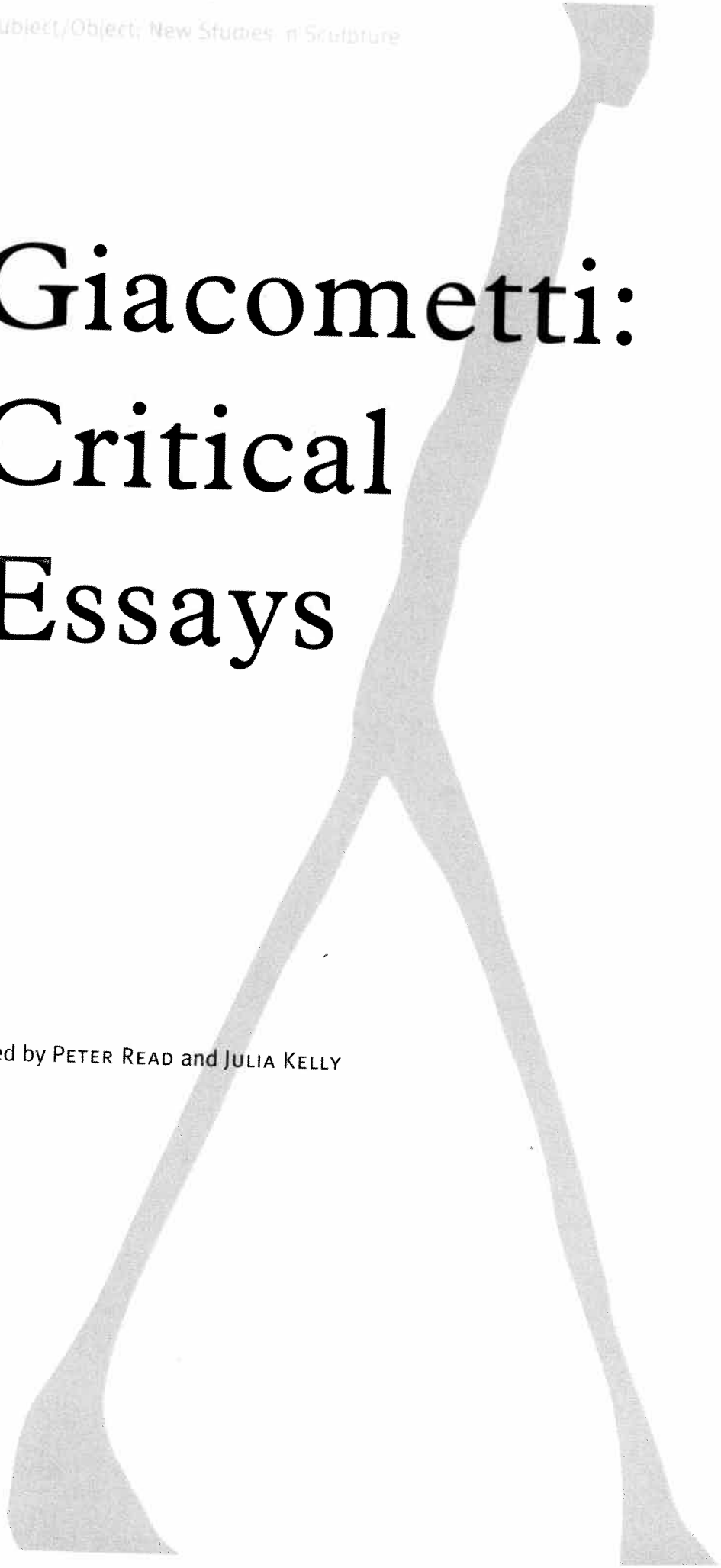
Giacometti: Critical Essays



Edited by PETER READ and JULIA KELLY

Giacometti: Critical Essays brings together new studies by an international team of scholars who together explore the whole span of Alberto Giacometti's work and career from the 1920s to the 1960s. During this complex period in France's intellectual history, Giacometti's work underwent a series of remarkable stylistic shifts while he forged close affiliations with an equally remarkable set of contemporary writers and thinkers. This book throws new light on under-researched aspects of his output and approach, including his relationship to his own studio, his work in the decorative arts, his tomb sculptures and his use of the pedestal. It also focuses on crucial ways his work was received and articulated by contemporary and later writers, including Michel Leiris, Francis Ponge, Isaku Yanaihara and Tahar Ben Jelloun. This book thus engages with energising tensions and debates that informed Giacometti's work, including his association with both surrealism and existentialism, his production of both 'high' art and decorative objects, and his concern with both formal issues, such as scale and material, and with the expression of philosophical and poetic ideas. This multifaceted collection of essays confirms Giacometti's status as one of the most fascinating artists of the twentieth century.

