Edith Sitwell, and Yeats. Jess has imaged here the self-generated genealogy, what Freud would call family romance, that was so central to Duncan's intellectual life, and which Duncan himself had collaged on the wall above his desk.⁸⁰ What is striking about this particular image is how crowded it is, suggesting both the intimacy and fullness of the elected family for this "poet of inclusiveness," as Thom Gunn once put it. 81 This visuality of elective association was significant enough to be recognized by friend and fellow artist Wallace Berman and mirrored back to Duncan as a mode of identification on a slight piece of ephemera, an envelope mailed to Jess and Duncan in 1962 from Los Angeles, per the postmark (fig. 12). Onto the envelope Berman collaged a reproduction of Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, from a 1934 photograph in which the couple poses on a staircase leading to a United Airlines flight bound for Chicago. On top of this Berman glues a torn photograph of Duncan's visage. The two women are also excised from their surroundings, so in the act of collage now three bodies form one mass—which is the same visual language employed in Jess's Rushmore-esque emblem.

Duncan's pin-up wall is largely composed of images of people, whereas Jess's is not. Jess's entire practice is a process of salvage: "Really all my work—'Paste-Ups," 'Assemblies,' 'Translations'—comes from salvaging," he explained to Auping. 82 And so he fills his studio with a sea of images rescued from many sources and many moments in history. Several studio photographs have survived (fig. 13). They show a space full but fairly organized. Tabletops are covered with books and images, and bookshelves are stacked with tools and boxes. In one corner we see Jess's image drawers—a filing system for visual material collected over the years and arranged by type. 83 Categories included, to give just a few examples, "Animals," "Buildings," "Transportation," "Vegetation," and a "Mean Section" subdivided into "Police," "Bigots," and "Militarists." Humor is in this space: in one photograph a plaque proclaims Jess to be a "BEAUTY SPECIALIST" (fig. 14). Near this bit of signage is Michelangelo's *David*, whose gaze alights on the image Jess has tacked immediately to the right, a reproduction of the 1903 painting Echo and Narcissus by the Pre-Raphaelite John William Waterhouse (fig. 15). In the painting, Echo turns toward Narcissus, but he ignores her, preoccupied as he is with his own reflection. Upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the image of David has been tacked up to block Echo from sight. In other words, David takes her place as the figure that desires Narcissus. The transformation of the Narcissus myth into an allegory of male beauty and

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⁸³ Auping, Jess: A Grand Collage, 49.

⁸⁰ See also Whitney Davis, "Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17:2-3: 315.

⁸¹ Thom Gunn, "The High Road: A Last Collection," in *Shelf Life: Essays, Memoirs, and an Interview* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993): 150.

^{150.} My phrase "elected family" recalls Goethe's novel *Elected Affinities* or *Kindred by Choice*. ⁸² Paste-up is Jess's preferred term for his collages, and assemblies are what he called his three-dimensional assemblages. Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 25-26.

same-sex desire that Jess undertook in his *Narkissos* collage (discussed in chapter 3) is likewise enacted on the studio wall (fig. 16).

In fact, the space of the artwork and the space of the studio are at first glance nearly impossible to differentiate in these photographs (fig. 17). One wall is a collage of collages, mostly Jess's own paste-ups, arrayed on a surface that has taken on the character of old paper—water-stained, sepia-toned, cracked and peeling, such that layers of time are revealed in the very walls of the home. ⁸⁴ In the center is Jess's cover for Michael Davidson's book of poems, *The Mutabilities*, published in 1976 by Berkeley's Sand Dollar Press (fig. 18). And it takes a moment to recognize that on the far left of this photograph is the *Narkissos* pinboard (fig. 19), so seamlessly does it integrate into or conform to the visual logic of the whole wall. The pinboard aesthetic, which artists ranging from Rauschenberg to Eduardo Paolozzi adopted in the 1950s, is usually understood in terms of commodity culture—as a nod to the visual language of advertising. 85 Things placed on shelves or in rows are like things for sale in the aisles of supermarkets. "Today we collect ads," Alison and Peter Smithson wrote with delight and desperation (to paraphrase Hal Foster) in 1956. 86 But the pinboard aesthetic, as Jess's own collection demonstrates, is also a domestic aesthetic, devotional as well as typological, for things have a life after consumption, and are sometime acquired with that life in mind. Jess and Duncan's small groupings are closer to the votive corner of a home (Jess even called his Assemblies "votive objects"), a tenacious religious and cultural tradition stretching back millennia, and one that Malevich exploited to spectacular effect by installing his iconic, and iconoclastic, black square in place of the customary Russian Orthodox icon in 1915. 87 This sacred devotional space and Jess and Duncan's affective pinboard collages of found images and elected family portraits are both meant to be lived with over time. Alterations and substitutions may be made, but these images come to belong in this space and to this person. They congeal or settle into this space of belonging over time, as eventually would the image fragments in a Jess collage, pinned before glued into place.

Duncan was, according to those who knew him, a force in every room—loquacious, argumentative, even domineering. 88 He also took on the role of speaker and promoter of Jess's work, about which Jess himself hardly ever spoke: "I open my mouth

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⁸⁴ In an interview with Michael Auping, Jess explained, "One of the things I've always loved about living in this old house are the water stains and cracks in the ceiling and walls. I can't help staring at them and making pictures or fantasy images out of them. This is what da Vinci said an artist must do—to take note of all the stains on the walls and pay particular attention to foliage, things that are very real in an abstract way." Auping, *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 21.

⁸⁵ See Hal Foster's writings on Pop Art, including *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter, and Ruscha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); "On the First Pop Age," *New Left Review* 19 (Jan/Feb 2003): 93-112; and

[&]quot;Survey," in Pop, Mark Francis, ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 2005).

⁸⁶ Foster, "On the First Pop Age," 93.

⁸⁷ Solnit, 38.

⁸⁸ Hilde and David Burton in conversation with the author, 9 April, 2010.

and the fog pours out," he once wrote to his longtime New York-based dealer Federico Quadrani, in the midst of a sophisticated description of the painting series called the Salvages. 89 Interviews with Jess are rare, and his artistic statements often are comprised of quotations from other writers. The catalogue for his 1980 exhibition of paste-ups at the Odyssia Gallery in New York includes no less than sixteen excerpts from previously written texts by authors ranging from Heraclitus to Baudelaire to James Joyce—all given proper attribution. Robert Duncan appears in this list of quotations, too, and on several other occasions wrote about Jess's work for publication; his essays remain the most insightful texts in print about Jess's work, and will be drawn on throughout this dissertation. 90 Jess insisted that images came to him and worked through him, and he recoiled from providing explanatory statements that might dictate how and what something in the work means. "Such exposition," he wrote to Quadrani, "whether of concept or of content, has to be extended and intensive, and therefore an entirely other work of art in itself, to be worth the distraction away from the actual works from which the thoughts sprang."91

From the beginning of their relationship Duncan traveled extensively, primarily in the United States but also abroad, to give readings and guest lecture. He doggedly promoted Jess's work along the way, showing slides to curators and gallerists and attempting to drum up sales and shows alike. He often saw exhibitions of Jess's work that Jess himself did not. 92 Though Jess accompanied Duncan in the early years of their relationship, he soon began to stay at home, even calling himself, in one of the numerous letters the two men exchanged while Duncan was away, a "housewaif." This vivid pun, typical of Jess's word play, reminds us of the highly gendered roles of the American household during this time, and the ways in which these two men were conscious of occupying them, at times parodically: Jess tends to the home while Duncan is on the road, the traveling salesman.

Jess may have styled himself the housewaif, but a more crucial role in this household, one that both men played, is that of the guardian. Duncan, for his part, guarded Jess: acting as Jess's agent, he protected him from the more public or promotional aspects of the art world. But beyond this concrete evidence of how they

⁸⁹ Letter to Federico Ouadrani, 18 December 1971, BL.

⁹⁰ Duncan's texts on Jess's works include essays for a 1959 exhibition at the Dilexi Gallery in San Francisco and the exhibition *Paste-Ups by Jess* at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1968; "Introduction," in Translations by Jess (New York: Odyssia Gallery, 1971); and An Art of Wandering (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Art, 1977). For Jess's 1971 exhibition at the Odyssia Gallery, Duncan wrote: "Living with Jess's work for more than twenty years...my own work and thought has grown intimately with his, and, just as writing here of his work I find myself coming into realizations of elements of my own poetics that have been born in contemplation of paintings and paste-ups, so passages come to mind, as here, from my work, that seem to speak for his intent." Duncan, "Introduction," xiii.

⁹¹ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 12 November 1973, BL.

⁹² In 1960 Duncan writes to Jess that he has shown slides of Jess's works to Dorothy Miller, the Museum of Modern Art curator who organized the series of Americans shows from the 1940s to 1960s. Letter to Jess, 30 April 1960, PC. In a letter to Federico Quadrani, Jess explains that Duncan will give a reading at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and see Jess's concurrent show of paste-ups. Letter to Federico Quadrani, 15 January 1973, BL. 93 Letter to Robert Duncan, 18 May 1967, PC.

managed their professional lives, it is clear that Duncan considered the householder and the guardian to be one and the same role. When Duncan first met Jess, he wrote a poem called "The Song of the Borderguard" in which the new love becomes both a scent emanating from a nearby body, recast as a lion, and a vast empire to be protected by the "Poet on Guard." The poem was later included in the 1966 collection, A Book of Resemblances: Poems 1950-1953. In this volume, Duncan writes: "Songs of a Householder: With *The Song of the Borderguard* in 1950 my life with Jess, the illustrator of this book, had begun."94 Here Duncan directly equates the "songs" of the householder and the guardian. The work of the householder is to guard the household—there are in fact many valences of the word "hold," from embrace to fortress, embedded in householders—which is exactly what Jess did. 95 By several accounts—and contrary to the passive, wilting figure conjured by the housewaif—Jess forcefully policed the boundaries of their home, determining, for example, who could and could not enter. The protection of the household was an exclusionary as much as inclusive process of selection, and over the years several individuals found themselves, in Kevin Killian's turn of phrase, "banished from their magic circle." 96

Though the two men cultivated and occupied wildly different public personae— Jess as the reclusive housewaif, and Duncan as the socially hungry poet-wanderer guarding the household had the same use for each: it allowed them both to manage the overwhelming fullness of the world. For Jess, the onslaught is visual, a sea of images but given the nature of his work, could it be otherwise? Here is one of the rare instances in which he articulates this condition: "I try to explain how floods of images oppress and drown me, [but] it appears that everyone else joyously assimilates every new scene and impression as an easy addition to his psyche or else can shield it out as dispensable or irrelevant." And Duncan writes in the preface to A Book of Resemblances of the "troubling plenitude of experience" which he attempts to negotiate in his efforts to create a multiphasic poetic form. "In our immediate oceanic being," he explains, "we can seem to our examining conscious view all but hopelessly lost in a medium at once overpowering and vague, too huge to be true."98 Duncan's references to the household as a safe haven in the maelstrom of the outside world are frequent, and make emphatically clear the need to guard the former in the face of the latter. Here again is a line from A Book of Resemblances: "The fortress—a household—and, beyond, the desolation of a

⁹⁴ Duncan, A Book of Resemblances, Poems: 1950-1953 (New Haven: H. Wenning, 1966): viii.

⁹⁵ The term guardian appears explicitly in a work discussed in chapter four, *Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon, Series Two, "The Guardian Angels' Guidebook,"* a set of thirty-seven collages made in 1955, mostly from images culled from *Life* magazine. David and Hilde Burton, longtime friends of the couple, noted that each man protected the other, and that, according to Hilde, "Jess insisted that only certain people enter" their home. Interview with the author, April 9, 2010. Lisa Jarnot has also confirmed that the concept of guarding was foundational to Duncan and Jess's relationship. Interview with the author, April 26, 2010.

⁹⁶ Interview with the author, December 14, 2009.

⁹⁷ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 7 May 1971, BL.

⁹⁸ Duncan, "Ideas of the Meaning of Form," 103 and *A Book of Resemblances*, vii. For a clear and rigorous treatment of the multiphasic form in Duncan's poetics and worldview see James Maynard, "The Plurality of What Is," in *Architect of Excess: Robert Duncan and the American Pragmatist Sublime*, diss. State University of New York at Buffalo, 2006.

continent swept by spectral storms in which the sound of perishing armies rang." And again: "the form of elements in commotion, clouds, fire, smoke, the sea, and the household kept (the work of art as hearth of feeling) in the midst of catastrophe." Or again, in the epigraph at this chapter's outset, from a 1966 notebook entry: "The household Jess and I have made I have seen as a lone holding in an alien forest-world, as a campfire about which we gatherd [sic] in an era of cold and night."

But as with Kitaj's safe-household, matters are not quite so straightforward. "In my home-life," Duncan writes in the same preface, "I had then to be at home with fearful domesticities." The household is not always or only a sanctuary—when is this ever the case? And although the household may be characterized in terms of closeness (a fortress, a hearth, a campfire), it is not a place of retreat. As the poet Robin Blaser once put it, "Duncan's work is much concerned with being-at-home. Simple as that—yet, Odyssean." Blaser's phrasing has a clever contradiction built into it, given that for Odysseus, home was a place he labored so mightily to reach over ten years. It is important to keep in mind the distinction between couple and household, and that the latter term is the organizing structure here. The household functioned as an alternative political and social structure, one that provided the rubric through which the couple organized their lives and allowed those lives to resist normativity. For Jess, policing the household's boundaries was a means of self-preservation, while for Duncan the same policing allowed for promiscuity outside the home, and stability and long-term companionship inside of it. 103

Having given some sense of the coordinates of this household, both real and imagined, it is useful to return to the neologism of the safe-household raised at this chapter's outset by introducing some new voices. The first belongs to artist and filmmaker Lawrence Jordan, a close friend of the couple and Jess's collaborator on the film *The 40 and 1 Nights, or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon*, 1955-62. ¹⁰⁴ Jordan described the ménage on 20th Street this way:

⁹⁹ Duncan, A Book of Resemblances, vii.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. viii

Fearful domesticities also seems to remember Blake's fearful symmetry in "The Tyger": Tyger, Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night, / What immortal hand or eye / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

¹⁰² Blaser, "Afterword," 47.

¹⁰³ The self-organization and self-governance of small groups—such as households—that would resist totalizing and conformist pressures of centralized power administered from above was articulated by the poet and essayist Laura Riding. According to Joel Nickels, Riding developed "a robust, if highly idiosyncratic, political vision—one in which self-managing companies of friends would take over functions once served by abstract, disembodied mechanisms of production and exchange." Such self-management by small groups allows for refusal of certain social moirés. See Joel Nickels, *Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 176. For more on Duncan's promiscuity outside the home see Lisa Jarnot's biography.

¹⁰⁴ The film is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Jess was deciding that he would like to build a home and maintain a home and have the magic of, the protection of, a home. And he taught me a great deal of my lifestyle out of that—what the meaning of a home is. It's a whole lot more than bourgeois values, it's a magical kingdom and it needs to be protected from all the wayward vibrations that come and go. So there were rules about who could come and it was very civilized; it was not the usual open American flop pad at all. They abhorred pads, sleeping on the floor on mattresses. And that taught me a great deal about being civilized, which is hard to find in this American culture. 105

And Stan Brakhage, who lived with Jess and Duncan in the early 1950s, later would recall:

...everything about the place was exotic. I just didn't know what to think. Robert and his lover, Jess, invited me in, and they were civilized and exciting. They were wonderful people and nobody can top them with their deep and active interest in every interstice of life. They were people living out the peculiarities of their lives as a triumph, rather than an abyss. ¹⁰⁶

These recollections are worth taking a moment to parse. For Jordan and Brakhage, Jess and Duncan's household was notable for being *civilized*—this is the word used by both men, and used twice by Jordan. But this so-called civilized household is striking precisely because it went against the grain of how others lived—artists, poets, and homosexuals—in the communities located in San Francisco neighborhoods such as North Beach and the Fillmore in the 1950s. Their household stood in stark opposition to the image of heteronormative domesticity so prevalent in postwar American culture, but also enacted a refusal of the Beat-era lifestyle, worn like a badge of honor, of a life spent on the road, communal flop pads, and "wayward vibrations." Brakhage identifies some of the anomalism of the household created by Jess and Duncan, the way in which it seemed so out of place in the social context of their peer group, with his phrase "everything about the place was exotic." That a "civilized" home would appear exotic demonstrates just how purposefully this household differed from other available models at the time.

¹⁰⁵ Solnit, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 35. For an elegant analysis of the Jess and Duncan household as it intersected with the filmic ethos of Brakhage, see James Boaden, "Keeping House: Jess, Stan Brakhage, and the Outmoded Interior."

¹⁰⁷ Brakhage would go on to stand for a similar commitment to household, but a more patriarchal one. His ambivalence towards Duncan and Jess was seized on by Duncan later, who castigated Brakhage for calling him and Jess "incredible magicians," writing, "there is no care in these terms for what we actually are, much less for our own effort to be truthful to what we are." Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 217.

Allen Ginsberg writes of the term beat, "the original street usage meant exhausted, at the bottom of the world, looking up or out, sleepless, wide-eyed, perceptive, rejected by society, on your own, streetwise." "Prologue," in Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America*, 1950-1965, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995): 18.

¹⁰⁹ Helen Adam wrote, "Duncan and his friend, the great visionary painter Jess Collins, who share a fantastic palace of a house in San Francisco, have always seemed to me like avatars, visiting

Here is another account of Duncan and Jess's life, this one written from a somewhat different perspective than those offered by Jordan or Brakhage. This is Michael Rumaker's *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, a memoir by a young poet who lived in San Francisco in the late 1950s and was very much part of both the poetry circles and gay bar culture thriving in the city at the time. He describes his first encounter with Duncan:

...this gay man who I'd heard early on at Black Mountain was living, and had been living for some years in San Francisco, with another man, a painter named Jess, in what, from what I could learn, was a reasonably harmonious and loving friendship. That seemed unbelievable to me. 110

Unbelievable, Rumaker goes on to explain, because Duncan and Jess lived openly as a gay couple. Though commentators on the Duncan and Jess household characterized it in terms of safety, protection, and boundaries, in the 1950s the openly queer household was far from a common social arrangement in the United States, or even in San Francisco, a city with a long history of queer subcultures visibly present in the urban sphere. These real social conditions, of course, make the views of visitors all the more poignant and paradoxical. If during World War II male homosexuality became more visible as young men moved from small towns to large port cities, where they found, and became part of, thriving bar cultures, after the war San Francisco witnessed a crackdown on gay cruising grounds and bars. Such policing of urban space was not limited to San Francisco—it

this ill-fated planet from other more magnificent and ideal worlds." Helen Adam, "A Few Notes on Robert Duncan," in *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous*, 36. George Herms shared this sentiment: "It was stepping off the planet to visit them." Interview with the author, October 23, 2010.

¹¹⁰ Rumaker, Robert Duncan in San Francisco, 5-6.

¹¹¹ Nan Alamilla Boyd writes, "San Francisco is a queer town not simply because it hosts disproportionately large gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities but because a queerness is sewn into the city's social fabric." Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 2.

¹¹² John d'Emilio's Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Homosexual Minority in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) is an especially useful historical account of the history of homosexual life (and the rise of urban gay bar culture) in the decades before Stonewall. See also George Chauncey's study of homosexual subcultures in the first half of the twentieth century, including the decline in visibility and tolerance of gay communities following World War II, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York: Basic Books, 1994). Such clampdowns paradoxically led to mobilization of gay communities, especially in New York and San Francisco. This is an argument made by (among others) Jeffrey Weeks in Sexuality and Its Discontents; Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities (London and Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1985). In his survey of homoerotic art of the last hundred years, Emmanuel Cooper notes that the conservatism of the immediate postwar period discouraged openly homosexual art, but such work did appear and circulate in more private, subcultural venues. See Cooper, The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). Other useful resources on this history include James M. Saslow, Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) and Frances FitzGerald,

was a widespread phenomenon in cities throughout the United States, one that dovetailed with a narrowing of acceptable gender roles and domestic arrangements that marked the 1950s as a whole. Indeed, the characterization of San Francisco as a "police city" during this time is one shared by firsthand accounts and historical studies alike. And yet, these collisions with the law forced the bar-based subcultures and the homophile societies, groups operating nationally to advocate a slower, more mainstream acceptance of gays and lesbians, into contact with one another. This contact resulted in a proto-activism that culminated in widespread protests and the emergence in San Francisco of a gay community by the mid-1960s, predating Stonewall.

These conditions provide some measure of historical context for the household shared by Duncan and Jess, and allow it to take on a political dimension. Certainly their household was not the only one of its kind in San Francisco—oral histories have proven that similar arrangements did exist during this time—but it was far from the norm, and its foundational importance for the two men in spite of this fact was part of what made it remarkable, if not exceptional. This made place was still *out of place* in 1950s San Francisco—"different" in more ways than one. Their household was out of place within legible patterns of behavior for gay men on the streets and in bars, and within a suburbanbound model of heterosexual, familial domesticity so prevalent in the American social body at this time. The out-of-placeness—the queerness—of this household performs a

Cities on a Hill: A Journey through Contemporary American Cultures (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

Rumaker writes, "But the Morals Squad was everywhere, and the entrapment of gay males in the streets, the parks, and in numerous public places was a constant fear and common occurrence." *Robert Duncan in San Francisco*, 14. And here is Nan Alamilla Boyd: "In constant negotiation with multiple policing agencies, the communities that formed inside gay and lesbian bars took on a siege mentality. As they fought to defend their territory from police intrusion, they came to understand the power of collective action." *Wide Open Town*, 17. Rebecca Solnit provides a counterpoint to these descriptions, which throws into relief the relativity of any account of conditions of daily life under bigotry and marginalization. She describes San Francisco as "a sanctuary during the 1950s, a place where the conservatism and conformity of the McCarthy era weren't so stifling, a tolerant cosmopolitan city whose tone had been set by the festive adventurers of the Gold Rush." Solnit, "Fillmore: The Beats in the Western Addition," http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Fillmore: The Beats in the Western Addition. Accessed November 2, 2012.

¹¹⁴ Members of the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project conducted oral history interviews describing lesbian and gay life in the 1950s; archives can be found at the San Francisco Public Library and the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco.

115 "Duncan knew the horrors and fragmentation of street-life for a gay male," Rumaker recollects, "and took care that his friendship with Jess and their home together remained intact and central in a deep instinctual sense of containment in one whose sensual energies and attentions streamed everywhere. It literally kept him off the streets I haunted." Rumaker, 77. Duncan, as has been widely remarked on by historians of poetry, literature, and queer studies alike, at an extremely early date—1944—published in the journal *Politics* an essay titled "The Homosexual in Society," in which he not only came out but publicly criticized the separationist, even cliquish ethos of homophilic activism and queer urban, highly educated subcultures. Robert Duncan, "The Homosexual in Society," *Politics* 1:7 (August 1944): 209-11. Instead he advocated a broader, more inclusive and democratic notion of civil rights into which homosexuals could be

double difference. Not only does the household inhabited by Duncan and Jess imply their making a home together, something seen as alien, even exotic, by many of their peers, but it also implies two male bodies occupying and disrupting on a daily basis an institution that, in the 1950s, was produced and regulated as nuclear, and meant for a man and woman.¹¹⁶

III. Seven Deadly Virtues

In the hallway of Duncan and Jess's home hung a small plaque announcing the "Seven Deadly Virtues of Contemporary Art: Originality, Spontaneity, Simplicity, Intensity, Immediacy, Impenetrability, and Shock" (fig. 20). These seven deadly virtues certainly allude to Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté*, his 1934 surrealist collage novel of interiors sutured from French nineteenth century serialized novels melodramatic, bourgeois, lurid images "lifted from a thousand old books that no longer make the grade," in Breton's words. 118 Ernst's graphic novel, which strongly impacted Jess when Duncan gave him a copy in 1952, is structured around seven deadly elements, each corresponding to a day in its unfolding "week of kindness." Taking up Ernst's inversion of logic and conventional narrative, the domestic plaque in Jess and Duncan's home sets in motion a play of reversals: seven deadly virtues rather than seven deadly sins, and seven virtuous qualities associated with modernism and its art. The list is not exactly the opposite of what Jess and Duncan valued: Jess's excessively intricate collages or Duncan's peculiar, highly theatrical oration could both, for example, be found guilty of the deadly virtue of "intensity." But many items on the list do reveal the stakes of their respective projects. The deadly virtue of originality, for example, is the first trap into which contemporary art can fall. Such a "commandment" indicates an acute awareness, on Jess's part, of how insistently appropriative his project is: derivation seeps into every aspect of his work, forming a relationship to word, image, narrative, and history.

What is being valued here, in both this list and the conjuring of its opposite? What worldview is being shaped by this inventory, and what are we to make of its formation through absence rather than presence, through acts of play and puns? In 1958, Duncan wrote the following in his application for a Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship:

incorporated. The essay had immediate ramifications, as John Crow Ransom, the editor of the *Kenyon Review*, withdrew the previously scheduled publication of Duncan's poem, "An African Elegy."

¹¹⁶ A thorough articulation of theories of the everyday and the body in postwar art can be found in Elise Archias, "Everydayness and the Body," *The Body as a Material in the Early Performance Work of Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, and Vito Acconci*, diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Solnit, Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era, 111.

Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, trans. John William Gabriel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991): 217.

¹¹⁹ The seven deadly elements of *Une Semaine de Bonté* are mud, water, fire, blood, blackness, sight, and the unknown.

Formally, the work of this whole period seems to be that of recapitulation. Perhaps it is natural where my concern has been one of boundaries and where "exploration" and "discovery" have come to belong to movement beyond the enclosure won from chaos—the adoration of the Field is a domestic work, not a heroic work. 120

The field is a spatial imaginary—the space of the artwork or poem—discussed in the next chapter. Here Duncan makes a key distinction about the labor involved in its maintenance and protection: "the adoration of the Field is a domestic work, not a heroic work." Duncan's words apply to Jess here, too, for Jess's project is similarly domestic, not heroic. Neither man needs heroics because this is already enough, and indeed sometimes too much. Jess makes art out of the texture of life and its relationships—with Duncan, with interlocutors past and present, and, we shall see, with the astonishing image world of *Life* magazine. He understands his inadequacy to the task—isn't that what such an egoeffacing list makes nakedly apparent?—and his constant teetering on the precipice. The too-muchness threatens to drown him, but he can't help but proceed in his efforts to rescue, sort, and collect from the vast repository of the image world. These efforts are inevitably inscribed with failure, but such acts of recognition and misrecognition that go on and on are what mark, and indeed define, any alternative life.

¹²⁰ Letter to the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Notebook 17, 31 January 1958, PC.

Chapter Two: The Gate and the Field

I. Introduction

The preceding chapter, "Householders," establishes the Jess and Duncan household as carefully constructed through a process of accumulation, and purposefully occupied as a site—the site—of artistic production. Even more so, the household is the prerequisite for production to occur, and claiming and revaluing a site whose labor had long been gendered female and thereby rendered invisible productively troubles existing paradigms, centered around the studio, of where artistic work gets done and why. This chapter takes Jess and Duncan's household on the road, so to speak, in order to examine a specific case of collaboration between artist and poet: Caesar's Gate, a book of poems written by Duncan and collages made by Jess in Majorca, Spain in 1955. Despite its portability and physical containment within the two covers that bind it, it establishes a field of associations and operations that expand far beyond its limits as a material object. Caesar's Gate is a book deeply concerned with relation and difference, as befits a collaborative work. It performs a constant negotiation of these terms—relation and difference—and brings this negotiation into especially close proximity, as nothing makes more plain the comparison and conversation between two cultural practitioners than when their efforts lie on facing pages.

Although *Caesar's Gate* may be a modestly scaled artists' book known almost exclusively to Bay Area literati of the Beat Generation or aficionados of twentieth century poetry, its ambitions are hardly limited and inward turning. The project, however, has received little attention in either the Duncan or Jess literature. Lisa Jarnot devotes a paragraph to it in her biography of Duncan, and Ingrid Schaffner does the same in her exhibition catalogue essay, "Found in Translation." The poet Tom Gunn lingers on Caesar's Gate for a couple of pages in his essay, "Homosexuality in Robert Duncan's Poetry," and the chapter that follows will engage his insights. 122 The most significant secondary source is Duncan himself, namely his lengthy preface to the 1972 edition, in which he revisits and ruminates on his earlier 1955 effort. This preface joins three primary sources: the book itself, with collages by Jess and poems by Duncan; Duncan's original preface from 1955; and letters Duncan wrote from Majorca to Helen Adam, close friend of the pair and fellow San Franciscan poet. Jess's extraordinary collages opposite Duncan's poems are drawn from sixteen issues of *Life* magazine from 1955, procured in Majorca and cut up and deployed in *Caesar's Gate* and dozens of other small collages from the same period. 123 Jess engaged two primary interlocutors in making these collages, and so these are my primary sources as well: Robert Duncan and Life. No one has yet located the source imagery for Caesar's Gate, but in addition to doing so, this chapter considers how the original contexts of the image fragments exert pressure on Jess's collages, and likewise what Jess's interventions might do in turn to these "original" images.

Section two, *Fieldwork*, suggests that, perhaps surprisingly, the early exploratory moment of collaboration between Jess and Duncan in *Caesar's Gate* did not lead to a

¹²¹ Jarnot, *Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus*, 141, and Schaffner, "Found in Translation," 51.

¹²² Thom Gunn, "Homosexuality in Robert Duncan's Poetry," 148-151.

¹²³ Kevin Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," 296.

lifetime of collaboration between the two men. Collaboration was a passing phase, one that gave way to something more abstract, more akin to a spatial imaginary, similar to the household, that they constructed and occupied: this is the field. Finally, in *Significant Others*, surveying the literature on collaboration and couples shows that the Jess and Duncan household contributes to but also troubles existing models and methodologies of couples and collaboration.

II. Through Caesar's Gate

Jess and Duncan made *Caesar's Gate* away from home. The book came about in 1955, when they were living at Bañalbufar, on the western coast of Majorca. 124 They arrived that March at the invitation of the poet Robert Creeley, and stayed nearly a year, living in an eight-room apartment that cost ten dollars a month and was previously occupied by Creeley and his wife Ann. 125 At Bañalbufar they enjoyed a leisurely, but productive stay—Jess made some twenty-eight oil paintings in the first six months—that Lisa Jarnot describes as "something of a delayed honeymoon." ¹²⁶ Caesar's Gate was a collaboration undertaken by the couple while on the island. It consisted of previously unpublished poems Duncan wrote in 1949 and 1950 and collages Jess made in response to Duncan's poems from *Life* magazine issues from 1955. A dialogue extending over time was envisioned from the start, for Jess's new collages speak back to poems from an earlier period in Duncan's life, before he began a relationship with Jess. But this is not all. The conversation, which Duncan might have called an expanding structure, continued, as Duncan wrote four new poems in response to Jess's collages. In Caesar's Gate, these poems were reproduced in Duncan's handwriting in order to differentiate them from the earlier poems, which are in typescript. 127 More layers followed: Duncan and Jess decided to produce Caesar's Gate in a special edition of thirteen copies that included original poems and collages on facing pages at the end of each book. 128 And finally, in 1972, Sand Dollar Press published an expanded edition that included a lengthy new preface by Duncan, a number of additional poems, a new epilogue, and several more collages by Jess (fig. 21).

The first edition of *Caesar's Gate*, published by The Divers Press in September 1955, included roughly seventeen collages by Jess interspersed throughout the book, almost always opposite Duncan's poems. ¹²⁹ It cost two dollars and was published in an edition of 200. Robert and Ann Creeley founded the press in Majorca in 1953, and in the following years they published a dozen works, some, such as Charles Olson's *Mayan Letters*, of literary renown. The Creeleys ran the press rather like a residency, inviting

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¹²⁴ Duncan and Jess lived on Majorca from March 1955 to April 1956. Bertholf, "Introduction," in *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous*, vii.

¹²⁵ Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 139.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 143, 138.

¹²⁷ The four new poems are "Aurora Rose," "Tears of St. Francis," "Sunday," and "Bon Voyage!" Robert J. Bertholf, *Robert Duncan: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1986): 41.

Amongst Duncan scholars, *Caesar's Gate* is given much less attention than, for example, later works such as *The Opening of the Field* (1960), *Roots and Branches* (1964), and *Bending the Bow* (1968), three works considered to comprise Duncan's most significant achievements.

writers, who were also often friends, to Majorca to produce books that were themselves the result of intensive collaboration: the Creeleys, who usually managed the design, worked closely with Louis Ripoll, the printer in nearby Manacor who handset the type and translated the design into print. ¹³⁰

Book production (and reception) is by nature a collaborative process, and the undertaking on Majorca was no exception. In 1955 Jess had had little experience reproducing his collages, and later recalled that he was unaware of the difficulties inherent in half toning images that are already halftones, or have already been reproduced—in this case, his cuttings from *Life*. Ripoll worked extensively with Jess to create multiple masks for each image, which were compiled into a composite image when printed, so that the printing process was itself a collage process. The collages take a final form—as reproductions—that echoes that of their initial source, while the process used to arrive at this form is a process of collage. Such a push and pull of process and form means that Jess's collages are like the *Life* images in a constitutive way, but also insist on their difference from their original source—which is precisely Jess's response to Duncan's poems, too.

The collages' source material is highly circumscribed, limited to the issues of *Life* that Jess could procure while in Spain. These same physical constraints lend the collages a distinct sense of being both contemporary and ad hoc: almost all the imagery is derived from the last half of 1954 and the first half of 1955, and they possess a looseness of formal construction arising from limited means and materials. This working method is far removed from that of the later collages, those made once Jess and Duncan had settled into their San Francisco Mission district home. Jess soon accumulated massive stores of materials from which to work, drawn from sources ranging widely in type, format, and date of publication. The result of long periods of labor in the studio, his collages became more complex and painstakingly rendered, as dense webs of imagery blended seamlessly into a whole.

These are the facts. One book, with multiples stages and versions, stretching from 1949 to 1972. But what is Caesar's Gate? Duncan generated the phrase from Marco Polo's account of his travels in Asia, in which he describes the difficulties Alexander the Great encountered at a certain mountain pass, beyond which lie the "wastelands" of Kublai Khan. 131 "It is the sign of a place, not a mood," Duncan tells us in the preface to the first edition. Like the household, Caesar's Gate is a made place, an imagined spatial construction. In these terms, Jess's collages for this book are made places, too: they depict real places—produce markets, city streets, factory floors, missile test sites—that he has remade or made over. Almost all of the collages begin with a ground image,

¹³⁰ Robert Creeley interviewed by Alastair Johnston, *Ampersand* 7 (Winter 1987).

Robert Duncan, "Preface for *Caesar's Gate*: July 1955," in *Caesar's Gate*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Sand Dollar Press, 1972): xi.

¹³² He elaborates: "And we see it so, because we too, given up as we are to the poem, see now, what we thot [*sic*] to be personal expressions are places necessary in the structure of the poem's being." Ibid, xvi-xvii.

one of the photographs from *Life* magazine. These images are then modified, turned upside down or sideways and invaded by Jess's collage fragments.

What do we see in Jess's collages in *Caesar's Gate*? What do they say to their source, *Life* magazine, and vice versa? How do they respond to Duncan's poems across the page? The pages below attend to three of the collages, selected because their sources in *Life* have been found, and so their imagery reveals much about process as a form of transformation simultaneously in dialogue with *Life* and with Duncan. Consider the collage opposite the first set of poems in the collection, "Four Poems as a Night Song" (figs. 22, 23). 133 Long rows of boxed fruit dominate the image, but Jess has turned the source photograph upside down, an inversion that is disorienting both spatially and materially. Now suspended above a black void, the heavy boxes of fruit defy gravity, and rush towards the viewer as much as they recede into the distance. The image Jess used as the ground for this collage first appeared as a full-page reproduction in a January 3, 1955 Life pictorial on New York City's food distribution system (fig. 24). The caption below the image reads: "SYMMETRICAL DISPLAY of California oranges is made on Erie Railroad's pier for examination by buyers who will bid for choice lots. Receivers employ skilled display men but buyers often inspect back boxes anyway for comparison." In one of the earliest collages in this volume, and the collage that accompanies Duncan's first poem, the "display man" is introduced, an anonymous presenter of products whose efforts will be inspected by potential buyers, his skill notwithstanding, since "buyers often inspect back boxes anyway."

Jess inverts the image so that what was safely contained (fruit) is now ready to spill forth. Cutting up an image, particularly when that image is a photograph intent on demonstrating its indexicality to the real, allows the collagist (or cut-up, as Jess might call himself) wielding the scissors to impose another logic, an illogic or logic of the collage. The absurd is at work here: the world has been turned upside down. But also present is a sensitivity to and even heightening of the best effects of the *Life* photographer's original image: the dramatic depth of receding orthogonals, those perfectly aligned rows of fruit, which Jess seems to relish setting free. His inversion and upsetting of an orderly world is also a response to Duncan's two poems on the opposite page, "The Construction" and "The Walk to the Vacant Lot." These poems exude the anxious, uncertain dream logic of darkness and night. The collages never illustrate the poems, but this image does conjure the nocturnal world of industry and labor found in Duncan's poem: "After dark the construction begins...the engineers gather, unrolling blueprints, *imaginings*, but diagramd [sic] and wired and piped."

Jess's collages imagine two very different interlocutors: Duncan's poems and *Life* magazine. One private and intimate, the other with mass appeal and distribution, they elicit two different imaginings of the domestic: home and nation. Or, as the writer Lewis Ellingham succinctly put it, life and *Life*. This is why the collages must be so contemporary, although Jess often preferred much older source material: if the dialogue with Duncan extends through time, even into the couple's prehistory, the dialogue with *Life* must be differentiated from this expansive form, collapsed into just a few months of

¹³³ All collages are without titles.

¹³⁴ "Biggest Appetite," *Life* 3 January 1955, 25-27.

Conversation with the author, June 11, 2011.

published issues, utterly fresh in the viewer's mind to emphasize its publicness in contrast to the more private, temporally extended dialogue with Duncan.

There is more to say about this first collage. To the right of the boxed fruit a figure meets our gaze and gestures with such rapidity that his hands are blurred in motion. He draws attention to the main drama of the scene—a familiar art historical trope and one often used by Jess, who populates his collages with figures viewing the scene from the margins. Our guide to this picture is stern and forbidding, and his hands refuse to stabilize the image. He is a Flamenco dancer named Escudero who appeared in the February 28, 1955 issue of *Life*, the subject of the weekly introductory spread "Speaking" of Pictures" (fig. 25). The "crusty and proud 62-year-old" Spanish artist is on his first US tour—something of a reversal of Jess and Duncan's own sojourn in Spain—and Life's spread shows him performing in some half-dozen shots. The first image superimposes the dancer's hands over his face and multiples them, dramatizing the spectacular nature of his abilities. In Jess's collage, his fast-moving hands now figure the dexterous work of the display man. A profusion of hands and eyes appear throughout the Caesar's Gate collages: eyes that belong to faces have migrated elsewhere on the page; hands and arms are removed from bodies and reattached to machines or suspended, disembodied, in midair; inanimate objects are given eyes that look askance warily. This is the case with the bale of twisted cable beneath the boxes of fruit, excised from an image of a Brooklyn sugar refinery where, the caption tells us, "Men are tied to pipe frame over pit lest they fall into huge grinding teeth which chew up sugar."

Emphasis on body parts is not limited to *Caesar's Gate*. In *Love's Captives*, from 1954, sepia-toned eyes, hands, and faces are interwoven with much cooler bodies beneath (the two sets of images come from different print sources) (fig. 26). Despite the shifts in scale and significant tonal difference of the two sets of images, Jess has an uncanny facility in making the two registers flow into one another. By contrast, *Brimo of Colchis*, also 1954, is a monstrous creation (*Brimo* names an especially vengeful goddess in Greek mythology), an Arcimboldesque composite head and body in which the figure's face is formed by elements such as a stag, rooster's head, and human fist (fig. 27). Hands and eyes invoke the sensorium—touching and seeing—especially forcefully; they also point to the work of artist and viewer—to making and looking.

In *Caesar's Gate* the deployment of parts of the body is more akin to the affect of *Brimo of Colchis*—the composite as monstrous, furious—than it is to the desirous and gentle touch of *Love's Captives*. (The *Portrait of Robert Creeley* that Jess made on Majorca shares much common ground with the grotesque *Brimo*, fig. 28.) Love and fury both exist in the household, and both inflect this book, too, although the latter may have the edge. Thom Gunn describes this aspect of *Caesar's Gate* well:

Here the energy is everywhere, and...it informs an extraordinary book. It is about sexual hell, where lust is continuous, and where neither body, mind, nor spirit can be satisfied. In his 1972 preface to this book, Duncan speaks of how love, which can lead to the Household, the place of growth and harmony, also contains a fury. This work, then, largely focuses on sexual fury, both self-mastering and self-defeating. Afterwards he can see

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^{136 &}quot;Speaking of Pictures," *Life* 28 February 1955, 9.

the hell as a place he had to pass through on the way to the Household, but at the time he can see nothing ahead. 137

It is unfortunate that Gunn fails to comment on the collages opposite the poems about which he writes so incisively, for Jess's collages answer the tenor of Duncan's poems, which were composed in a period of exhaustion and rage, even as they resist this all-consuming sexual fury. Carefully but insistently, the collages have their own visual language, and their own dialogue with *Life*, ensuring that the conversation with Duncan is not the only one taking place.

Jess and Duncan possessed wide-ranging tastes—this common trait is one of the most constitutive aspects of their household. Duncan, for his part, adopted collage-like reading habits that summer on Majorca, moving rapidly from text to text, taking fragments from each. He kept fastidious notes of his reading, so we can reconstruct his intellectual engagements at a given time. Here is his reading list from June 1955:

George MacDonald Lilith, H.D. By Avon River, Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida, Dodds The Greeks and the Irrational, Emerson On Dreams, Freud Civilization and Its Discontents, Cassirer Essay on Man, Laura Riding A Progress of Stories, Blake Songs of Innocence and Experience, Bergson Creative Evolution, Sapir Language, Nijinsky Diary, Ibsen Peer Gynt, Jane Harrison Themis, Dorothy Richardson Pilgrimage. 138

Add to the mix the two texts that crop up the most frequently in his Majorca notebooks, the kabalistic *Zohar* and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. ¹³⁹ Jess's literary sources are just as extensive and eclectic. The Translations, to take an example discussed in the next chapter, are each paired with a textual source, ranging from books on Mayan and Egyptian culture to works by Plotinus and Thomas Hardy. This breadth of knowledge throws into sharp relief Jess's purposeful choice of an immensely popular mass-cultural source for the *Caesar's Gate* collages. *Life* images were recognizable images, and contemporary viewers would have known some of the images' original contexts within the magazine's pages. Jess later explained, "The images came out of *Life* magazine, and so they were in everyone's minds then." ¹⁴⁰ And Duncan said much the same:

Thom Gunn, "Homosexuality in Robert Duncan's Poetry," 148. The excerpt from Duncan's 1972 preface he mentions is this: "Today I see Love and that Household in which I live, as I saw it in its beginning twenty years ago, as a homestead I and my companion there would create, even pathetically, within Man's nature, 'shelterd by our imaginary humble lives from the eternal storm of our rage.' I cannot forget the claim fury has in me. I cannot forget the ruthless exploiter and tyrant of the soul's realm the poet can be in his craving for greater triumphs in his art." *Caesar's Gate,* xi.

¹³⁸ Lisa Jarnot, "Caesar's Gate,"

 $[\]frac{\text{http://www.harpandaltar.com/interior.php?t=r\&i=6\&p=32\&e=66}}{\text{139 Ibid.}}, accessed May 30, 2010.$

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Wagstaff, "Conversations with Jess," 271.

As a matter of fact you get more out of these collages by Jess when you've seen *Life* magazine all through certain years and you recognize the issue of *Life* that the picture came from. You see, then, what's been done to it and with it. It could be called trivially related because it's transformed. Its presence is enhanced by recognition. ¹⁴¹

In 1960, for Jess's solo exhibition at San Francisco's Dilexi Gallery, Duncan contributed a statement on the artist's paste-ups that went even further in explaining what Jess aims to achieve:

For those who search out and recognize the identity of each cell of these organisms there is another wonder as the intelligence unfolds its self, the suggestion of a universe that is meaningful throughout, built up of correspondences, puns, patterns—melodies of things seen.¹⁴²

"For those who search out and recognize the identity of each cell." These images are not meant to be divorced from their sources or understood as belonging to the artist. Far from it. Duncan and Jess are declaredly derivative artists, adopting a strategy not merely of avowing their sources, but also of using the most widely seen images in the United States at that time in their book. This strategy does important work for them: it insists on the ability of collage to wholly transform an image, and thereby unlock its hidden potential. Duncan's comment above—"It could be called trivially related because it's transformed"—shows just how much this is so. Recognition of the sources enhances the "presence" of the collages, but this is a presence that values difference, a presence that takes its distance from its mass culture sources—the relationship is "trivial"—while adamantly acknowledging them. And this negotiation of private and public, of private speech acts entering the public sphere, is what lies at the heart of collaboration.

These collages—as already emphasized—are distinctly contemporary, made in 1955 primarily from material published in the preceding twelve months. The images do not originate, that is to say, in nineteenth century issues of *Scientific American*—a publication Jess mined liberally later in his career. Three paintings in the Translations series, for example, appropriate technical apparatuses reproduced as engravings there (figs. 29, 30). By contrast the *Caesar's Gate* collages derive from what was then one of the most widely read and distributed publications in the United States. Here are some statistics: in 1960 the magazine had around six million subscribers, and the highest "passalong factor" of mass-circulated magazines, according to advertising agencies. An Alfred Politz market research study commissioned by Time, Inc. found that over the course of a thirteen-week period in 1954 (a year prior to the publication of *Caesar's Gate*), no less

¹⁴² Robert Duncan, untitled statement for "Paste-ups & Assemblies by Jess," Dilexi Gallery, San Francisco, December 12th, 1959 to January 7th, 1960.

¹⁴¹ Kevin Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," 24.

¹⁴³ "Life magazine, which was a weekly at the time," Jess later remarked in conversation with Michael Auping, "was a goldmine of imagery for me." Auping, Jess: A Grand Collage: 1951-1993, 25.

than sixty percent of Americans over the age of ten had seen one or more copies of *Life*. ¹⁴⁴

The relationship between high art and mass culture is terrain well-covered by the history of art, and is often framed as mutual negation or exploitation, in which, to give one example, the avant-garde functions as the "research and development arm of the culture industry." ¹⁴⁵ The relationship between Jess's collages and his source material is much less antagonistic than this. His work encourages a series of correspondences and resemblances, acts of play and flux, between the collages and their sources. The editors at Life understood the power of pictures and aimed to manipulate those pictures to image an ideal American society. As Walter Hicks, the magazine's picture editor, noted around this time, Life "stood for certain things, it entered at once the world-wide battle for men's minds...If a picture was alive when it left a photographer's hands because of something he had put into it, it became still more alive for what it was to say as social, political or cultural report and commentary." ¹⁴⁶ "What it was to say," or rather, what the photograph was made to say when given a caption or embedded within a specific editorial context. The malleability and manipulation of the images of photojournalism, but also their refusal to play along, was what made them attractive to Jess and many other artists throughout the twentieth century. 147 Certainly the images took on a life of their own, and often far exceeded the scope of their intended message.

In his collage *Untitled (Look for the 5 Ribs)*, made in 1955, the same year as *Caesar's Gate*, Jess uses for his ground an image that was extremely common in *Life* during these years: the kitchen (fig. 31). The kitchen is the model of order, cleanliness, and functionality, but most of all it is a showcase for new appliances, the acquisition of which, so goes the equation, will ensure the values just named (fig. 32). Jess inserts into this feminine-coded space three men who engage in activities not intended there: a flagman waves his checkered flag, a carpenter operates a hydraulic device, and a soldier in mid-stride hunkers down, perhaps to avoid an oncoming attack. What should we make of these men, who are so out of place here? The image Jess has appropriated belongs to a *Life* feature on a popular topic at the time: tips and techniques for housewives to increase efficiency in the kitchen. The article's title, "Ways to Cut Down Kitchen Work," is especially resonant within the context of collage, itself a medium concerned with "ways to cut." The feature presents us with a kitchen that "suffers" from "half-baked planning" (fig. 33). Efficiency experts are called in, and two subsequent photographs show how such a "disorganized" and "confused" space is transformed. Jess plants his men-at-work

¹⁴⁴ Erika Doss, ed. *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001): 3, 42.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Crow writes, in a memorable formulation, "That service could be described as a necessary brokerage between high and low, in which the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture industry." *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 35.

¹⁴⁶ Doss, 85.

Interwoven with the magazine's features and photojournalism are the many advertisements, which outweigh the editorial content. Images in *Caesar's Gate* do not derive from ads, but other collages by Jess do. *Goddess Because Is Is Falling Asleep* (1954), for example, appropriates and reworks the tagline of a recurring advertisement for Modess, a feminine sanitary product line: "Modess…*because*."

in the original kitchen, so that they, in their misuse of the space, are now complicit in its sorry state. They do not belong here. The five ribs of the title are also known as false ribs; they sit below the true ribs, which attach to the sternum. The whole absurd scene becomes an affront to efforts to make domestic space functional or even logical—and perhaps an affront to attempts to cement the gendered nature of the kitchen in particular. Hence the hourse is as disruptive to the logic of that space as two men queering the bourgeois (even Victorian) home, and the misuse and absurdity of the image becomes an allegory—political, pleasurable, and humorous—of Jess and Duncan's own household.

For present day viewers, the kitchen collage, especially with the insertion of the soldier into a domestic setting, calls to mind the photomontages by Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, which span from 1967 to 1972 and were reprised by the artist during the Iraq War in 2004 (fig. 34). Rosler cut up images of the Vietnam War (then at its peak) taken from *Life* and inserted them into advertisements for domestic interiors from *House Beautiful*. Her jarring combination insisted that the war over "there" and daily life "here" was a false separation, while at the same time the obliviousness of one set of protagonists to the other, and vice versa—a young woman vacuums the drapes without registering the bunkered soldiers outside her window, who likewise pay her no attention (fig. 35)—shows the strength of this very fiction. The familial resemblance between the photomontages by Jess and Rosler is not accidental—Rosler makes it explicit in a 2008 interview with Iwona Blazwick:

Yet, it's a direct outgrowth of Dada—actually Surrealism; Max Ernst was my first model on this and a Californian artist named Jess who worked with what subsequently we would call clip art and made them into elaborate tableaux. What interested me about those practices, as opposed to the Dada photomontage of which we saw very very little in the US in the mid 60s, was the rational space—they weren't flying off at all angles. I was very taken by the idea of giving a viewer a place to stand, and therefore the photographic became the obvious choice because photography tends to suggest the possibility of a real space, if you don't just cut it up and ignore the idea of perspectival relationships. 149

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¹⁴⁸ See also Helen Molesworth, *At Home with Duchamp: The Readymade and Domesticity*. diss. Cornell University, 1998.

[&]quot;Taking Responsibility: Martha Rosler Interviewed by Iwona Blazwick," *Art Monthly* 314 (March 2008): 2-3. Rosler's collages (which are more well-known than Jess's) are often linked to the agitprop photomontages of John Heartfield, although she tends to dismiss this as an art historical influence on this work ("we saw very very little [Dada photomontage] in the US in the mid 60s.") There is, however, a historical connection to be made between the mass circulated "image world" of Heartfield and that of Rosler and Jess within just a few degrees of separation. Kurt Korff, a German refugee who had been an editor-in-chief at the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* from 1905-1933, introduced photography in place of engravings, and transformed the periodical into the leading German illustrated weekly between 1924-1933, was hired as a special consultant during *Life*'s start-up period in the mid-1930s and guided the magazine toward a "straight" style of photography.

Rosler gets to the crux of the matter: in Caesar's Gate Jess makes collages that give us "a place to stand." The made place must remain *legible* as a place. This is why each collage begins with a ground image—a real place—that is then made over. Like Rosler's collages, our ability to read the images as part of a certain cultural landscape—*Life*, House Beautiful—is what makes the subsequent transformations by each artist register as significant interventions in this landscape. The efficacy of these interventions depends on the viewer's recognition of the original cultural codes. Made places, whether those of collaged image worlds or the alternative household, are existing places that have been transformed: they are made-over places.

Jess's sources remain legible, then, and allow us to retrieve some meanings and take note of some differences that would have been readily available to his contemporary viewers. But even when sourcing the images in *Life* does seem to reveal dimensions of the artist's "hidden order," it is not always possible to know whether viewers would have understood these meanings or if they belonged to a private language between the two collaborators. To take one example, the collage by Jess opposite Duncan's poem "Daddy Sunday" features none other than then-Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, a highly recognizable figure made monstrous and a bit silly by the addition of a gargoyle's head and an umbrella (figs. 36, 37). In the undoctored image, part of a January 3, 1955 photographic essay titled "The U.S. Goes Out to Lunch," Dulles is an exemplar of "Frugal Solitude in Washington," as he "lunches alone in his State Department office on a salad of lettuce and cottage cheese, red apple and a pot of tea" (fig. 38). 150 Jess has wreaked havoc on this image—we can imagine him enjoying his myriad invasions into the man's sanctuary—by adding new elements to the walls, redoing the painting adorning his office, and cluttering his workplace with a fedora, fishbowl, pet dog, and jackhammer. The imagery is familial and domestic—even the family pets are near at hand—with the dinner table the heart of the family ritual. Gone are solemnity and order, along with the American flag, and as the jackhammer prepares to bring the place down, the umbrella will have to do as a shield from the fallout.

Though perhaps the message is not so serious. Humor and pleasure appear in these collages (as they did in *Life*) for the viewer's enjoyment. The jackhammer comes from the September 27, 1954 issue: the worker wielding it has gone to lunch, and simply leaves his gloves, which have molded to his hands with repeated use, gripping the machine's handles (fig. 39). There is a class critique at work in Jess's collage: the *Life* stories are about two men taking their lunch break, but one man belongs to the working class—the gloves are physical evidence of his accumulated manual labor, and the city street situates him in his daily workplace—while the other man is ensconced within a sanctuary of power and privilege that the jackhammer aims to shatter. On the other hand, Dulles is bound to place, visible in his duty to the nation, while the worker has the freedom of a private moment off camera.

Such class collisions offered moments of frisson for *Life* readers. In the January 1955 spread, abutting the photograph of Dulles are two images of blue collar workers taking their lunch on the go: a construction worker drinks from a thermos atop a

¹⁵⁰ "The U.S. Goes Out to Lunch," Life 3 January 1955, 70.

skyscraper beam and below him, a logger in the Pacific Northwest rests before a blazing fire, drinking coffee and eating a sandwich. Jess, by letting working class men invade the space of the white collar power broker (echoes of men-at-work in the kitchen), pushes the tensions of the original pictorial juxtaposition even further—no one would have failed to register the deep discrepancies in this collective, national "going out to lunch"; the success of the *Life* pictorial depends on them. But it is impossible to know whether Jess's move to bring the worker's jackhammer into the office of the Secretary of State, and the significance of this invasion, would have registered with contemporary viewers, or with Duncan as he watched the collages come into being. Duncan, upon viewing the collage, formed his own response by way of a new poem that names Jess's grotesque central figure. "Daddy Sunday" is a meaty metaphor that calls to mind the symbolic, corrupted power of the father, the law, and the church in one fell swoop: "Daddy Sunday: Lord of this world / whose peace is fear / whose state is almighty / whose counsel is despair."

One final collage: opposite the poem "Aurora Rose," a cityscape occupies the page (fig. 40). In the foreground, a skyscraper in mid-construction rises to dominate the visual field of the scene. The city vanishes perspectivally beyond, its recession emphasized by the dramatic diagonal of the street below. No doubt the image appealed to Jess not least given his urge to structure his collages with an intense sense of depth. Throughout the scene Jess has inserted sculptures—statues and masks—that alight on this architecture. Some transform the buildings into pedestals, such as the classical nude torso at left, or the beatific head, perhaps Hindu, which rests atop a building at top center. An African mask hovers above the crowd gathered on the scaffolding, just below the arm of an outstretched crane. On the platform a crouching figure awkwardly shares the same space with the crowd—they are there to celebrate construction reaching the 40th floor—while another figure is made to walk the tightrope of the steel cables above.

This group of sculptures is a collection of copies. So reads the caption accompanying the source illustration in *Life*, a photograph found on the second page of an article whose headline reads, "Which Degas is the Duplicate? ONE OF THESE STATUES IS WORTH \$8,000, THE OTHER SELLS FOR \$75" (figs. 41, 42). 151 Above this headline, occupying fully two-thirds of the page, are two identical bronze sculptures of a young dancer by Edgar Degas. The ploy is common enough: which is original and which is a reproduction? It is impossible to tell, of course. In the brief article that follows, we learn that the "rare bronze cast made from the original wax statue by Degas" is on the left, and on the right is a recent reproduction, "one of hundreds now on sale in museums and stores across the U.S." made from Alvastone, "a synthetic material developed by Alva Studios in New York which can simulate bronze, marble, ivory, slate, wood, or volcanic rock." Between 1949 and the publication date of 1955, Alva Studios made scale replicas of nearly 300 works of art housed in museums both in the United States and abroad. The reproduction from which Jess cut his city-bound sculptures displays a selection of these copies, arranged on three tiers as if for sale and geographically and culturally collapsed—equalized by their sameness as replicas and wares. Jess's collage has turned the menagerie loose in the streets and atop the buildings of Chicago (fig. 43).

¹⁵¹ "Which Degas is the Duplicate?," *Life* 25 April 1955, 115-116.

They are monstrously large in their new habitat, scaled up to several stories high. But the scale shift works both ways, for the city shrinks as buildings become mere pedestals for the statues that sit atop them. Such instability of scale makes this, to use one of Jess's preferred terms, a "flux-image." ¹⁵²

A whole host of cultural codes and values is tangled up in this *amuse-bouche* of an illustrated article, which goes some way to explain its appeal for Jess. There is the implication of cultural hierarchy—the *original* Degas replica versus the recent replica—that is fixed by means of price: the former is worth \$8,000, the latter just \$75. But this hierarchy is subsequently inverted, for the reader is meant to marvel both at the verisimilitude of the copy, its skillful execution we might say, and its affordability. All of these statues, after all, are for sale, and the *Life* pictorial, in spite of its human-interest angle, is at bottom free advertising for Alva Studios.

The collage dialogues with Duncan's poem on the facing page, too. Aurora Rose is a shape-shifter: "She has reappeard as the roar of space," Duncan writes. "Crowds are her." Jess's vertiginous cityscape and cohabitating populations of people and statuary alike become inflected by these phrases. The poem's overarching imagery of rising up—a roar arose—or stirring, of the present and the ancient past colliding, and of a goddess who transforms herself in every line are all waiting to be found in Jess's collage. But Duncan's poem is a response to the collage, not vice versa: "In the Caesar's Gate poems," he wrote to Helen Adam that Majorcan summer, "I am looking at the order of Jess's collages, themselves a hidden order." The new poems are "a series of visions—growing from contemplation of the collages done for the book." We sense in these words a certain pleasure derived from looking, from puzzling out and over meanings and connections, from the call of the image or poem to the forming of the response. There is also a resistance that Duncan perceives in Jess's collages, a resistance to total exposure or nakedness: despite his proximity to them, the collages remain a "hidden order."

We have spent some time thinking through the collages and poems that appear in Caesar's Gate, attempting to parse their webs of association and methods of extension. The relationships forged veer from the most intimate to the most widely shared, or from the domestic and artistic partnership of the two producers to the link between Life and its readers, although Life dreams of intimacy, too. Such multi-directionality is the goal not only of Caesar's Gate but also of Duncan's poetry and Jess's art tout court. It allows the book and its contents to remain unsettled and in flux despite their concrete form and fixed parameters. Collage, in its etymology and as a process of making, is a gluing down, a fixing of components in relation to each other. But in Caesar's Gate Jess and Duncan sought ways to undo such fixing, to allow the project to be in a near constant state of dispersion. Dispersion is a form of anti-collage or cut-up collage—something that Jess, who took his scissors and cut the 1961 Echo's Wake collage into six pieces, was not opposed to—performed in the special edition of Caesar's Gate, the thirteen books that

152 Auping, Jess: A Grand Collage, 48.

Letter to Helen Adam, 15 July 1955, PC.

include original collages and poems on facing pages at the end. ¹⁵⁴ In a letter to Helen Adam from the summer of 1955, Duncan described the special edition:

The marvelous outcome is a bit of home magic. For the thirteen collages are to be a book, dispersed like the leaves of a book among thirteen holders. Once it leaves my pen and Jess's scissors and paste-pot it will come into being as it falls apart. I shall keep no copies of the poems any more than Jess can keep a copy of his collages. But the numberd copies of the edition will give the sequence of the scenes. 155

The collages in the special edition were meant to be a book of their own, to tell a story in thirteen parts. Although Duncan made a list of the original recipients, many of the copies are now unable to be located, so that as Duncan predicted, it is impossible to gather the fragments of the story and make it whole again. ¹⁵⁶ Duncan and Jess each kept a copy of the special edition (figs. 44, 45), so some thoughts about it can be ventured. ¹⁵⁷ Jess's copy is called "Source Magic" and Duncan's is "Circulating Lights," both named for the title of the poem pasted at the end opposite a collage by Jess. These collages are, strikingly, in full color. Coming upon them after paging through a book whose images are entirely in black-and-white makes them all the more phantasmagoric—the lurid golds of "Source Magic" transform industrial-grade smelting into an alchemical chamber—and more jewel-like—in "Circulating Lights" a large crystal hovers like an unnatural sun above a bucolic scene set within two imposing columns. Magic appears twice in the lines above: Duncan describes the "marvelous outcome" of his collaboration with Jess as "home magic," which may be as succinct a definition of what collaboration meant for the couple as could be hoped for. Home magic: it happens at home, first and foremost, and it is magical, in the sense that it is both non-rational, in that it cannot be explained or held onto or even fully known, and alchemical. "Source Magic" is the site as well as the source of that alchemy.

It seems likely that the phrase "circulating lights" refers to the physicist Sir Charles Sherrington's 1941 book *Man on His Nature*, which Jess appropriated in a couple of works, including his series of thirty-seven collages also made in Majorca in 1955 from *Life* images and titled *Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon, Series Two, "The Guardian Angels' Guidebook."* The paragraph Jess chose from Sherrington captures especially well the scientist's curious and unique ability to transform a technical description of a biological process into something approaching a prose poem (a talent to which Jess, the former

¹⁵⁶ In one of his notebooks Duncan lists the names of the individuals who received copies of the special edition, and which number in the edition they received, PC.

¹⁵⁴ Jess commemorated cutting up *Echo's Wake* with a photograph of the original collage over which he drew crayon rectangles of the excised portions. He titled the dissected photograph *A Post-mortem: Echo's Dying, Dying, into Echo's Wake: '61-'66.* See Schaffner, "Found in Translation," 69.

¹⁵⁵ Letter to Helen Adam, 26 August 1955, PC.

Both copies are now housed at The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

¹⁵⁸ Sir Charles Sherrington, Man on His Nature (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1950).

radiochemist, surely warmed). The passage concerns the brain's activity while sleeping, which Sherrington describes as "trains of traveling lights" that pursue "a mystic and recurrent maneuver as if of some incantational dance." The purpose of such a dance? To regulate our breathing while we sleep, which Sherrington's language transforms into another kind of source magic. *Caesar's Gate*, Duncan tells us, is a collection of poems written from a place of rage, but also exhaustion: "These poems seem most to long for sleep." But Jess does not give us the Sherrington passage in full. Instead across each of the collages he has written a fragment in longhand, so that the paragraph is dispersed across the collages and only reconstituted and read with some effort. The tactic is much like that of the *Caesar's Gate* special edition. Here is Duncan again writing to Helen Adam from Majorca:

Thus each reader of the limited edition will start out with one part of a mysterious map or design. I myself shall have forgotten the nature of the chain. And perhaps see some of the other links, but never all of them. I, myself, will from time to time come across these odd pieces of a riddle. Like a recipe of fourteen pages cut up and sold page by page. ¹⁶¹

Duncan's metaphor of a recipe—itself a domestic form of communication passed along and modified like an heirloom or folktale—works well. A recipe is a set of instructions meant to be legible, but a recipe cut into pieces ceases to function as intended—how could we make such a dish? The recipe's logic is thwarted or undone and meaning must inhere elsewhere, in revealing the structure of signification of such a form, in the fragments that remains, and in the imaginative speculation about what might be missing.

III. Fieldwork

"Whenever I make a mark, I have to think of its relation to a dozen others."

-Virginia Woolf, in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, October 11, 1929

In 1976, twenty-five years into his relationship with Jess, Duncan told Kevin Power in an interview, "The only place there was collaboration between us was *Caesar's Gate*." But how could such a claim square with the long list of publications on which both men worked? Very early on Jess and Duncan collaborated on the humorous, erotic, Dadaist broadsides *Boob #1* and *Boob #2*, both 1952 (fig. 46). And there are several publications over the years for which Duncan contributed text and Jess provided illustrations, which indicates that both poet and artist found this format, initiated by

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 183.

¹⁶⁰ Duncan, Caesar's Gate, xi.

Letter to Helen Adam, 15 July 1955, PC. It is unclear why Duncan would mention fourteen pages—perhaps at one point the special edition was meant to number fourteen copies, but by his August letter the number has become thirteen, which is the final size of the edition.

Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," 53.

¹⁶³ Ingrid Schaffner writes that *Boob #1* was "composed by Jess from letters and images that Duncan picked." She attributes *Boob #3* (1954, unpublished) to Jess only. Schaffner, "Found in Translation," 20.

Caesar's Gate, to be worthwhile. The list includes Caesar's Gate (1955), The Opening of the Field (1960), A Book of Resemblances (1966), The Cat and the Blackbird (1967), Names of People (1968), and Robert Duncan: Notebook Poems (1991). Jess also designed fliers for events or readings such as "Unkingd [sic] by Affection" at the San Francisco Arts Festival (1963), "Robert Duncan Reading at Le Conte Auditorium" (1970), and a New York-based production of Duncan's play "Faust Foutu." As Ingrid Schaffner showed in her revisionist exhibition and accompanying catalogue, Jess: To and From the Printed Page, Jess contributed collages or drawings to a great many of his poet friends' publications, including Helen Adam, Norma Cole, Joe Dunn, Michael Davidson, Denise Levertov, and Jack Spicer, so this was something he did with others as well as with Duncan (fig. 47). Duncan, likewise, wrote texts to accompany publications of Jess's work on multiple occasions.

Yet, this long list notwithstanding. Duncan was right. The only concrete object to result from collaboration between him and Jess was the illustrated book Caesar's Gate. By this I mean collaboration as the alchemical "home magic" sort, which is different from the labors of the list above. Surely it was perfectly natural, not to mention convenient, for each man to lend his particular talent to the other's project when needed. Who better to provide visuals for publications of Duncan's poems than Jess, and who better to write about Jess's art than Duncan, when each knew the other's work so well? But while the resulting Jess illustration or Duncan text may be steeped in intimacy and mutual appreciation, it is a supplement, not a collaboration. True enough, the early broadsides were collaborations—for the first Duncan selected the letters and images, and Jess composed them on the page—but Duncan may not have mentioned them because they were negligible juvenilia, or in the category of diversions that included the exquisite corpse drawings that he and Jess and guests would undertake at the kitchen table after dinner. Or maybe he simply forgot about them. There were some stray collaborative works, then, but it is more significant that the poet and the artist did not collaborate more often. Collaboration, as Caesar's Gate demonstrates, was a passing phase, not a mode of production to which both men were committed. The household that Jess and Duncan formed required joint labor to maintain, but it did *not* lead to collaboration. Collaboration can be a matter of discovering in practice an essentially unbridgeable artistic difference. however close and bound together the artists as individuals may be. Or it may have been that the collaboration forced the couple to confront the to and fro of power within the dyad, as it became the subject of their artwork those months in Majorca.

Jess and Duncan backed away from this confrontation (which, notably, they had braved while they were not at home). Instead, the couple rejected the paradigm of collaboration in favor of jointly cultivating the "home magic" of the household: the assembly of what the couple called by turns the "image nation," "*de macrocosmi fabrica*," "the grand collage," "the great story," and the "commune of Poetry." Put another way, Jess and Duncan needed to move through the gate to reach the field.

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As noted above, "Image nation" is Jess's term, from his "Notes" notebook, BL, and *de macrocosmi fabrica* is the title of the twenty-fourth Translation (which was originally planned to be the last in the series, as discussed in the next chapter). "The grand collage" is the subtitle of Jess's retrospective and derives from Duncan's book *Bending the Bow*, as do "the great story" and "the commune of poetry." Duncan writes, "But now the poet works with a sense of parts fitting in relation to a design that is larger than the poem. The commune of Poetry becomes so

This term—the field—requires explanation. Duncan's conception of the field makes its debut in his best-known poem, "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow," which begins the 1960 collection The Opening of the Field. Here are the first few lines of the poem:

Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow

as if it were a scene made-up by the mind, that is not mine, but is a made place,

that is mine, it is so near to the heart, an eternal pasture folded in all thought so that there is a hall therein

that is a made place, created by light where from the shadows that are forms fall. 165

Along with Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse," a text that influenced Duncan deeply, by a poet who became a crucial interlocutor, this poem is a landmark of American open form poetry. 166 Duncan conceived of the open form poem as a compositional field, a spatial metaphor that, as the words "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" make clear, becomes a place of permission. The field is a spatial imaginary, a made place—like the household—that is generative and process-driven. The open form poem conceived as a field has no direction, and no beginning, middle, or end. It is an active space, one that we may move through in multiple ways. "It is the field projected by the poem as its own form," Duncan once wrote, getting to some of the slipperiness of the poet's place within the field to which the poem's lines allude: "that is not mine," "that is mine." Duncan's move from the gate to the field was chronological as well as metaphorical: he penned the first draft of "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" in January 1956, just a few months after completing *Caesar's Gate*, although the collection of which it is the central poem, *The Opening of the Field*, was not published until 1960. 167 Thom Gunn ascertains this shift from gate to field, too, when he describes The Opening of the Field coming on the heels of Caesar's Gate: "Now he," Gunn writes, "the conqueror and empire-builder as poet, has moved through that gate into a larger territory that is indeed haunted, as he had heard it would be, but by spirits that mingle continuously with the living in mutually pleasing concourse." ¹⁶⁸

track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself." "The Field," http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237880. Accessed January 25, 2013.

real that he sounds each particle in relation to parts of a great story that he knows will never be completed." Duncan, Bending the Bow (New York: New Directions, 1968: vi-vii.

Robert Duncan, *The Opening of the Field* (New York: New Directions, 1960): 7. ¹⁶⁶ In his manifesto, first published in pamphlet form in 1950, Olson writes, "From the moment he [the poet] ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no

¹⁶⁷ Jarnot, Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 149.

¹⁶⁸ Gunn, "Homosexuality in Robert Duncan's Poetry," 151.

Jess conceived of the field as a space for play, or a playing field. Declining an interview request to discuss his scientist background, Jess explained that he had long since abandoned science: "I turnd [sic] to the playing field that had beckoned to me since childhood," he wrote, "and there I've been engaged for going on 50 years." This playing field finds pictorial representation in the painted soccer field of *Montana* Xibalba: Translation #2 (1962), but more broadly conceived the playing field is the field of the image, and the practice of collage becomes the pleasurable play of image components across a given field or ground (fig. 48). Yet Montana Xibalba teaches us that the playing field is a site of trauma and rage as much as it is an idyll or utopic space of permission. ¹⁷⁰ The Arcadian collegiate soccer field, a photograph of which Jess stumbled on in a 1944 University of Montana yearbook and used as the source image for Montana *Xibalba*, is also Xibalba, the nightmarish underworld ruled by ancient Mayan death gods (fig. 49). ¹⁷¹ Such wild multivalence ensures that the field and the image remain dynamic. In terms of process, Jess attempted to form a field in flux by first pinning all of his collage elements in place: "They are pinned," he explained, "because that allows them to move throughout the whole field until these interactions of images and spaces have made a weave, by shuffling back and forth, have woven a tapestry."¹⁷²

Duncan would have agreed. In *The H.D. Book*, his posthumously published treatise on his poetics, titled for one of his foremost interlocutors, he quotes Virginia Woolf: "Whenever I make a mark,' she says of working on *The Waves*, 'I have to think of its relation to a dozen others.' These are the rudiments of a projective-feeling in writing, of composition by field."¹⁷³ In this formulation, writing is compositional in the way that a picture is compositional: both involve mark making as an activity that impacts the field of marks already put down. Jess's collages tack between life and *Life*, between private and public, and between the intimacy of the collaborative labor at hand and the collective address of *Life* to its multitude of readers, though that address aspires to intimacy, too. This is something of a balancing act, of marks considered in relation to other marks, of competing pressures. The *Caesar's Gate* collages needed to be more than a response to Duncan's poetry. Perhaps the poems risked overwhelming the collages with their rage and exhaustion and sexual fury. *Life* may have provided the right counterweight, or perhaps even antidote, since it too was a master of seduction and persuasion, albeit seduction and persuasion in the guise of fact, of observation, and of "current events."

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¹⁶⁹ Letter to Jonathan Weisman, 25 August 1994, BL. A school playground was located opposite the house where Jess and Duncan lived from 1967 on, so the playing field would have been part of their everyday experience.

¹⁷⁰ The painting is addressed in the next chapter.

David Quarles writes, "Love and hate are combined in Duncan's poetry, which he describes as 'chiaroscuro, mixing the light and the dark." It is interesting that Duncan chooses to describe this state of affairs with an artistic term. Robert Duncan with David Quarles, "Poet of the Light and Dark," in *A Poet's Mind*, 178. Quarles's piece originally appeared in *The Advocate* in 1976. Additionally, Robert Bertholf reads Duncan's understanding of field composition through action painting. See Bertholf, "The Concert," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 83.

¹⁷² Auping, Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies) 1951-1983, 16.

¹⁷³ Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 492.

The field is, finally, a space that a community of others may inhabit. Jess populates his artworks with appropriated found imagery from wide-ranging sources, and offers quotations by other writers as textual commentary on his work. To echo Thom Gunn once again, those "spirits that mingle continuously with the living" crowd together on most Jess surfaces. Similarly Duncan, in response to reading Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* at Black Mountain College, where he taught after leaving Majorca, began to create "persons of the poem" who spoke through him. ¹⁷⁴ He also employed a variety of styles: ballads, prose poems, quotations, open forms, and so on. Such maneuvers are attempts to negotiate the strong desire to be both inclusive and expansive, while within the bounded form of the field. ¹⁷⁵

The field is a foundational structure for these two men, but, the previous chapter argues, so is the household. How might we reconcile these two places, which seem so opposed spatially—one expansive and open, natural, found rather than built; the other contained, cultural, constructed and maintained? Duncan, for his part, collapses the two when he writes, "the adoration of the Field is a domestic work, not a heroic work." The massive shifts between Life and life, between public and private, share something with the disparities between field and household, and with the impossibility of being simultaneously inclusive and expansive: bringing together such contrasting terms partakes of the logic of collage, and maintains the flux or multiphasic meaning both men desired. But the field and the household do share two constitutive traits: they are both made places, and they are both expanding structures. 177 Jess and Duncan insisted that the most modest, most mundane space could be vast and expansive: a day, a kitchen table, a home. The poet Robin Blaser understood this expansiveness, and called it "the largeness of being at home." 178 Jess and Duncan moved through the gate to reach the field, and although they left the gate behind, they sought to maintain the "home magic" produced in their collaboration, which would result not in concrete collaborations, but amplified into the collaborative labor of the household.

III. Significant Others

¹⁷⁴ Michael Davidson, "A Book of First Things: *The Opening of the Field*," in *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ James Maynard astutely notes that "the multiphasic 'open field' is also Duncan's means of acknowledging without having to reconcile the many idiosyncrasies and contradictions that so thoroughly distinguished his life in poetry both on and off the page." In Maynard, *Architect of Excess.* 190.

¹⁷⁶ Letter to the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Notebook 17, 31 January 1958, PC.

¹⁷⁷ Introducing *The Years as Catches*, a selection of poems from 1939-1946 reprinted in 1966, Duncan stated: "One of the factors in my returning now to these poems of it seems so long ago—other lives and other worlds ago—is that I would admit them as part of my life work....As once I moved away from them, putting them away as immature things, now I move back or out in an expanding structure to take them up again as conditions of my maturity" Duncan, *The Years As Catches: First Poems (1939–1946)* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1966): xi.

Robin Blaser, "The 'Elf' of It," in *Robert Duncan: Drawings and Decorated Books*, ed. Christopher Wagstaff, exh. cat. (Berkeley: Rose Books, 1992): 23. This connects directly with Blaser's observation, quoted in chapter one, that "Duncan's work is much concerned with being-at-home. Simple as that—yet, Odyssean."

It has been twenty years since Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron published Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership, a collection of essays by different authors, each of whom address a different creative couple. ¹⁷⁹ The thirteen couples are limited to visual artists or writers, but they vary in other respects, such as historical and social circumstance, internal power dynamics, gender, class, and sexual orientation. They include Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West, Sonia and Robert Delaunay, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, and Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, among others. The editors' point of view is gender, and their purpose is to excavate the social constraints, but also the internal dynamics, of these partnerships. Jess and Duncan could have been included in this collection, but they were not, because no one was thinking and writing them together. This is partly a disciplinary divide, evidenced by the simple fact that the thirteen couples in Significant Others were either both painters or both writers. And although studies have emerged over the past two decades that consider artistic collaborations and/or relationships, the monograph is still strong, with books on postwar artists Marcel Broodthaers, Bruce Conner, Tony Conrad, Gordon Matta-Clark, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Rauschenberg, and Robert Ryman appearing in just the last decade. 180

One of the essays included in *Significant Others* was Jonathan Katz's "The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," introduced here to reach a concluding comment on methodology. In his essay, Katz takes up the fact that Johns and Rauschenberg were a couple between 1954 and 1961, and argues that the near total silence on this fact is the result of "an insistent and damaging homophobia that has led both artists to actually deny the substance of what they had together." Katz aims to rectify this omission from the art historical record, and claims that together the couple created an entirely new pictorial language in response to the dominance of Abstract Expressionism. As his title suggests, Katz goes on to identify a number of visual clues or

¹⁷⁹ Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Anne M. Wagner, Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Joaquim Pissarro, Cézanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg: Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Don't Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, ed. Louise Downie (London: Tate, 2006); Charles Green, The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Bibiana Obler, Intimate Collaborations: Gender, Craft, and the Emergence of Abstraction, is forthcoming with Yale University Press (2014). Many other monographs could be added to this brief list, all but one of which are from MIT Press and include: Rachel Haidu, The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976 (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010); Branden W. Joseph, Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003); Carrie Lambert-Beatty, Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008); Pamela M. Lee, Object To Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000); Branden W. Joseph, Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts after Cage (New York: Zone Books, 2008); Suzanne P. Hudson, Robert Ryman: Used Paint (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009); and Kevin Hatch, Looking for Bruce Conner (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012). Jonathan Katz, "The Art of Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," in Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership.

codes in this art referring to homosexuality and gay culture (in Rauschenberg) or closeted identity (in Johns). 182

Ten years later, an exchange ensued between Katz and Yve-Alain Bois in response to the exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, which was organized by Paul Schimmel and debuted at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2005. In his review of the show and catalogue for the March 2006 issue of *Artforum*, Bois takes issue with decoding imagery in Rauschenberg's combines, even when that decoding is of the (preferable, Panofskian) iconological variety. For Bois, this method is inherently flawed because it cherry-picks meaning. "Profoundly antithetical to Rauschenberg's Cagean leveling of hierarchies," Bois writes, "this approach edits out the noise and selects, among many possible elements, those that can be synthesized into a narrative through a chain of association." Bois's essay named Katz as one of Rauschenberg's gay iconographers, and prompted a letter to the editor from Katz in which he insisted that he emphasizes the distinction between private and public meanings thematized by Rauschenberg's closetedness, rather than decodes gay imagery in the work. Bois responded in turn, reiterating his opposition to teasing out any single meaning in Rauschenberg as a misguided attempt to "tame the shrew."

This to and fro in recent literature backs us into a corner, forced to choose between a willed blindness to a work's content or the impossibility of decipherment or even attention to any one detail, and a manic scrutiny of a sign's legibility, for those properly equipped to do the reading. The former abdicates the art historical responsibility of interpretation and the latter presumes to "out" the artists, a presumption that assumes a coherence of position or identity that the artists would have never claimed. Ses's collages in *Caesar's Gate* are not simply a private language between

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¹⁸² On the occasion of the Guggenheim Museum's 1996 Rauschenberg retrospective, Katz bluntly outs the secret the museum refused to reveal: "Robert Rauschenberg's a queer." Jonathan Katz, "Rauschenberg's Honeymoon," *Art/Text* 61 (May/July 1998): 46.