PETER READ is Professor of Modern French Literature and Visual Arts at the University of Kent, UK.

Dr JULIA KELLY is Honorary Research Fellow in Art History, University of Manchester, UK.

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Series Editor: Penelope Curtis
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We have become familiar with the notion that sculpture has moved into the 'expanded field', but this field has remained remarkably faithful to defining sculpture on its own terms. Sculpture can be distinct, but it is rarely autonomous. For too long studied apart, within a monographic or survey format, sculpture demands to be reintegrated with the other histories of which it is a part. In the interests of representing recent moves in this direction, this series will provide a forum for the publication and stimulation of new research examining sculpture's relationship with the world around it, with other disciplines and with other material contexts.

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Notes on contributors

CASIMIRO DI CRESCENZO, former director of the Brolo Centro d'Arte e Cultura in Venice is now preparing the catalogue raisonné of Italian artist Armando Pizzinato's paintings and drawings. He has curated exhibitions on a range of modern artists including Camille Pissarro, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, and has published extensively on the work of Alberto Giacometti.

THIERRY DUFRÊNE is Professor of the History of Contemporary Art and Director of the Research Centre for the History of Art and History of Representations at the University of Paris X, Nanterre. He is also Scientific Secretary of the Comité international d'histoire de l'art (CIHA) and Deputy Head of the Institut National d'Histoire de l'art, Paris (INHA). He specialises in the history of sculpture and installation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and particularly in the work of Alberto Giacometti, on whom he has published extensively. He is one of the curators of the show *En perspective, Giacometti*, Caen: Musée des Beaux-Arts, May–September 2008.

JULIA KELLY is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Manchester. She has published essays on Henry Moore, Joseph Cornell, and on surrealism. She is the author of *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects, Paris c.1925–1935*, Manchester University Press, 2007, and co-editor of a collection of essays on assemblage art in *Art Journal*, Spring 2008.

ALEX POTTS is Max Loehr Collegiate Professor in the Department of History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He is author of the books *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (1994 and 2000) and *The Sculptural Imagination. Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (2000), and co-editor of an anthology of texts on modern sculpture, *The Modern Sculpture Reader* (2007). He is currently writing a book on the artistic culture of post-war Europe and America titled *Art and Non-Art: Experiments in Modern Realism*.

PETER READ is Professor of Modern French, Literature and Visual Arts at the University of Kent, Canterbury. His publications include *Picasso*

and Apollinaire. The Persistence of Memory, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2008, and *Les Dessins de Guillaume Apollinaire* (with Claude Debon), Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2008. He is a member of the Editorial Board of *Forum for Modern Language Studies*.

ROBIN SPENCER is joint author of the standard book on Whistler's paintings (1980) and editor of Paolozzi's writings (2000). He recently retired from St Andrews University, Scotland, where he was formerly Chairman of the Department of Art History.

MICHAEL STONE-RICHARDS is Associate Professor in the Department of Liberal Arts at the College for Creative Studies in Detroit where he teaches critical theory and comparative literature. He is also a founding member of the Program Committee of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (MOCAD). He has two books forthcoming: *Logics of Separation: Exile and Transcendence in Aesthetic Modernity*, from Peter Lang, and *Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: Commentaries*, Detroit: Halvard Press/Chamber Works. Michael Stone-Richards is also a founding member of the editorial board of *Glossator* (Brooklyn College), a journal devoted to the theory and history of commentary.

AKIHIKO TAKEDA is a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hosei, Tokyo. He is the co-editor (with Eiji Usami) of *Yanaihara Isaku: Giacometti*, Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 1996.

SARAH WILSON is Reader in History of Art at the Courtauld Institute, London. She has published widely on the cultures of post-war France, and on aspects of contemporary art. She was the principal curator of *Paris, Capital of the Arts, 1900–1968*, Royal Academy, London, 2001, and of *Pierre Klossowski*, Whitechapel, London, 2006. She has published on Germaine Richier, Boris Taslitzky, Liliane Lijn, Orlan and Michel Journiac, and is preparing a two-volume study, *The Visual World of French Theory* for Yale University Press.