¹⁸³ Yve-Alain Bois, "Eye to the Ground," *Artforum* 44 (March 2006): 245.

¹⁸⁴ Katz, "Iconoclash," Artforum 44 (May 2006): 9.

Bois, Ibid. Bois himself had drawn out a speculative conclusion from a problematic comparison in 1996, when he claimed that Walter Hopps' exhibition of Rauschenberg's early work convinced him that "in the relationship between the two artists, a relationship about which there has been so much gossip but so little scholarship, Rauschenberg had acted as the Picasso of the pair." He goes on to argue that although John receives much credit for his "investigation of indexical signs," Rauschenberg's early innovative and conceptual works (such as the 1953 *Erased de Kooning Drawing*) clearly influenced the younger artist. Yve-Alain Bois, "Early Lead," *Artforum* 36 (September 1997): 97.

¹⁸⁶ Christopher Reed offers the beginning of a way out of this double bind, one that aligns with Katz's belief that these artists were negotiating divisions between public and private. For Reed, Johns and Rauschenberg's refusal of self-expression in their work, whether through strategies of visual blankness or barrage, was itself the result of the fact that "the daily experience of homosexuals in the 1950s honed skills of coding." Moreover, he claims, "sexual secrecy in general—and the secret of homosexuality in particular—animated much postwar American culture." Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 156-158.

¹⁸⁷ It is dangerous to graft contemporary understandings of homosexuality or sexual identity onto this time period, when, as others have pointed out, sexual identity was much more fluid. On this

two collaborators, and two partners, that we may decode with the right set of references or, alternately, that we refuse to interpret because to do so would privilege one reading over another or succumb to the pitfalls of biography. The collages' relationships to Duncan and *Life* are more dialectical and ambivalent than allowed by these binaries: one always beginning with negation, the other fundamentally essentializing. Jess's work does not participate in a logic of negation, although the most excessive of his works fail precisely because they veer too much into this territory. His work equally resists the reductive tethering of image to identity, or image as illustrative of identity.

Jess and Duncan have escaped this interpretative double bind in part because of the degree to which their domestic model was embedded in their larger project, whereas Johns and Rauschenberg's domesticity was fragile, and invisible to most. But perhaps most telling of all, the practice of collage that New York engages with, versus San Francisco, is startlingly different. New York can be fitted into an art historical narrative (that of neo-dada) and is. Its affect, whether as practiced by Johns or Rauschenberg, is strikingly different from that of Jess's work—the latter uses collage to retell (art) history, to rewrite what is literal and empirical in contemporary life (*Scientific American, Life*), and further sediments his materials under layers and layers, as if to freeze or bury the past. This comparison particularizes what Jess's eccentricity is made up of, and his acknowledgment of the strengths and weaknesses, the limits and possibilities, that inhere in not being "in the center," ideologically speaking or in terms of art world power.

point as it intersects with the cultivation of domestic space see, for example, Jasmine Rault, *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011): 5.

Chapter Three: Narkissos and Translation

I. Introduction: Narkissos Taking Form

Narkissos is Jess's representation of the myth of Narcissus, the primary elements of which can be readily seen in the picture: Narcissus is entranced by his own reflection as Eros watches nearby, and Echo, whose unrequited love for the young Narcissus led to her death, jumps in anguish from a cliff in the upper right corner (fig. 16). A dense, literary, heavily researched and deeply allusive collage. Jess's Narkissos (the title takes the Greek spelling, reflecting the origins of the myth) is usually, and understandably, read in terms of its iconography. This chapter foregrounds a different aspect of the work: process. 188 Process here encompasses far more than the eponymous paste-up, completed in 1991 and acquired by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1996, that has become the central emblem for the whole undertaking. The work took thirty-two years, beginning with the first rough sketch of the *Narkissos* subject in 1959, and saw its maker evolving his procedures as he went. Also in 1959 Jess began the Translations, a set of no less than thirty-two paintings based on found images and produced through 1976. Jess undertook them to teach himself how to paint, so that, like a medieval guild artist or journeyman, he would be ready to tackle *Narkissos* when his training was complete. ¹⁸⁹ In addition to providing an extended primer on painting, the Translations had the added benefit of delaying *Narkissos* (delay is also part of process), a work almost too mythic, too weighty, and too foundational to be made real.

The first two sections of this chapter take up the Translations as the precursor to *Narkissos*. Though charting a long view of process, one that ranges over decades, "Strange Magic" begins with a narrow focus, examining how process operated in a single painting: *Montana Xibalba: Translation #2* (fig. 48). Though this is the second in the series, it is the first to evince Jess's unorthodox approach to painting, which becomes a hallmark of the series. ¹⁹⁰ Pausing to read *Montana Xibalba* more closely, setting it into

Translations by Jess (New York: Odyssia Gallery, 1971) and Auping's "Jess: A Grand Collage,"

¹⁸⁸ Nearly twenty years separates the only two in-depth studies of *Narkissos*: Michael Palmer's "On Jess's Narkissos" and David Lomas's "Homoeros Unprofaned." Both texts are written with sensitivity and erudition, and are primarily iconographical readings of the work, with Palmer helpfully detailing the sources and implications of image fragments and Lomas drawing upon a broad reservoir of knowledge about the history of the Narcissus myth for his reading of themes of mirroring and representations of identity. Narkissos, and its history and process, is glossed in Michael Auping's comprehensive introduction to Jess's work for the retrospective catalogue and in Ingrid Schaffner's Jess: To and From the Printed Page. See Michael Palmer. "On Jess's Narkissos," in Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993, 93-103; David Lomas, "Homoeros Unprofaned," in Narcissus Reflected, exh. cat. (Edinburgh: The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2011): 89-111; Michael Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," in Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993, 52-54; Ingrid Schaffner, "Found in Translation," in Jess: To and From the Printed Page, 63-67. 189 "Journeyman" is how Jess self-describes his role in the project. See "Biography," compiled by Jess, in Translations, Salvages, Paste-Ups, By Jess, exh. cat. (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1977): npg. Duncan also referred to himself as a journeyman: "I have achieved," he wrote, "not mastery but a journeyman's craft." Robert Duncan, "Concerning the Art. This December 1963," in Robert Duncan: Drawings and Illustrated Books, 6. ¹⁹⁰ The two key texts on the Translations are Robert Duncan's "Iconographical Extensions," in

conversation with the painting's critics, other artists, and its method of making, counteracts the resistance to interpretation that results from such a lengthy series of paintings, each freighted with literary and imagistic references to which we feel compelled to attend. Section two, "Scientific American," succumbs to this compulsion and does make a claim for the series as a whole, which is that a particular model of self is being imagined, and imaged, here.

There are two invaluable primary resources upon which any study of the Translations ought to draw. The first is an extraordinarily rare statement by Jess about the pictures, a scant three paragraphs printed in an exhibition brochure for a group show in 1977 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The lines are so simply put and honest that it is hard not to regret that Jess did not speak or write more often about his work. The second source is "Iconographical Extensions," an essay by Jess's long-term partner, the poet Robert Duncan, published on the occasion of Jess's solo exhibition at the Odyssia Gallery in New York in October 1971, the first public outing of the Translation series. Duncan wrote in an official way about Jess's work on four occasions, for four different exhibitions, in 1959, 1968, 1971, and 1977, a frequency that suggests active and willing participation as an ambassador for the work, but implies restraint when set against Duncan's vast and copious writings overall. Of the four texts, the fourteen-page essay about the Translations is by far the most significant, in terms of length and rigor of argument, but it is also dense and prone to hermetic pronouncements. It is not straightforward or explanatory in the way that we expect such introductions to be, for both Jess and Duncan would oppose any supplement that might allow the work to settle in any stable way. The essay is full of insights, however, and is referred to in what follows with some regularity. 191

Despite his long delay, Jess was working on Narkissos throughout the 1960s and 1970s, collecting and archiving material related to the myth: literary references, images, and so on that he compiled in an accompanying notebook that accompanies the work, and operates as a skeleton key. Like the Translations, this archival work is a crucial component of his process. Jess's proclivities for collecting are not only manifest in tangential aspects of the project such as the notebook; the Narkissos paste-up is itself idiosyncratic and personal archive. It is, in short, a queer archive. That the myth Jess chooses to construct his archive around is one fraught by its being marshaled as evidence of homosexuality's inception and status as perversion—by Freud most notoriously, but also by others—makes Jess's choice of this myth as the core around which to build his archive all the more pointed. These aspects of the work are addressed in section three, "Narkissos and the Image as Archive," which concludes by comparing Jess's Narkissos to Caravaggio's Narcissus (1599-1600), a painting whose very different treatment of the same subject reveals the model of self underpinning Narkissos, one in which self becomes coextensive with, even constituted by, the individual's chosen environment.

In "Storytelling," the dramatic turn in the *Narkissos* narrative is reached. Jess meant the whole endeavor to result in two works: a paste-up and a Translations-style painting that would face each other in a gallery. But the artist abandoned the painting

in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 1951-1993, 52-62. Both take a holistic view, and no in-depth study on any one of the Translations has been published.

When Duncan's text is asked to "translate" Jess, it is done with the aim of cementing or emphasizing arguments.

around the time of Duncan's death in 1988. In 1992, he explained, "As with much of my dreaming in art, the projected finale has to stand in the Imagination—and here the *Narkissos* drawing plus all that preceded it...are the springboard for the dive." This last section revolves around a single unpublished photograph of the paste-up and abandoned painting in process in Jess's studio, an image that reveals the degree to which process enacts the very structures of myth so valued by both Jess and Duncan.

II. Strange Magic

In 1963, over a period of about four months, Jess painted *Montana Xibalba: Translation #2*, a modestly scaled, squarish canvas measuring 30 x 33 inches (fig. 48). The scene reveals itself readily and is innocuous enough: a soccer game has been captured mid-action, attested to by the player at right who has just made contact with the ball, and the athletic central figure whose sports jersey bears the number "8." On the left are several other players, at least three: nearest to us, a figure wears a uniform similar to that of the kicker, as does the figure in the distance behind him, who remains still but alert to the main drama on the field. These three, we might surmise, are on the same team. On the very far left, we catch a glimpse of the arm and leg of another player. The canvas cuts off the remainder of his body, but a slight indication of striped shirtsleeves puts him on the same side as the central player. Opposing sides are engaged here, and pictured in the heat of action. Bodies are in motion, mid-torque, and heels dig in, attempting to find traction in the grass and soil. The bulk of the canvas is given over to these players and their playing field, save for the narrow band of an adjacent strip of landscape at top.

But to say all this is hardly to say anything at all about this painting. The scene rendered here in paint is important, and will be discussed further on, but to describe the painting's subject barely begins to account for its presence. And description alone fails to explain the critical responses heaped on this painting and the rest of the Translations series over the years. Critics puzzle over the "eccentric commitment and odd romanticism" of these works, and their "strange, mystifying beauty." They are, the critics venture, part of a "strange, visionary universe," executed in "a strange medium" that emanates an "unearthly tinted glow." These fragments are excerpted from criticism written between 1965-1983, but even in 2008, after a painting like *Montana Xibalba* has been part of our collective cultural landscape for forty-five years, this kind of interpretive language continues: the Translations, we are told at even this recent date, are "a series of downright bizarre paintings." 195

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¹⁹² Letter to Serge Fauchereau, 8 August 1992, BL.

¹⁹³ William Wilson, "Los Angeles," *Artforum* 4 (October 1965): 13. The second phrase is from Don Factor, "Los Angeles," *Artforum* 4 (February 1966): 15.

The three excerpts, in the order that I quote them, are from the following sources: Thomas Albright, "A Visionary's Strange Universe," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, May 18, 1983; John Ashbery, "Review of Exhibitions," *Art in America* 63 (March-April, 1975): 89; and John Ashbery, "Painting Becomes Theater," *Newsweek*, April 26, 1982: 63.

¹⁹⁵ Naves, "Struck by Conscience," http://www.observer.com/2008/arts-culture/struck-conscience.

It may come as something of a surprise that these descriptions are by and large in the service of positive rather than negative judgments of this group of works. "Their eccentric commitment and odd romanticism makes one anxious to see more of him," William Wilson writes in his review for *Artforum* of a group show at the Rolf Nelson Gallery in Los Angeles in 1965 that included Jess, George Herms, Robert Indiana, and others. True enough, the ambivalence of the word "anxious" here is suggestive given Wilson's response to the eccentricity of the Jess's work, but the overall assessment is positive. A year later, in 1966, in an *Artforum* review of Jess's solo show at the same gallery, the "strange, mystifying beauty" of the paintings is understood as nothing less than "remarkable." And in 2008, on the occasion of Jess's first solo show at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York City, the *New York Observer* deems these "downright bizarre paintings" to be "Jess' finest works."

To sample the critical language surrounding these paintings is to suggest that it has been notably consistent from the works' earliest public appearances in the 1960s to the present moment. This is by and large the result of two factors. The first is Jess's crafting of a personal set of coordinates of influence and interest that tended not to intersect with the concerns of the postwar art world and art history. The great poet and art critic John Ashbery became one of Jess's most sensitive and sustained reviewers over the years—perhaps an unsurprising turn of events given Jess's own sustained engagement with poets and poetry in his life and work. In 1975, reviewing Jess's presentation of the Translations at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, an exhibition organized by Kynaston McShine, Ashbery observed, "to New Yorkers, when they look, the work of westerners often seems merely curious." To curious we might add "strange" and "eccentric," two frequent descriptors of Jess's Translations that, like "curious," carry a whiff of the dismissive or inscrutable, attendant praise notwithstanding. Jess, working in San Francisco for the entirety of his five-decade career, certainly fit the bill of the "curious" westerner. But in addition to his geographical distance from New Yorkcentered debates about Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Pop, Conceptual Art, performance, video, and so on—debates that would structure the syllabi of numerous postwar modern art survey courses—Jess's points of reference, laid bare in the Translations, remained beyond the purview of these conversations as well. These sources include nineteenth century experimental science and science fiction; myths of all stripes, from Mayan to Celtic; the "phantasmal nonsense" of Romantic writers such as Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll; Robert Duncan's poetry; and the densely collaged webs of Max Ernst and James Joyce. 197 These two lists, that of the canonical art history syllabus and that of the interests of the curious westerner, map onto two vastly different narrative axes.

The second factor accounting for the critical consistency regarding the Translations over the decades is the simple fact that no other paintings like these exist. They are singular in the history of art, which makes the critics' bafflement over the decades understandable. Jess painted *Montana Xibalba*, as he did all of the Translations,

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¹⁹⁶ John Ashbery, "Jess at the Museum of Modern Art," *Art in America* 63 (March-April 1975): 89.

¹⁹⁷ The items on this list are points of reference, but they are much more than this. A quick perusal of the OED proves that "source" is the better term, with its connotations of origins and influence but also flow and family. "Phantasmal nonsense" is Duncan's phrase. See Robert Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," in *Translations by Jess*, vi.

from a found image. The paintings' source images are engravings, illustrations, and photographs. *Montana Xibalba* began as a photographic reproduction in the 1944 University of Montana Yearbook, which Jess found in a San Francisco junk shop (fig. 49). ¹⁹⁸ This working method—painting from a photograph—is hardly limited to him. ¹⁹⁹ It is one of the most profound developments in the history of modernist painting, whose incarnation in the postwar period in the United States occurred in the wake of Abstract Expressionism. Painters like Jess who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s were trained by and as Abstract Expressionists—Jess, for example, was a student of Clyfford Still at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). Jess responded to what he perceived as a mythic, living quality in Still's paintings, as well as the older artist's instruction to reject any single style (which is ironic given the signature style of Still's own mature paintings). ²⁰⁰ But images kept surfacing in Jess's early painting; this and his later turn to painting photographs would have been anathema to Still and his cohort. For a number of young artists, painting from a photograph offered a more legitimate response to conditions of contemporary art and life than that earlier model. ²⁰¹ Contingency and mediation informed this painting, and the photograph became the ideal vehicle for several of its practitioners.

Compare, for example, *Montana Xibalba* with a work like *Suspended Plane*, painted by Vija Celmins a few years later, in 1966, or Gerhard Richter's *Motor Boat*, from 1965 (figs. 50, 51). These three paintings all date from a moment—the early to mid-1960s—in which the appearance of recognizable, appropriated images in painting had become increasingly common, from Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup cans to Roy Lichtenstein's comic strip dramas to the hand-painted logos of Ed Ruscha. But Jess, Celmins, and Richter form a trio worth bracketing off from these other practitioners. Not only did each negotiate and even make central to their practice the fraught relationship between photography and painting, but their repertoires of chosen photographs are drawn from both the artists' contemporary moment and from points further in the past than Pop would care to venture. The historical consciousness to be imputed to these painting practices is at once elegiac and contemporary. While these artists share certain affinities in this regard, considering Jess's practice (the least known of the three) in relation to that of Celmins and further on, Richter, is a way to understand how very different, or curious, or odd, or eccentric the Translations really are.

Jess and Vija Celmins share much in their work and process: both scavenge photographs from old books or junk shops in San Francisco or Los Angeles, respectively.

¹⁹⁸ Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," in Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993: 56.

Painting from a found image occurs in the history of art as early as Cézanne's copies of French fashion plates published in *La Mode Illustrée*. For more on Cézanne's "use and abuse of fashion imagery" see André Dombrowski, The Emperor's Last Clothes: Cézanne, Fashion, and 'l'année terrible'," *The Burlington Magazine* 148 (September 2006): 586-594.

²⁰⁰ Auping, "An Interview with Jess," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 1951-1993, 20. Jess also studied with David Park and Edward Corbett.

Vija Celmins, discussed below, also trained as an Abstract Expressionist at Indianapolis's John Heron Art Institute. She has explained her turn away from the gestural mark-making of "Action Painting" by saying, "I couldn't resolve the stroke-making with the essential stillness of the painting." Lane Relyea, "Vija Celmins' Twilight Zone," in *Vija Celmins* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2004): 58-9.

Both paint slowly and painstakingly, accumulating painterly detail and layers on the canvas over long periods of time. Both paint images from the past—the same historical period, in fact, is cited in these two paintings: Montana Xibalba comes from a 1944 photograph, and Suspended Plane is based on a photograph of a WWII American B-17 bomber. There are certainly differences—in the nature of their imagery, for instance. And Celmins paints her photograph faithfully, while Jess does not. Celmins adopts the grayscale of the original image in her palette, and transfers the photograph's signs of age—those smattering of white flecks just above the plane—into painted marks on her canvas. Her only significant editorial departure from the source image is cropping the photograph in the final canvas. Using paint, which is inherently non-photographic, requires her to invent photographic effects. The photograph, for Celmins, is an armature on which she can hang her marks. "I treat the photograph as an object, an object to scan." she once explained. 202 Such analytical language dovetails with her insistence that the photograph provided a layer of distance between her and the canvas, and betrays the profound influence of Jasper Johns, whose work impacted Celmins when she first encountered it at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1960.²⁰³

Jess does something different. He has clearly taken serious liberties in rendering this University of Montana yearbook photograph in paint. The photograph, for one, is black and white, while Jess's painting is in full color. That move, to paint in color a scene that exists for the painter only in black and white, is an impossible one. Impossible, which is to say willful and speculative. It is impossible to reconstruct or capture the particular hue of green (was it green, even?) that one imagines the soccer field may have been, or to conjure the color of player number eight's dark jersey. Black? Blue? Brown? Jess settled on green, and opted for white for the numeral "8" (which he particularly liked for its connotation of a Mobius strip turned on its side), and sleeves of pink and pale lavender, on the right, and a muddied orange, on the left.²⁰⁴ The playing field is an even wilder imaginary construction. Shadows cast by the various players provide the formal rationale for divvying the field up into blocks of color: the lower left quadrant becomes a glistening, reflective black whose undulating textured surface calls to mind Rauschenberg's black paintings, while the remainder of the field is given over to blocks of dirty pastels—cream, lavender, apricot, pale blue. 205 The soccer ball becomes a golden orb, hovering as if the sun itself had been called into play. Color is deployed as if by a post-Warholian, postmodern Fauvist. Jess once put it this way: "I want to get the level of light that was in the original. My colors are absolutely imaginary, not realistic. At my best, I want to pay homage to the original and a completely imaginary complex of color that is my translation of that original."206

Faithful transcription—or claiming the image and fixing it in paint—is foreclosed. The absurd, imaginary palette Jess chooses is meant as a demonstration of this very

²⁰² Ibid, 68.

²⁰³ Fellow Angelino Ed Ruscha called Johns "the atomic bomb of my education." Ruscha quoted in Kirk Varnedoe, "Fire: Johns's Work as Seen and Used by American Artists," in *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1996): 95.

²⁰⁴ Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 56.

The two craggy horizontal tongues of paint in the lower right of the canvas may be parodic homages to Still.

²⁰⁶ Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 55.

foreclosure. "If I use, say, a nineteenth-century engraving," he explained in an interview with Michael Auping, "I'm not trying to evoke a replication of a nineteenth-century sensibility. I don't have the skill or knowledge to do that. I'm translating that image out of the nineteenth-century into my time, using what knowledge I do have, which is not enough." The gap between the source image and the painting of that image is built into the painting's public life, for when the Translations have been published as a set, the source image always accompanies the reproduction of the painting. This is true of the 1971 publication, *Translations by Jess*, which includes a "Gloss," an explanatory text that reproduces each source image and gives its full citation. Jess's retrospective catalogue goes one step further and places the source image on the facing page of each Translation, inviting direct comparison between the black and white original and the wholly imagined, full-tilt color translation of it. The aims that are not Jess's are not those of Celmins, but the contrast with Celmins is pointed: there is no need to see her World War II bomber photograph because we already know exactly what it looks like.

If color works to point up distance (and difference) in *Montana Xibalba*, texture does the opposite, and performs closeness. Color, in other words, shows us how far away the image is, while texture, a texture that results from Jess's painting process, invokes the opposite—not the closeness of the image per se, but the *desire* to bring and keep the image near. The surface of *Montana Xibalba* is thick and heavy. Its thickness is not slablike or sedimentary, as is, Jay DeFeo's painting *Incision* (1958-61, fig. 52), for example, in which DeFeo's piling on of paint feels like something geological has been cut through and exposed. *Montana Xibalba*'s thickness is small-scale, intricate, and evenly dispersed throughout the image field. Lawrence Jordan later recalled, "Jess would say, 'The image needs to congeal.' That's his word: *congeal*. You can make a whole practice around one word." Overall, the sensation is of a surface thick and congealed, per Jordan's recollection of Jess's word choice, but it is also writhing, every point alive and sensitive. The paint itself, so accumulated and congealed, nonetheless twists and turns, rises and falls, hundreds of times over the surface of the canvas. Globs of paint capture light and shadow, making straight lines tremble.

This is the result of the process Jess developed specifically for the Translations, a series he commenced in 1959 with the aim of holding onto an image that threatened to slip away:

Up to that time I had painted rapidly and mediumistically, with a field in flux, reconstituting and erasing images until the painting had tuned itself in. Yet I sorrowed over the myriad lost images half-arrived only to be displaced. How could I force my automatic hand to stay and develop a single image magically swept in on a flood of the world's psyche?²¹⁰

This quote seems to argue against the idea of movement, since its force is towards, but "staying and developing an image" also meant developing its inherent potential to remain in flux. Equally dialectical is the push and pull of closeness and distance. This is the

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 27.

²⁰⁸ Interestingly, this book reproduces the Translations paintings in black and white.

²⁰⁹ Interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

²¹⁰ Jess, 8 Artists, exh. brochure, Philadelphia Museum of Art, April 29-June 25, 1978, 7.

dilemma of the collector, and is endemic in Jess's work, studio, home, and possessions, but also repeatedly performed in his process. Jess began *Montana Xibalba*, as he did all of the Translations, by drawing the outlines of the image freehand and in pencil on the bare canvas. Areas delineated by that pencil line were filled in with discrete layers of paint carefully applied with a small brush, or larger occlusions of old paint adhered to the canvas and then painted over, forming the globules undulating across the canvas that are far removed from a photographic surface. Jess worked exceedingly slowly over many months, adding new layers only once the existing layer had dried, patiently building up the canvas in dissected, discrete parts. Early on he realized that such an accumulation of paint necessitated laying the canvas flat on a table, rather than upright on an easel.²¹¹ He went so far as to fashion blinders to wear while painting to produce the conditions of deep focus, or what he termed indwelling, he believed these works required (fig. 53).²¹² He used multiple colors on each area, so that while the composition remained fixed, the way the painting looked changed often. ²¹³ This archeology of discarded scenarios hums just below the final painting's surface, and can be glimpsed at the borders between tesserae (to appropriate one of Jess's descriptors). In the center of *Montana Xibalba*, between the hip of the main figure and his opponent's shoe at left, a bit of lavender appears at the top edge of a dark mustard passage, an especially visible instance of such fissures

It was crucial that the initial pencil lines drawn on each canvas retain their delineating function. As paint accrued, each line became a miniscule chasm, "an all but invisible excitement," as Duncan would put it.²¹⁴ In some imagined future, long after the paintings were made, the surfaces will reveal their secrets by "cracking open like a ripe pomegranate," in Jess's rich turn of phrase.²¹⁵ This is "painting painting itself," he explained on more than one occasion.²¹⁶ Such insistence on the life of images beyond that of their maker we have seen before, in the special edition of *Caesar's Gate*, which disperses like leaves in a book or pages of a cut-up recipe. The Translations also emphasize an automatism that is not spontaneous, but rather temporal—a movement according to deep, entropic time, in which making and unmaking approach each other. The temporal and spatial dimensions of process are profoundly elastic in Jess's work. We can zoom into the microscopic fissures of *Montana Xibalba*, a narrowing of focus made

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²¹¹ Additionally, each painting lay flat for one to two months to dry. Letter to Federico Quadrani, 27 February 1968, BL.

²¹² Auping, "Solar Systems," 25.

²¹³ Jess explained, "Occasionally I drew a line on the canvas with color, but more often the flicker of outline color comes from the incremental layering of hues leaving an edge effect of traces of undercolor." Madeleine Burnside, "Jess," exh. cat. (New York: Odyssia Gallery, 1989): npg. ²¹⁴ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," x.

Letter to Rolf Nelson, 28 May 1965, BL. Jess reiterated this imagined, future turn in the paintings' process in a letter to Kynaston McShine: "I groan to hear that it 'was a major concession' to let <u>Trinity's Trine</u> travel at all because of its 'extremely fragile' condition. You see, it was built in order to fall apart bit by bit or much by much; that is basic to its own painterly truth as a work of art, as it is for all of the Translations. If the Museum wads it in cotton...it is doomed. It required nine months of ten-hour days without swerving, to layer and engineer its beauties, which, I declare, are more than surface deep." Letter to Kynaston McShine, 16 May 1977, BL.

²¹⁶ Letter to Rolf Nelson, 28 May 1965 and letter to Federico Quadrani, 27 February 1968, BL.

possible by the extreme—and it is extreme—strategy of wearing handmade blinders. But we are also cautioned by the artist on several occasions to relinquish such control, and to let the paintings "paint themselves" over the *longue durée*: "I expect these 'translations' to 'paint themselves' (by fissuring to reveal hidden chords of color) in a time I'll not see with these eyes," he wrote in 1965. 217 Temporally, the Translations are a delay, an echo (as all translations are) reverberating into the past, but they have an imagined future, too, structurally built into their material surfaces. Process for Jess is at once accumulation and dissolution. Accumulation occurs in actions both micro and macroscopic—from the minutest application of paint on a canvas like Montana Xibalba to the whole of the journeyman years of the Translations as necessary preparation for *Narkissos*. But dissolution is there too, in the artist's abandoning the work to the vagaries, but also the revelations, of aging.²¹⁸

Gerhard Richter painted *Motor Boat* in 1965, just two years after *Montana* Xibalba (fig. 51). Motor Boat, like Montana Xibalba, depicts a group at play: the privileged play of leisure in the former and the play of the competitive sports match in the latter. Both paintings prove the malleability of the photograph, for both denaturalize leisure pastimes, transforming such banal, everyday imagery, albeit to very different ends. In Richter's hands, the image—a newspaper advertisement for Ralph Lauren, the quintessential American leisure brand—becomes grotesque, verging on monstrous, while Jess makes his soccer game over into a struggle of epic consequence, and remakes his yearbook photograph into a mythic image. Color works in a painting like *Montana* Xibalba to reveal the painter's distance from the image, as the impossibility of reconstructing the scene in color gives way to, or even permits, an entirely imaginary concoction. Texture does the opposite. The accumulated layers of paint are the result of a laborious painting process that wishes to slow down, keep close, dissect, and fix the image in every minute detail. "Each painting grew by deceleration," Jess wrote of the Translations, a formulation that slows the future of the painting, too. ²¹⁹ The painting's surface becomes distinctly unphotographic: process allows an imagined world to emerge.

In Richter's painting practice these terms are reversed. As in Celmins's photobased paintings, Richter's grayscale palette mimics the tonality of his black-and-white photographic source. The painting's initial exactness as a replica attempts some closeness to its source. As Richter explained, "I simply copied the photographs in paint and aimed for the greatest possible likeness to photography. So I avoided brushmarks and painted as smoothly as I could."²²⁰ Richter, then, copied the photograph as best he could, though he did not stop there, of course: he wiped a squeegee, methodically and evenly, across the

²¹⁷ Letter to Rolf Nelson, 28 May 1965, BL.

²¹⁸ Jess makes this point explicit in the same letter to Nelson: "But because the work in its makeup is referent to the process of dissolution, the transitory, the beauty inherent in aging and the flux of time—I incorporate magical ingredients, occlusions of old paint (I've never cast away paint from palette or scrapings) and am only too pleased that the brush dwindles away into the work; and these will be foci finally for cracking and crumbling." Ibid. ²¹⁹ Jess. 8 *Artists*, 7.

²²⁰ Gerhard Richter, "Notes, 1964," in Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews, 1962-1993, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, ed., David Britt, trans. (Cambridge: The MIT Press in association with the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London, 1995): 23. It is interesting to note that revelatory fissures become part of Richter's abstract process, yet not his work in color.

near-finished canvas.²²¹ This final move of blurring the canvas is an undoing of this verisimilitude or closeness. It pushes the image away. Doing so provides a desperately needed layer of distance between the newspaper advertisement and *Motor Boat*, and between the practices of photography and painting. The blur also softens the image, and softens the blow of its grotesquerie.

If Celmins, Richter, and Jess were placed on a continuum, a spectrum from something like fealty to the found image to a full-blown reimagining of it, the order would be Celmins, then Richter, and then Jess, with Jess positioned quite far from the other two. Celmins attempts sameness, although, and this gets to the great strength of her work, attempting sameness does not mean achieving sameness. Think of Howard Singerman's phrase, employed in regards to Sherrie Levine's *After Walker Evans* series and lifted from Marcel Duchamp, that the distance between a photograph by Evans and the appropriation of the same image by Levine is "infra thin." Celmins makes things by hand, painstakingly, and so the infra thin here is not what Duchamp originally had in mind, specifically the slight, regulated temporal distance between two assembly line products.²²³ But the charge of her work is often supplied by the infra thin in a different sense of the term: To Fix the Image in Memory (1977-1982, fig. 54), eleven pairs of found rocks and painted bronze copies, engages opposing poles of twinness and opposition via the infra thin. Celmins paints the photograph faithfully, aware of the power of the infra thin distance between image and painting. Richter "simply copied the photographs in paint," but then blurred them, adding a protective layer that guards all parties involved: photograph, painting, painter, viewer. Celmins and Richter, however, do not simply reproduce the scale of the original photograph: It is easy to treat the paintings. when seen in reproduction, as if they too are photographic images, but this denies the terms in which they are seen in person, as much larger objects in space, which range from easel paintings to wall size canvases.

But Jess transforms the found image profoundly. Even the most cursory glance at the three paintings under consideration reveals this. The transformation is one that occurs in process, a process of translation, not copying. What Jess offers us is almost a bad translation, in which attention to each detail has resulted in the wholesale abandonment of any pretense of verisimilitude. Liberties have been taken, and the forest gleefully abandoned for the trees. Perhaps it would be better to say that Jess recognizes some quality in the image that he preserves, even reveals, in translation. And while Richter paints from a collective image world, Jess paints from his own carefully selected, carefully constructed "Image Nation." This is his "greater language." Images are chosen not for their banality, their everydayness, but for their mythic potential. This is not history painting, or even pop, but paintings of myths.

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²²¹ Richter elaborates in his notes: "I blur things to make everything equally important and equally unimportant. I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike but technological, smooth and perfect." Richter, "Notes, 1964-65," in *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting*, 37.

Howard Singerman, "Sherrie Levine's Art History," *October* 101 (Summer 2002): 101. Duchamp's use of the term in his notes is as follows: "the difference/ (dimensional) between/2 mass produced objects/.../ is an infra thin....In time the same object is not the/ same after a 1 second interval." Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 129.

Jess appended a textual fragment to each of the Translations. These texts are drawn from a wide range of sources, from the Egyptian Book of the Dead to Thomas Hardy, from Rilke to Blake. The text accompanying *Montana Xibalba* is an excerpt from the *Popul Vuh*, the Mayan book of creation and arguably the most important text of the Americas.²²⁴ The passage Jess chooses is from an episode in the narrative in which the hero-twins Xbalanque and Hunahpu travel to Xibalba, an underworld and place of fear. 225 There, they play—and defeat—the Lords of Xibalba at a ballgame held on the rulers' own court. Triumphant, they ascend to the sky and become the sun and the moon. The Xibalba of *Montana Xibalba* now becomes clear, and a soccer field in Missoula, Montana is translated into a mythic place; the phantasmagoric underworld of Xibalba. The game, too, is recast, from collegiate soccer match to central drama of an origin myth. The "downright bizarre" palette and surface of *Montana Xibalba* (we might also note the similar structure and cadence of the two words) ensures the success of this transformation. The field, a crucial spatial metaphor for both Jess and Duncan, may be either a generative place of permission or a devastating wasteland, and the chameleonlike nature of the field is in part where its power lies. It is Montana, and Xibalba, but also it is the emotional despair of the windswept barren plain seen from Caesar's Gate, or the footage of the effects of an atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, screened the following day for the scientists, including Jess, working in Oak Ridge on the Manhattan Project, As Duncan wrote in his 1971 essay, "Iconographical Extensions," "Xibalba, the land of violent death, whose Lords cause bleeding in the road, vomiting of blood, running of pus from open sores, the terrors of revolution and of war, has been known by the artist not only in dreams but in actuality."²²⁶

In the *Popul Vuh* excerpt accompanying *Montana Xibalba*, the game is about to begin, and the opposing sides are negotiating its terms. But this particular exchange remains elusive, almost nonsensical, in part because the rules of the ancient ballgame are unknown today: "Let us play for a worm, the chil,' said the Lords of Xibalba. 'No, but instead, the head of the puma shall speak,' said the boys." Even the pioneering Mesoamericanist Charles-Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, who translated the *Popul Vuh* into French in the nineteenth century, found this passage to be unintelligible. What we do know is that the original Mayan text contained a play of words, both here and throughout the document, that presumably appealed to Jess's own facility with puns and permutations of language. Even more intriguing is the dialectical relationship between text and image in Mayan languages: "the writing not only records words but sometimes offers pictorial clues to its meaning. As for the pictures, they not only depict what they mean but have elements that can be read as words." This reciprocity resonates with Jess's own use of word and image in the Translations, but Jess's inclusion of texts to fashion a dialectical image could be as baffling to critics as the paintings themselves.

²²⁴ Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life, Dennis Tedlock, trans. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," viii.

²²⁷ Translations by Jess, npg.

²²⁸ Dennis Tedlock, "Introduction," in *Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, 27-8. Moreover, we are told, "In Mayan languages the terms for writing and painting were and are the same." Ibid.

Hilton Kramer, reviewing the MoMA exhibition of the Translations in 1975, concludes, "An odd lot of miscellaneous sources...forms the visual basis of these paintings, which carry the additional burden of literary references whose direct relation to the visual imagery is anything but apparent." Here again is the descriptive language so often assigned to the Translations: "odd lot" is right at home with "eccentric" and "downright bizarre." But the Translations are not based on an odd lot of images, though: they are a purposeful and carefully curated selection, as the next section aims to prove.

III. Scientific American

The year is 1959. Throughout this decade Jess has made a number of paste-ups, his preferred term for his collages, as well as broadsides and illustrations for book projects by various poet and writer colleagues. This year, however, he makes the first quickly scrawled sketch for *Narkissos*, a painting that he will never complete, but towards which he will work for the next three decades (fig. 55). The sketch is a wisp of a thing, just three by four inches, and rendered in pencil on paper. Unlike later, more sophisticated studies for the work (figs. 56, 57), the drawing is raw and inchoate, a putting-down of the basic terms of the image. A nude man—Narcissus—kneels before the outstretched arms of his ostensible reflection; ostensible because this reflection refuses to reflect, but instead has become a separate entity whose outstretched arms may reach for help, or may entreat Narcissus to join him, contrary to the myth. The flower into which Narcissus is transformed after perishing in vain pursuit of his reflection grows nearby. Behind him a winged man watches the scene at the water's edge, alert and poised, bow and arrow held in one hand. In future iterations he becomes Eros. Further back, steep cliffs form a perch for a sphinxlike figure, and at the top right corner Echo begins a dive into the crevice between the cliffs.

The basic coordinates and main protagonists in this sketch remain remarkably intact in the final *Narkissos* paste-up, which Jess completed more than thirty years later, in 1991. But in 1959, rather than begin work on the *Narkissos*, Jess turned to the Translations instead. As he explained to Michael Auping:

Narkissos meant I had to teach myself how to paint, almost like a medieval guild artist. So I developed the idea of the 'Translations' series, which I originally thought would be a group of twenty-four images, a magic number, that would present themselves as needing to be painted, and I would copy them with as much detail as I could.²³⁰

In his correspondence, he refers to the Translations (which grew to 32 paintings, with the last completed in 1976) variably as "the approach-set," "the *Narkissos* set," or the "*Narkissos* series." This is an artist who believes that he is inadequately prepared to undertake a picture. Abjuring more modernist archetypes, Jess adopts the much earlier model of medieval guild artist in preparation for *Narkissos*, and will train as a

Hilton Kramer, "Art: Variety of 2d Westbeth Show," *The New York Times*, June 5, 1971, 25. Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 54.

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See, respectively, letters to James Newman, director of San Francisco's Dilexi Gallery, 3 May 1969 and 21 May 1968, and letter to Federico Quadrani, 2 February 1968, BL.

journeyman approaching his "masterwork," except here, by Jess's own autodidactic formulation, "the journeyman's own work has set the specifications." ²³²

Such acknowledgment of inadequacy is deeply at odds with the subject of Narcissus, and the myth's cautionary tale of the repercussions of blind reverence for self and image. This oscillating tension between belief and failure, between possibility and inadequacy, structures the Translations as a whole. The Translations are a series of paintings dedicated to the sun, that ultimate symbol of power, light, and creation, but the series is comprised entirely of modest paintings made of other men's images, and made to teach the painter how to paint.²³³ The sun has fallen from the sky, hit the ground, and met the unseemly bottom of a collegiate soccer cleat. It is significant that the twenty-fifth painting, the first made after the initial set of 24 had been completed, is *The Lament for Icarus*, the son of the mythological Daedalus who flew too close to the sun, which melted his wax wings and caused him to fall to his death (fig. 58). And yet Jess explained, "The term translation has hidden into it 'being translated into the empyrean, into heaven.' It is the possibility of being translated to a higher level emotionally and sometimes spiritually."234 The series, marked as it is by wild shifts the between inadequacy and failure of Icarus, on the one hand, and the transformative potential of the "empyrean," on the other, shares the same structuring principles as *Narkissos*, in which an all-consuming love of an image and the abandonment of a project over three decades in the making cohabitate.

It was also in 1959 that the poet James Broughton gave Jess the entire 1887 volume of *Scientific American*, which would prove to be the next crucial impetus for the Translations. *Scientific American* was founded in 1845 as a forum for science enthusiasts, not professionals in the field. In its initial decades, the publication focused on new, scientifically minded inventions and patents with an earnestness that at times shaded into awe. As a primary source document of the industrial revolution, its image of that moment is nonetheless profoundly one-sided, leaning heavily towards a belief in technological discovery and promoting the notion in its pages that the everyday tinkerer could become an inventor of note, and thereby participate in this heady, accumulative atmosphere of progress.