JON WOOD co-ordinates the research programme and curates exhibitions at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. He is also an Associate Lecturer at Leeds University, teaching on the MA in Art History. He has written widely on twentieth-century and contemporary sculpture and is the co-editor (with Alex Potts and David Hulks) of the *Modern Sculpture Reader* (2007). He has curated several exhibitions, including *Against Nature: The Hybrid Forms of Modern Sculpture* (2008), *Rock Paper Scissors: Manual Thinking in Contemporary Sculpture* (2007), *Freud's Sculpture* (2006), *Shaping Modern Sculpture: Stephen Gilbert and Jocelyn Chewett* (2006), *With Hidden Noise: Sculpture, Video and Ventriloquism* (2004), *Shine: Sculpture and Surface in the 1920s and 1930s* (2002), and *Close Encounters: The Sculptor's Studio in the Age of the Camera* (2001).

2

Giacometti's objects: poetry, childhood and the neurotic theatre of projection

Michael Stone-Richards

Creation of a synthesis between the exterior world and self, self and the exterior world both recreated in a third object which [is] the synthesis.[1]

Alberto Giacometti

either objects
or poetry
no other thing[2]

Alberto Giacometti, c.1932–33

Since the generation of William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage* (1968), many of those working in psychoanalysis as well as art history have furthered thinking on the non-art qualities of the surrealist object.[3] This is partly due to recognition of the pertinence of phenomenological and, even more acutely, psychoanalytical accounts of objectality for any adequate understanding of its status. Whereas for Rubin, 'The surrealist object was essentially a three-dimensional collage of "found" articles that were chosen for their poetic meaning rather than their possible visual value',[4] much subsequent research has approached the surrealist object 'Never for form, nor for plasticity, nor for the aesthetic, but the opposite. Against, absolutely', as Giacometti put it, in about 1932.[5] Giacometti's statement parallels precisely the terms indicated by André Breton, in taking 'the word *object* in the broadest philosophical sense'.[6] Breton also characterised the object as caught between 'the sensible and the rational'[7] (where '*sensible*' may imply sensitivity but also translates as perceptible, physical or tangible), and this establishes the possibility of either a phenomenological or an object-relations psychoanalytical reading.

In his 1935 Prague lectures, Breton spoke of the surrealist object as a non-sculptural construction; in 1931, Salvador Dalí defined the surrealist object, which is to say the object with symbolic function, as an object which lends

itself to a minimum of mechanical functioning and which is based upon phantasies and representations that may be triggered by the realisation of unconscious acts.[8] Though the surrealists thought Giacometti's sculpture-objects of 1929–31 were, by definition, still closer to sculptures and not yet surrealist objects proper, all agreed that the way to the object had been opened up by Giacometti, and his hybrid sculpture-objects dramatically inflected the dynamics of the group, even contributing to a re-formation and re-founding of the group's sensibility at the level of transference. One way to appreciate why Giacometti's work of this period became so significant for the surrealists is to understand a *rapprochement*, an inner correspondence, between sculpture-object, drawing and poetry – part of Giacometti's efforts 'To go further, to re-start everything: *sculptures, drawings, writing*'.[9]

Giacometti's writings of that period should be understood as surrealist prose poems and narratives whose prototype was the *récit de rêve*, or dream narrative. I shall argue that Giacometti's work from that time is fully and foundationally surrealist because of the way it explores the relationship and tension between the psychoanalytic and phenomenological dimensions of movement, leading to an intense preoccupation with the manner in which the affective dimension of movement serves to circumscribe a problematic of *enfance* (childhood). This process, in a set of works leading to 1934 and *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, constructs a language of object-relations oscillating between neurosis and obsessional rituals, the underside of which is perversity. It includes an erotic violence that is incestuous in tone and triumphal in expression, exemplified in the prose poem 'Hier, sables mouvants' ('Yesterday, quicksand'). Such concerns are related to the predominance of an imaginary of archaic heritage and the feminine as maternal, and the fascinating question in Giacometti's sculptural work of the relationship between *touch and distance* (or frame and framing). The elements of this complex articulation and symbolism are movement (as alteration); what Giacometti himself terms a new space (*un espace nouvel*); and object (as partial-object – breast, skin as surface – which bears the traces of unconscious phantasy).