Jess chose five engravings from the 1887 volume to translate into paint. The black and white engravings appear in the top center of the roughly eighteen-by-twelve inch page, surrounded by text and accompanied by identifying captions appearing under each image: "Apparatus for Standardizing Sensitive Plates," "Thermoscopic Balance,"

²³² "Biography," compiled by Jess, in *Translations, Salvages, Paste-Ups, By Jess*, npg.
²³³ The phrasing here, "dedicated to the sun," is made after weighing circumstantial evidence.
Michael Auping calls the Translations Jess's "ultimate homage" to the sun, and quotes Jess as describing the series as informed by a "worshipful attitude towards the sun, as in ancient times." Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 54, 56. Then there is the anecdotal text appended to the first Translation: "Sick. In bed. Turning to Ruskin, Turner said: 'But the Sun is God, my Dear.'" Sunlight seems to have been necessary for Jess to work, or so one would conclude on the basis of Duncan's description of Jess's painting habits, which insist on the degree to which the sun was the determining factor in his labor: "...working in every hour of sunlight through the day, and, in periods of sun, working every day without days off..." "Iconographical Extensions," x.

²³⁴ Jess, as quoted in Michael Auping, "An Interview with Jess," in *Jess: A Grand Collage, 1951-1993*, 26.

Randall's Lathe Center Grinding Machine," "Laboratory Tromp," and "Convex Mirror" (figs. 59, 60). How might we characterize these devices? What appeal might they have had for Jess, as concrete tools, as images, and as potential paintings? First, they are inventions, new things in the world meant to aid the scientist. A "laboratory tromp," for example, is an improved suction instrument for the laboratory (fig. 59) and a "thermoscopic balance" is a device whose movement, or unbalancing, is prompted by alternating globes coming into contact with a heat source (fig. 60). But their newness, announced in the pages of *Scientific American*, has long since faded, and their technological innovation surpassed. In 1959, when Jess discovered them, they were relics whose newness the magazine enshrined. The status of these objects in the world is contradictory—the paradox of a new relic being something like a deadly virtue. These are also small, contained instruments, the opposite of the unfathomable scale—macro and micro—of the atomic bomb, whose development Jess participated in during World War II.

As images, they are demonstrative and diagrammatic, but also rendered with care. Consider the precise placement of the shadow cast by the thermoscopic balance at lower right, or the attention paid to the white rim of water in the top left globe, or the ever so slight indication of the heat source that powers this device in the darker shading below this sphere (fig. 60). Such precision and attention to detail recurs in Jess's painting of this engraving (fig. 61). It is an inherent quality of the image that Jess re-performs in his own version, albeit with different results. Perhaps, too, Jess was drawn to the anonymity of the engravings, the way in which their handmade facture is signaled by the drawn signature at bottom of each image, although this signature is institutional, not individual: "Sci Am. N.Y." Authorship is set at a remove, not unlike Jess's appropriative gesture of translating the image into paint.

Then there is the highly circumscribed context of these images. The textual descriptions that accompany each are remarkable for the ways in which they describe in detail how the device functions, but hardly ever explain for what broader use it is intended. This may be because the publication assumes such knowledge on the part of its reader, or because *Scientific American* introduces its reader to a new tool, and the reader then finds an application for it—which is what Jess does, in his own way. Such an absence of instruction, combined with the obsolescence of each item's usefulness, facilitates the artist's appropriation of these instruments for his own purposes. As Duncan explains, such "illustrations of apparatus and phenomena of the scientific world operate as pictorial puns to illustrate propositions of the artist's world, emblems belonging to a second series related to a process in vision." The Translations based on scientific

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²³⁹ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," vi.

²³⁵ Locating the engravings in *Scientific American* is not a difficult task, for Jess provided (as is typical) the citation of each, including publication date, in the "Gloss" section that concludes *Translations by Jess*.

²³⁶ The term "tromp," for example, is no longer used in modern scientific language.

A list of the "Seven Deadly Virtues of Contemporary Art" hung in Jess and Duncan's home and is discussed in chapter 1; they are "Originality, Spontaneity, Simplicity, Intensity, Immediacy, Impenetrability, and Shock."

The thermoscopic balance, for example, is essentially an early version of a solar rocker, or solar toy—a device with no practical purpose other than play.

imagery are "propositions" or proposals, suggestions, opening salvos. *Scientific American*'s tendency to introduce a new invention, thoroughly describe how it functions, and then refrain from prescribing any single use for it transforms each invention into a proposition, too. Put into the service of painting, what kind of propositions do these devices now offer about this artist's world? They propose a "process in vision," or perhaps the advent of vision, for the artist but also for the viewer, through the process of painting. The seven paintings Duncan calls propositions, after all, begin with a remarkable, utopian nineteenth century device meant to photograph the stars and end with a phantasmal bath of "zodiacal light," per the painting's title, across the landscape. It is not just vision that painting illuminates, but these salvaged, rescued images that we see anew.

The Translations are an homage to the sun, but this is so broad as to be nearly useless, which may be the point. Specificity is everywhere in this series, reference heaped upon reference, but specific meaning is to be avoided at all costs. "It must all remain in flux so that no single story dominates," Jess cautions us. 240 Indeed, multiple stories are told by multiple subseries, with the propositions of the seven paintings in the "Ex" subset being just one. (The Translations are likewise a subset of the larger project encompassing paintings, paste-ups, illustrations and so on that Jess, and Duncan for that matter, repeatedly calls the "grand collage.") Yet the two men closest to the Translations disclose that the complete set of paintings does tell a story: "The whole sequence is a picture book" or even a "primer," Duncan writes, and Jess explains, "Every engraving, drawing, litho or old or new photo that linked itself into the larger Set...inevitably formed a magic psychic storybook. ³²⁴¹ In a letter to Kynaston McShine, Jess writes of his delight that the "complete set" of the Translations would be shown at MoMA as he intended, as "a single Assembled Work."²⁴² The Translations coalesce into a picture book, a primer, and a storybook. But what story is being told here? And is it at all advisable to attempt to discern a narrative thread, given the paintings' intense disavowal of such clear narratives?

Narkissos is an "Imaginary Self-Portrait."²⁴³ Could we also read the Translations, a series intimately linked to, even predicated on, the *Narkissos*, this way? Not as a self-portrait in any conventional sense, but rather as a conceptual self-portrait, or a model of self. Jess's act of self-portraiture is difficult to ascertain, yet it is there. Consider that four of the first five Translations—all except *Montana Xibalba*—are based on images from *Scientific American* (fig. 62). The Translations begin with *Ex. 1—Laying a Standard: Translation #1*, a painting from 1959, several years before Celmins or Richter would paint from a found image (fig. 63). This is Jess's first Translation, made the same year as the small *Narkissos* sketch and just after Broughton gave him the 1887 volume of *Scientific American*. The painting illustrates a specific device, alluded to above: an apparatus for standardizing photographic plates meant to photograph "stellar spectra," or

²⁴⁰ Jess, as quoted in Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 26.

²⁴¹ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," i, and Jess, *8 Artists*, 7. Here is Duncan again: "Reflecting again upon the artist's titles and texts we find that these present not only a progress of the artist's vision in painting but also a story of ideas of what vision is as a development of states of Mind in human history." Ibid., viii.

²⁴² Letter to Kynaston McShine, 26 July 1974, BL.

²⁴³ Jess, as quoted in Auping, "Jess: A Grand Collage," 54.

the stars, by exposing each plate to a minute square beam of light (fig. 64).²⁴⁴ In choosing this image to inaugurate his series, Jess handily invokes the empyrean and its obsolete representation, not to mention the astronomical and the miniscule, in one fell swoop. He also lays a standard for the paintings to come: they will derive from a printed or photographic source, and they will make visible phenomena not easily or usually seen.

Jess waited four years before painting the second in the series, *Montana Xibalba*. But from then on he painted with speed, particularly for a notoriously slow artist. The next three paintings, all from *Scientific American*, were completed in just one year, 1964: *Ex. 2—Crito's Socrates: Translation #3, Ex. 3—Fionn's Finnegas: Translation #4, Ex. 4—Trinity's Trine: Translation #5*. As Duncan has noted, all Translations derived from *Scientific American* begin with the prefix "Ex," the precise meaning of which remains uncertain and may refer to "X' or 'Ex-' as well as Example," or even, "Ex-' chemist," a nod to Jess as the ex-scientist that also, when read aloud, sounds a bit like alchemist. There is also the meaning of the word, a Latin preposition, which is "from." Jess himself is the Scientific American, and the first five paintings in the series recall his early formation, even as they do so with an image of science that hardly squared with Jess's own experience as a radiochemist. Similarly, the Montana playing field is not Jess's own (though its depiction of collegiate youth reflects the period in Jess's life, his college years, in which he pursued a scientific career), but is appropriated and transformed into a mythic imaginary of the apocalyptic potential of mid-century scientific progress.

The Translations begin with an initial cluster of five paintings, after which we meet Robert Duncan in The Enamord Mage: Translation #6, 1965 (fig. 65). Based on a photograph taken by Jess in 1958, it is certainly purposeful that Duncan is portrayed in the couple's house, since the house is the physical manifestation of the household. The architecture and furnishings surrounding Duncan in this painting make this location clear. He is even partially obscured by the stuff of the house occupying space with him: books and bookcases, lit candle and candlestick, an overflowing ceramic vessel, a Tiffany lamp, and plants and pictures in the background. The most prominent books are *The Zohar*, the foundational Kabbalist texts in which the cosmos is constructed from an alphabet, and from which Duncan developed a theory of poetry as child's play, a primal act. 246 Jess's encounter with Duncan allows a different conception of the field than that of Montana or Xibalba to present itself: now the field becomes the spatial imaginary of the "made place" as a place of permission crafted and tended to by poet and artist. The four Translations (nos. 7-10) that ensue after Duncan's introduction into the series chart the select coordinates of the pair's handcrafted universe. The sincerity and absurdity of the Victorian age is conjured by Pre-Raphaelite painter and craftsman Sir Edward Burne-Jones and two examples inspired by San Francisco humorist Gelett Burgess, while Melpomene and Thalia, the muses of tragedy and comedy, call to mind ancient Greece (fig. 66). These four paintings are elements of the new field, one willfully grown for seed: Fig. 2—A Field of Pumpkins Grown for Seed: Translations #11, 1965 (fig. 67).

²⁴⁴ "Harvard Observatory and the Henry Draper Memorial," *Scientific American*, October 29, 1887, 278.

²⁴⁵ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," vii, viii.

²⁴⁶ Devin Johnston, "Better to Stumble to It: The Start of Duncan's *Letters: Poems, 1953-1956*," *Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov: The Poetry of Politics, the Politics of Poetry*, Albert Gelpi and Robert J. Bertholf, eds. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006): 38.

Next science and the "Ex" series return with *Ex. 5—Mind's I: Translation #12*. Now science has been transformed into something closer to science fiction; it is more magical and experimental than before (fig. 68). Jess paints engravings from G.M. Hopkins 1895 tome *Experimental Science* (which reproduced several of the *Scientific American* engravings found in Jess's 1887 volume) and John Uri Lloyd's *Etidorhpa, Or the End of the Earth*, a fin de siècle science fiction novel similar to Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The prefixes of these later scientific (and science fiction) paintings—Ex. 5, 6, 7—connect them to the earlier Scientific American, but now, in Duncan's phrasing, "individual imagination takes over from the collective reality."²⁴⁷

Sandwiched between the group of paintings just described are four sequential paintings of individuals, or the people in Jess's life. Included here are the bubblegum pop phenomenon of the Beatles (one thinks of Jess's own early, and for him head-scratching, inclusion in Pop Art exhibitions due to the Tricky Cad paintings) and the Beat-era artistic circles of the Bay Area, represented by a photograph taken by the artist George Herms of the dancer Fred Herko with Herms's daughter on his shoulders, an exquisitely romantic view of the unrestrained bodiliness and closeness of the artist and poet world that Jess and Duncan inhabited (figs. 69, 70). The last of this group is a painting based on the only known image of the legendary recluse Sarah Winchester, a painting originally owned by Kenneth Anger, who christened Mrs. Winchester "Mother Nature" (fig. 71). 248 A short sequence of paintings exploring either a child's view of the natural world, or a clinical. diagrammatical dissection of the human body appear before the twenty-fourth Translation, the last painting of the originally planned set. This painting, Fig. 8—De Macrocosmi Fabrica: Translation #24 (1969), returns us to a macrocosmic view, but the satisfaction of a journey made full-circle is just ever so slightly withheld (fig. 72). Jess's Translations coalesce into a depiction of a self formed by events and encounters, rather than represented by an outward visage or coherent body. The next section aims to show that, similarly, *Narkissos* presents a model of a self constituted by one's environment, by one's elected family and salvaged archive of images.²⁴⁹

IV. Narkissos and the Image as Archive

Standing before Jess's *Narkissos*, a large work on paper nearly six feet tall (it measures 70 x 60 inches), the first impression is of a visual density bordering on vertigo (fig. 16). The sensation of vertigo is bound up in the myth itself, in the irresistibility of Narcissus's downward turned attraction: "My eyes have fallen down / Into the water," Jack Spicer, San Francisco Beat poet and friend of Jess and Duncan, writes in his poem

²⁴⁷ Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," xi.

²⁴⁸ Letter to Jess from Kenneth Anger, 8 April 1971, BL. In the course of his lifetime Jess, too, became something of a legendary recluse.

Duncan expressly uses the language of family to craft an artistic geneaology for Jess when he writes, "Jess's paste-ups and assemblies are children out of <u>Une Semaine de Bonte</u> by Max Ernst—visible poems—and from <u>Finnegans Wake</u>—a night language." Duncan, untitled statement for "Paste-ups & Assemblies by Jess," Dilexi Gallery.

"Narcissus." Psychoanalytic readings of the myth similarly recognize the vertigo it induces, as in Julia Kristeva's description of the Narcissus myth as "the vertigo of a love with no object other than a mirage." Narkissos makes this vertiginous depth palpable in passages such as the steep vertical cliffs at right, sliced through by the ribbon of river that becomes the inky pool that proffers Narcissus his reflection in the form of Brancusi's *Le Narcisse* (figs. 73, 74). Echo's compulsive jump, arms outstretched, into this chasm from the cliff edge at far right dramatizes this vertigo. The path of Echo's jump is itself a visual echo, as she transforms from image to image like stop-motion animation. Different women represent her at various points of her cascading dive through the chasm, an indication that we are past the moment in which any specific body belonged to her. Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus causes her to waste away, and only her voice remains to echo words to which she eternally replies. Her jump begins as a dive, but in her subsequent versions, which include drawings after Blake and Goya, she rights herself, then touches down on a mountain pinnacle and comes to rest in a "beckoning" pose. Her transformation appears to have caused her no harm.

Already we have gone too far down the rabbit hole. The vertigo of *Narkissos* is not only one of representation: it is also the product of any attempt at description or interpretation of this work. It is almost impossible to describe *Narkissos* without recourse to its iconography. This includes even the barest bones sketch of the composition: the centrality of Narcissus kneeling at the water's edge; Eros, bow and arrow in hand, gazing toward him from his perch on a rocky promenade; and Echo, who jumps from the topright corner of the canvas. The soothsayer Tiresias, who "predicted that Narcissus would live only until the moment he saw himself," is the smartly dressed man gazing at Narcissus from just past his right shoulder (fig. 75). Not far below appears Ameinias, Narcissus's spurned lover who kills himself with a sword sent to him by Narcissus, an act now performed via Pontormo's sixteenth century drawing of a seated nude boy (fig. 76). To his right two eighteenth century sleeping monsters become Narcissus's parents, the nymph Liriope and the river god Cephisus. And so on, nearly ad infinitum.

The irresistibility of the image's iconography also stems from the convenient availability of each and every image source in the *Narkissos* notebook, Jess's textual compendium of the materials that make up the collage, housed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The notebook's collection of quotations and sources, we might say, is about the myth of Narcissus in the way that Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, another massive, unfinished collage, is about nineteenth century Paris. The *Narkissos* notebook runs to near two hundred pages. The list of appropriated images used in *Narkissos* appears near the beginning, and sources are cited with remarkable bibliographic precision: "Bernice Abbott/Photographs. Horizon Press, N.Y. p. 133 [reversed] 'Parabolic mirror, made of many small flat sections, reflecting one eye' (1958-

²⁵⁰ Jack Spicer, "Narcissus," in *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian, eds. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008): 140.

Julia Kristeva, "Narcissus: The New Insanity," in *Tales of Love*, Leon S. Roudiez, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987): 104.

Jess, "Echo," *Narkissos* notebook, npg.

²⁵³ Jess, *Narkissos* notebook, npg.

61) Photo: Bernice Abbott."²⁵⁴ And there the mirror is: a photographic reproduction excised from its background, reversed, copied by hand, and pasted in the top-left corner of the work, where it now directs our gaze downward to the drama unfolding below (figs. 77, 78). So it goes for every image that appears in *Narkissos*, from the figures of Narcissus and Eros, composites sourced from male bodies in *The Young Physique* (the *Life* magazine of mid-century "health and fitness" publications for gay men) and George Minne's 1898 bronze, *Kneeling Youth* (fig. 79), to the assortment of panels from George Harriman's Krazy Kat cartoon that Narcissus holds in one hand. All are duly cited in Jess's fine, careful script. But there is more: at the end of the notebook, Jess includes his "Images Reservoir," extensive lists of all of the possible image sources for each figure or theme in *Narkissos*, the vast majority unused.

Over the years, as Jess collected image material for *Narkissos*, he also methodically researched the Narcissus myth, its appearances and permutations throughout history. These handwritten excerpts comprise the bulk of the *Narkissos* notebook. They include a lengthy translation of Ovid's telling of the myth; a series of Theosophical and Gnostic texts addressing the subject; Narcissus-related quotations from authors ranging from Shakespeare to Paul Valéry; excerpts from Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*; several poems by Robert Duncan; and many more. There are images, too, the most improbable of which is a publicity shot of a young, grinning Ronald Reagan posed within a life preserver upon which the word "Narcissus" has been stenciled (fig. 80). The breadth of collected sources for just this one myth is astonishing: it ranges temporally from ancient Greece to Jess's contemporary moment, and makes bedfellows of the most exalted forms of literature and the Hollywood press photo. "Alas, when will Time cease its flight and allow this flow to rest?" reads a line by André Gide appearing on one notebook page.

Does too much clarity obscure? After Duncan, the writer who impacted Jess the most deeply was James Joyce. While in the army Jess discovered *Finnegans Wake* and Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson's recently published *A Skeleton Key to* Finnegans Wake (1944). Finnegans Wake is Joyce's book of the night, as opposed to *Ulysses*, which takes place over the course of a day. Describing his work in progress, which would occupy some seventeen years and was published in 1939, just two years before his death, Joyce explained the work as "A nocturnal state, lunar. That is what I want to convey: what goes on in a dream, during a dream." The result is a dense, experimental text that is willfully obscure. Jess, by contrast, dedicates his Translations to

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²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Berenice Abbott and Jess share an interest in science: Abbott was an amateur inventor and science photographer—she was the photographer editor for *Science Illustrated* in the 1940s and photographed scientific phenomena for a physics textbook.

²⁵⁶ Herriman's Krazy Kat (beloved by Jess and Duncan, but also by other artists in the 20th century—Guston comes to mind) is itself an ongoing saga of Krazy Kat's unrequited love for Ignatz Mouse; and in one of the panels Jess chose, Krazy "tests" the Narcissus myth by staring into a mirror.

²⁵⁷ In 1944, Jess sent away for a signed, limited edition copy of *Finnegans Wake*. See "Chronology," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 234.

²⁵⁸ John Bishop, *Joyce's Book of the Dark: Finnegans Wake* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986): 8.

the sun, and unlike Joyce, constructs his own skeleton key to accompany our reading of *Narkissos*: the notebook. ²⁵⁹ Jess made many paste-ups throughout his career, but *Narkissos* is the only one in his oeuvre to which he compiled a guide. If Joyce is purposefully obscure, Jess attempts to be utterly clear. Everything is revealed for the intrepid researcher, although such clarity can be blinding.

There is no question that Jess was a deeply archival artist. This is part of what makes his work of interest to the contemporary moment, one in which a broad swath of artists are engaged in research and the archival. 260 Thus we witness the retrieval of earlier archival models, such as Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, or the publication of current ones, chief among them Richter's Atlas, the artist's ongoing image archive of amateur photographs and photojournalism. ²⁶¹ In Jess's *Narkissos* archive, there is no clear separation between image and archive here: the image is an archive. Moreover, Jess's approach to cataloguing, tracing, and imaging the path of a Greek myth through history is personal and idiosyncratic. This is, simply put, a queer archive, one for which Ann Cvetkovich's description of gay and lesbian archives seems apt: "In insisting on the value of apparently marginal or ephemeral materials, the collectors of gay and lesbian archives propose that affects—associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma make a document significant."²⁶² Jess's *Narkissos* archive charts a struggle to make visible a homoeroticism that is not pornographic, which he attempted and failed to realize on several occasions leading up to Narkissos, a work whose ultimate goal is "to maintain intense homoeros unprofaned, sensuous, joyful-fearful."²⁶³ Jess also revalues a cautionary tale that had been cast by Freud (whose way was paved by a number of other writers, including Havelock Ellis) as probable cause for homosexuality: "They are plainly seeking

²⁵⁹ The decision to allow the notebook to leave his possession in order to accompany the work came at a slight delay. Jess ceased working on the *Narkissos* paste-up in 1991; five years later, in 1996, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art acquired the work. Jess donated the *Narkissos* notebook to the museum the following year, in response to a questionnaire on the work sent to the artist by the museum's registration department. Jess's handwritten note on the July 14, 1997 letter from SFMOMA reads: "9/23/97 took finisht questionnaire to SFMOMA—along w/ gift to museum of NARKISSOS NOTEBOOK and reference materials." BL.

²⁶⁰ See, for example, Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3-22; Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's 'Atlas': The Anomic Archive," *October* 88 (Spring 1999); Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York and Göttingen: International Center of Photography and Steidl Publishers, 2008); Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006); Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder, and Binna Choi, eds., *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Utrecht and Frankfurt am Main: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst and Revolver, Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2008); *The Journal for Artistic Research*, published by the *Society for Artistic Research*; and the June 2011 special issue of Texte zur Kunst on "Artistic Research."

A notable example of such retrieval is Georges Didi-Huberman's exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in 2011, *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back.*²⁶² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003): 243. See also Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

²⁶³ This quotes is taken from a handwritten chronology by Jess, "Narkissos taking form," which is located near the beginning of the Narkissos notebook, npg.

themselves as a love object, and are exhibiting a type of object choice which must be termed 'narcissism.'"²⁶⁴ Jess's *Narkissos* is an homage to symbolist painter Gustave Moreau—not Moreau's treatment of Narcissus, which he painted over a dozen times (fig. 81), but rather his *Hercules and the Lernaean Hydra*, 1875/76, (fig. 82). The large painting—Jess made his canvas the exact same size—depicts the second labor of Hercules, in which he must slay the hydra despite the monster's propensity to regenerate its many heads. Moreau's hydra is itself a pastiche, lifted from snakes Moreau had seen in the Parisian zoo and representations of cobras in Egyptian art. Jess revalues—or translates, or even better mistranslates—Narcissus, the tragic prototype for homosexual perversion, through an appropriation of Hercules, the ultimate classical, and pop cultural, hero.

Narcissus is a popular subject in western art, which is not surprising given the myth's core of self and reflection, so easily recast as artist and image. Alberti's oftquoted pronouncement goes so far as to claim Narcissus invented the medium of painting: "Consequently I used to tell my friends that the inventor of painting, according to the poets, was Narcissus, who was turned into a flower; for, as painting is the flower of all the arts, so the tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. What is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?"²⁶⁶ Artists as divergent in means and aims as Nicolas Poussin and Salvador Dalí have treated the subject. Of special interest here are Echo and Narcissus (1903), by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John William Waterhouse, and Caravaggio's Narcissus (1599-1600), now in the Palazzo Barberini (figs. 15, 83). Both paintings appear in reproduction in photographs of Jess's studio, and both have been détourned. Jess's adjustment to the Waterhouse is discussed in chapter 1. so the argument is only sketched here: Waterhouse, in his composition, foregrounds the unrequited love of Echo for Narcissus. These are the main protagonists and this is the central drama of the scene. In the studio, however, Jess replaces Echo with a reproduction of Michaelangelo's *David*, so that his gaze, rather than hers, is now directed toward the self-absorbed youth nearby (fig. 14). With this simple, one-stroke act of collage, Jess reclaims from Waterhouse the myth's narrative of same-sex desire that his own effort, *Narkissos*, makes central.

²⁶⁴ Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism," in *The Freud Reader*, Peter Gay, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989): 554. For Steven Bruhm, most discussions of narcissism and homosexuality since Freud "tend toward either a universalizing model—where a narcissistic structure is located within straight modes of desire so that the homosexual functions mostly as a disruptive parody of the larger culture—or a minoritizing model where the object-oriented narcissistic ego authorizes a specifically gay identity whose boundaries it delimits at the same time that it wants to explode them." Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 11.

²⁶⁵ Jess, in a letter to Quadrani, confirms this is purposeful: "...you ask what size: it is to be 60 x 70" (Gustave Moreau's *Herkules Slaying the Hydra*)." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 18 December 1970. BL.

²⁶⁶ Michael Fried, *The Moment of Caravaggio* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010): 135. David Lomas also cites this Alberti passage in his excellent *Narcissus Reflected*, 19.

Jess reinflects the Caravaggio with equal sensitivity to the specificity of the painting's visual argument, and its particular staging of the myth. Caravaggio's canvas, which is roughly 45 x 38 inches, is neatly bisected by the water's edge. Above this line, a kneeling Narcissus draws near to his reflection, his pose mirrored with accuracy by the lower half of the canvas. His hands appear to make contact with those of his reflection, and his bare knee, combined with its reflected counterpart, anchors the center of the composition. In the Caravaggio, Narcissus and his reflection join to form an "ideal wheel," with that bright, naked knee as its hub. 267 A truly severe symmetry exists between Narcissus and his reflection that has no counterpart in other depictions of the myth, and which Jess takes to its almost logical conclusion in the studio. A 1983 photograph of the peeling, mural-like west wall of Jess's studio includes thrift store paintings and an empty gold-painted frame propped against the wall; a small, littered table in the corner; and, tacked on the wall just above this, a medium-sized reproduction of the Caravaggio that Jess has flipped upside down (fig. 84). Narcissus's reflection now gazes down at him. By 2004, the image has rotated on its axis yet again, and Narcissus has returned to his correct orientation (fig. 85). Here too the reproduction is tucked away in a corner, as if its magnetism and power (despite Jess's playful, irreverent upending and spinning of it) meant that it had to be kept to the side, even blocked by Jess's own Narkissos pinboard in the later photograph. Or perhaps he simply lost interest in it.

Despite being slightly sequestered, the reproduction remained in the studio for at least twenty years, so it clearly bore some relationship to Jess's own version of the myth. That relationship is an antithetical one. Caravaggio's *Narcissus* is distilled into two primary, linked elements: Narcissus and his reflection. For Michael Fried, the composition moves us beyond absorption, a term whose implications Fried has explored for over thirty years, and into a realm of immersion: "We have in the Narcissus a virtual allegory of the 'moment' of immersion, or perhaps I should say of absorption becoming immersion, conjoined with the strongest possible statement of the specular separation of the viewer—originally the painter-viewer—from the painting."²⁶⁸ The absoluteness and intensity of such immersion, its relentless and uncompromising nature, is predicated on that ideal wheel, the near-seamless connection between Narcissus and his reflection. But it is also predicated on a disavowal of environment, or a refusal to engage with or even acknowledge the world that surrounds him. World, in Caravaggio's picture, has been reduced to an absolute minimum, muted and stripped down to the barest surface possible on which to place his protagonist: a strip of bare brown earth, flecked with white to mark nominal contact with the water's edge. This distance from world may be behind the ultimate sidelining of the reproduction in the studio.

Jess's *Narkissos*, by contrast, presents an overabundance of world. World is everywhere in this picture, not just in the form of the appropriated images, but also as environment: landscape, flora, fauna, architecture, feats of engineering, design, symbols, icons, diagrams, equations, text, patterns, other dramas, other bodies, and other gazes. Narcissus is usually a solipsistic figure, immersed, true enough, in his own reflection (though, of course, he does not recognize the reflection as his own). Rather than isolation or solipsism, however, Jess offers a version of the myth in which Narcissus is coextensive with his world, in which self and world are coextensive rather than polarized into subject

²⁶⁷ This is Michael Fried quoting Matteo Marangoni in *The Moment of Caravaggio*, 135. ²⁶⁸ Ibid. 138.

and object. The most crucial aspect of Jess's process is what he termed indwelling, which is a deep and attentive focus on making, as described above in regard to the Translations. Indwelling also takes place in time, in that images and correspondences only congeal or come to belong over time. He waits "for the piece itself to tell me where it belongs." The images in *Narkissos* came to belong there long before they were glued down onto the paper, and the temporal dimension of process, Jess's slowness and inclination to collect, sit with, and live with certain images for years, decades even, allows belonging to occur. ²⁷¹

Narkissos's gaze does not appear to alight on his reflection, Brancusi's Le Narcisse, but rather travels down to his own, emphatically hand-drawn hand, and then to the backscratcher that he holds, a tool that functions like an extension of self making possible this contact with the world—or distancing him from it. The backscratcher—here funny, earthy, and grounding—becomes a tool that facilitates closeness and distance. And while a perfect body holds it, backscratchers are made for imperfect bodies, for bodies that itch and may be overweight. The network of connections between Narcissus and his surroundings occurs at the level of material and medium as well: There is an overallness to the image, a visual blanketing that is purposeful. Each element of the picture is drawn by hand, with this consistency of medium supplying an overall cohesion despite the disparate range of sources from which the pieces are drawn. The collection of cut-out images arranged on the Narkissos pinboard, which Jess never made public and which is in the collection of his estate, demonstrates how atomized the source images could have remained, how distinct and individualized each element seems in comparison to the composition of the paste-up, in which every fragment is carefully situated (or belongs) within an overall landscape. The pinboard, with its range of media, scale, print quality, and paper stock, also makes vivid the cohesion brought about by drawing each element for the paste-up (fig. 19).²⁷² Though the painting was never completed, there is an act of translation on view in the paste-up, a process of making through which sources are

²⁶⁹ "After the cards had been placed or replaced," Jess wrote about the Translations, "they needed in-dwelling, a contemplation during painting that spanned twelve years." Jess, 8 Artists, 7. And as Duncan once explained, "That feeling of fittingness I would say is identical with truth." See A Poet's Mind, 34.

Jess, as quoted in Auping, Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies) 1951-1983, 13. T.J. Clark's recent comments about space in Picasso's The Blue Room (1901) are also resonant here: "Space is belonging, a complex nineteenth century word which certainly in its plural form speaks to the century's dreaming of space as something possessable; but also consider the longing built into the noun belonging, something desired, vulnerable, patiently constructed, easily lost." From "Picasso and Truth: Object," The 58th A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, 2009.

This is not unlike Heidegger's notion of dwelling or being in the world as a fundamental belonging. Duncan and Jess both read Heidegger, and their library contained no less than fourteen volumes by Heidegger, including *Being and Time*, and citations by Jess of *On the Way to Language* appear in his archives. See "notes," box 18, BL and sections I-III of Division I in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962).

One senses here, too, the importance of Max Ernst for Jess, specifically in the way that Ernst consciously used one medium—engraving—to achieve a believable consistency of image in collages such as those that comprise *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934), a key precursor for Jess.

copied by hand, resulting in a level of intimacy and knowledge about each image. Jess made many collages over the years, but this is the only one that received this hand-drawn treatment, yet another testament to the singularity of this affect of cohesion, of the permeability of self and environment. Narcissus dominates the composition of *Narkissos*, but this body is not an imaginary portrait of Jess. The self-portrait here is a model of self revealed in the whole of the Narkissos project, and figured in the paste-up as coextensive with one's environment.

V. Storytelling

As the story told of stars and subatomic particles and the story told of living organisms continue to reorient our possible knowledge of what is, the poetic imagination faces the challenge of finding a structure that will be the complex story of all the stories felt to be true, a myth in which something like the variety of man's experience of what is real may be contained. –Robert Duncan²⁷³

By 1975, a stretched, blank canvas measuring five by six feet stood waiting in Jess's studio. It was intended to become the *Narkissos* painting. Jess had delayed beginning work on the canvas for some sixteen years—first by turning to the Translations, his extended primer on how to paint, and then by the interruption of the first run of the Salvages from 1971-74, a new set of paintings which caused *Narkissos* to be postponed yet again. In June of 1977, Jess at long last began to "undertake THE WORK—pencil development begun June," he writes, "advancing well by year's end." Progress was slow but steady until 1984, when Jess turned his attention to caring for Duncan, who was suffering from kidney failure. Jess abandoned the painting soon after Duncan's death in 1988, as his notes makes clear: "1990—broadcast decision to give up on painting *Narkissos*. Will work on drawing till complete."²⁷⁴

In the course of the fourteen years that the *Narkissos* was in active progress in Jess's studio, only one photograph of the work *in situ* and in progress appears to have survived (fig. 86). It is housed with the *Narkissos* notebook in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and presumably was dropped off by Jess in 1997. This black and white, 8 x 10 inch print has never been reproduced, and has not been cited in previous scholarly discussions of *Narkissos*, or in the whole of the Jess literature. The photograph is

²⁷³ Robert Duncan, *The Truth and Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography* (New York: House of Books, Ltd., 1968): 12.

Jess, "*Narkissos* taking form," BL. In this chronology Jess details his progress on the work year by year, beginning with its prehistory in 1952 ("attempts at painting homoerotic romance") and ending in 1990, with the annotation just cited. The *Narkissos* painting was not the only component of the project abandoned along the way, as Duncan makes clear: "it is important to realize that in the total project there are to follow [the Translations] a large canvas, *Narcissus*, in homage to Moreau, and then a series of paintings from alchemical plates, and finally, a painting from Dürer's *Melancholia I*." Duncan, "Iconographical Extensions," vii. Jess describes the imagined works similarly when writing to Quadrani of "the alchemical series culminating in Melancholia I as homage to Dürer." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 27 February 1968, BL.

Melancholia I as homage to Dürer." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 27 February 1968, BL.

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undated, but it is accompanied by a handwritten note on stationary from the Odyssia Gallery reading, "Mid-Stage Progress Transferring + Pasting." It is difficult to say when the photograph was taken. In his chronology Jess writes of having "half-completed" the work by 1984, but photographer Ben Blackwell recalls seeing Narkissos at a more advanced state than shown in the photograph when he first visited Jess's studio in 1982.²⁷⁶ Although the date is difficult to pin down, the location of the image can be established with certainty—the peeling walls behind the works in progress match those seen in the photograph of the west wall of Jess's studio cited above. ²⁷⁷

While Jess revealed his sources for *Narkissos* with breathtaking scrupulousness. his notes on process are laconic and circumscribed, making this photograph especially valuable for the insights it provides. Here is what we see: on the right, an expanse of white paper, the left side and bottom edge of which still retain hand-drawn fragments intended for the paste-up. This is a staging ground for composing the image, as the fragments are not yet pasted down, but instead are pinned in place. Individual pins can be discerned, for example, just above the head and at the right ear of the figure of Narcissus (fig. 87). Bits of paper elsewhere on this sheet, such as the lily pads at bottom, curl slightly at their edges, more evidence that this is a transitional, contingent state of the work (fig. 88). Jess pinned up all of his paste-ups before gluing them down—glue, in a collage, is a more permanent gesture than paint on a canvas. George Herms recalls seeing Narkissos in process in the studio, covered with a "forest of straight-pins" that became three-dimensional when viewed from the side. 278

The basic composition of *Narkissos* now settled on this pinned page, the photograph shows Jess in the process of transferring each individual element from this staging ground to the prepared canvas for the painting, and then to the sheet of paper that will become the paste-up. The canvas is at far left, stretched and snug in its easel, and the paste-up is at center, many of its elements already glued firmly in place. The photograph proves that the painting and paste-up were developed simultaneously: each paper fragment lifted from the board at right, copied onto the canvas via pencil line (the same process Jess used for the Translations), and then pasted on the paper at center. Just over half of the image material has made its way to canvas and then to paper. The empty white space on both canvas and paper, so clearly delineated by the outline of Narcissus's absent head and body, corresponds precisely to the remainder of material at right. Pieces left on two stools in the foreground are likely the next components to be transferred: on the left, the craggy mountain that Eros will stand on, and on the right, the stream and riverbank near which Gaia will be seated (fig. 89).

The studio photograph reveals something (though not everything) of Jess's process, and for this alone it is useful. But even more helpfully it demonstrates the degree to which a deep symmetry exists between process and meaning in the whole *Narkissos* undertaking. There is, to begin, an insistence on the integrity of each fragment or detail, an insistence that is characteristic of the collector. "I have gathered a posie of other men's flowers, and nothing but the thread that binds them is my own," reads the Montaigne line

²⁷⁶ Ibid and Ben Blackwell in conversation with the author, August 12, 2011.

The caption appended to this image reads: "West wall of Jess' studio, San Francisco 1983. Photo Ben. Blackwell."

²⁷⁸ Interview with the author, October 23, 2010.

reproduced by Jess in O!.²⁷⁹ Jess arranges his archive of collected images, or posie of other men's flowers, on the staging ground by dint of that forest of pins, but each individual component is selected out, copied onto the canvas, and pasted onto the sheet, so that each detail receives his attentive focus during this process. "What he has achieved," Duncan declared in his preface to O!, "is totally his, but in every detail derivative." **Narkissos* operates metaphorically or analogically, and what it stands as a metaphor of is this paradox of part and whole, derivation and original.

Jess's methodical focus on transferring each image fragment, one by one, is a process of composition by accumulation. This is another crucial structuring device of this work: the accumulation of beloved images by a collector, the accumulation of an archive, the accumulation of versions of a myth, the accumulations of a self-generated genealogy, and the accumulative preparations of methodically training oneself to paint. This labor is methodical. *Narkissos* is made through a series of repetitive small-scale gestures that are methodical, not spontaneous, the latter belonging to the list of repugnant deadly virtues. Repetition, to be sure, occurs in the recurrent move of transferring each fragment from staging ground to painting to paste-up, but something else takes place: each fragment is doubled along the way. One work, in other words, is in the process of becoming two, as the studio photograph makes vividly clear. And the jolt of recognition we feel in finding the absent body of Narcissus in both painting and paste-up brings home the exactness of their duplication.

The duplication in progress here is where the allegorical inheres most forcefully in this work. For Jess, the goal is always a multiplicity of meaning. "My personal stance has been positive contradiction without negative assertion," he writes in a formulation that, typical for Jess, revalues a set of terms. Now contradiction—fundamental to collage—is positive while declarative posturing of assertion becomes negative. Positive contradiction shares some common ground with Walter Benjamin's idea of the "productive disorder" of a collection, and is preferred by Jess for its inherent ability to foster a multiplicity of meaning rather than a single meaning (the negative assertion). Such a "network of possibility," as he put it, leads to a flux-image, to use Jess's term, or a multiphasic form, to use Duncan's term, which owes much to Dante's notion of the polysemous. Interest in Dante was revived by the Romantics and continued in the early decades of the twentieth century by modernists like Yeats, Beckett, Eliot, Pound, and

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²⁷⁹ Jess, *O!* (New York: Hawk's Well Press, 1960): npg.

²⁸⁰ Robert Duncan, "Pre-Face," in Jess, *O!*, npg. Joyce s terrific pun "stolentelling" also comes to mind. In *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999): 424.

²⁸¹ Jess. 8 *Artists*. 7.

Walter Benjamin, "Convolute H," *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

283 "The artist," Duncan wrote, "after Dante's poetics, works with all parts of the poem as *polysemous*, taking each thing of the composition as generative of meaning, a response to and a contribution to the building form." This excerpt from the introduction to Duncan's volume *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968) appears in a list of appropriated texts Jess paired with a selection of his collages in *Jess: The Four Seasons and Other Paste-Ups*, exh. cat. (New York: Odyssia Gallery, 1980): npg. Duncan's poetic homages to Dante include the "Dante Études," in *Ground Work: Before the War / In the Dark* (New York: New Directions, 1984).