Un espace nouvel: la production de chacun de nous

The surrealist object is not merely a non-sculptural construction, but is an object caught between the rational and the sensible, whose functioning thus alters the experience of thinking – that is, makes alteration a felt phenomenon – at the same time that, being sensible, it modifies the experience of space. But what kind of object is it, and in what kind of spatiality does it function? Any psychoanalytical account of the object must understand the object as the function of a drive, and the object which corresponds to the drive can only be partial, or a part-object, as Kleinians would term it. Giacometti's

sculpture-objects (*Suspended Ball* or *Hour of the Traces*), according to the account developed by Dalí, may indeed have still held to the means proper to sculpture, but they created a sensation among the surrealists because of the way they functioned within the context of the group, as a shared experience conducive to accentuating mimetic bonds amongst the participants. The objects could not therefore be interpreted in narrowly aesthetic terms. Because they were interpreted as part of an *event* whose stability was only momentary, the object source of the experience could be understood as drawing upon a metapsychology of movement. At the same time, in terms of the imaginary, they raised the implicit question 'What's the matter, mother?' (if I may allude to *Hamlet*) and in so doing held to the means proper to fetishism.

In this respect, one needs to be attentive to the varying contexts for the interpretation of Giacometti as well as to the overlapping circles to which he belonged at any one time, in order to stress, where it is available, the commonality of interpretation of Giacometti in terms of fetishism and crisis and the configured movement of inside and outside, interiority to exteriority. That the first published essay in this milieu was by Michel Leiris in 1929 is not sufficient to enlist Giacometti in an anti-Breton cause, not least because Giacometti, even when critical of the surrealists, remained open to various aspects of the culture of surrealism throughout his life.[10] From a thematic and intellectual point of view, what Leiris identifies in Giacometti is in no way different from what any surrealist of the moment could have appreciated. The first quality that Leiris addresses in the sculpture of Giacometti is the capacity to respond to a real fetishism:

> That is to say, that love – really *amorous* – of ourselves, projected from the inside to the outside and endowed with a solid carapace which imprisons it between the limits of a precise thing and situates it, like a piece of furniture of which we may avail ourselves in the vast foreign room that is called space.[11]

The investigation of such a space was regarded as a defining feature of the surrealist generation. Thus, in his 1929 notebooks, Giacometti, following Antonin Artaud and André Masson, noted the following response to Breton's definition of surrealist experience as pure psychic automatism:

> 'Outside of all control', etc., etc.
> I think this sentence by Breton in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* retains today, and especially today, all its value. Our activity is nothing but a continual *question* to the universe which is also ourselves.[12]

Giacometti poses the question of movement in terms of the investigation of the relation between the universe and ourselves, through an allusion to Breton's narrative *Nadja* and more generally to Breton's thought. He goes on to state his aim, namely, the attempt common to surrealism and implicit in the relation between viewer and artist (in his words, the production of each of

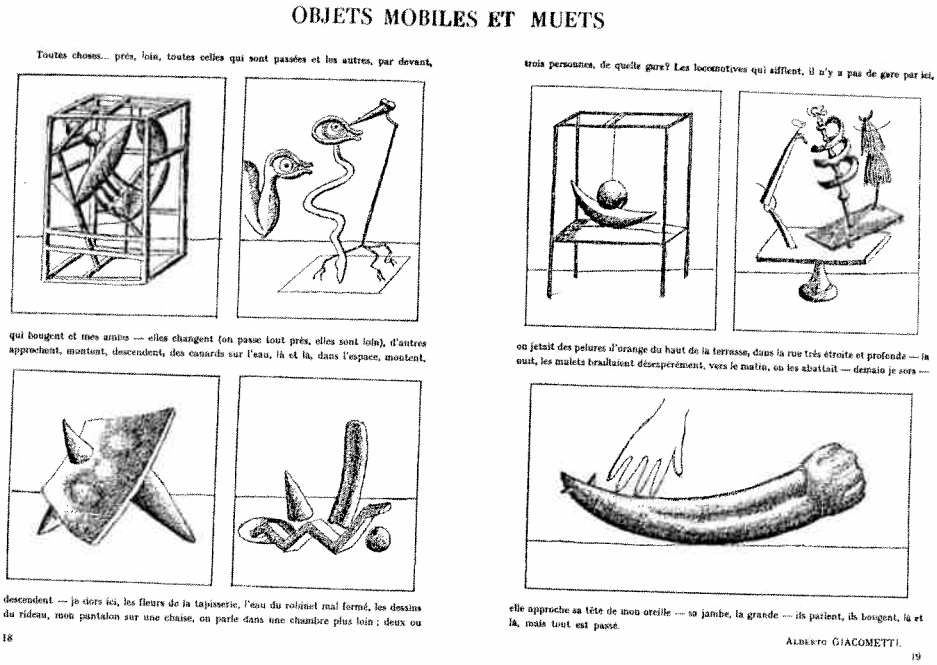
us, *la production de chacun de nous*), to generate a new conception of spatiality, a conception which is part of a developing thinking on the phenomenology and status of place: 'The production of each of us is the exact reflexion of this difference of angles and positions. All that impassions us is to discover a new edge, a new space, the least particle of a new space, to perceive it in the penumbra, hardly touched by the light.'[13] So when Leiris attends to the other dimension of Giacometti's sculpture, namely how it results from a crisis that problematises exteriority, there can be little doubt that we are dealing with a common set of terms:

> There are moments which can be called *crises* and which are the only ones to matter in a life. They are moments where the outside seems brusquely to respond to the summons that we hurl toward it from the inside, where the exterior world is opened to allow a sudden communication between it and our heart. [...] I love the sculpture of Giacometti because everything he makes is like the petrification of one of these crises.[14]

The final distinction of Giacometti's work that Leiris elicits in his 1929 essay, namely the palpable *feel* of recollections (*souvenirs*), is particularly significant, for the phenomenological dimension of memory is indeed an important thematic of Giacometti's prose poetry and its relation to his sculpture-objects. Consider, for example, the following text from Giacometti's 'Objets mobiles et muets' ('Moving and silent objects'), which accompanied drawings of, and designs for, sculptural projects, published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in December 1931 (Figure 2.1):

> All things ... near, far, all those that have passed, and the others, in front, which are moving and my girlfriends – they change (you pass close by, they are far away), others approach, go up, down, ducks on the water, here and there, in space, up, down – I sleep here, the flowers in the tapestry, water from the badly closed tap, the drawings in the curtain, my trousers on a chair, they are talking in a room further away; two or three people, of which station? The locomotives whistle, there is no station here, rinds of orange were being thrown from up on the terrace, into the very narrow and deep street – at night, the mules were braying desperately, just before morning, they were being slaughtered – tomorrow I'm going out – she moves her head towards my ear – her leg, the tall one – they speak, they move, here and there, but everything has passed.[15]

To begin to read this staccato passage aloud is to realise that it cannot be heard in the diction of the merely colloquial: its saccadic rhythms are too tightly organised in a nearly cohesive anaphoric pattern, and its tone, borne on a slow tempo, shaped by excessive paratactic contents over two sentences, is too set apart from the everyday, its disarticulations too dream-like. What may well be everyday, though, and this is part of its effect, is the manner in which language and diction here capture multiple and sliding – often silent – perceptions jostling and displacing one another in the same frame


OBJETS MOBILES ET MUETS

Toutes choses... près, loin, toutes celles qui sont passées et les autres, par devant, qui bougent et mes amies — elles changent (on passe tout près, elles sont loin), d'autres approchent, montent, descendent, des canards sur l'eau, là et là, dans l'espace, montent, descendent — je dors ici, les fleurs de la tapisserie, l'eau du robinet mal fermé, les dessins du rideau, mon pantalon sur une chaise, on parle dans une chambre plus loin : deux ou

18

trois personnes, de quelle gare? Les locomotives qui sifflent, il n'y a pas de gare par ici, on jetait des pelures d'orange du haut de la terrasse, dans la rue très étroite et profonde — la nuit, les mulets braillaient désespérément, vers le matin, on les abattait — demain je sors — elle approche sa tête de mon oreille — sa jambe, la grande — ils parlent, ils bougent, là et là, mais tout est passé.

ALBERTO GIACOMETTI.

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2.1 Alberto Giacometti, 'Objets mobiles et muets', *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution*, no. 3, December 1931, pp. 18–19 © ADAGP/FAAG, Paris and DACS, London, 2009