Joyce, for whom "Dante has dominated the imagination...as has no other writer." Dante so captivated these later writers in part because he invigorated the Italian language so thoroughly and prodigiously that he was truly able to make it new, per Ezra Pound's dictum. In 1300, the Italian language comprised between 10,000 and 15,000 words; Dante's lexicon included almost 28,000 words. More than this, Dante was the first to ascribe a literary interpretation to his works, going so far as to appropriate for his own poetry the four levels of meaning used by theologians to interpret scripture (literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical). Dante defined his theory of the text as polysemous, which proved influential to Duncan and many others: "the work may be described as 'polysemous,' that is, having several meanings; for the first meaning is that which is conveyed by the letter, and the next is that which is conveyed by what the letter signifies; the former of which is called literal, while the latter is called allegorical, or mystical." Joyce recklessly incorporates and distorts Dante's formulation of this multivalent structure ("May Father Dante forgive me!") in *Finnegans Wake*, a foundational text for Jess.

Narkissos is in the process of being doubled in the studio photograph. This doubling allegorizes the central theme of the Narcissus myth, which is the encounter between Narcissus and his reflection, or double. The two versions of Narkissos we see in the studio, painting and paste-up, stage that encounter. But Jess is interested in translations and versions, not perfect copies, and his doubling of Narkissos is a mistranslation or misreading. In his Convivio, Dante elaborates in a useful positive contradiction that for poets, the literal level is a lie, while allegory is "a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction." The "beautiful fiction" of this act of doubling is that the two pictures do not mirror each other as an image and its reflection would. Jess intended the two works to be installed in a gallery facing one another, and this method of display would also seem to participate in the logic of the reflection, but such a display would not result in a work and its mirror image (indeed, which is the original or "real" picture and which is its reflection?). The visual logic of the facing pictures is not a mirror, but an

²⁸⁴ Stuart Y. McDougal, ed., *Dante Among the Moderns* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985): ix.

²⁸⁵ Lucia Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante, and the Poetics of Literary Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 3.

Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966): 173. Jess wrote in his notebook, "The Allegory and the Anecdote in painting hereabouts is on the outs, seems to me, with the purists, the must-splitters, gotta-snipes." "Notes" notebook, BL. Allegory was dusted off and resuscitated in the late 1970s and early 1980s as support for postmodernism's break with modernism. In "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," Craig Owens charts the history of allegory in order to prove that it is the defining mode of postmodernism (he is thinking of so-called Pictures Generation artists such as Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, and Troy Brantauch, among others). Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 67-86.

Dante, Convivio II, I, 2-4, trans. Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990).

According to Michael Palmer, "The drawing was originally conceived as the mirror (enantiomorphic) image of a painting of the same size." The mirror structure was eventually abandoned, Palmer writes. See Palmer, "On Jess's *Narkissos*," in *Jess: A Grand Collage*, 93. Auping explains, "[Jess] wanted the two images to face each other when and if they were finally

echo—this is the truth beneath the beautiful fiction.²⁸⁹ The mirror is a closed loop, a perfect wheel, but the echo extends temporally and spatially, and this is the logic of the *Narkissos* project and process, imaged in the studio photograph.

In proffering two versions of the same image, Jess allegorizes not the specific myth of Narcissus, but the way that myth itself functions. Myth, as both Jess and Duncan understood it, is inherently unstable and changing. Origins are long lost, and instead the power of myth lies in its permutations and retellings over time—it is iterative and accretive. It courts confusion and contradiction in its reveling in its own permutations and in the hands and mouths of its various tellers. Divorced from the facts that ostensibly govern history, it is wildly imaginative. It is an ancient form of motivated and embellished storytelling. The two connected structuring devices of myth are one and the same as those laid bare in the studio photograph of *Narkissos* in process: the echo and the version. Such a rejection of clear or linear narrative in favor of the fluidity, the twists and turns, of myth corresponds to Jess and Duncan's belief that meaning must remain in flux. There are deeper structures of signification at work here, and images and words are chosen for their ability to open onto an attendant network of possible correspondences. Jess's early collages comprised solely of words or phrases, then, are structurally similar to the image-based collages: both strive for a certain flux or play of associations that serve to keep image and text in a state of potentiality. Jess's reluctance to finish any work takes on new valences in this light, while his methodology of collection productively troubles this reading.

Jess and Duncan's choice of myth rather than history as a mode of engaging and interpreting the past corresponds to their choice of the household or private sphere as the site of production over that of the traditionally male-gendered workplace, or public sphere. The link between myth and the household is made explicit in Duncan's bawdy, tossed-off one-liner, "You can't take a piss in this house without hitting a myth." Such choices—myth, household—are a refusal to be interpolated as subjects by normalizing cultural and political forces. Theirs is a model of how self interacts with the world that is self-generated, appropriative, maintained, and protected. So I turnd to the playing

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complete. Clearly, the MOMA drawing is part of the *Narkissos* project. I think it was meant to be the final painting." Email to the author, June 3, 2011.

²⁸⁹ David Lomas has written about the echo as a structuring principle of *Narkissos*, and indeed all of Jess's work. For Lomas, *Narkissos* is a "vast echo chamber" that emblematizes what Derrida would call *echographie*, a kind of drawing or writing comprised of a series of echoes. See Lomas, *Narcissus Reflected*, 90.

²⁹⁰ Robert Duncan in conversation with Robert J. Bertholf, October 7, 1972, and quoted by Auping in "Jess: A Grand Collage," 41. This appears to be an especially memorable saying of Duncan's, as more than one interviewee recited it to me.

One thinks here of Michel Foucault's call for "new relational modes" that would lead to "new ways of being together"—a formulation taken up and examined in depth by Leo Bersani in his work. See, for example, Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," interview by R. de Ceccaty, J. Danet, and J. Le Bitoux, trans. John Johnston, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, vol. 1 of *The Essential Works of Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997): 136-8; Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," in *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 641-656; and Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010). Rather than present a new relational mode, Jess and Duncan appropriate and inhabit older modes in new

field that had beckoned to me since childhood," Jess wrote in 1994, "and there I've been engaged for going on 50 years." ²⁹²

Because the work remained incomplete and was not publicly exhibited or reproduced in print during his lifetime, Duncan never spoke on record about *Narkissos*. Nor did he write about it, although he wrote about Jess's work on other occasions, and took up the Narcissus myth himself in poems that Jess knew well. But we do know something of how Duncan felt about myth more generally from his 1968 treatise, *The Truth and Life of Myth: An Essay in Essential Autobiography*. For Duncan, the great travesty of modern life is the drive to exorcize myth. The modern mind is a demythologizing mind, and what we lose when we lose myth is a sense of belonging or connection, not only to each other and to a network of inherited stories, but also to the things that surround us. Duncan's writing in the passage below, in which he nearly fuses Rainer Marie Rilke's words with his own, is so deeply felt, so furious, that the words tumble over one another in a manner unlike his usually more measured cadence:

Our whole American Way of Life is designed to save the householder from his household myths, from the lifestory of working in which he has his communion with the house; as in the factory, the worker, no longer a maker, is removed from his work....Tables and chairs, "the house, the fruit, the grape," that the poet Rilke saw, "into which the hope and meditation of our forefathers had entered," become props. "Now there come crowding over from America empty, indifferent things, pseudo-

ways: their version of the household owes much to Victorian-era bourgeois definitions of this structure, and the transmission of myths is an ancient mode of communication. Despite his hard-to-argue-with conclusion that Duncan is "certainly one of the most unpityingly pretentious poets I have ever come across," the poet and critic James Dickey wrote these astute lines in his classic collection of reviews, *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now*: "Duncan has the old or pagan sense of the poem as a divine form of speech which works intimately with the animism of nature, of the renewals that believed-in ceremonials can be, and of the sacramental in experience; for these reasons and others that neither he nor I could give, there is at least part of a very good poet in him." Dickey, *Babel to Byzantium: Poets and Poetry Now* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968): 175.

²⁹³ Jess included four poems by Duncan in the *Narkissos* notebook which do take up the Narcissus myth: "Star, Child, Tree," "Source," "And Hell Is the Realm of God's Self-Loathing," and "The Face." In a 1967 notebook, Duncan gives his own "Précis of mythic reference: Orpheus as singer; Christ as crucified, as King, as food, as incarnate; the Lover; the True Self; Apollo, leader of the Muses, as Sun and Black Sun; Phaeton; Prometheus; Apollo as master of the lyre; Prometheus thief of fire and sacrifice of vulture; (Narcissus)…" The list goes on, but I stop at Narcissus to note its bracketing off in parentheses—the only mythological figure to receive such treatment, which may indicate a tacit acknowledgment that this particular myth is Jess's territory. Notebook, August 1967, PC. This is a different reading than that offered by Peter O'Leary who, in his insightful study on Duncan, argues that the bracketed "Narcissus stands out from the list, attracting special attention." See O'Leary, *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan and the Poetry of Illness* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002): 79.

²⁹² Letter to Jonathan Weisman, 25 August 1994, BL.

things, dummy-life," Rilke writes: "The animated, experienced things that share our lives are coming to an end and cannot be replaced." ²⁹⁴

Here again the connection between myth and household is reinforced, both under threat of the emptying out of a kind of vitality or animation that, for Duncan, occurs as myth becomes increasingly obsolete. Clearly Duncan stakes the core of his poetics on myth—it is integral to his tightly knit worldview. Occupied with the myth of Narcissus for over thirty years, Jess's engagement with myth is equally intensive, but is more specific, as well as more humorous, more excessive, and more caught up with the hand-me-downs of culture. His remarkable achievement was to take one myth and show its endless permutations and extensions, and to engage in a process of making that would allegorize the very qualities of myth that were so crucial to the values held by him and Duncan. He had found what Duncan calls for in a mandate used as this section's epigraph: "a structure that will be the complex story of all the stories felt to be true."

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²⁹⁴ Duncan, The Truth and Life of Myth, 34-5.

Chapter Four: Salvage: A Life's Work

I. Introduction

"Well, really all my work—'Paste-Ups,' 'Assemblies,' 'Translations'—comes from salvaging," Jess once explained to curator Michael Auping. 295 Salvage is meant as both a verb and a noun here: it is what this art does and what it is. Jess salvages images discarded on the refuse pile of history, and attempts to put together a world from these salvaged pieces. "It is all about rescuing or resurrecting images," he revealed to Auping, marking salvage as a process tinged with romanticism, ethics, and spirituality. ²⁹⁶ This chapter offers the first in-depth examination of salvage in Jess's work, and specifically positions his tactic as a response to the postwar order ushered in by the invention and detonation of the atomic bomb. Its first section, *Madmen*, offers a lengthy reading of *The* 5th Never of Old Lear, a collage that combines imagery of some of the most heinous episodes in William Shakespeare's work with engravings of large-scale heavy industry to present a nightmarish and monstrous scene of men and machines. The section provides the first in-depth reading of this work, and is also the first to locate its visual sources in Shakespeare and *Scientific American*. The reading is sustained but not comprehensive, and the elements whose iconography are deciphered with the aid of the original sources and their contexts are strategically chosen to support a larger argument about the work.

The 5th Never of Old Lear was made in 1974, but section two, Heavy Water, moves back in time to excavate Jess's formation as a radiochemist drafted to serve with the Manhattan Project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee during World War II and his subsequent crafting of a protective origin myth regarding that period of his life. This section also explores how Jess's work as an artist contends with the immense shift in scale in twentieth century science, emblematized by the massiveness of the Manhattan Project, and the introduction of the mushroom cloud as an icon of the atomic age. Section three. Salvage in the Atomic Age, turns to Hanford, Washington, where Jess worked after the war and which is now the most contaminated site in North America. This section argues that salvage, as a worldview and as an artistic operation, stems from Jess's lived encounter with nuclear waste at Hanford. Signd and Resignd: The Salvages returns to the 1970s, the same period in which The 5th Never of Old Lear originates, and addresses a series of paintings Jess made in the later part of his life. This is a group of eight pictures called the Salvages that were made in the 1970s and 1980s by reworking older canvases. The retrospective mood of the Salvages coincides with a similar period of selfexamination by Jess's partner, Robert Duncan, in these years. Finally, Vandalism considers salvage as a form of collecting that begins with an act of vandalism, as the collected item is excised from its original context and inserted into a new configuration that is ultimately redemptive. This is also a vandalism of a normative or given picture of the world, which Jess constantly worked against.

²⁹⁵ Paste-up is Jess's preferred term for his collages, and assemblies are what he called his three-dimensional assemblages. Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 25-6.

²⁹⁶ Robert Duncan elaborated in an interview, "Our homosexuality also meant rescuing the irregular." Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," 31.

II. Madmen

In May of 1974, the series of paintings called the Salvages was well underway, and occupied most of Jess's time in the studio. He had completed four paintings which would form part of the group, and was about to turn to the smallest canvas, which measured just under a mere 8 x 16 inches.²⁹⁷ At the same time, Jess continued to make paste-ups. This is not unusual in his oeuvre: paintings and collages (and book illustrations and assemblies and so on) are interwoven throughout. It is a testament to the constellated nature of his practice, but it also reveals a studio process and artistic mentality that require that labor be diffuse. Upon entering the studio, there must be several options from which to choose that day, so works in progress that are not quite ready to move forward can sit and steep a bit longer without producing too much anxiety in a self-consciously slow artist. Choice of medium is also a matter of light. Days with good light were days for painting, while San Francisco's notorious fog meant work must be done in other media.²⁹⁸

That May, while right in the thick of the Salvages, Jess signaled his intention to begin "a large engraving paste-up, using the old lovely 18th century engravings culld [sic] from a vandalized Shakespeare folio."²⁹⁹ The result is *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, completed in 1974 (fig. 90). The collage is 33 x 28 inches, so in the mid-range of easel picture sizes. It is not given a proper frame so much as a wooden support onto which the pasted-on imagery has been extended. The imagery, in other words, spills over the picture plane's first edge, down all four sides about an inch, and continues across a second tier. Reproductions of the work tend to flatten out this three-dimensionality; the central, raised wooden panel reads as recessed with the second wooden tier as an enveloping band. Yet the paste-up is decidedly three-dimensional, a slab-like object affixed to a larger wooden slab. Having the collage elements bank down and then across this support emphatically reinforces their materiality. This is just glued printed paper, after all.

It mattered to Jess how certain works were framed. Many of his small collages were given thrift store frames, lending them a whiff of both the jewel box and the threadbare. He chose frames for paintings in the Translations series that echoed or winked at the painting's subject matter or style. The first in that series uses a painted red frame set within a larger blue frame, a construction that mimics the lines of the painting's doorjamb and table legs (fig. 91). The frame for *Fig. 4—Far and Few...: Translation # 15* (1965) is coated in a fuzzy peach velour, a nod to the painting's texture and its source in a kitsch souvenir postcard of the Beatles (fig. 69). In the early 1970s, the period in which *The 5th Never of Old Lear* was completed, Jess made two in a series of four large (all roughly 50 x 70 inches) and dense paste-ups based on the four seasons; *Spring* begins the series in 1971, followed by *Summer* in 1972 (fig. 92). In both collages, imagery

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²⁹⁷ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 24 May 1974, BL. Quadrani was Jess's longtime New York dealer, and Jess's letters to him are now housed in The Jess Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California.

²⁹⁸ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 7 May 1972, BL.

²⁹⁹ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 24 May 1974, BL.

³⁰⁰ The full titles are *Midday Forfit: Feignting Spell II* [Spring], 1971 and *The Virtue of Incertitude Perplexing the Vice of Definition* [Summer], 1972.

spreads beyond the picture plane and out onto the warm ash frame. The effect is something like a declaration that this image world is porous. And in *Summer* especially, the image world is also unfinished. The prismatic mosaic of cut triangles peters out, revealing the bare wood of the frame beneath, a parallel to the bare areas of the collage's ground image of Utah's Bryce Canyon.³⁰¹ Both frame and canyon could have been papered over entirely with found material, but the artist exercised some restraint.

Jess's treatment of the frame, then, reinforces a given work's primary methods of world building. This is true for *The 5th Never of Old Lear* as well, although the game is different here. There are no bare patches of wood or glimpses of an underlying image. Instead, the whole image flows over and down the sides of the secondary wooden support. This flow reinforces the consistency of the image and its affinity for pattern or decoration, an affinity that has a soothing effect. It is the opposite of the agitprop Dadaist shock tactics of Richard Huelsenbeck and Raoul Hausmann, or the Hannah Höch of Cut with a Kitchen Knife. Yet the balm of such homogeneity mitigates, or perhaps contends with, a scene as monstrous and tragic as any Dada or Surrealist nightmare. This peculiar framing technique, which is singular in Jess's oeuvre, also emphasizes both heaviness and lightness: the heaviness of two wooden slabs, one on top of another, and the lightness of paper, which hugs this three-dimensional support like an expertly wrapped gift. The delicacy of paper is understood by one more detail, which though difficult to see in reproduction is immediately apparent standing in front of the collage: the right wing of an upside-down butterfly just right of center lifts off the surface, equating the tenuity of the gossamer, paper-thin wing with the thinness of paper (fig. 93). We are witnessing a balancing act between heavy and light on the level of both materials and structure.

The visual cohesion mentioned above is partly the result of a consistency of medium: most of the cut-up and pasted-on scraps are reproductions of engravings. This lends the picture an overall graphic quality and a gray scale palette that deploys a spectrum of lights and darks. Elements of the collage have yellowed with age, such as the face and hand of the young woman in profile on the left of the picture, but no such yellowing appears in a 1983 reproduction of the work, which is further evidence that Jess was after visual consistency (fig. 94). The uniform use of engraving, a technology used for mechanical reproduction before photography, has the added effect of making the image seem much older than its years, which is not uncommon in Jess's work. Jess employs a modern visuality—collage—but his materials belong to an earlier visual culture, one figured with an outmoded technology. The process and ethos of reuse, recycling, and even rescue is made plain by the collage's insistence on its pastness.

All of this uniformity and consistency seems to be, as claimed above, as a salve to its nightmarish scene, one already invoked by the dance between heavy and light. Visual consistency may smooth out or conceal this scene, but now that we have spent some time with the paste-up, its pictorial logic begins to come into view. The picture is divided into roughly two halves, an upper portion governed by bodies in motion and a lower portion dominated by a panoply of machines. Bodies and especially limbs—arms and legs extended and curved—are set in opposition to the linearity and geometry, not to mention

³⁰¹ The canyon paste-up was intended to be "a companion-piece for last year's play upon the Grand Tetons," or *Midday Forfit: Feignting Spell II* [Spring]. Jess, letter to Federico Quadrani, 28 August 1972, BL.

cold steel, of the machinery below. 302 Butterflies flit across the whole; their purpose is to undo any clean partitioning between the two halves and punctuate the dark mood with a touch of lightness. Their metaphorical and physical lightness is not fixed, however, for just above the two men in the very center of the picture, Jess transforms his butterflies into a pair of pelvises, or perhaps it is the other way around. Meanwhile, bubbles drift up from the glassblower at center left, another indication to the viewer that lightness but also fragility, even breakability, are being invoked. By this point, more than twenty years into his collage practice, Jess is clearly a master of the medium. He makes the picture appear effortless, as if it could be no other way, but this degree of seamlessness, dynamism, and flow are achieved only with tremendous skill and patience.

The fulcrum for the picture's two worlds is the pair of men at center, a soldier and perhaps a servant who holds the oil lamp overhead. Their centrality is emphasized by the placement of the seal that marks the true center of the picture, a concatenated butterflycum-decorative bas-relief-cum clock that is a point of stillness in an otherwise thoroughly moving image. The men clutch the covering that separates the lower realm and the upper, although it is uncertain whether they aim to reveal or cover what lies beneath. Their cohort above remain oblivious to this dilemma, so deeply absorbed are they in their own agonized dramas.³⁰³ And dramas they are: each of the large figures in the upper half of the paste-up (and this is where we will linger for now) is excised from the aforementioned "vandalized" Shakespeare folio. The folio to which Jess has taken his scissors is uncle and nephew John and Josiah Boydell's ambitious, but ultimately ruinous undertaking, first published in 1803 and titled with helpful expository flair, A Collection of Prints from Pictures painted for the purpose of illustrating the dramatic works of Shakespeare by the Artists of Great Britain. The folio of prints was just one component of a larger venture initiated by John Boydell in the late eighteenth century to elevate British painting to continental levels of achievement. He was equally keen to create a national school of painting, specifically history painting, and foster exports of British engravings in order to lessen the massive imports of French engravings at the time. In pursuit of these goals, Boydell opened a brick and mortar gallery, the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, in London in 1789, and commissioned Britain's leading painters— Sir Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, and George Romney were headliners—to illustrate scenes from Shakespeare in paintings that he exhibited there. But the gallery was simply a means to his true end: two great publishing ventures, an illustrated edition of Shakespeare's complete dramatic works published in 1802 and the Collection of Prints published the following year. For the latter, Boydell employed dozens of engravers to translate the paintings into engravings. Some of the engravings that resulted were considered successful artistic achievements: West, for example, is reported to have approved of William Sharpe's engraving of his King Lear (c. 1788), a painting now in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts (figs. 95, 96). 304 But just as many are mediocre affairs, mottled from overuse of the stippling method and composed with stock figures in

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³⁰² According to Michael Auping, these are steel engravings made on a steel plate. Conversation with the author, April 17, 2012.

³⁰³ The upper register may refer to Cornelius van Haarlem's 1588 *Fall of the Titans*, with its panoply of agonized male bodies engaged in battle, as butterflies discreetly cover genitals.
³⁰⁴ This account is glossed from Winifred H. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1976).

canned arrangements. The challenge of transforming these engravings into a new composite image was certainly pleasurable for Jess. This confidence in one's abilities to recognize the hidden or neglected potential of a discarded or undervalued image—to save the image, to put it bluntly—is another facet to the project of salvage, of a life's work in the service of "rescuing or resurrecting images."

In choosing this particular compendium of prints for a paste-up, Jess had found the consummate manifestation of his own artistic practice, a practice wholly predicated on appropriation and translation. Boydell's artists make use of "canned" compositions and translate paintings into engravings, so there is common ground between the two practices. Indeed, consider the sheer number of transformations—or translations—that resulted in the Boydell volume Jess held in his hands; the prints are copies of paintings, which are illustrations of literary scenes, which describe events that were historical even in Shakespeare's time, and often themselves deeply speculative. Take, for example, the atrocities enacted by the tyrannical King Richard III in his quest to secure the English throne. The disappearance of the two young princes, Edward and Richard, from the Tower of London sometime around 1483 is amplified by Shakespeare in Act IV of Richard III into the assassination of the children on Richard's order. The assassins, Dighton and Forest, are "two flesh'd villains, bloody dogs," but they nonetheless recount the act with deep remorse: "We smothered / The most replenished sweet work of nature, / That from the prime creation e'er she framed."³⁰⁵ This event, or non-event, is just one permutation of the myth of the princes in the tower, and myth, with its endless mutations through telling and retelling, is a vital component of Jess and Duncan's worldview.

It is this murderous scene that becomes the fulcrum of Jess's paste-up. The engraving in Boydell's collection is after a painting by James Northcote, and depicts the moment just before Dighton and Forest's atrocious act (fig. 97). The soldier especially has a look of grim determination on his face as he grits his teeth and moves to suffocate the sleeping children. Jess excises the two princes from the scene, so that the purpose of the blanket is no longer to cover their bodies. The blanket's function now fluctuates between revealing the lower half of the collage and attempting to cover it up. Held high overhead, the oil lamp illuminates, and the two men gaze upon, not the children but the phantasmagoria of machinery below. It is this new realm that concerns them so and with which they must now contend. Jess uses various devices to make the lower half of the image distinct from the upper half. First, there is a scale shift, indicated by the many small (compared to the larger Shakespearean characters above) figures reclining, almost languidly, on the architecture below. Then there is the shift from bodies to machinery, or from the organic to the inorganic. Jess has collaged together several engravings of engines and one dramatic grain elevator belt to make this composite gargantuan engine room. He primarily uses issues of *Scientific American* from 1887, which is the same source he used for several of the paintings in the Translation series, a connection explored later in this chapter. In the center is the aforementioned grain belt, with its vertiginous receding depth—severe depth is common in Jess's collages—made all the more dramatic by the belt's transformation into a waterfall and topped with a gesturing figure wearing a tall cylindrical hat, perhaps of Ottoman origin (fig. 98). 306 To his left is a

³⁰⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III: The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 294.

³⁰⁶ A Big Grain Elevator Belt, Scientific American, 1887.

pair of "Improved Triple Expansion Engines," the *Scientific American* caption tells us, that Jess turns on their sides (fig. 99). ³⁰⁷ To his right is a composite of three engravings of large-scale machinery from *Scientific American*, all of which have been flipped upside down. Included here are several engines, such as an "Improved Beam Caloric Engine" and several joined "Improved Triple Expansion Marine Engines" (figs. 100, 101). ³⁰⁸ The last element of the group at right is the "Improved Stamper Battery," which was a machine used in mills to pound materials for processing or extraction, such as to free gold from surrounding material in a gold mill (fig. 102). ³⁰⁹ Jess took this new and improved—nearly every caption tells us so—large-scale industrial machinery and made his own improvements, fusing them as a Frankensteinian creation, a powerful and elaborate machine whose function remains a mystery.

The other figures in the upper portion of the collage are unaware of what the two men see, but they are also caught in moments of violence or torment. Jess chose two other Boydell engravings for this collage that depict violent acts or their aftermaths. In the first, Dighton and Forest transport the corpses of the two princes they have just smothered, and in the second, a scene from *Henry VI*, *Part 3*, Clifford is on the verge of murdering the young Earl of Rutland (figs. 103, 104). Jess mostly conceals the children, whose snow-white bodies too obviously figure their innocence and may formally disturb the visual cohesion of the paste-up with their vivid whiteness, and instead gives over the upper portion of his collage to murderers and madmen.

The most dramatic, and dramatically lit, of the men in this upper realm is King Lear, who Jess appropriated from Sharpe's engraving (fig. 96). Lear, anguished over the treachery of his two daughters and veering into madness, is caught with his companions in a brutal storm. Jess cuts away the voices of reason urging Lear to take shelter: Gloucester, with a torch, and Kent, at Lear's left ear. Yet the artist allows both fool, bearded and crouching to the left, and Edgar, in rags and impersonating a madman, to remain, as if to emphasize Lear's precarious state. The title of the collage, *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, derives from a later passage in which Lear laments the death of his loyal daughter Cordelia, concluding with five cries of "Never!":

No, no, no life! Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, never, never, never, never! -King Lear, Act V, Scene III

Lear's repetition of "never" is feverish and progressively unhinged, but the fifth "never" has a certain finality to it: the realization is both tragic and clear. A catastrophe has occurred. Jess will not name this catastrophe, since he believed it was crucial to create

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³⁰⁷ Improved Triple Expansion Engines, *Scientific American*, October 22, 1887.

³⁰⁸ Improved Beam Caloric Engine, *Scientific American*, 1887, and Improved Triple Expansion Marine Engines, *Scientific American* September 24, 1887.

³⁰⁹ Improved Stamper Battery, Scientific American, April 9, 1887.

The two men peering down into the abyss of this machine room are something of an inversion of the unveiling of the Wizard of Oz. The Oz books, written by L. Frank Baum, were especially treasured by Jess and Duncan, so much so that they resided on shelves in the couple's bedroom.

what he called a flux-image, in which meaning never settles.³¹¹ Rather, in his words, the myriad components of his works "must all remain in flux so that no single story dominates."³¹² This is why the blanket both covers and reveals the grotesque engine room below. It is also why Cordelia is not represented in this collage, but only invoked obliquely, so that the picture does not illustrate the play. It is why references to the most devastating moments in Shakespeare coexist with a visual subtheme of butterflies that flit across the same surface, their lightness counteracting the darkness of the madmen Lear and Edward.

The 5th Never of Old Lear presents a scene at the moment of its greatest intensity. its dramatic peak. The imagery tells us so, but the title does too. Lear's fifth "Never!" is catastrophic and climactic. The work is meant to be theatrical: it signals that theatricality on the level of sources and composition. The collage is a theatrical, allegorical staging of a catastrophe, one that results from the upper register's encounter with the lower register. 313 Something is simultaneously revealed and covered, or perhaps a revelation has been made that must be smothered at once. Meanwhile, the upper register is in turmoil, prompted perhaps by the discovery below. Madness and murder rule the upper register, and what we witness there is a chaotic disintegration of humanity, a breakdown of even the most basic social contract: another human being's right to live. The material culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gives form to this catastrophe, but it belongs firmly to the twentieth century. Jess's confrontation with nuclear power at Oak Ridge and Hanford, and later during the Cold War, has been translated here into the high theatricality of eighteenth century representations of Shakespeare: madness and murder, truly, but madness and murder counteracted by bodies that are beautiful, classicized, even idealized. Limbs are thick and muscular, robes billow and armor shines. A similar translation occurs in the lower register, which does not show the atomic bomb or mushroom cloud, but rather an outmoded set of signs for science and technology. Importantly, these are outmoded signs for *improved* science and technology, or signs for progress.

III. Heavy Water

Science has realized and affirmed what men anticipated in dreams neither wild nor idle.

—Hannah Arendt³¹⁴

Scientists love dada too: they grow mushrooms ten miles tall. —Jess³¹⁵

Jess was born Burgess Franklin Collins in 1923 in Long Beach, California to James Francis Collins, an engineer, and Clara Janet Collins, a housewife. ³¹⁶ Beginning in 1942, he studied chemistry at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena and,

³¹² Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 26.

³¹¹ Auping, Jess: A Grand Collage, 48.

Jess considered all pictures to be allegorical. Auping, 24.

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958): 2.

³¹⁵ Jess, handwritten entry in a notebook given the title page, "A Skeptic Milieu Medallion," 1954-1975, BL.

This information is from Jess's birth certificate, Carton 2, File 30, BL.

along with so many others, was drafted into the army during World War II. According to his honorable discharge form, he entered active service on February 11, 1943, and completed three months of basic training in chemical warfare. Then, he was assigned to the Special Engineer Detachment in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where he spent twenty-two months. After his date of separation on January 15, 1946, Jess reenrolled at the California Institute of Technology, and received his Bachelor of Science in chemistry, with honors, on June 11, 1948. While at Oak Ridge, his military occupational specialty and number was Chemist 292. His "Summary of Military Occupations" states that he "worked in a chemical laboratory, conducting investigations and research in the 'Manhattan Engineers District'. Did analytical control on processes of a secret nature." Jess's work for the army, so perfunctorily described by this staccato, bureaucratic language, was an official secret, but we well know what the Oak Ridge effort would eventually produce: an atomic bomb, which annihilated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the summer of 1945 and, to quote Leo Szilard, the Hungarian émigré physicist who initiated the Manhattan Project, ushered in "an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale."

The history of the development of the atomic bomb is one of scale. An "unimaginable scale," in Szilard's words. A colossal, stupendous scale of resources marshaled and consumed to produce the bomb, of enrichment facilities half a mile long that produced mere grams of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, of the endless and copious amounts of water needed to cool spent fuel slugs, and ultimately of the death and destruction caused in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Hiroshima, 100,000 were killed instantly; of these 95,000 were civilians. ³¹⁹ It is no wonder that something so unfathomable would soon be linked with the mushroom cloud: an image that has such clearly delineated form, an image that can be seen, comprehended, managed, and even aestheticized. But before this image was formalized, the rhetoric surrounding the bomb continued to perpetuate an idea of its vastness of scale. Henry Stimson, then Secretary of War, proclaimed that the Manhattan Project resulted in nothing less than a "new relationship of man to the universe" and the White House, in its official press release upon the first detonation, called the atomic bomb "the greatest achievement of organized science in history." Some scientists involved in the bomb's production, however, were devastated by what had occurred. "I was shocked and depressed beyond measure," recalled German chemist Otto Hahn. 320 "We face the prospect either of destruction on a scale which dwarfs anything thus far reported," opined a New York Times editorial the day following Hiroshima that now seems utterly bizarre, "or of a golden era of social change which would satisfy the most romantic utopian."321 What *The Times* failed to predict was the future of the bomb as the centerpiece of a Cold War structure dominated

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³¹⁷ Certificate of Honorable Discharge, BL.

³¹⁸ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986): 749. ³¹⁹ Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (New York: New Press, 2001): 112.

³²⁰ Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008): 71; Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 735-6. ³²¹ That such dualism dominated public perception on nuclear energy for much of the postwar period is argued in William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (July 1989): 1-37.

by two superpowers, each of which had the capability to destroy the other as catastrophically as the violence unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Manhattan Project began as an effort to develop a weapon that would harness the power of a split atom before the Nazis did, but it only became formalized, and urgent to the United States government, in 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The scope of the endeavor quickly became national, with the construction of three primary facilities spread out across the nation: uranium was enriched in Oak Ridge; Los Alamos, New Mexico became the centralized research laboratory and later, testing facility, under J. Robert Oppenheimer: and a massive plutonium production factory was erected in Hanford, Washington. Edward Teller recalled fellow physicist Niels Bohr telling him, "You see, I told you it couldn't be done without turning the whole country into a factory. You have done just that." The transformation of Oak Ridge, a 92 square mile parcel of "impoverished hill country" on the Clinch River near the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in eastern Tennessee, into a company town of 75,000 in a scant three years is a testament to the resources put at the disposal of the Manhattan Project, which at its height employed 130,000 people and was equivalent in size to the United States automobile industry. 323 The government built roads, railroads, laboratories, and all manner of support facilities, but the most massive structures were those that enriched uranium, such as the K-25 plant, a u-shaped facility that covered over two million square feet, or the Y-12 complex, which used an electromagnetic separation process and eventually comprised 286 buildings (figs. 105, 106). Jess arrived at this sprawling construction site in April 1943, just days after the entire area was fenced in with barbed wire, public access closed off, and its borders monitored by seven guarded checkpoints.³²⁴ Once inside he would have seen astonishing pieces of visual propaganda, such as billboards reminding workers, "What you see here / What you do here / When you leave here / Let it stay here" (fig. 107).

One of the most significant transformations in twentieth century science is scale, and no other endeavor dramatizes this transformation like the Manhattan Project. 325 The concept of the atom as an invisible elemental substance is ancient, but proof of its existence was discovered only at the turn of the last century. 326 The first chain reaction occurred in Chicago on December 2, 1942 and the first nuclear bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945 at Alamogordo, near Los Alamos. 327 Nuclear fission is a process that occurs at the level of the atom's component parts, or on the smallest scale imaginable. Yet, in an acute reversal, very large machinery, and much of it, is needed in order to

³²² Rhodes, The Making of the Atomic Bomb, 500.

³²³ Ibid, 486; Jeff Hughes, *The Manhattan Project: Big Science and the Atom Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 56.

Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 487.

This is argued by Jeff Hughes, who notes this shift culminates with the Hadron Collider: "The Manhattan Project created new links between scientists and the state, and put science—especially physics—at the heart of national security. But the Manhattan Project did not cause a radical change in the development of science; rather, it accelerated developments already taking place." Hughes, The Manhattan Project, 13.

Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*, 29.

Lindayist, A History of Bombing, 92, and Craig and Radchenko, The Atomic Bomb and the *Origins of the Cold War*, 76.

generate the material capable of producing atomic fission. Such a shift in scale is absurd, as Jess intuits when he quips, "Scientists love dada too: they grow mushrooms ten miles tall."328 Jess experienced this scale shift not least as it was registered in the chief icon of the nuclear age, the mushroom cloud, but also through everyday life at Oak Ridge for nearly two years, as he worked inside its colossal factories, moved through its spaces, ate in its cafeterias, and stowed belongings in its locker rooms. 329 A Dadaist response to this irreconcilable dialectic of scale, from atom to nationwide factory, and the similarly unfathomable dialectic between this banal pedestrian experience of locker rooms and cafeterias and the unimaginable horror of the bomb, seems appropriate (it is worth recalling that Dada emerged as a response to the First World War). Eventually Jess realized that he was participating in something very wrong. With characteristic understatement, he explained to writer Rebecca Solnit that such "evil methods [were] not conducive to self-esteem." He continued, "I remember the army had secret films in color [of Hiroshima, immediately after it happened, showing horrible burns and sickness]. People were passing out, and so was I."330 Bay Area filmmaker Lawrence Jordan remembers Jess telling him, "When they dropped the bomb, I knew science was made by black magicians."331

This is the nightmare of *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, the revelation beneath the blanket that leads to such murderous anguish in the upper register. 332 Just as Jess will invoke Cordelia but not represent her, so too does he invoke the scale and devastation of nuclear science, but only indirectly. The images he selects for the lower half of the pasteup are collaged together into a monstrous engine room whose curtain has been pulled back by the two anguished men above. These engravings are from the same 1887 issue of Scientific American that Jess used for paintings in the Translation series (figs. 59, 60). The science represented by those devices—small, contained instruments for standardizing photographic plates or alternating glass spheres via heat induction—could not be further from the industrial-scale big science that would produce the most destructive weapon the world had then seen. These devices represent the science that appealed to Jess, the science of the tinkerer, small-scale and alchemical, often without predetermined application. A science that is, for this artist, prelapsarian. This is the science he wants to rescue and preserve in paint, through the long, laborious process that the Translations required. The 5th Never of Old Lear, by contrast, is nightmarish, not unlike the ways paintings by Hieronymous Bosch are nightmarish. To my mind, this work has much in common with Bosch, for Bosch and Jess ask a shared question: How does one represent

³²⁸ Jess, handwritten entry in a notebook given the title page, "A Skeptic Milieu Medallion," 1954-1975. BL.

³²⁹ In an interview with Rebecca Solnit, conducted in preparation for her publication *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), Jess explained, "I was a private in the lines sitting at a bench to monitor production of the product." Transcript from an interview conducted with Jess on May 24, 1988, BL.

Solnit, Ibid. It is a testament to Solnit's manner that Jess spoke so openly and at length about this period of his life, which he was usually loathe to do.

³³¹ Interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

Jess described nuclear energy as "nightmarish": "At the time I was involved with nuclear energy, the direction it was going seemed questionable, nightmarish in some ways." Michael Auping, Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies) 1951-1983, 10.

the monstrous? Bosch, for his part, labors to make his monsters real. He fashions them as organisms, and places them in a plausible surrounding world legible to the viewer. Bosch was praised for his skill in joining things, "as if pairing the unpairable was what made a fantasy real."333 Jess, too, deploys incredible skill in "pairing the unpairable," but in *The* 5th Never of Old Lear, unlike many of his other collages, there is very little in the way of a surrounding, plausible world. The world has disappeared, and no ground or place to stand remains, the bottom of the picture reminds us, as water, wrenches, and a suited man all free fall into the depths.

Jess later admitted that he reacted slowly to what he experienced at Oak Ridge. "People are all very different," he told Rebecca Solnit. "I learned very slowly. I held it off until Hanford." Jess was discharged from the army in 1946, finished his degree at the California Institute of Technology in 1948, and moved to Hanford, Washington. In Hanford Jess continue working as a chemist, this time for the nation's plutonium production plant, but also took his first painting class at a local recreation center.³³⁵ Although he remained reluctant to discuss this period of his life, on several occasions he described the dream that constituted his break from it:

> At one point, around 1948 while I was working with atomic chemistry, I had a very strong and convincing dream that the world was going to completely destruct by the year 1975. I'm sure the kind of work I was doing had some effect on my state of mind at the time.³³⁶

I had a dream—what Jungians call the Big Dream—in which the world is being incinerated. It was stated very clearly that the world had only 25 years. 337

After a year in Hanford, sometime in 1949, Jess quit his job and moved to San Francisco. 338 He enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley and soon met Robert Duncan, in the fall of 1949. Jess left Berkeley in February 1950 for the San Francisco Art Institute, and in January 1951, he and Robert exchanged marriage vows and moved in together. Within less than two years, his life had changed radically, and though the form of this life was nascent in 1951, it remained structurally unchanged until Robert's death in 1988.

On the few occasions on which Jess discussed his work as a chemist at Oak Ridge and Hanford, his comments take the form of one of two strategic deflections. The first is

³³³ Joseph Koerner, "Impossible Objects: Bosch's Realism," RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics 46 (Autumn 2004): 78. This inscription, written in Latin by Bosch on one of his drawings, would have appealed to Jess; "Most miserable is the mind that uses always invented things, never inventing anything itself." Koerner, 84. Jess copied a Bosch drawing, The Forest that Hears and the Field that Sees, into the middle of Narkissos.

³³⁴ Solnit, transcript from an interview conducted with Jess on May 24, 1988, BL.

Michael Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 19.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Solnit, transcript from an interview conducted with Jess on May 24, 1988, BL.

³³⁸ Jess told Christopher Wagstaff that he spent a year in Hanford. See "Conversations with Jess," 269.

to downplay his involvement. In 1994, he wrote to Jonathan Weisman, "Unfortunately these brief biographies, whether in catalogues or reviews, without any sanction from me, overstate and dramatize my small connection with the atomic bomb. I was never more than a flunky chemist in the control labs." As an interview subject, he insists, he would be a waste of time. The second strategy is to claim that that period prompted a break or schism, and remains sealed, psychically and mnemonically inaccessible. Jess's letter to Weisman continues with this second strategy: "Indeed my memory now at 71 is fragmentary and unreliable, regarding that period of my life, especially as in an intense reaction I then willfully erased my mental connections with laboratory science." When his alma mater, the California Institute of Technology, asked for an interview in 1995, Jess declined. In a draft of his response, he writes, "I made the break almost 50 years ago, and willfully workt [sic] at erasing continuity with my life before devoting myself to art. I would be put in turmoil to rake it over."³⁴¹ The sentiment was originally even stronger: Jess had written "destroying" continuity, but crossed it out in favor of the more moderate "erasure." Surely we can empathize with Jess's reluctance to dwell on years spent in the service of producing weapons of mass destruction.³⁴² And as that period receded into history and was supplanted by a consistent practice as an artist and life with Duncan in San Francisco, it may well have grown hazy and inconsequential, an error of youth.

But Jess's break with laboratory science was neither immediate nor complete. despite his claim otherwise. Science crops up frequently in his work. Sometimes it is experimental and even alchemical, as in the devices he captures in paint, lovingly and in great detail, in the Translations: an apparatus for photographing the stars or the zodiacal light reproduced in G.M. Hopkins 1895 Experimental Science. In other images science is industrial, such as the large-scale engines in *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, and when machine-age imagery is used, it often invokes the monstrous or nightmarish. Even the image of the mushroom cloud itself appears on occasion, in the filmed collages of *Heavy* Water or The 40 & 1 Nights or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon, 1955 (a work to which I return below); the assembly (Jess's preferred term for assemblage) St. Nick, 1962; and the unusually political large paste-up Napoleonic Geometry, 1968 (figs. 108-110). Its most notable appearance is in If All The World Were Paper And All The Water Sink, a painting from 1962 in the collection of the de Young Museum in San Francisco (fig. 111). The painting, which is large, almost five feet wide, is an homage to Gustav Klimt, but if in Klimt's handling of paint, pattern stitches areas of the picture plane together like so many textiles, in Jess's picture individual squares of pattern scatter in the wind like bits of paper, as if the yellow mushroom cloud at center tore the fabric of the picture and its world. 343 Surely the painting is an evocation of Jess's apocalyptic dream—the presence

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³³⁹ Letter to Jonathan Weisman, 25 August 1994, BL.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Letter to Michael Rogers, undated, BL.

³⁴² Elaine Scarry, in comparing nuclear weapons to torture, argues that these phenomena annul any shared sense of humanity: "Both torture and nuclear weapons inflict their injuries without permitting any form of self-defense, both inflict their injuries without obtaining any authorization from their own legislatures or populations; both starkly nullify even the most minimal requirements of a contractual society; both destroy the foundational concept of law." Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011): xv.

³⁴³ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 10 February 1972, BL.

of a "self-portrait" in profile, watching from the side with tarot deck in hand, makes this point. (It is not Jess, but a stand-in, a photograph of the Olympic track star Bob Mathias taken from *Life* magazine.) The painting also collapses Jess's formative dream with the dream image that dominates Duncan's early life: "In one particular a field appeard [*sic*]," he wrote. "This was from the earliest persistent dream of my childhood.... There a ring of children danced so that I was in the center, crownd [*sic*]." Duncan believed that in this dream he reached full awareness of his own nature, but doing so prompted an imminent disaster, "a great Deluge, in inward bursting doors under the pressure of overwhelming waters." Jess and Duncan fold their formative moments of self-awareness into a totemic image that signals both loss of innocence and world destruction. Yet the annihilation of the world is recoded and redeemed through the rebirth of the world as one that will be self-made by artist and poet. As Duncan writes in "A Song from the Structures of Rime Ringing as the Poet Paul Celan Sings," "From my wreckage / This world returns / To restore me." To restore me."

Jess's dream, and his insistence on that dream as constituting a break from his life as a nuclear chemist, is an origin myth, a fable convenue. It calls to mind another notorious artistic origin myth from the same war, Joseph Beuys's tale of his plane crash in the Crimea. The Tartars discovered Beuys in the snow, and as he recalls, "They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep the warmth in." Fat and felt become foundational, alchemical materials in Beuvs's sculptural practice in the postwar era. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has written about the degree to which this myth informs Beuys's work and persona, but also reveals certain unintended truths. For Buchloh, it matters less that Beuvs's rescue in the Crimea occurred than that it enacts a kind of psychic survivalism. "What the myth does tell us," Buchloh writes, "is how an artist whose work developed in the middle and late 1950s, and whose intellectual and aesthetic formation must have occurred somehow in the preceding decade, tries to come to terms with the period of history marked by German fascism and the war resulting from it, destroying and annihilating cultural memory..."348 An analogy can be drawn between this postwar negotiation of self in relation to events lived and subsequently historicized and Jess's struggle to come to terms with the development and deployment of the atomic bomb by the United States, and his own involvement with that

³⁴⁴ Robert Duncan, Berkeley Notebook A//, PC.

³⁴⁵ Ibid. Duncan's interpretation of his dream is heavily influenced by his sustained reading of Freud. "Had my parents been Freudian instead of Hermeticists," he wrote, "they might have called it my birth-trauma dream." Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book*, 150.

³⁴⁶ Duncan, *Ground Work: Before the War / In the Dark*, 12. Jess painted *If All The World Were Paper And All The Water Sink* in 1962, just before he began *Montana Xibalba*, the Translation painting discussed at length in chapter 3 that depicts a field oscillating between a space of play and one of devastation. Letter to Federico Quadrani, 10 February 1972, BL.

³⁴⁷ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 47.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. Less compelling are subsequent turns in Buchloh's argument, in which Beuys's use of materials like fat, felt, wax, and brown paint recall an infantile anal stage that harkens back to the anal retentiveness of fascism, and thereby reinscribes a "deranged" "national self and historic identity." Ibid, 48.

project. The dream was one way of containing and bracketing off this event. Dropping his last name, Collins, was another.³⁴⁹

Just as Beuys would confront the aftermath of German fascism despite the war's end and the protective layer offered by his myth of origin, so too did Jess find himself living in the atomic age, his psychic and physical break with nuclear science notwithstanding. If we take *Life* magazine, which Jess read voraciously and cut up with similar energy, as a barometer of the cultural mood in the 1950s, the repercussions of a nuclear detonation on American soil is a constant and palpable concern. Atomic testing continued in the Nevada desert throughout the Cold War: on at least one occasion Jess wrote of feeling the blast of a nuclear detonation as far as San Francisco. This was the new world order, and its threats and traces were everywhere.

Jess was hardly the only artist to depict the mushroom cloud during the Cold War. It is not surprising, for instance, that Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist all painted one of the most charged icons of the age. Echoing the rhetoric of unimaginable scale detailed above, Lawrence Jordan explains that the mushroom cloud "was by that time both an icon and an emotionally charged image, almost too much for the mind to comprehend." In 1965, Warhol applied his signature, repetitive silkscreen technique to his canvas *Atomic Bomb* (fig. 112). Also in 1965 Lichtenstein painted *Atom Burst* and Rosenquist included a mushroom cloud overlaid with an umbrella (a symbol of fallout) in his mural-sized, wraparound painting *F-111* (figs 113, 114). And in that same year Robert Rauschenberg included an image of the mushroom cloud in one of the panels in his *Dante's Inferno: Drawings for Dante's 700th Birthday* (fig. 115). But the mushroom cloud had become a subject of art more than a decade earlier, appearing in

³⁴⁹ It seems Jess only officially changed his name to Jess Collins from Burgess Franklin Collins in September of 1975, perhaps in recognition that the dream's events had not come to pass. His name, as printed on his social security card, is "Burgess Franklin Collins." The card includes a handwritten annotation by the artist: "changes to Jess Collins 9/11/75," BL.

Here is a selection of *Life* feature headlines from a six-month period in 1955, when Jess was actively making many collages from these pages. February 28, 1955, "Facing the Fallout Problem: The AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] reports and scientist advises what to do about radiation." March 21, 1955: "As the bomb goes off and the cloud heads east... Science Tackles Radiation Peril." May 9, 1955: "Atomic Entombment: Hanford buries 'hot' masses in the cold ground." May 23, 1955: "H-Bomb Hideaway: Completely equipped family shelter to bury in backyard costs \$3,000." May 30, 1955: "Close Up to the Blast: Color film records ruin as CD watches from afar." June 6, 1955: "The H-Bomb Builder's Atom Show: Dr. Edward teller puts on a one-man television program to help popularize his favorite subject." July 11, 1955: "H-Bomb Shelter Tests Texas Family." August 8, 1955: "Young Engineers Usher in a New Era: Atomic Industry Is Already Big."

³⁵¹ He wrote to Duncan, "Felt an earthquake jolt yesterday up in studio, but turnd [*sic*] out that it was an H-blast from Nevada!," letter to Robert Duncan, 26 April 1968, PC.
³⁵² Email to the author, April 2, 2012.

³⁵³ Laurie Anderson has an intriguing theory as to why Warhol chose fifteen minutes of fame, opposed to five or ten or twelve: "fifteen was a very famous Cold War number. I remember seeing it in the headlines of papers like the New York Post. Fifteen minutes was the time it took for an ICBM to reach New York from Moscow." Anderson, "Time and Beauty," in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, eds. Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004): 116.

works as disparate as San Francisco Beat poet and filmmaker Christopher Maclaine's surreal *The End* (1953), which follows six people the day before a nuclear apocalypse, and Robert Frank's exquisite photograph of a rack of postcards at a souvenir shop, Hoover Dam, Nevada, 1955 (figs. 116, 117). 354 Frank's photograph shows three postcards from which the tourist, browsing the rack after pulling over for a pit stop or scenic view, may choose: the Grand Canyon, the Hoover Dam, or the mushroom cloud. These are the main roadside attractions in Nevada, and such a display proposes the three images as interchangeably epic, spectacular, and impressive to their would-be purchasers. Frank's inscription to his son Pablo at the bottom of the photograph. "For Pablo— Remembering the trip to California 1956 – Hoover Dam Nev.," underscores the photograph's status as a souvenir from the Frank family's trip across the United States in 1955-6, which resulted in Frank's *The Americans*. The shared characteristic of all photographs is remembrance of what is past, but this particular postcard clearly shows that by this time the mushroom cloud had been successfully pried apart from its destructive effects on Japan; abstracted into a sublime event in a sublime location, the Nevada desert; aestheticized into a form with clear, recognizable shape; and marketed as a tourist attraction.³⁵⁵

The first image of the atomic blast—not then termed a mushroom cloud—was a blurry, less bounded photograph of the Nagasaki explosion reproduced in *Life* magazine (fig. 118). A decade later, the image of nuclear detonation had been aestheticized for Americans, as *Life* again demonstrates in a full-color image of a test explosion in the desert, captured at just the right moment by a professional photographer (fig. 119). It is precisely this aestheticization that Jess's friend and fellow San Franciscan Bruce Conner lays bare in his film *Crossroads*, made some twenty years later, in 1976. For this 36-minute film Conner used, without alteration, recently declassified footage of the atomic test detonations, codenamed Operation Crossroads, at Bikini Atoll in 1946 (fig. 120). With half the world's available film on site to take some one million images at the moment of detonation, the explosion was the most photographed event in history. Conner edits the footage to repeat the event, so that the film's viewer seems to watch this spectacle over and over from different viewpoints, and adds sound effects by Patrick

³⁵⁴ Maclaine collaborated with Robert Duncan and composed the soundtrack for Lawrence Jordan's film *Trumpit*, which was shot in the basement of Duncan and Jess's Baker Street home. Jordan, interview with the author, March 21, 2011.

³⁵⁵ Peter B. Hales has examined the ways in which in the immediate aftermath of the nuclear attacks on Japan, the image of the bomb became aestheticized and defanged through the use of rhetoric of the sublime. He writes, "This new iconography then mediated the 'reality' of the atom bomb as viewers understood it, so that this new metaphor for absolute horror and destruction might coexist, however uneasily, in the web of significance that was and is American culture." Hales, "The Atomic Sublime," *American Studies* 32 (Spring 1991): 8.

³⁵⁶ Hales's analysis of these two images charts the transformation of this image into the iconic, but abstracted form it still carries today. See Hales, 5-8.

³⁵⁷ Conner had used images of atomic explosions in *A Movie* (1958), *Cosmic Ray* (1961), and *Report* (1963-67). In *Report*, which includes footage of the John F. Kennedy assassination that Conner filmed on his television set, the final image is an atomic bomb exploding while a radio report from the morning of the assassination announces, "we have a brilliant sun today."

³⁵⁸ Jonathan M. Weisgall, *Operation Crossroads: The Atomic Tests at Bikini Atoll* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 121.

Gleason and a hypnotic electronic score by Terry Riley to reinforce the debilitating visual seduction induced by the explosion.

For his part, Jess engaged the visual spectacle of the mushroom cloud in *Heavy Water or The 40 & 1 Nights or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon*, a group of 41 collages that Jess made in 1955 in Majorca, mostly from *Life* magazine issues from the first half of that year. This was also the source material for the *Caesar's Gate* collages, although the *Heavy Water* collages are in color, full of rich jewel tones and warm, golden metals. Several derive from a multipart *Life* series on "The World's Great Religions," and use images already exoticized for the armchair traveler, such as the Hindu statue, Buddhist temple, Islamic mosque, and Jewish Torah reading, all made even more fantastical and strange by Jess's interventions (figs. 121, 122). Other motifs—framed pictures within images, ominous architecture, cloaked and covered bodies and faces, stone statues and exotic animals, flames or molten lava—recall the fabulist storytelling by Scheherazade, who postpones her execution by entertaining the Persian king Shahryār with endless stories in *One Thousand and One Nights*, to which Jess's title alludes. *Heavy Water*, the first part of his title, was more contemporary, and refers to modified water used in nuclear reactors to encourage fission.

In 1956, back in San Francisco, Lawrence Jordan filmed the collages, and in 1962 Jess picked up the project again and gave the film a soundtrack.³⁶⁰ In the film, the only one Jess made, the collages flip up into view one by one, accompanied by a sound clip that lasts only as long as each image does.³⁶¹ The effect is as dramatic and theatrical as *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, an indication that for this artist such theatricality well suited the absurdity of the subject at hand.³⁶² The film debuted in 1962, but it appropriated a form dating from the turn of the century, the nickelodeon, as Jess's title declares.³⁶³ Nickelodeons, small converted storefronts that screened films to mostly working class audiences, often in combination with vaudeville acts or illustrated lectures, became

³⁵⁹ The *Caesar's Gate* collages are discussed in an earlier chapter. *The Guardian Angels' Guidebook* was also made in Majorca. See the "Chronology" of Jess's work by Robert Berg, BL. ³⁶⁰ In Jess's own handwriting, the work is titled and dated as follows: Heavy Water or The 40 & 1 Nights or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon by Jess 1955; 16mm prints put on film by Larry Jordan 1956—soundtrack from a collage magnetic tape by Jess 1962, BL. The title screen of the film, however reads: The Forty and One Nights / Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon 1955 From the Studio of Larry Jordan SF 1960.

³⁶¹ Jess also made a twelve-hour video assemblage from television shows over approximately ten years, which he titled *Peekaboo Flicks*.

³⁶² Jess may have intended to make *The Guardian Angels' Guidebook* into a film: "…the several"

³⁶² Jess may have intended to make *The Guardian Angels' Guidebook* into a film: "...the several plates from "The Guardian Angels' Guidebook" belong to a nickelodeon series of 42 plates that I would now like to assemble. The first nickelodeon series 'Heavy Water' has already been made into a little movie at the studio of a local collage-animator Larry Jordan." Letter to Kynaston McShine, 27 April 1965, BL.

³⁶³ In 1962 Jess painted two especially dark pictures: *If All The World Were Paper And All The Water Sink* and *Montana Xibalba: Translation #2*. Bruce Conner fled to Mexico the same year, which began with a United States embargo against Cuba and ended with the Cuban Missile Crisis. "I was running from death," Conner wrote Michael McClure. "It was called BOMB and war and hate surrounding and I finally realized there is no talk left and the end inevitable" Conner, letter to Michael McClure, spring 1962, Bruce Conner Papers, BL.

popular in the first decade of the twentieth century. 364 This moment saw the birth of the term *spectator*, but these new spectators did not intuitively comprehend filmic sequence, so films were didactic (again per Jess's title), mimicking other, more familiar forms like the magic lantern. 365 "There should be sequence," instructs a 1904 film catalogue, "each part leading to the next with increasing interest, reaching the most interesting point at the climax, which should end the film." In a nod to that subtext of climax and finale, the penultimate image in Jess's series is the mushroom cloud, taken from the same Life photograph of the explosion in the desert introduced above (figs. 108, 119). "The fastmoving action usually rose in a straight line from one climax to another," one source explains, "resolving itself in a beating or an explosion." Like Conner's *Crossroads*, Heavy Water is a film that understands the deep contradiction of its subject, its representational double bind. Jess dusts off an older form of entertainment, one in which an audience needed to be taught how narrative functions, for his didactic demonstration that the story, and the world, are ending. Jess's insistence on storytelling is part of what sets him apart from the pop treatments of the mushroom cloud, which focus instead on the image's iconicity. In the hands of Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist the mushroom cloud is an icon, a pure sign, and it receives the same artistic treatment as any other pop icon: the mushroom cloud picture is made with the same silkscreen painting technique Warhol used for Marilyn or Liz, and the same dot matrix Lichtenstein used for Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck. As a pure sign it occupies with ease the same visual field as an apple-cheeked blonde toddler or bowl of spaghetti. By contrast, Jess's film and its image of the mushroom cloud are at once theatrical entertainment and cautionary tale.

IV. Salvage in the Atomic Age

Jess's worldview, however, does not only derive from the iconicity of the mushroom cloud or its threat of annihilation, as his origin myth seems to insist. His work as an artist and his model of self are founded on the principle of salvage, which in turn emerges from his encounter with nuclear waste in Hanford, Washington. For Jess, as for most Americans, the atomic bomb was experienced only indirectly. It remained an abstraction: an imminent threat or deterrent, an aestheticized sublime, and a pop cultural icon. Even fallout, ever present in the pages of *Life*, was invisible, an absurdity pointed to by Rosenquist's appropriation of the umbrella in *F-111* as "protection" against what is essentially deadly air. But nuclear waste was part of Jess's daily life at Hanford in 1948 and 1949, several years after the bombs had been dropped and the war had ended. In the letter to Jonathan Weisman cited above, in which Jess claims his involvement with

³⁶⁴ See, for example, *The Silent Cinema Reader*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 83; Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 133; and *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Thomas Schatz (London and New York: Routledge, 2004): 26-7.

³⁶⁵ Miriam Hansen writes about the emergence of the term spectator in *Babel and Babylon:* Spectatorship in American Silent Film (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). See also *The Silent Cinema Reader*, 80-3.

³⁶⁶ Grieveson and Kramer, *The Silent Cinema Reader*, 79.

³⁶⁷ Schatz, Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, 27.

nuclear science was inconsequential and his mental connections with it willfully erased, he goes on to name the realization that convinced him to abandon science:

And more and more I came to contemplate that utter impasse that confronts all production of nuclear materials: namely, the impossibility of safe (for the planet earth) disposal of radioactive long-lived wastes. So I turnd [*sic*] to the playing field that had beckoned to me since childhood, and there I've been engaged for going on 50 years. I can hardly explain it more clearly. ³⁶⁸

Jess's fears were well founded. The Hanford Site, 500,000 acres of scrubland, primarily used for sheep grazing, on the Columbia River in eastern Washington State, is now one of the most contaminated places on earth, and the most contaminated in North America. Like Oak Ridge, Hanford's appeal to government planners was as an under-populated, remote parcel of land with plentiful electricity and water. 369 Built with haste by DuPont for the United States government, and managed by General Electric after the war, the Hanford Engineering Works became the world's first plutonium production facility (fig. 123). A massive industrial complex with multiple reactors, processing plants, and hundreds of support buildings, Hanford was oriented more towards industrial production than scientific research, and the site employed more engineers than scientists. It was difficult to find men and women willing to come to Hanford, "the flattest, most lonesome territory I have ever seen," according to one worker, so plagued by sandstorms that "when the wind blew you wouldn't be able to see across the street" (fig. 124). 370 Hanford was a dismal place, a tough frontier town in which contamination was a constant concern.³⁷¹ It was also the "workhorse" of the nuclear industry, producing 75 tons of weapons-grade plutonium between 1944 and 1988, with each gram of this plutonium generating 8,000 gallons of radioactive byproduct materials, or waste.³⁷²

When Jess was at Hanford, in the early years of the Cold War, the brief was simply to produce as much plutonium as possible, regardless of the consequences. Those consequences have been dire. According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, 177 buried storage tanks contain 53 million gallons of solid radioactive waste, of which one million gallons has already leaked into the ground and groundwater of the Columbia River basin. In addition to the storage tanks, gaseous radioactive wastes at Hanford were dispersed through emissions into the air, and liquid wastes released directly

³⁶⁸ Letter to Jonathan Weisman, 25 August 1994, BL.

Rhodes, 497. For Hanford's history, see also Michele Gerber, *On the Home Front: The Cold War Legacy of the Hanford Nuclear Site* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); John M. Findlay and Bruce Hevly, *Atomic Frontier Days: Hanford and the American West* (Seattle: Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest in association with University of Washington Press, 2011); and Daniel Grossman, "Hanford and Its Early Radioactive Atmospheric Releases," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 85 (January 1994): 6-14.

³⁷⁰ Findlay and Hevly, 21-2.

Rhodes, 499. "Wash it, scrub it, paint it, check it, and sometimes dispose of it. I never cleaned so much stuff that already looked cleaned," recalls one Hanford worker. Gerber, 51.

Findlay and Hevly, 43 and 34.

http://www.ecy.wa.gov/features/hanford/hanfordecon.html

into the ground. Of the three forms of waste, by far the greatest threat was from gases emitted into the atmosphere. And of these airborne emissions, Iodine-131 was the most toxic and released in the greatest quantities from the stacks of Hanford's processing plants. Iodine-131 seeks the thyroid when it enters the body, which leads to cancer. Workers at Hanford had more than 70 times the recommended iodine levels in the thyroid.³⁷⁴ At Hanford, Jess worked to scrub excess Iodine-131 from airborne emissions. His job, then, was to attempt to mitigate the most toxic aspect of the most toxic process at what is now the most toxic site in the nation. This was what he did, every day, for months. It is striking that in the face of this profound abstraction (scrubbing air) that his subsequent artistic project would become so adamantly figurative. Even more important, salvage became a vital condition of production for this artist over the next fifty years. We would do well to recall Jess's words that opened this chapter: "All my work...comes from salvaging," he tells us. "It is all about rescuing or resurrecting images." ³⁷⁵ Jess's commitment to salvage was not only a reaction to the trauma of his wartime experience, but must be understood in a larger frame, as a form of world building. Jess salvages images cast aside, rotting, neglected, unseen by others, for this world, and works to find the place within his self-made constellation in which they belong. This labor was pleasurable: tracing the path of a found image back in time, placing it in relation to others in order to prompt new correspondences, weaving in more and more components of a world or image of the world that, because the work of salvage is never done, will always remain a work in progress. The work of a life as a work in progress, as the work of salvage, is the concern of the chapter's next section, which addresses the most selfreflexive, self-examining work Jess undertook: the series called the Salvages.

V. Signd and Resignd: The Salvages

It is not the age it is the wearing. -Robert Duncan, "Salvage: An Evening Piece" 376

There are eight paintings in the Salvages series.³⁷⁷ They date from 1971 to 1988—roughly a seventeen-year span. The series follows the Translations, the first group of which Jess finished near the end of 1970 and which debuted at Federico Quadrani's Odyssia Gallery in New York in May of 1971.³⁷⁸ After completing the last Translation painting in December 1970, Jess wrote to Quadrani of his hopes to finally begin *Narkissos*, "after these 26 stages of journeymanship," but delayed the project yet again to

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³⁷⁴ Grossman, 6.

³⁷⁵ Paste-up is Jess's preferred term for his collages, and assemblies are what he called his three-dimensional assemblages. Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 25-6.

³⁷⁶ Gerber, 78.

³⁷⁷ According to Christopher Wagstaff, there are technically nine salvages, if the painting "*Danger, Don't Advance*" is counted. This painting was unfinished at the time of Jess's death in 2004. Letter to the author, April 25, 2013.

The passage discussed in chapter 2 is from Jess's letter to Federico Quadrani in which he demurs from attending this opening: "Even close friends look at me uncomprehendingly as I try to explain how floods of images oppress and drown me—I must be a freak of nature, for it appears that everyone else joyously assimilates every new scene and impression as an easy addition to his psyche or else can shield it out as dispensable or irrelevant—The mere thought of New York City's swarm is frightful to me." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 7 May 1971, BL.

turn to the Salvages, which he went so far as to call the second stage of Translations.³⁷⁹ By late 1971, he was at work on the first two Salvages, and painted five in the series over the next three years. The last three paintings appeared more sporadically, in 1981, 1987, and 1988. All eight Salvages were made the same way. For each, Jess began with a canvas painted some years earlier. Usually these paintings were Jess's own, though at least two were canvases painted by others: "A Panic That Can Still Come Upon Me": Salvages II, 1963/1972, began as an anonymous "trouvé Sunday painting," and "...When We Will Tempt The Frailty Of Our Powers...": Salvages IV, 1952-54/1972-74, was a gift from another painter in 1951 for Jess to use as he wished (figs. 125, 126). 380 Like the Translations, the Salvages are given literary quotations as titles and come appended with textual fragments that Jess handwrote on the verso of each canvas. These are reproduced opposite the images of the paintings in the retrospective catalogue.³⁸¹ Each painting has two dates: the first is the year in which the painting was initially made, and the second is the year it was painted over, or salvaged. The first painting in the series, for example, is titled and dated as follows: Cold Pastorale On A Theme Of The Cyclops: Salvages I, 1964/1971 (fig. 127). Thus in 1971 Jess "picked up and radically used" a canvas he had painted seven years earlier (this is Duncan's apt phrasing). 382

The Salvages are tightly bound to Jess's other undertakings, especially the Translations. All but one of the Salvages originated between 1963-65, a three-year period that was mined heavily. The mid-1960s also saw Jess feverishly producing the Translations: 10 in that series were painted in 1965 alone. As this chronology demonstrates, the Salvages began alongside the Translations, and when Jess "radically used" them, he introduced found images using a process he called translation. Jess selected an image, traced it on a scrap of paper, and in his words, "translate[d it] in a leap into the painting-space," sometimes with the aid of a projector. The photograph of a lion that Jess traced, flipped, and painted on the last Salvage canvas demonstrates this process (figs. 128-130). Conversely, the Translations also involve salvage: they

Letter to Federico Quadrani, 18 December 1970, BL. Although they unspooled over nearly two decades, Jess may have selected all of the recycled canvases up front, as he did for Translations. In the 1974 letter in which he introduces *The 5th Never of Old Lear*, Jess writes of his intention to begin "the smallest of the remaining <u>Salvages</u> by next week." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 24 May 1974, BL. Regarding the connection to the Translations, Jess writes, "I begin to see these of the second stage of Translations—as Xtallizations—for the images added and resultant further paint are like crystallizing nodes in a matrix. Alchemical then." Letter to Federico Quadrani, 9 April 1972, BL.

³⁸⁰ In his chronology of this painting Jess writes, "1951 Brock Brockway gave me one of his unfinished abstract expressionist oil paintings, for me to use as I wished." Box 21, folder 7, BL. ³⁸¹ I was able to inspect the versos of two of the Salvages, and on both the text was handwritten in Jess's script.

³⁸² Kevin Power, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan about Poetry and Painting," 25.

³⁸³ The exception is the canvas given to him by Brock Brockway.

³⁸⁴ Letter to Federico Quadrani, 12 January 1974, BL.

This last painting in the series dates from the year Duncan died, and the lion, sometimes a symbol for Duncan, may refer to him here. The full quote, from *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, reads, "Torture the eagle till she weeps and the Lion be weakened and bleed to Death." 208. Thomas Vaughan, *The Works of Thomas Vaughan: Mystic and Alchemist*, ed. Edward Arthur Waite (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1968): 208.

salvage images that, as Jess puts it, "were close to the end of their life sitting and rotting in a used bookstore, and they have spoken up out of the matrix of images that surround them." Drawing on individual scraps of paper, and then translating those drawings into a larger composition, also anticipates his process in *Narkissos*.

Not much is known about the recycled painting used in *Salvages I*, which measures 36 x 30 inches (fig. 127). We do have Jess's description of it when he recounts launching the series: "Salvages I opend [sic] my new path by salvaging a romantic nonobjective painting that had ceased speaking to me years before."387 By referring to the painting as romantic and nonobjective. Jess puts it in the category of paintings he made in the 1950s and early 1960s that ranged from the atmospheric landscape *To Corbett*, 1951 (so named for his San Francisco Art Institute teacher, Edward Corbett) to the far less "nonobjective" If All the World Were Paper, from 1962 (figs. 131, 111). 388 The first Salvage painting, replete with vase of roses, nearby toad, and surrounding landscape, is a garden scene, unabashedly romantic. Jess knows that his garden will be recognized immediately as belonging to a genre. The Salvages present a model of self engaged with past images, but this painting's recursive engagement is with the tradition of landscape painting, and with painting in general. The expectation of plenitude, however, the glimpse into a self-contained world that the garden signals, is not on offer here. The thick, bright red gash of paint that interrupts the surface, the awkward staging of depth (especially the trio of toad, satellite, and striding man), and the erotic scene on the Greek stamnos are all ways in which the painting sabotages lineages of type and tradition.³⁸⁹

What is being salvaged here? Jess's process, his ethics, his worldview, his sense of family and belonging, and his daily life are all predicated on salvage. "It is all about rescuing or resurrecting images." So certainly, images are being salvaged. They leap into the painting, eager to find a new space of belonging. But Jess attempts to salvage his older paintings, too. These were, simply put, failed pictures, unsuccessful pictures that lingered for years in the liminal space of the studio. Jess did not think he was a great painter, and often wished for greater technical facility. He speaks openly of not having the skills to achieve what his mind envisioned. This is why he used images that already existed, and why his rescue of them is not selfless: their insertion into the discarded

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³⁸⁶ Auping, 26. This quote begins by Jess making this connection explicit: "The Translations are also a form of salvage in a way ..."

³⁸⁷ Letter to I. Michael Danoff, 11 November 1993, BL.

³⁸⁸ These are the first and last paintings included in the retrospective catalogue section, "Nonobjective and Romantic Paintings."

³⁸⁹ Jess wrote a rare, lengthy explanation of the painting to Quadrani, in which he describes the topmost rose, which remains from the earlier canvas, as calling up for him Odilon Redon's *The Cyclops*. Jess goes on to say that he agrees with the anthroposophist (he may mean Rudolf Steiner) that "the blinding of the Cyclops is a cover image for the destruction of the inner vision of Western man by the thirst of Greek rationality, & in later times technologic infatuation." The other images in the painting refer to various world myths about the inner eye and wisdom. Letter to Federico Quadrani, 18 December 1971, BL.

³⁹⁰ "Any virtuosity I may have rests in extended patience," he wrote to Quadrani in 1970, a line that becomes especially poignant in the context of the long retrospective view of the Salvages. Letter to Federico Quadrani, 23 July 1970, BL.

canvases is what allows the earlier, unsuccessful pictures to be recuperated. ³⁹¹ "This is a retrieval and repetition of the would-be-lost rather than the ready-made," Briony Fer writes about Eva Hesse. Fer argues that the "would-be-lost" is a remainder, a leftover or offshoot from process, whereas Jess's "would-be-lost" are the discarded images, but also his own past paintings, that he salvages. Yet Fer's words are apposite for Jess: "The process is endless, in the same way that the work of salvage continually recreates itself—as a means of redeeming the object as a fundamentally precarious yet structured thing—without ever making it final or conclusive; to redeem without the rhetoric of redemption." What allows Jess to keep his process endless is his slow pace and massive stores of unused materials. Finished works may be sent into the world via the Odyssia Gallery, but the work of salvage, and the work of the collector, is never done.

Salvage is not simply a recuperative operation. It is also a retrospective operation, for the Salvages display all of Jess's artistic techniques on a single surface. Consider a painting like "Attention Which Is The Eye Of The Heart": Salvages III, 1963/1972, the title of which derives from the writings of the fourteenth century Sufi mystic, al-Jili (fig. 132). The painting is medium-sized, 24 x 30 inches. Its ground is one of Jess's earlier paintings, a canvas from 1963 that may have looked something like a paler *To Corbett* and into which Jess inserts a range of images and painterly techniques. The most dramatic is the thick plume of black paint smearing the center of the painting, from the depths of which emerge two masked divers carrying amphorae. To the right, a male surfer coasts with ease into the picture, while on the left another surfer (this one's form is a bit more plausible) bends back as if recoiling from pair of agitated stallions above. Below this group, a diagrammatic illustration demonstrating the "Position for holding victim and reentering boat" is copied into the painting, white border and caption to boot. Nearby a group of spectators in silhouette watch the scene, while a smattering of images from ancient Greece (Hercules) and Egypt (the ibis) appear in the top half of the painting. What unifies these disparate, disjointed players on the field is a pervasive figuring of paint as water, an alchemical transformation not unlike the way that the laborious buildup of painted globules on the surface of the Translations can make paint seem like something entirely other than itself.

While *Salvages III* assembles techniques from both the nonobjective paintings and the Translations on its surface, the dominant mode and structuring principle of the Salvages is collage. The prototype for the Salvages was a painting into which Jess inserted a small landscape found in a Salvation Army store—in other words, one painting glued onto another. And for *Salvages II* (fig. 125), Jess excised the tree in the center from the surrounding canvas.³⁹³ Approaching these paintings as if they are collages

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³⁹¹ As Jess explained to Auping, "What my mind wanted to see happen would require skills that I could not possibly use. Therefore, I had to use images that had already been made for me. They came and asked to be used in the way I wanted to. So collages were the sensible answer to the problem." Auping, 11.

³⁹² Briony Fer, "The Work of Salvage: Eva Hesse's Latex Works," in *Eva Hesse* (San Francisco, New Haven and London: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Yale University Press, 2002): 87 and 94.

³⁹³ "However, the prototype (for me) had happend back in 1961 with "Thethys' Festival," where a small dark landscape found in a Salvation Army store inspired me to inset it as the distance for a foreground mythic scene framing it. At that time I hadn't realized that I was also indulging in

demonstrates fluidity among media, a certain transgression or willful misunderstanding that is a key component of this practice, and provides a link to peers like Johns and Rauschenberg. Moreover, the principle of salvage is one of collage: the bringing together of a selection of items in one place, and tying them together.

The Salvages are backward glancing, the result of "a moving point of view that does not forget its own history," as Jess eloquently describes it. ³⁹⁴ In the early 1970s, Jess and Duncan were in a retrospective mood, a self-reflective, stock taking mood. Both men were in their fifties, and both could look back on a quarter-century of work and a life together. Some friends had been lost, while other friendships had been irrevocably damaged. The poet Jack Spicer, who met Duncan in Berkeley in 1946 and was close with the pair early in their relationship, had a painful falling out with Jess and Duncan in 1962, and passed away in 1965 at the age of 40. The Scottish poet Helen Adam, whose portrait Jess painted in 1958 and who inspired Duncan to write ballads, moved away to New York in 1964.³⁹⁶ Duncan and the poet Denise Levertov eventually ended a long friendship over their disagreement about poetry as a form of protest, which Duncan adamantly opposed. The Vietnam War, the occasion for this argument, dragged on, inciting Duncan's scathing poem "Up Rising, Passages 25": "The all-American boy in the cockpit / loosing his flow of napalm...for the victory of American will over its victims, / releasing his store of destruction over the enemy, / in terror and hatred of all communal things, of communion, / of communism."³⁹⁷ The poem was published in Duncan's 1968 collection Bending the Bow, after which the poet self-imposed a fifteenyear publishing hiatus. ³⁹⁸ Yet in 1972 Duncan reissued *Caesar's Gate*, first published in 1955, with a new preface and accompanied by new collages by Jess. This was right when Jess was in the thick of the Salvages, picking up and radically using his own past

appreciative criticism, thru expanding the painting and slightly altering it as well. Thus the idea of 'Salvages' although started hadn't been stated." Letter to I. Michael Danoff, 11 November 1993,

³⁹⁴ Joseph Simas, "Now Now Jess!" Arts Magazine 65 (Summer 1991): 52. Backward-glancing is a term taken from Kitaj, who described Jess's work as "a backward-glancing thing of alchemical beauty." Kitaj, "Foreword," in Auping, Jess: Paste-Ups (and Assemblies) 1951-1983, 9. ³⁹⁵ Lisa Jarnot sketches the unfolding of the feud in Robert Duncan: The Ambassador from Venus, 217-19.

³⁹⁶ The Jess painting is titled *The Adam Family in Nesbittland: Imaginary Portrait #18: Helen* Adam, 1958. Adam, perhaps inspired by Jess, made astonishing collages of female models in magazine reproduction, onto which she pasted various creatures, such as bats and snakes. ³⁹⁷ Duncan, Bending the Bow, 81.

³⁹⁸ For Duncan's reasoning behind this consult Michael Duncan or James Maynard, quoted here at length: "This self-imposed hiatus is understandable. First of all, he had just completed a prolific run of publications; in 1968 alone he published five books of new and previous work, including The Truth and Life of Myth, Names of People ("Stein imitations from 1952"), Bending the Bow, The First Decade: Selected Poems 1940-1950, and Derivations: Selected Poems 1950-1956. Furthermore, The Opening of the Field, Roots and Branches, and Bending the Bow were all books composed around fairly consistent images and ideas of organic growth, a trope against which Duncan the poet of open forms had begun to chafe. One of the presumed benefits of waiting, Duncan once stated in an interview, was to create an undetermined space in which he could 'undo the heavy business of thematic composition' and once again open up the field to different "possibilities of writing." Maynard, 248.

material. Clearly the two men shared this retrospective, self-examining mode during these years: it manifests in Duncan's hiatus and return to material some twenty years old, and Jess's collaging of his former artistic modes into a group of paintings whose title is charged, even fraught: the Salvages.

Although Duncan's next book, Ground Work: Before the War, was not published until 1984, he had written and circulated a prospectus for it as early as 1971, the same year Jess began the Salvages. Ground Work was a deeply reflective project, in which he set out those works he considered foundational, whether by him or by other poets (this kind of excess recurs in Duncan, and finds its parallel in Jess's excessive image collecting). "Before the War," the book's subtitle, refers not to temporality but to one's position as a witness in the face of war, specifically the Vietnam War. 399 Ground Work was also "an intense engagement with old age and dying," Duncan explained in a 1976 interview. 400 In 1977, Jess penned a biography for his Dallas Museum of Fine Arts exhibition catalogue, referring to himself in the third person. Chronicling the development of the Salvages, he characterizes the earlier canvases using the very same term devised by Duncan for his forthcoming publication, groundwork: "Resuming work on oils earlier abandoned, he began an on-going set called Salvages, in which images are translated into the often nonobjective groundwork." The two men use the term somewhat differently, but they share a sense of groundwork as what remains when one clears away what has been produced over the years.