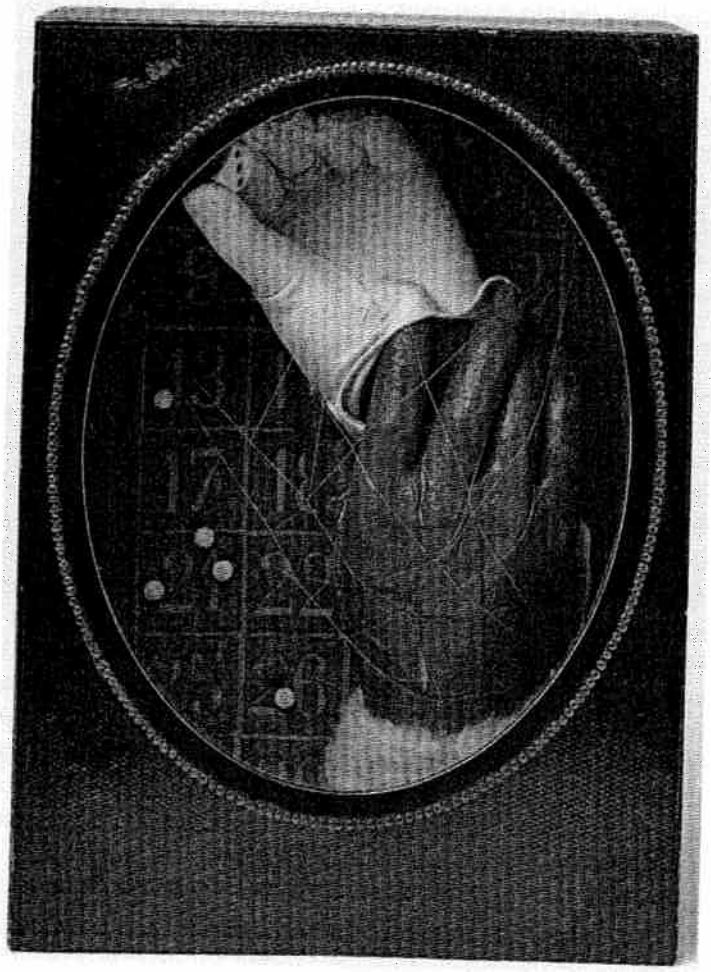
– the same place of differing temporalities – in a movement that may justly be characterised as filmic, notably for its use of dissolving and abrupt transitions and interruptions in the articulation of the attempt to make the movements of perception the subject of self-consciousness. Consider, in this light, the depiction of approach and distance as female figures come into and go out of imagination and are compared to ducks bobbing up and down on water; this at least is how the consciousness of the act is grasped. Then bear in mind the coming into one frame (one place, that is, as the meeting of differing temporalities), one time, *here*, of multiple events which are not to be grasped sequentially: 'I sleep here, the flowers in the tapestry, water from the badly closed tap, the drawings in the curtain, my trousers on a chair, they are talking in a room further away.'

It is difficult, when reading aloud, to fail to hear the prose poetry of Giacometti's 'Objets mobiles et muets' as embodying the rhythm of memorial regard, the tone of the surrealist *récit de rêve*, the paratactic accumulation that shapes and accompanies the chance movement shaped by image clusters and, finally, the equivocation between the rhetoric of recollection and that of projective phantasy. This manner, tone and modelling of unconscious phantasy extends to, and is even more pronounced in, the poetic prose *récits*

of 1933: 'Charbon d'herbe', 'Poème en 7 espaces', 'Le rideau brun', and 'Hier, sables mouvants', all published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in May 1933,[16] as well as Giacometti's own interpretation of *The Palace at 4 a.m.* in *Minotaure* of the same year.[17] In each case, as with the prose poetry of 'Objets mobiles et muets', the language is one of affective movement in which the opening up, approach and overcoming of distance is conveyed in terms of affective spatiality and stasis. The motions of up and down and to-ing and fro-ing are part of the cultural metonymies of carried desire – the stop and start rhythms of invitation and refusal, of approach and blockage. This point is readily appreciated if attention is paid to the syntactic-symbolic function of the adverbs of distance and proximity: 'All things ... near, far [...] approach, go up, down, [...] here and there [...] of which station? [...] there is no station here, rinds of orange were being thrown from up on the terrace, into the very narrow and deep street.'

Before the fragrance of the orange rinds, there is first the motion of throwing from on high and this motion is simultaneously geared into the long passage of a street at once narrow and deep: the erotic furtherance of these lines is of a piece with *Project for a Passageway* (1932), or the use of grooves in *Circuit* (1931) and finds a summation in the erotic gearing of *Suspended Ball*. In one sense, the language of 'Objets mobiles et muets' pivots on substituting metonymies: it is less the street than the quality of path, of entry, and then furtherance that is important; one notices, too, that the metonymies extend to motion (from on high into the narrow depth), with the witty refusal of entry, 'there is no station here'. These elements of Giacometti's poetry and sculpture-objects will point the way to the conceptualising of the surrealist object in terms of fetishism, and the interrelation of movement and lack in terms of configured motion, the very basis of which is given by Giacometti's Hegelian diction of the synthesis of interior and exterior through a figure of *the third* as given in the form of the object. The object, then, is not a thing with an inside and an outside, but rather a process, a faceted event.