Signd And Resignd: Salvages VII, 1965/1987 is smaller than the works discussed so far—it is only 16 x 20 inches—but it has a darker mood than the woozy romanticism of Salvages I or the watersport antics of Salvages III (fig. 133). This is due to a more autumnal palette and the stern gaze of the man at right, who, yawning cat in his lap, leans back to observe the scene at hand: two young boys pause to watch a sidewalk painter, and a heated street fight dominates the center of the painting. Jess likely took his title from a passage in Duncan's poem "Over There," included in Ground Work: "In the halls of air interim away from you I have created out of all the old poetry left over I am. Over and out. Signd again. Resignd. Tired again. Retired." The pun of Signd And Resignd is well-suited to Jess: the dual meaning of "resigned" as both signing again, which is what the Salvages do, and the state of being resigned, which is how Duncan feels. Just a few pages later, Duncan amplifies this sentiment in "Rites of Passage: II," which is even more affecting in its deep exhaustion and vulnerability: "What can I say / when song's

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Writing and learning my letters before the decade of publishing 1960-1970, of the three books, *The Opening of the Field, Roots and Branches*, and *Bending the Bow*. The extension of the poem as a field in process, the ramifications below and above the trunk of vegetative life, and the vector force of the connection-spring of the tension and the intent: these still appear 'before' me; all the poetry before *me* before me. With the Field, the Tree, and the Bow, before me, I propose to return to the Ground-Work (GROUND WORK, the title of the fourth book then! instead of TRANSMISSIONS which I had taken for the title)." Duncan, "A Prospectus / for the prepublication issue of GROUND WORK / to certain friends of the poet / Jan. 31, 1971," 1. Michael Duncan writes, "As citizens we are placed *before* the war itself, in this case Vietnam." Duncan, "Introduction," in *Ground Work: Before the War / In the Dark*, x.

⁴⁰⁰ Peters and Trachtenberg, "A Conversation with Robert Duncan (1976)," 111.

⁴⁰¹ "Biography," compiled by Jess, in *Translations, Salvages, Paste-Ups, By Jess*, npg.

demanded? –I've had my fill of song? / My longing to sing grows full. Time's emptied me." Duncan's confession teeters anxiously between metaphors of fullness and emptiness: a longing to participate now sated, and an emptying out of self over time. So too does Jess clear away the groundwork of the Salvages, only to fill that space with ever more rescued images. Jess and Duncan are artists of inclusivity: they work by collecting and accumulating and craft self-made genealogies of love and influence through acts of appropriation. They part ways here, however, for Jess's use of an image's groundwork as a space to populate with rescued images salvages the older work, which differs from Duncan's exhausted oscillation between full and empty: "My longing to sing grows full," his melancholy at near-debilitating levels. "Time's emptied me."

VI. Vandalism and Repair

Jess is always a collector: a collector of images and, in the Salvages, a collector of his own artistic history and technical repertoire. But the work of collecting does not begin merely on the picture plane, with gluing cut images into place. For Jess it began in San Francisco, at the AS-IS-St. Vincent on Folsom and 14th streets, at the Salvation Army (apt for the work of salvage), at Goodwill, at the salvage warehouses across the bay in Oakland. 404 Jess routinely made the rounds of various second-hand stores, looking for material that would speak to him amidst the mass of discarded stuff "sitting and rotting" around him. Mostly he collected images, from every possible source: books, magazines, photographs, and postcards. Many were filed away on the studio's shallow shelves in accordance with an elaborate, highly detailed filing system devised by the artist to classify and store them for further use. 405 Here is just one label, which details the contents of three vertical shelves: Bee, Wasp, Fly Ladybug / Fossil Insect, Caterpillar, Coccoon [sic], Butterfly-Moth, Dragonfly / Slug-Snail, Ant-Termite, Spider, Centipede-Scorpion, Water Bug, Beetle (fig. 134). Despite the artist's care in filing it, the vast majority of image material that Jess collected was never used: piles of images of roses and thick stacks of Cézanne reproductions and reams of cigarette advertisements in magazines never found a second life (fig. 135). And there are the many books, thick, encyclopedic volumes of images with titles like One Hundred Crowned Masterpieces of Modern Painting. Opening this volume only to see a woman's midsection cut away, leaving an irregular hole of blankness, provides its own kind of shock (fig. 136). This is not just due to the vandalism done to her (more on this in a moment), but also because we are witnessing the rest of the image—what was *not* chosen.

For an item to be salvaged it first must be removed from its context, although the residue of this context is everywhere on the salvaged remainder. Asger Jorn, who in his Modifications painted over and within secondhand, kitsch paintings purchased at flea

⁴⁰⁵ Auping calls the act of filing a "rehearsal" for the making of collages. Auping, 16.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 73. Singing is also invoked by the satirical Byron lines that accompany the painting: "The Angels were all singing out of tune, and hoarse with having little else to do, excepting to wind up the sun and moon or curb a runaway young star or two." Lord Byron, "The Vision of Judgment," in *The Vision of Judgment 1822* (Menston, England: The Scolar Press, 1973): 6. The citation is Jess's own.

⁴⁰⁴ Jess often writes of his shopping trips in his letters to Duncan. See for example Jess, letter to Robert Duncan, 30 April 1967, 8 May 1971, 4 May 1976, and 2 July 1978.

markets, knew this. So did Jacques Villeglé and Raymond Hains, who six decades ago began cutting the layered and shredded posters from the streets of Paris, affixing them to canvas, and exhibiting them as works of art. When Jess paints over his own canvases or cuts images out of books it is an act of vandalism, but it is equally an act of repair, a recuperation through selection, or *culling*. Jess described *The 5th Never of Old Lear*. we recall, as a work made "using the old lovely 18th century engravings culld [sic] from a vandalized Shakespeare folio." 406 Pleasure may have been derived from vandalizing these outmoded volumes, from illustrations of Shakespeare to the dubious *One Hundred* Crowned Masterpieces of Modern Painting, whose description of the aforementioned painting of a flower girl begins, "All civilized people (and doubtless many savages) have loved flowers." But this is vandalism in the service of culling, Culling, the Oxford English Dictionary tells us, is the act of "selecting or picking," and has a particular valence in farming as the work of separating out the best animals in a flock or herd.⁴⁰⁷ The culled animals were the refuse, so, unsurprisingly, Jess reverses the meaning of the word: he culls what he considers to be the best images from the vandalized folio, those that "have spoken up out of the matrix of images that surround them." Salvage is a rescue operation that may begin in vandalism, but ends in repair and recuperation. It lifts the image out of context or even out of circulation, but in order to renew meaning rather than destroy it. This misuse of the operation of vandalism is similar to Jess's misuse of translation in the series of that name. But salvage is also a recuperation of the outmoded remainders of the world: the relevance and import of Boydell's Shakespeare folio is undone through the passage of time as much as it through Jess's scissors. Things in the world wax and wane over time, and come in and out of focus. Jess was often (though not always) drawn to the neglected or unfashionable—what his current moment had culled from history. These are the remainders that he salvages. When he does choose popular material current in his time, he attempts to save the material from itself by unlocking its inherent potential and releasing it from the stultifying and narrow range of acceptability for how and what images say. This is true for his Dadaist slice-and-dice of Dick Tracy comic strips, *détourned* into his alter ago Tricky Cad (fig. 137). It is also true for his grotesque refashioning of urbane advertisements for Modess sanitary napkins or Lord Calvert blended whiskey, both of which he found in *Life* magazine (figs. 138-140).

This chapter concludes by briefly considering vandalism and repair through the lens of the activity of the collector, as articulated by Walter Benjamin and elaborated on by Hannah Arendt, whom Duncan and his cohort encountered when Arendt taught at Berkeley in the spring of 1955. 409 Perhaps no one better understood the motivations of

⁴⁰⁶ Jess, letter to Federico Quadrani, 24 May 1974, BL.

⁴⁰⁷ "culling, n.1". OED Online. December 2012. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45659?rskey=GicxgW&result=1&isAdvanced=false (accessed December 31, 2012). The metaphor of the field, discussed in chapter 2, adds a further dimension to this language's evocation of the agricultural labor.

⁴⁰⁸ Auping. 26.

Robin Blaser draws our attention to this meeting: "We discovered *The Origins of Totalitarianism* when she taught at Berkeley in 1955. In the 1950 preface to that book, she argues that 'human dignity needs a new guarantee' and concludes: 'The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality

the collector than Benjamin. The correspondences between Benjamin and Jess run deep and broad: they shared a sense of building a materialist history that would find meaning in the margins, in the fragments, ruins, and quotations of modernity. They were backward-glancing collectors and collagists who resided near, but not in Surrealism. 410 "The true, greatly misunderstood passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive," Benjamin argued. 411 The collector wishes to protect the collected item, but also has a strong impulse to remove it from being classifiable within a world of things. He or she wants to destroy its context. Yet modernity has already done this for the collector: the modern collector, Arendt tells us, "only needed to bend down, as it were, to select his precious fragments from the pile of debris." This image of the modern collector as a creature who picks from the dross of history can so easily be mapped onto Jess, who sifts from the wreckage of a world shattered by the atomic bomb and the constant threat of annihilation of that world. Jess, who participated in that unfathomable endeavor, staged a break from it and wrapped that break in the protective blanket of an origin myth, and then spent a lifetime salvaging a world and model of self from the fragments surrounding him. The artist himself was salvaged by his self-appointed task of rescuing and resurrecting images.

The destructive impulse of the collector to pry a thing from its context is also a vandalism of tradition, or a vandalism of a normative picture of the world. "There is no more effective way," Arendt writes, "to break the spell of tradition than to cut out the 'rich and strange,' coral and pearls, from what had been handed down in one solid piece." Arendt is speaking of Kafka, within the context of Benjamin's writings on the author, though her words, "rich and strange" and coral and pearls, derive from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, echoing back to the Shakespearean past of this chapter's opening salvo. Arendt's words perfectly describe what Jess aims to do in everything he undertakes. The solid pieces in desperate need of breaking apart may be *Life* magazine, in its demonstrative imaging of a narrow normativity in the 1950s, or *One Hundred Crowned Masterpieces of Modern Painting*, whose crowns are far from secure. In other words, Jess salvaged what he perceived to be the rich and strange, coral and pearls, from life and art both, and refashioned them into a wholly new constellation of what the world might be, despite the great betrayal of that world by what the Manhattan Project produced.

in which we live'...I copy this out now with the same grief I felt when I first read it." Blaser, "Afterword," 44.

Full fathom five thy father lies:

Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange.

⁴¹⁰ "Backward-glancing" is taken from R.B. Kitaj. See fn. 95.

⁴¹¹ Walter Benjamin, as quoted by Hannah Arendt in "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940," *Illuminations*, 45. Benjamin's *Illuminations* and Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* were both in Jess and Duncan's library.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Ibid, 42.

⁴¹⁴ The passage is from Act I, Scene II of *The Tempest*:

Coda: The Philosophy of Put-Togethers

"There is an inherent mockery in collage," Harold Rosenberg wrote in a 1972 *New Yorker* essay. "The put-together"—this is Rosenberg's term for collage—"is like a painting, but without the effort of painting or the need to know how to paint." Not only does collage mock the labor and skill required to paint, but it also lacks intentionality. "Its materials," he continues, "besides being inexpensive, have the air of having been picked up by chance, so the collage seems to say to the spectator, 'See how easy it is to make a work of art." That its elements are chosen at random is simply one more insult on the heap of insults collage piles at the feet of advanced art, most notably painting.

Jess would have agreed with Rosenberg that collage handily circumvents the need to know how to paint. His turn to collage was strategic: he knew he could not capture certain images in paint. "If I use, say, a nineteenth-century engraving," he explained, "I'm not trying to evoke a replication of a nineteenth-century sensibility. I don't have the skill or knowledge to do that. I'm translating that image out of the nineteenth-century into my time, using what knowledge I do have, which is not enough."417 Jess admits this insufficiency of knowledge, presumably aware that it is compensated for by other skills and talents, not knowledge, but recognition of an image's hidden potential. But Rosenberg glimpses in collage something far more insidious than a dilettantish assault on painting, and later in his essay he makes clear what he perceives to be the real threat of collage: "Documents waved at hearings by Joseph McCarthy to substantiate his fictive accusations were a version of collage, as is the corpse of Lenin, inserted by Stalin into the Moscow mausoleum to authenticate his own contrived ideology." Collage, according to these highly charged, politicized examples, is not random, but purposeful: the medium allows for some of the most egregious fictions of the Cold War to be proclaimed and substantiated by providing a new context for the selected fragment, whether McCarthy's documents or Lenin's corpse. "Collage," Rosenberg concludes, "is the primary formula of the aesthetics of mystification developed in our time." The collagist, so this line of argument suggests, may fabricate a fictive whole through a canny use of parts.

Writing five years earlier, in 1967, the English critic Adrian Stokes likewise recognized collage's ability to combine fragments of the external world into a configuration that becomes more significant than that of any part. In other words, a collage is more than the sum of its parts. Stokes characterizes collage's relationship to painting as nothing less than a revolt, or what he describes as the "entire abandonment of the studied imitation on a painted surface of objects in the outside world," but he is less damming of the medium than Rosenberg. Instead he reads collage as both produced by and symptomatic of a shattered world, a world in which a combination of science and

⁴¹⁵ Harold Rosenberg, "Collage: Philosophy of Put-Togethers," *The New Yorker* (March 11, 1972).

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Auping, "An Interview with Jess," 22.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Adrian Stokes, "Collages," in *Reflections on the Nude* (London: Routledge, 1967): 314.

cultural bareness join forces to sublimate our shared myths of the physical world. 420 "Once," Stokes argues, "every form of knowledge and understanding tended to coalesce. They are more likely today to be disparate." 421

When the world no longer coheres, or when it is no longer possible to dream of a world that might cohere: this is the condition under which Jess engages in a form of making and living that can only be called collage. Collage structures his labor as a collector and his relationship to history. The materials of collage, Apollinaire tells us, are already "steeped in humanity." Collage also provides the visuality of both Jess's appropriation of the words of other speakers and his painterly methodology. Collage for Jess gestures towards world building, but is equally inscribed with failure, or the impossibility of cohesion. "We have had the medium of a life together," are the words by Duncan that introduce the first chapter of this dissertation, and the form of that life was collage. 422 Jess's collages evade the skills needed for painting, and they lengthen and circulate mythologies through their tropical profusion of signs and constant insistence on their pastness, but they are never random or duplicitous. Putting things together meant breaking up stale tautologies and inventing new ones, and unlocking alternative meanings in the process. In the alternatives practices of Jess and Duncan, collage is an undoing as much as a gluing together, and the collaged world of the household is a precarious refuge despite its careful construction, maintenance, and protection.

⁴²⁰ His language recalls some of Duncan's admonishments quoted earlier in this dissertation: that we live in "an environment that is not simply spiritually vacant...but polluted." Or that "Our whole American Way of Life is designed to save the householder from his household myths." ⁴²¹ Stokes, 322.

⁴²² "Our general lifestyle is collage," Duncan explained, once again collapsing the work of art and the work of life. Duncan, *A Poet's Mind*, 137.

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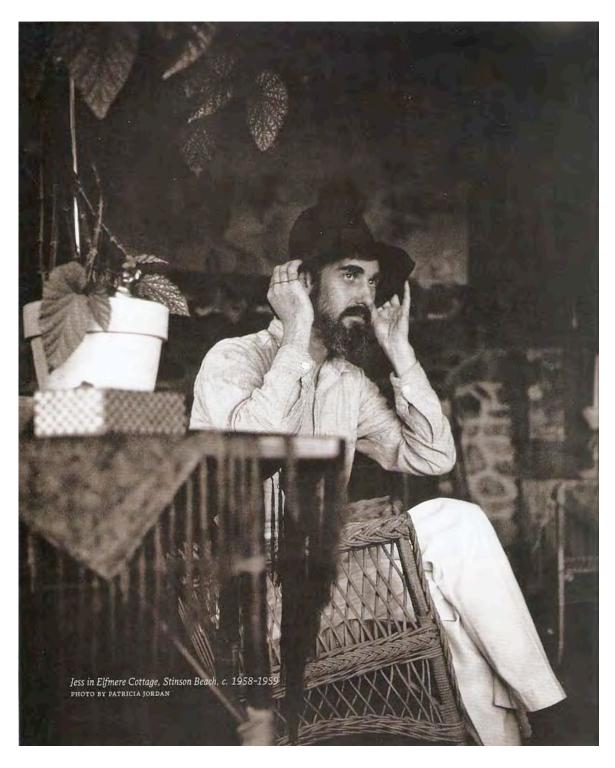


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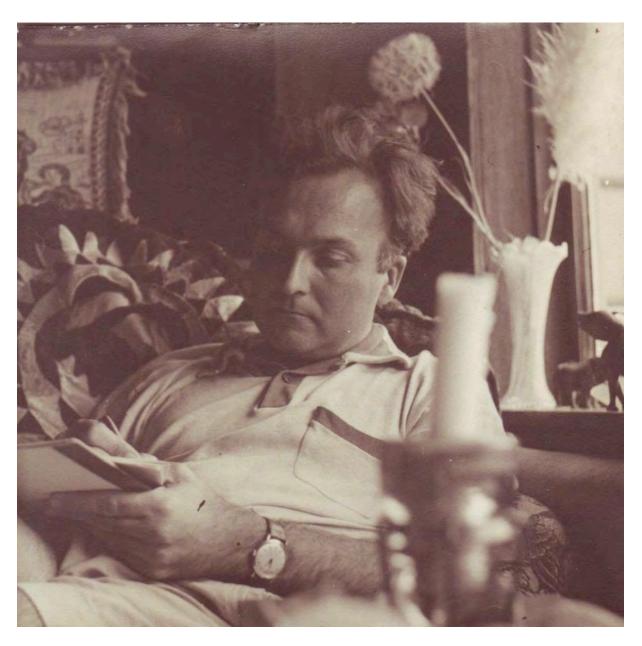


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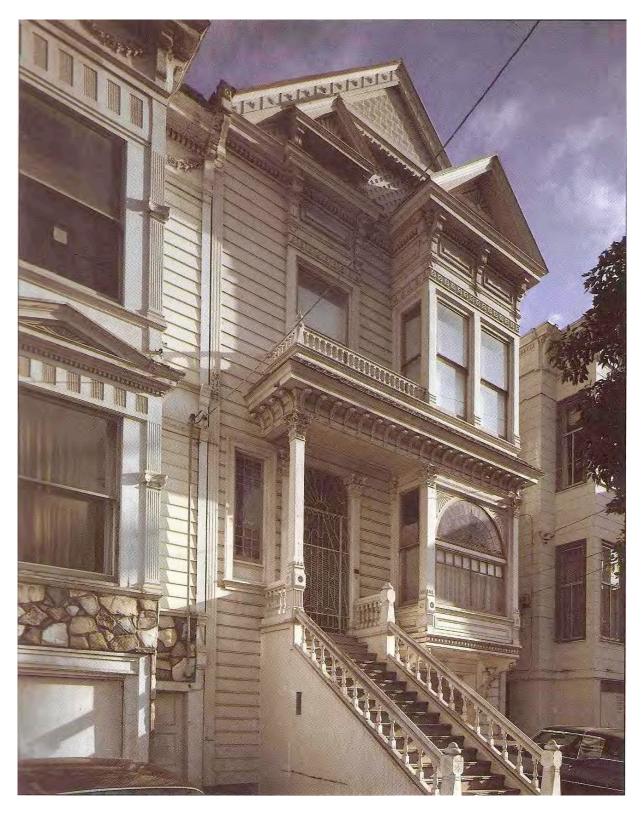


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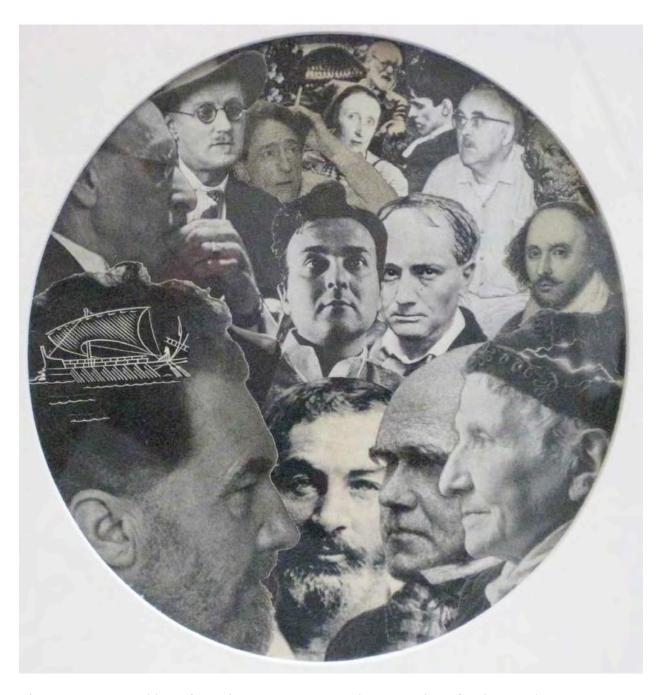


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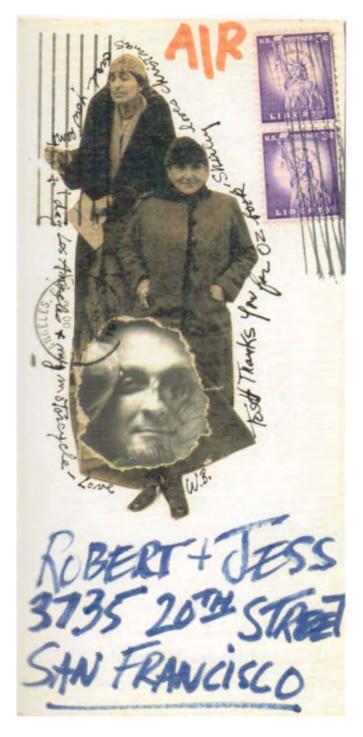


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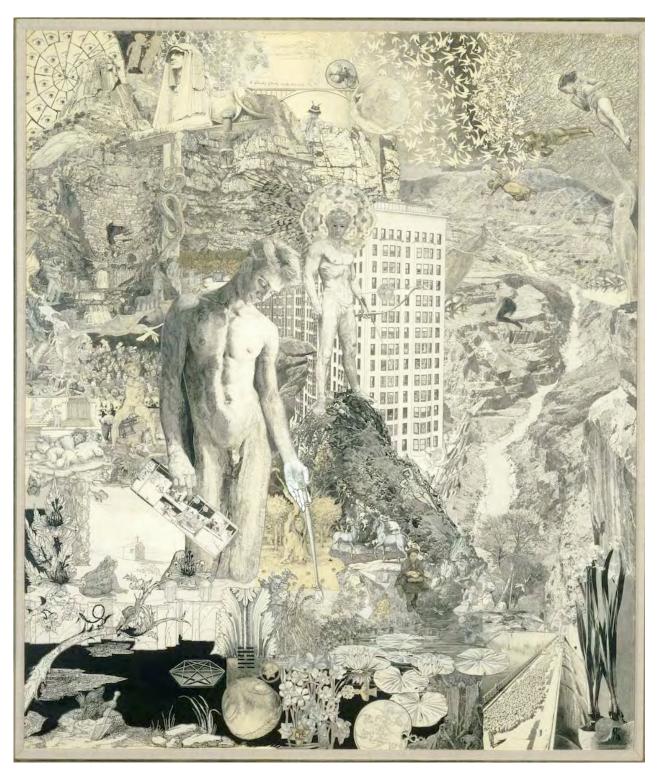


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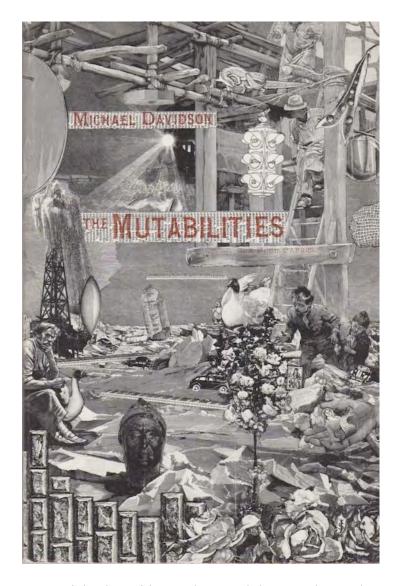


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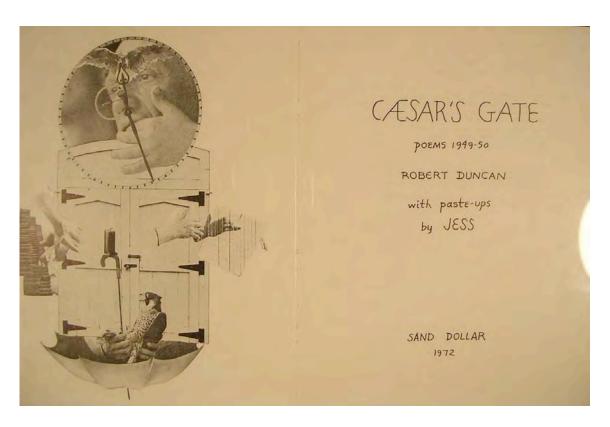


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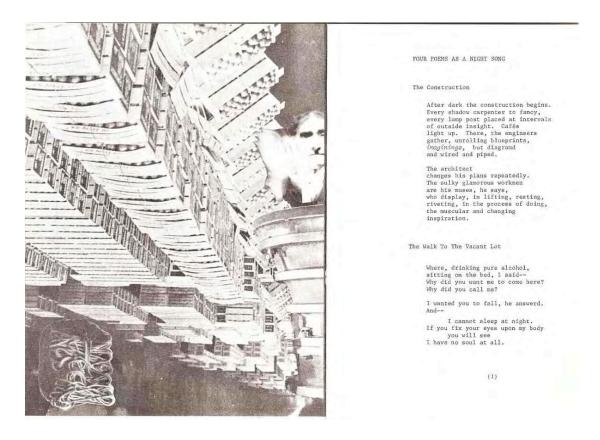


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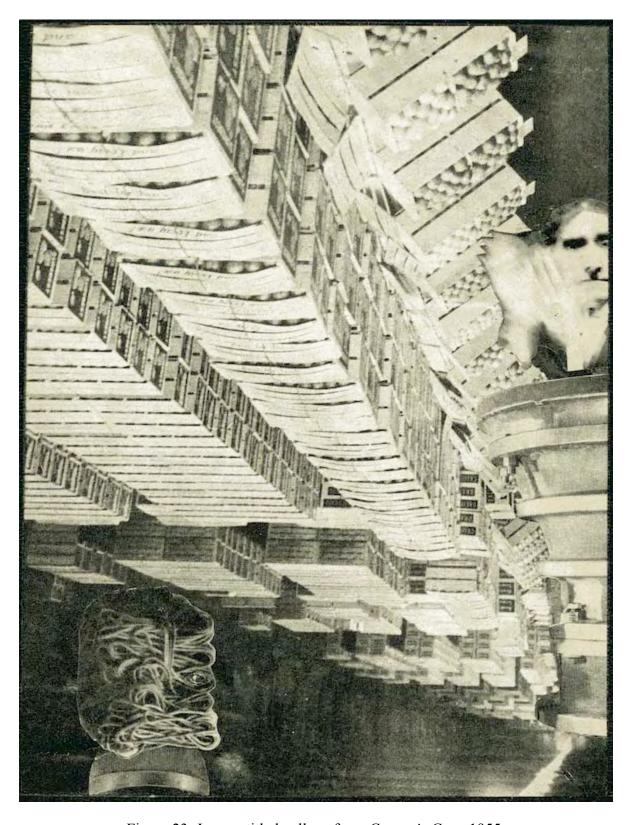


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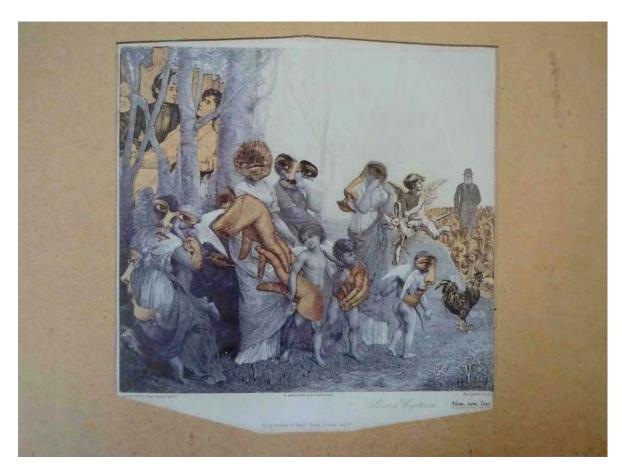


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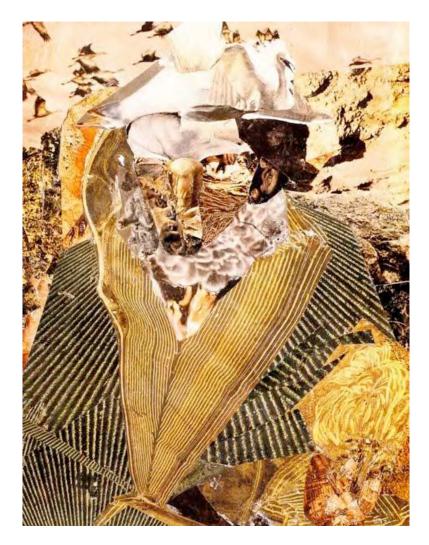


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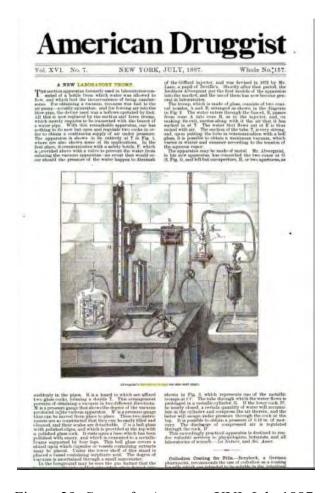


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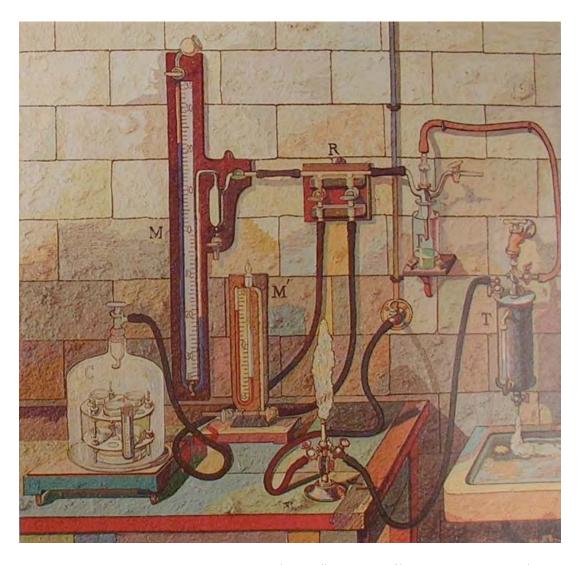


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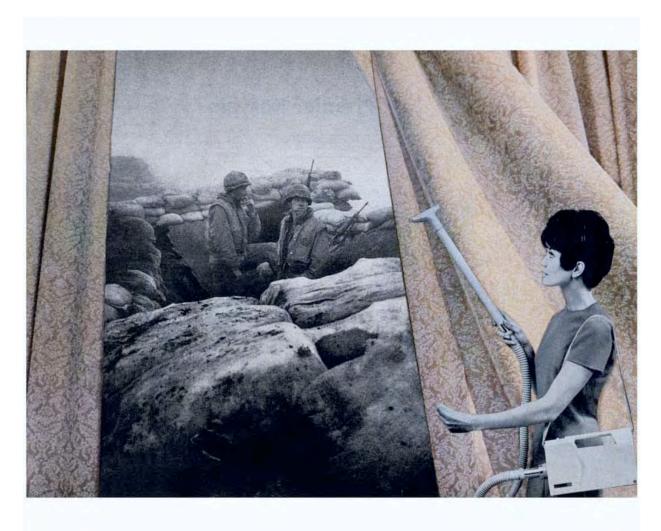


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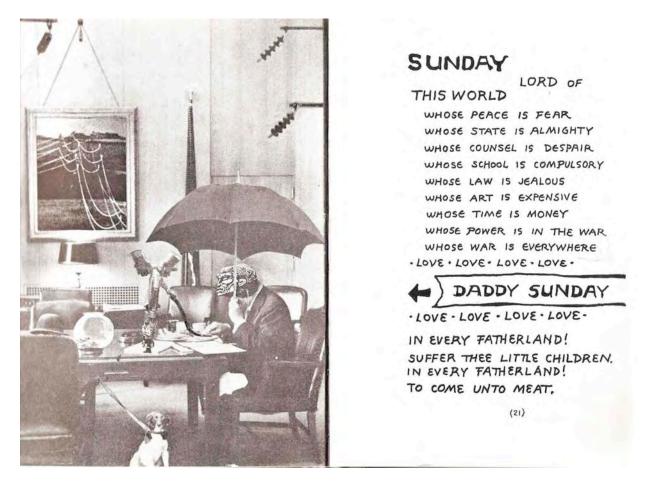


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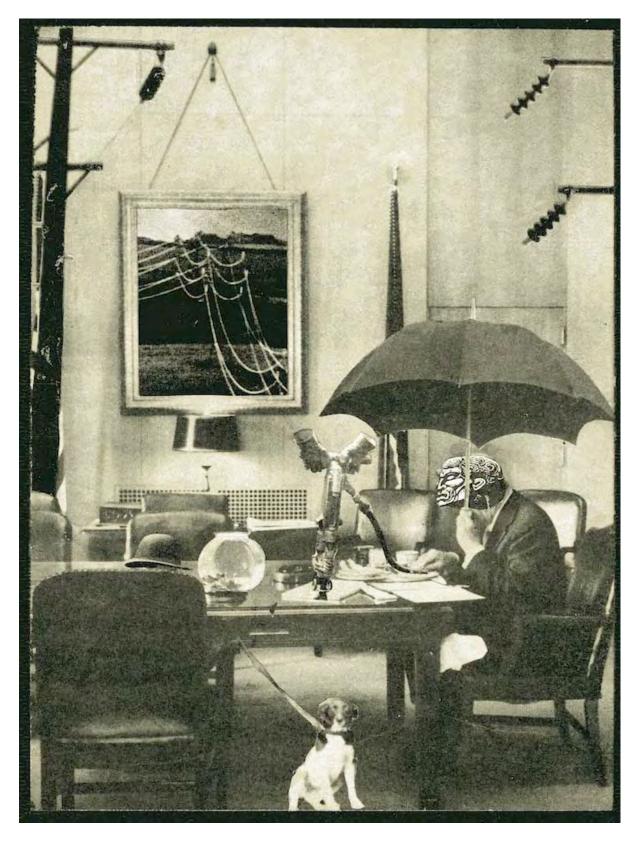


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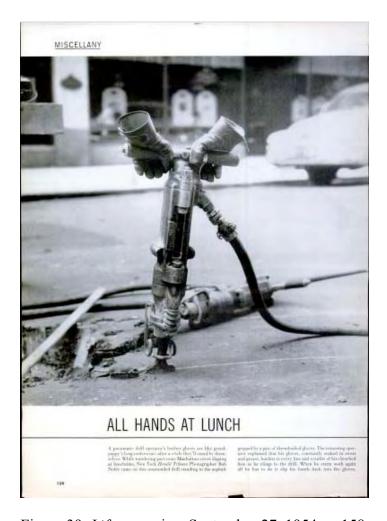


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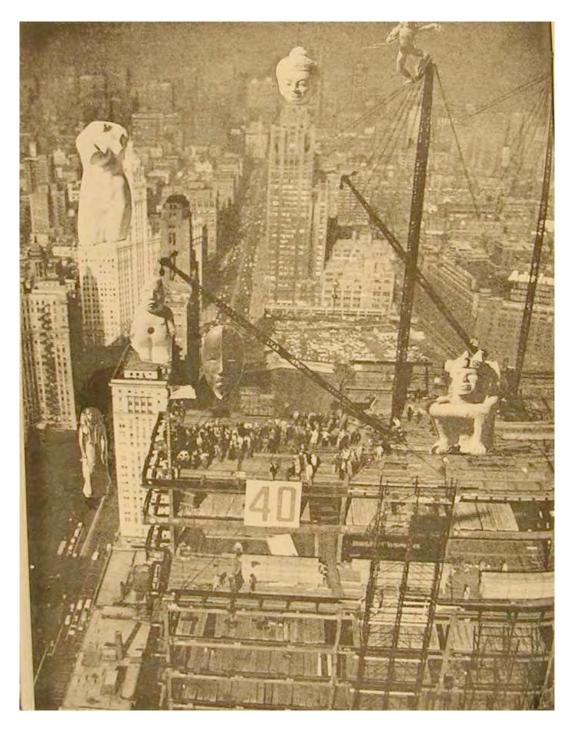


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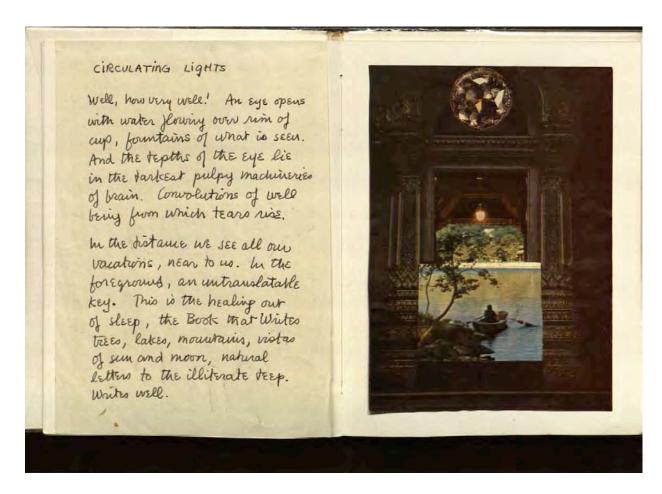


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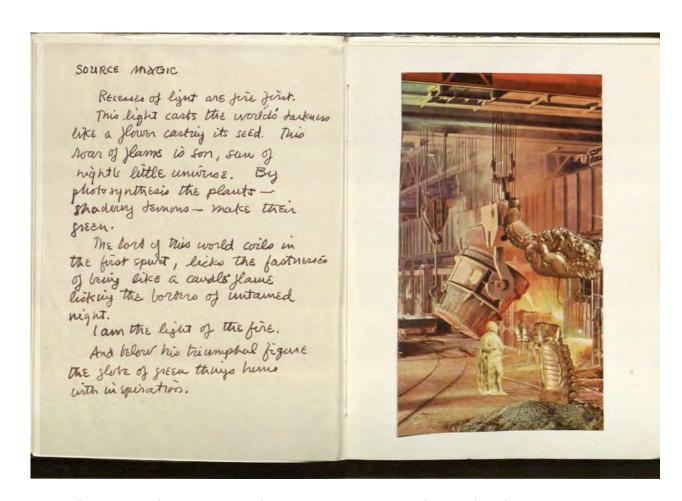


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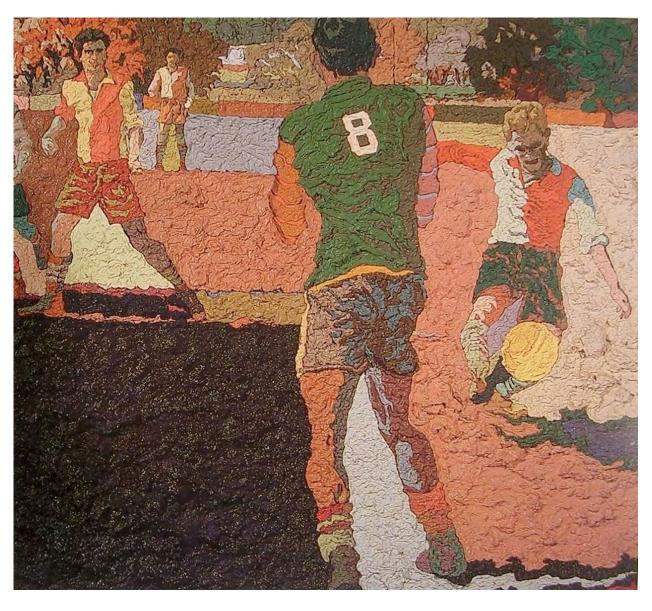


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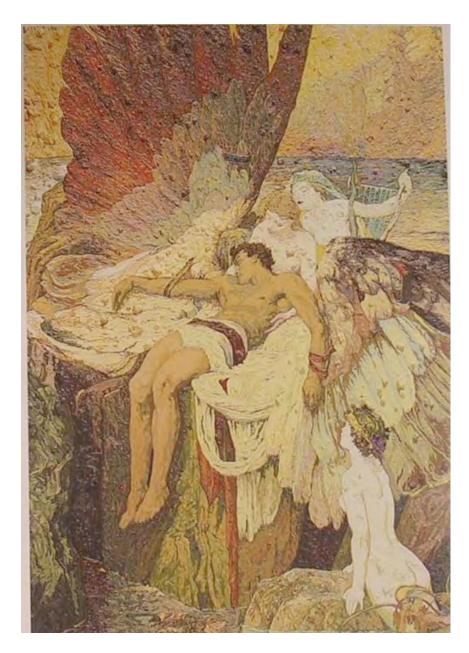


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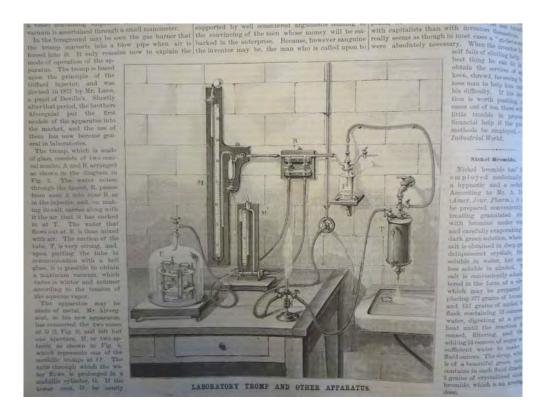


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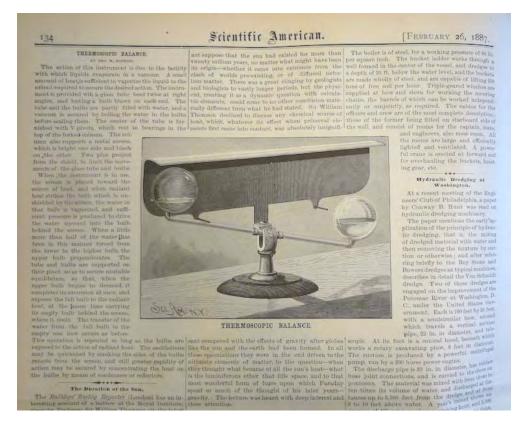


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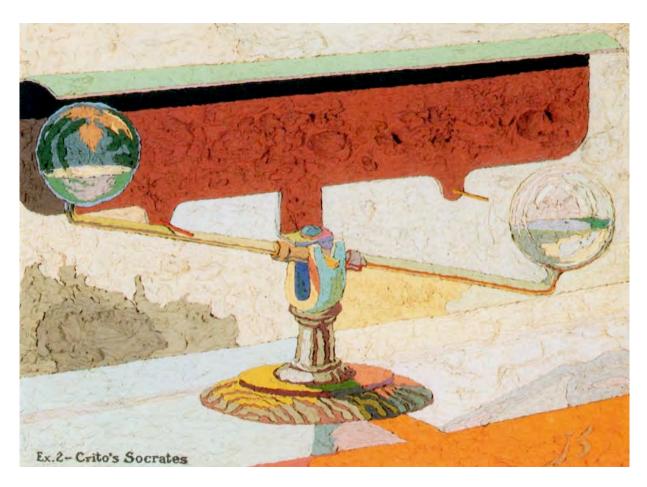


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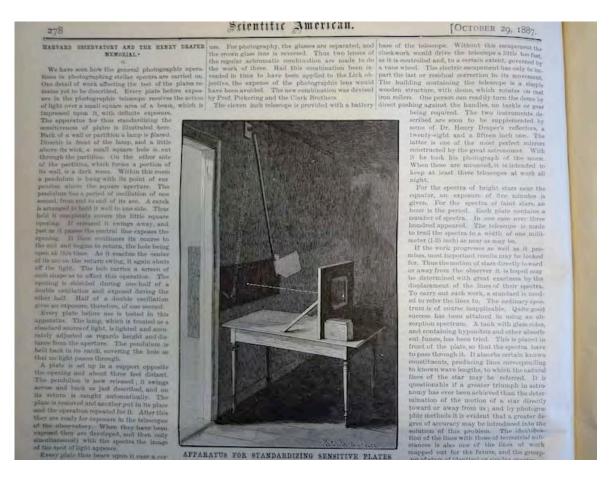


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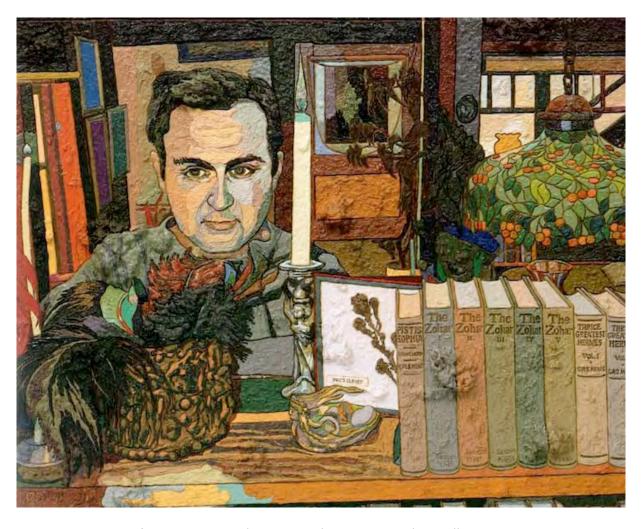


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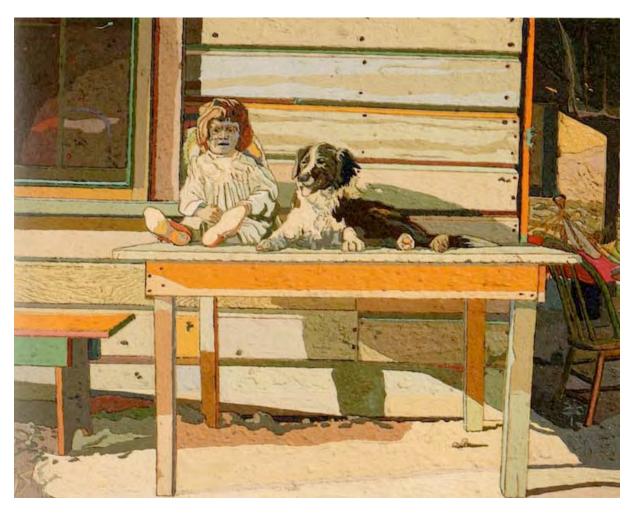


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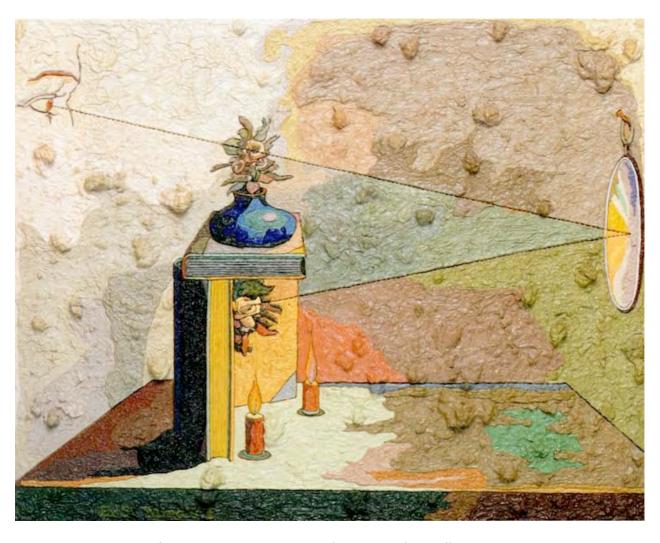


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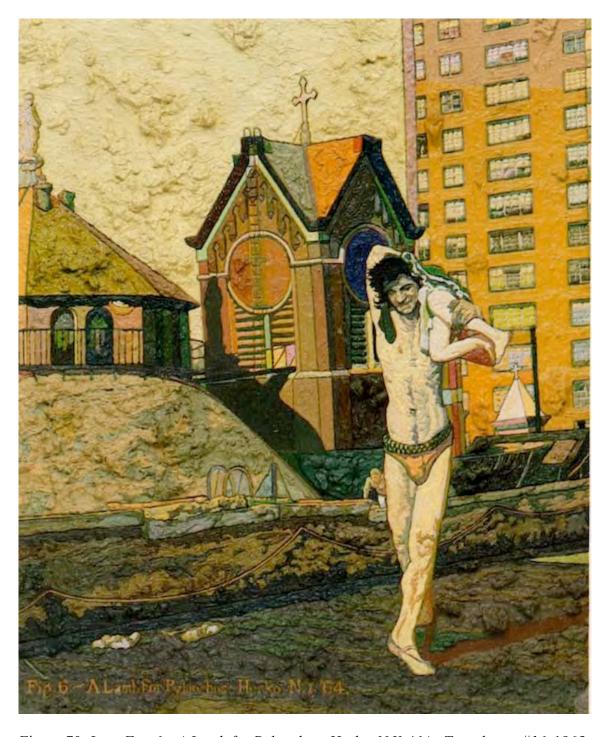


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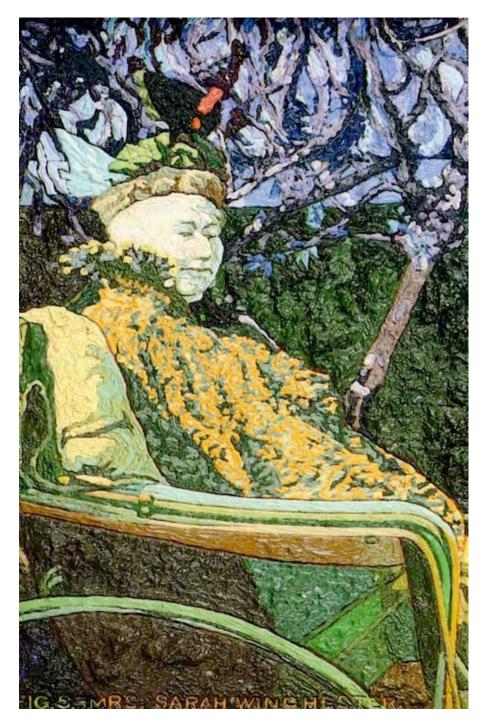


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Figure 75. Jess, *Narkissos* (detail), 1976-1991. Pencil on paper and paste-up. 70 x 60 inches. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

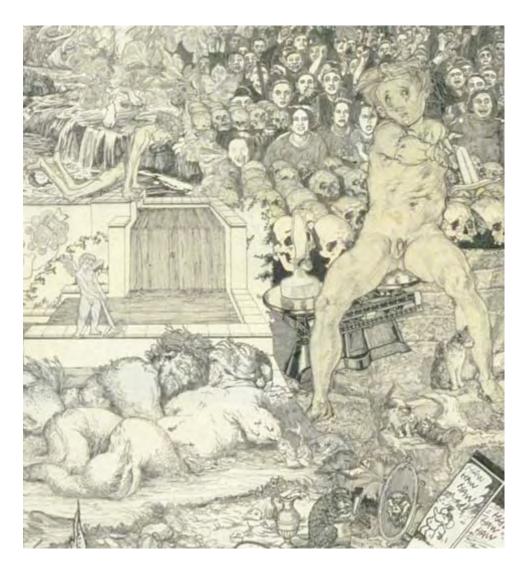


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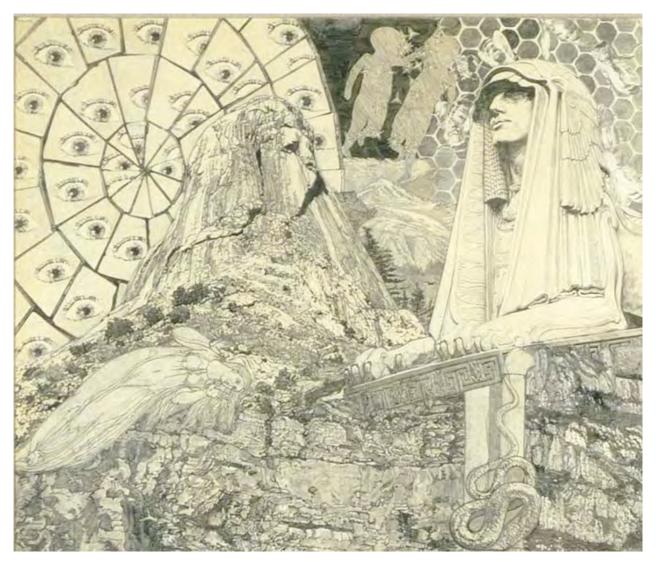


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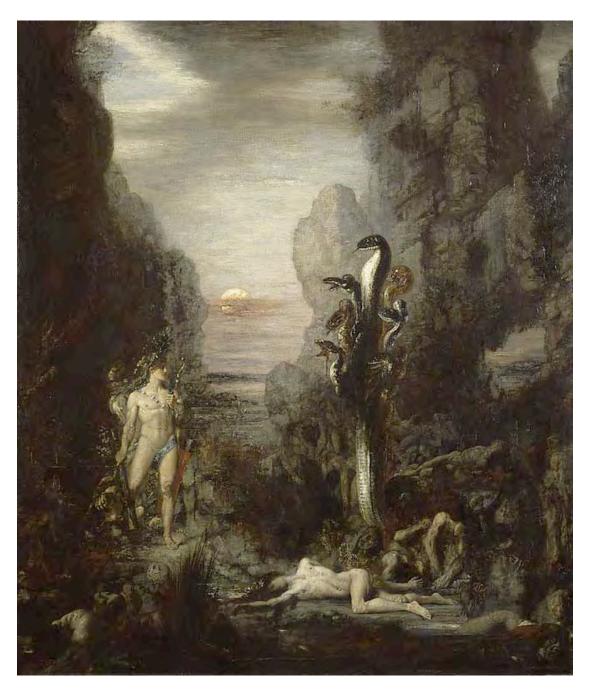


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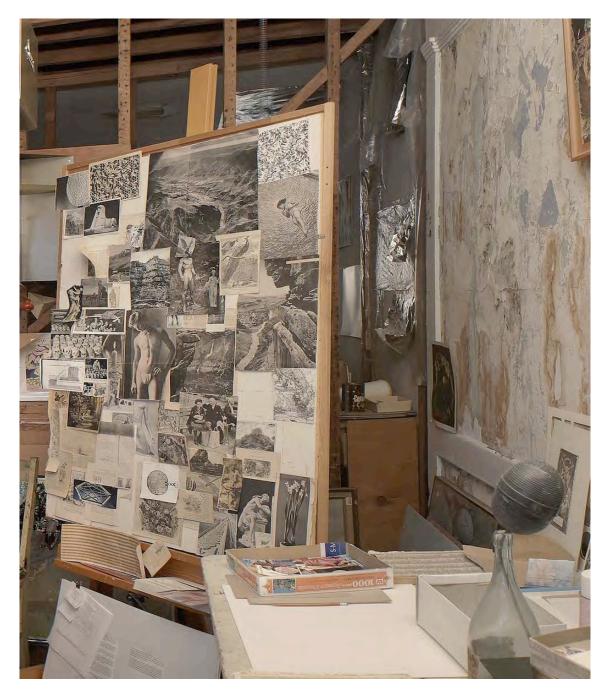


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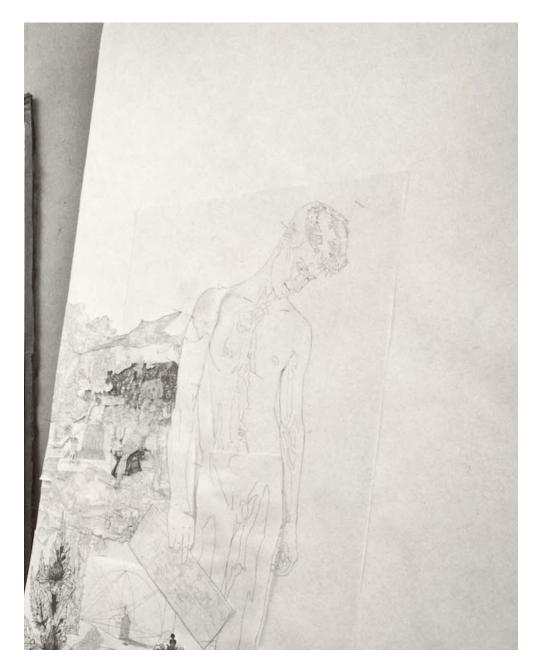


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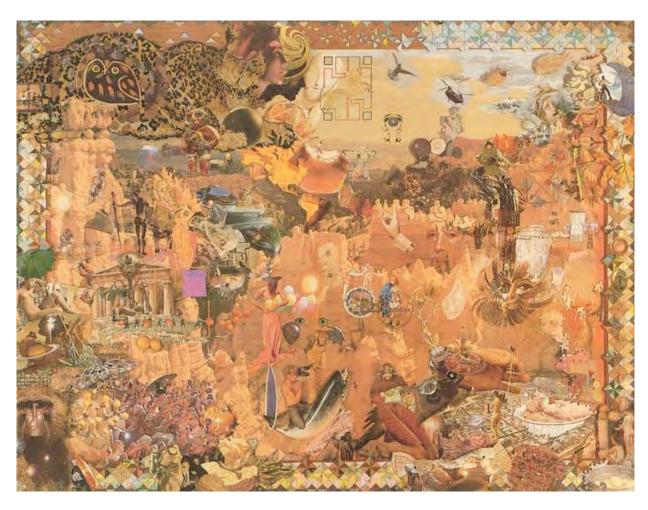


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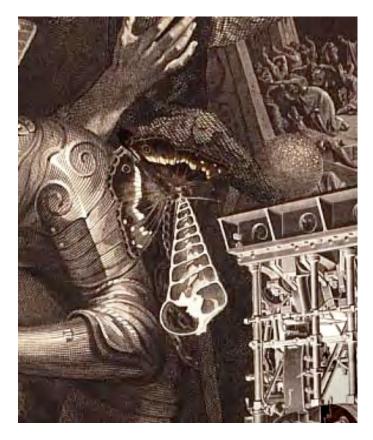


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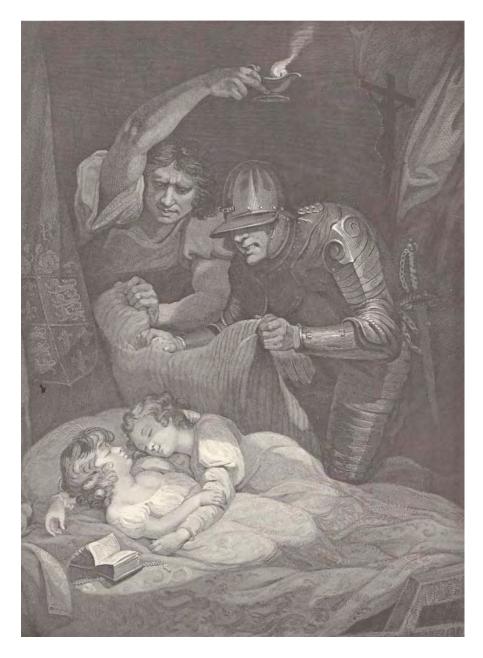


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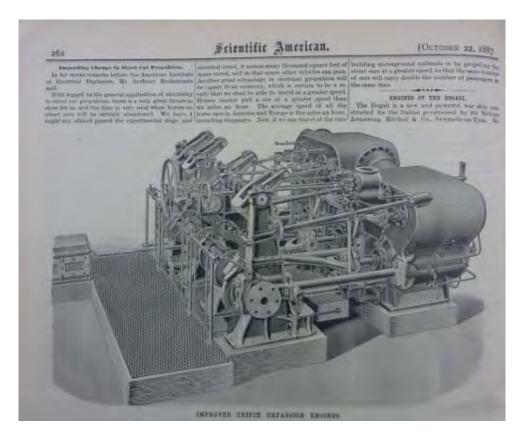


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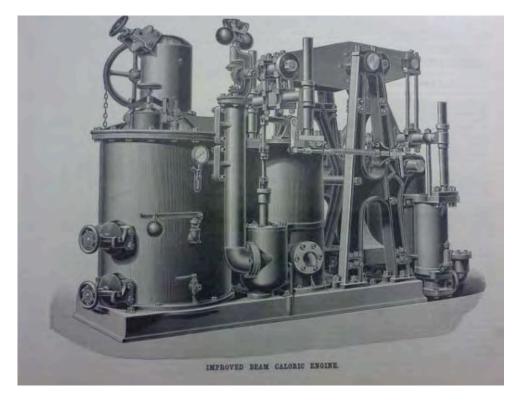


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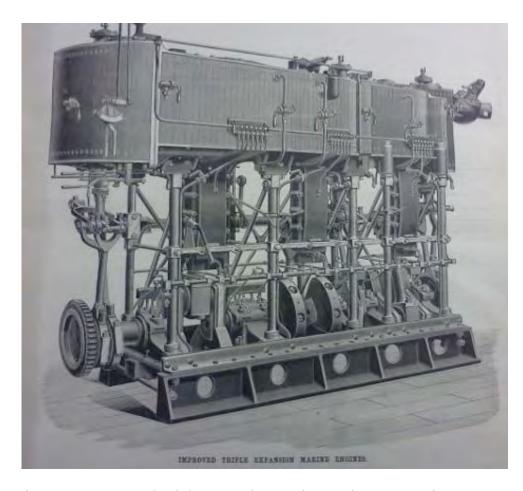


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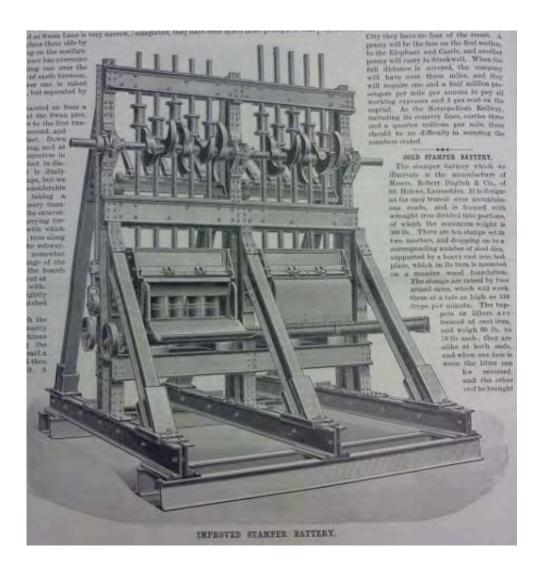


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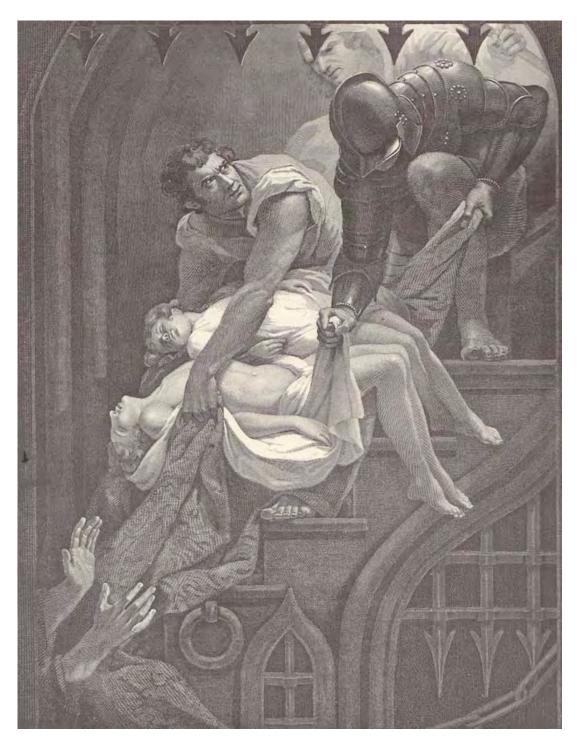


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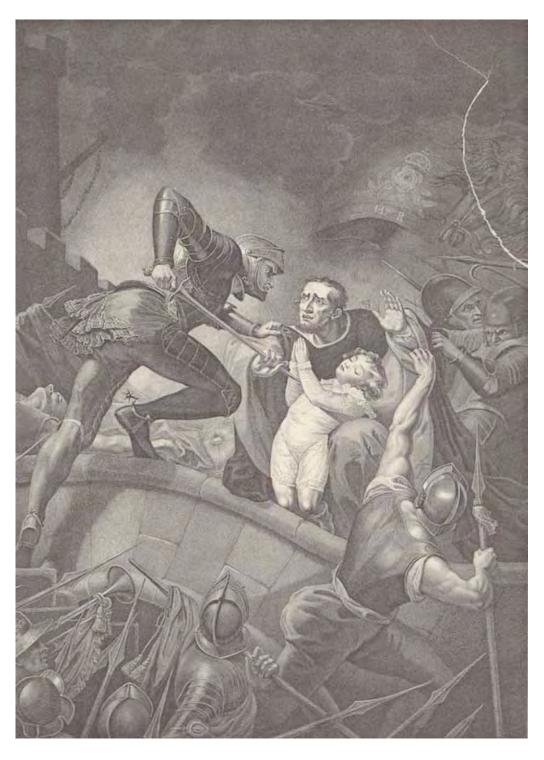


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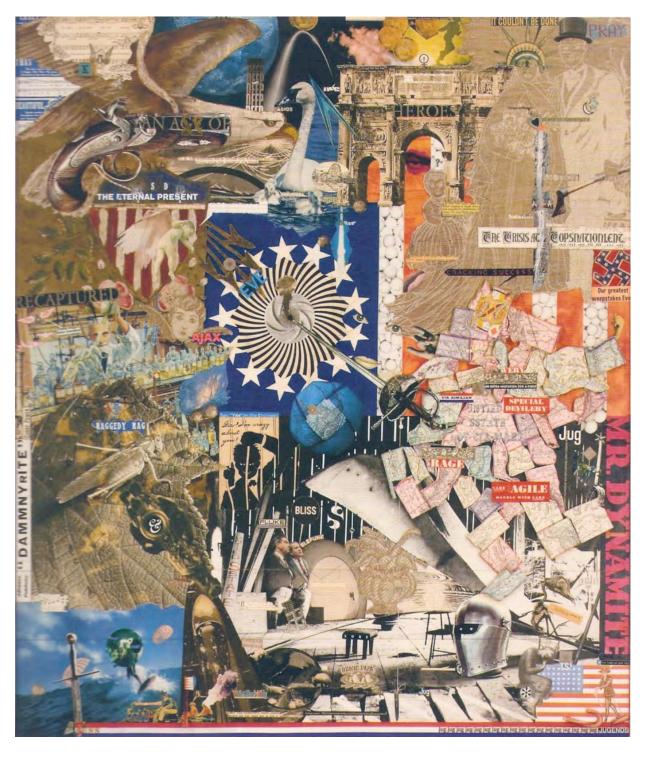


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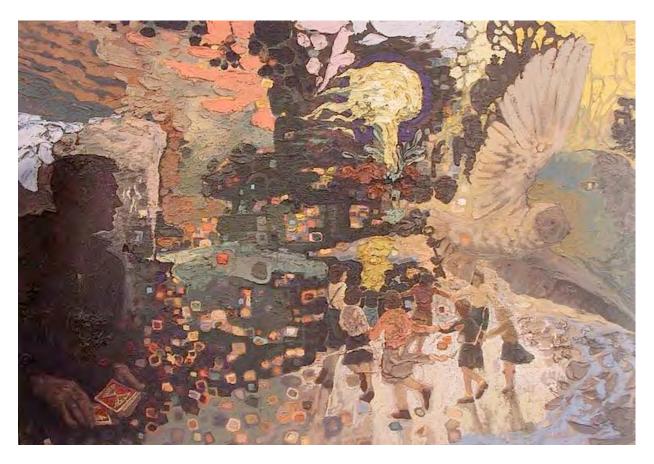


Figure 111. Jess, *If All The World Were Paper And All The Water Sink*, 1962. Oil on canvas. 38 x 56 inches. Collection de Young Museum.

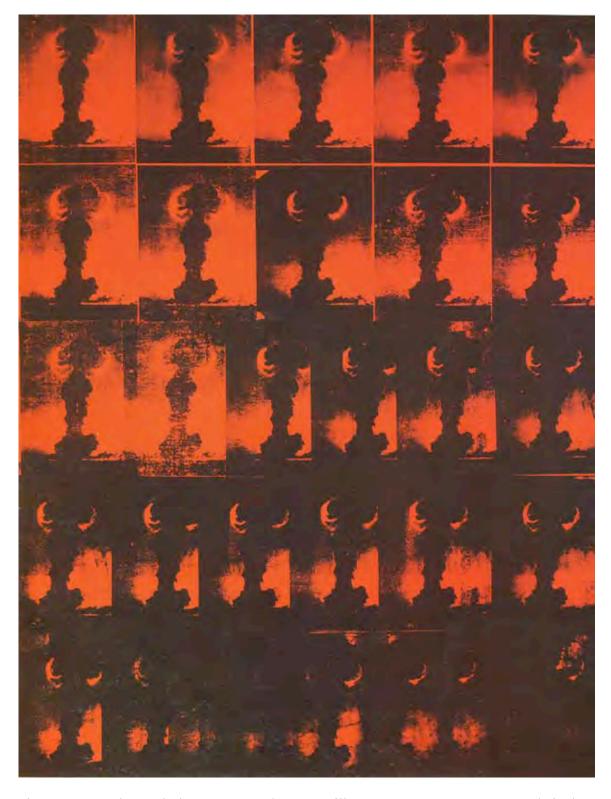


Figure 112. Andy Warhol, *Atomic Bomb*, 1965. Silkscreen on canvas. 104 x 80 1/2 inches.

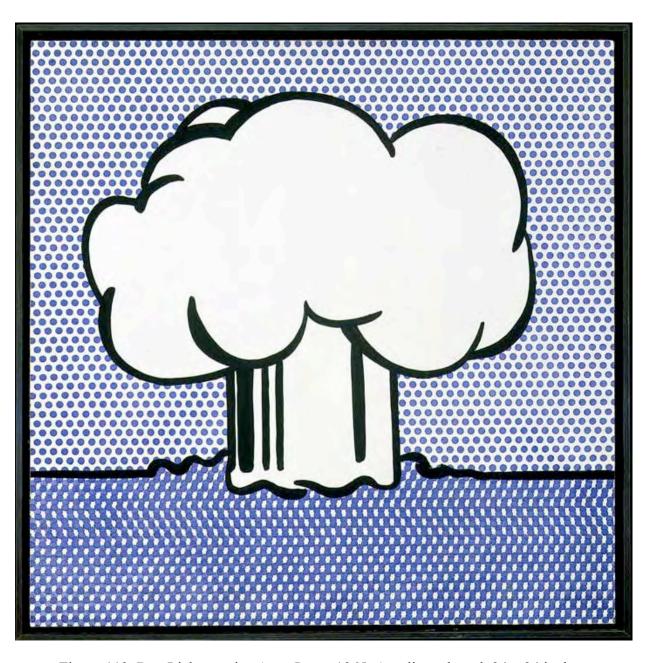


Figure 113. Roy Lichtenstein, *Atom Burst*, 1965. Acrylic on board. 24 x 24 inches.



Figure 114. James Rosenquist, *F-111* (detail). 1964–65. Oil on canvas with aluminum, 23 sections. 10 x 86 ft.

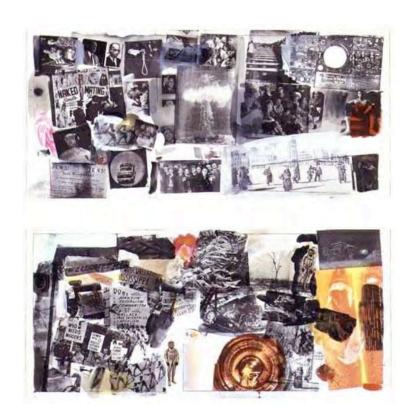


Figure 115. Robert Rauschenberg, *Dante's Inferno: Drawings for Dante's 700th Birthday*, 1965. Colored crayons, graphite, acrylic, gouache, and colored inks silkscreened on composition board.



Figure 116. Christopher Maclaine, The End, 1953.



Figure 117. Robert Frank, Hoover Dam, Nevada, 1955.



Figure 118. Life, August 20, 1945.



Figure 119. *Life*, May 30, 1955.



Figure 120. Bruce Conner, Crossroads, 1976.



Figure 121. Life, January 7, 1955.



Figure 122. Jess and Lawrence Jordan, *Heavy Water or The 40 & 1 Nights or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon*, 1955-62. Still from a 16mm film transferred to DVD.

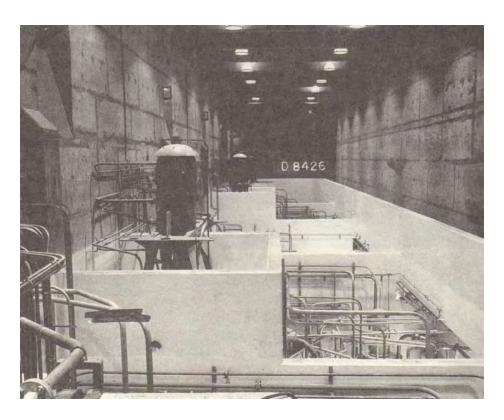


Figure 123. Cells in Hanford chemical separations plant, 1945.



Figure 124. Dust storm at Hanford Camp.

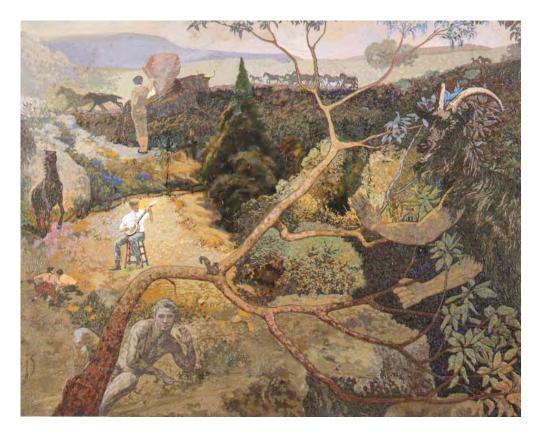


Figure 125. Jess, "A Panic That Can Still Come Upon Me": Salvages II, 1963/1972. Oil on canvas with collaged inset. 16 x 20 inches.



Figure 126. Jess, "... When We Will Tempt The Frailty Of Our Powers...": Salvages IV, 1952-54/1972-74. Oil on canvas, 68 x 96 1/4 inches.



Figure 127. Jess, *Cold Pastorale On A Theme Of The Cyclops: Salvages I*, 1964/1971. Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches.

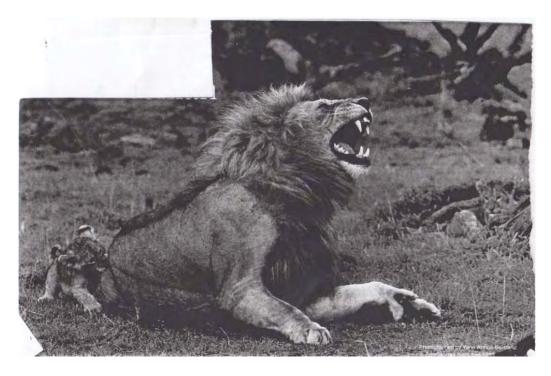


Figure 128. Photograph of a lion from Jess's archives.



Figure 129. Undated, untitled drawing from Jess's archives.

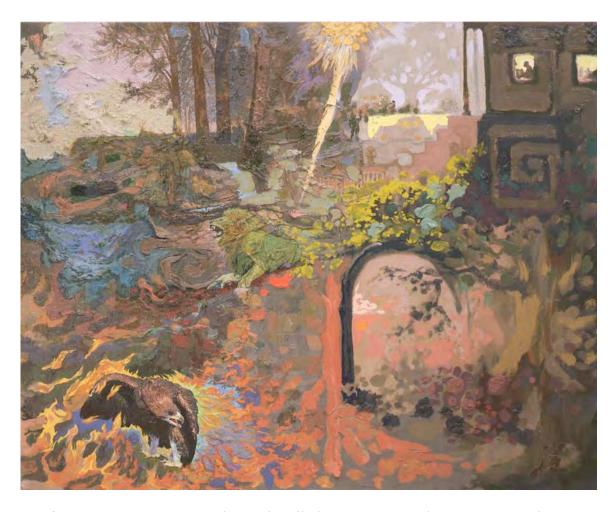


Figure 130. Jess, "Torture the Eagle Till She Weeps...": Salvages VIII, 1965/1988. Oil on canvas, 26 x 32 inches.



Figure 131. Jess, *To Corbett*, 1951. Oil on canvas, 46 x 36 inches.



Figure 132. Jess, "Attention Which Is The Eye Of The Heart": Salvages III, 1963/1972. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches.

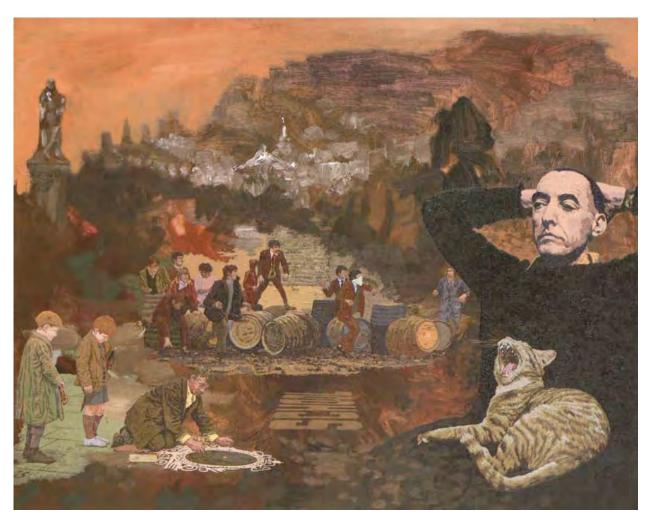


Figure 133. Jess, Signd And Resignd: Salvages VII, 1965/1987. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 inches.



Figure 134. Jess's filing system.



Figure 135. Unused images of roses from Jess's studio.



Figure 136. Francisque Edouard Bertier, *The Flower-Girl*, 1884, in Jess's copy of *One Hundred Crowned Masterpieces of Modern Painting*.

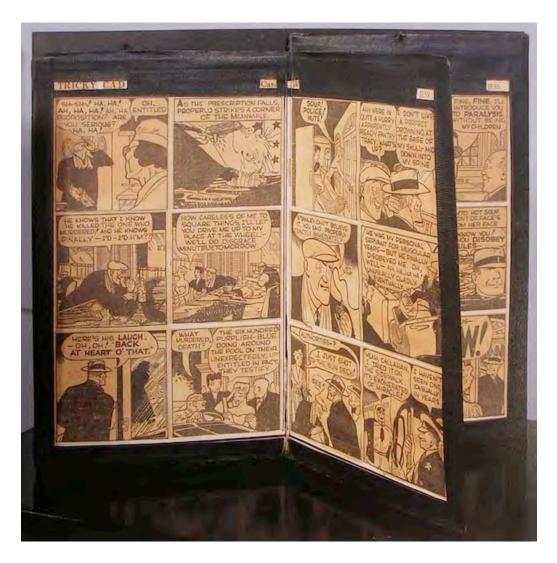


Figure 137. Jess, *Tricky Cad: Case IV*, 1957. Collage book, 9 ½ x 5 ½ inches.



Figure 138. Jess, Goddess Because Is Is Falling Asleep, 1954. Collage. 11 x 8 ½ inches.

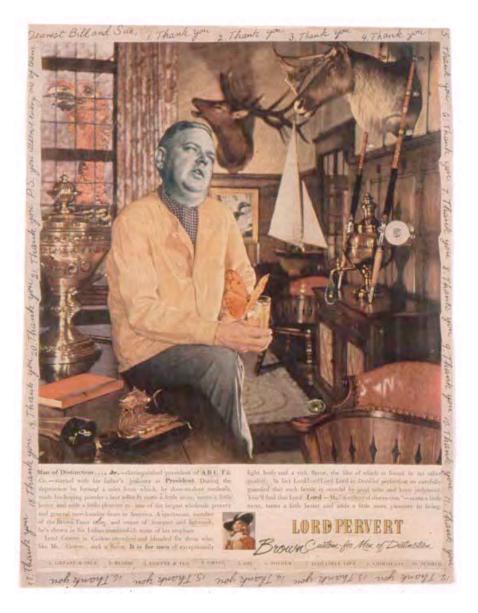


Figure 139. Jess, *Lord Pervert*, 1956. Collage. 13 x 10 inches.



Figure 140. Lord Calvert whiskey advertisement from *Life* magazine.