Without doubt, *Suspended Ball* formed the basis of subsequent reflection on the status of the object for all surrealists. Along with Valentine Hugo's *Object of Symbolic Function* (1931), it is amongst the most remarkable and accomplished of surrealist objects. It is here that 'configured motion' comes into play, and that the particular value of Giacometti's sculpture-objects to the surrealists becomes apparent due to their concern with affective mimetism and the metapsychology of movement. All commentaries and responses to these two works concentrate, quite rightly, on the *effect* upon the viewer, and particularly consider the indefinite motions of sensation – the feeling of feeling – which the viewer experiences, resulting not in a sense of satisfaction but of irritation and incompleteness, which more generally one may term as an instance of either lack or absence.[18] The mimetic affective motions which link a viewer to a set of phantasms generated by the imaginative implication



2.2 Valentine Hugo, *Object*, June 1931, mixed media, 32.5 × 23 × 9.5cm, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris © ADAGP/FAAG, Paris and DACS, London, 2009. Photograph CNAC/MNAM, Dist. RMN/ © Philippe Migeat

of movement and by the fetishistic texture of the object-space do not require a stable identification of the signs of sexual differentiation of the constituent parts of the construction: hence the androgynous aspect of such works.

Such phantasies of motility are common to Giacometti's surrealist works and surrealist objects such as Hugo's *Object* (Figure 2.2). Amidst the material of fetishism, indexed to its intended recipient, Breton, the gentle penetration of finger into hand under glove in Hugo's *Object* evokes a reciprocal motion of touching and being touched within a sense of delayed anticipation: not so much the penis of the mother (at the basis of Freud's account of fetishism) as

a configuration of gradual loss of distinct sensation in anticipated *jouissance* and androgynous conflation.[19] André Thirion described Hugo's *Object* as follows: 'On a piece of roulette felt, a hand of a woman, gloved in black, clasps the wrist of a hand gloved in white. The woman's index finger penetrates under the white glove to caress the palm.'[20] The sole reason for thinking that the 'black' gloved hand (which is in fact red) belonged to a woman is the presence of ermine, a material which held considerable attraction for Breton. But the ermine, in this context, functions not only metonymically to present the values that Breton attaches to it, but also to signify the presence of 'Breton' himself within this space (as do the presence of the numbers 17 and 13, associated with Breton because he noted that these numbers resembled his handwritten initials, A and B), a space in which the two gloved hands are held, constrained by a common material, the net. The white gloved hand could as easily be seen as belonging to a woman, accepting the penetration of the other hand, or together they could be the left and right hands of the same person. Some of the more compelling surrealist objects, such as Meret Oppenheim's *Object (Fur-covered Cup, Saucer and Spoon)* (1936, New York, MoMA), or Ladislav Zívr's *Surrealist Object* (1935, destroyed), whilst exploiting the fetishism of materiality, at the same time draw upon similar imaginative proximities to motion (the chance disposition of the dropped string or any material) as invitation (the touch of hair or any part of the body linked to phantasy). It is to this mutual implication of unconscious motility and absence that I shall now turn, through a consideration of Giacometti's prose poetry and *récits*.

Object, phantasy and the play of childhood violence

> Automatic writing was the search for the first grumblings of the baby to its mother without the father, that is to say, without the symbolic chain of discourse.[21]
>
> Xavière Gauthier

> In advancing the notion that artistic creativity was linked to the turbulent relationship between baby and mother, Klein also threw a light upon the inner world of the creative being.[22]
>
> Joyce McDougall

The psychic and phenomenological dimension of movement was a widespread preoccupation internal to the culture of surrealism – aleatoric movement in groups in the city, the chance movement of language and affect called automatism, the concern with the transferral of thought in séances, and so on. However, in Rosalind Krauss' reading of his sculpture-objects and their motility, Giacometti is seen not in relation to the concerns of Breton in

this respect, but to those of Bataille, particularly through an interest in pre-Columbian art. Thus, of *Suspended Ball* and *The Hour of the Traces*, Krauss comments:

> The two sculptures are structurally connected by virtue of their shared play with a pendant element swung from a cagelike support. Within the universe of ideas associated at that moment to Aztec culture, the sculptures may be thematically connected as well. But without any doubt they are both assimilable to Giacometti's fully elaborated accounts of his own thoughts of sadism and violence. Although first published in Breton's magazine, a text like 'Hier, sables mouvants', with its fantasy of rape ('the whole forest rang with their cries and groans') and slaughter, has little to do with the notions of convulsive beauty authorized by Surrealism. Its relationship is to Georges Bataille, whose own writing and preoccupations seem to have given Giacometti permission to express these fantasies of brutality.[23]

How, then, in the light of this passage, are we to understand that Giacometti's first published writing appeared in a surrealist journal? How, even, might we begin to understand what it meant for Giacometti to begin to write, that surrealism called him to *write*, all the more so as writing was not a matter of facility, but of anguish for him?[24] And would it matter that in his *Carnets et feuillets* we do not find a single mention of Bataille, though we do find, in 1933–34, '*Breton d'accord avec le poème*'?[25] It would be vulgar, as though by way of counter-demonstration, to point to the many transcriptions of phantasised violence in the work of Breton and other surrealists. One can say, though, without in any way lessening the importance of Giacometti for Leiris and, maybe, Bataille, that the sort of phantasised violence found in Giacometti's prose poetic works not only did not require Bataille's permission – what a curious notion! – but is utterly distinct from the culturally codified conception of ritualised violence important to Bataille during the 1930s.

Against the claims of Krauss, the motility and phantasised violence of Giacometti's prose poetry has everything to do with the conventions of the surrealist dream narrative and the objectality implicit in this practice of transcription. Conventions of the surrealist dream narrative imply such characteristics as the tone and rhythm of memorial regard, or the equivocation between the rhetoric of recollection and projective phantasy in the expression or representation of unconscious phantasy, characteristics which are clearly pronounced in Giacometti's poetic prose works, and in a manner demonstrably linked to his surrealist sculpture-objects of the 1930s. The issue is not one of discourse over experience, but rather – following on from the Hegelian conception of negative infinity – that there is no outside position, even for discourse, because affect and language struggle with each other in the time of composition, in the same medium. Sarah Kofman expressed a similar idea as follows: 'if it is true that the work carries in it traces of the past, they are in no way elsewhere [they are nowhere else]. The work does not, in deforming the recollection, translate it; it constitutes the recollection phantasmatically. It

is an original memory and the substitute of the infantile psychic memory.'[26] In turning to the surrealist dream narrative, we may seek to explore how Giacometti was able to recognise such affect in the original memory, which is also a substitute for the infantile psychic memory in the time of writing of the dream transcription; this structural mechanism is linked to the constitutive role of childhood in surrealist thought.

Breton's first surrealist manifesto provides arguably the central formulation of the role of childhood in surrealist thought, which as container of imagination is the reserve available when life becomes caged and rationalised. Precisely what childhood makes available from its reserve is the anachrony of time, the 'absence of all rigour which leaves it the perspective of many lives led at once', an illusion in which one may become ensconced and in which one may know nothing more than 'the extreme, momentary facility of all things'.[27] On beauty, movement and immobility, René Magritte, for example, defined the experience informing his painting by writing that 'I was in the same state of innocence as the child who thinks it is able to grasp from its cradle the bird which is flying in the sky'.[28] When, in *Surrealism and Painting*, Breton addresses or evokes the archaic – beginning with the eye existing in a savage state – it is first by speaking of the sempiternal capacity of trying to fix visual images which result in a true language. This language, in another sense of the archaic, is the language of childhood, expressed through toys which today, comments Breton, would make us weep with rage; the world of toys suggested to him by the work of Picasso (especially *La femme en chemise*, 1914, then in Eluard's collection), but also the coloured enigmas of Giorgio de Chirico's Metaphysical Period. Hence, says Breton, returning to the archaic of eyes, maybe 'men will experience the need to return right to its veritable sources the magical river which flows from their eyes, bathing in the same light, in the same *hallucinatory shadow* the things which are and those which are not'.[29]

This imagination of the origins of the experience for painting – the eyes, the inward light, shadows, toys, hand movements ignorant of distance – all point to the dimension of childhood and, by extension, to the mother. One of the ways in which Freud attempted to conceive femininity is in terms of an inward turning of attention; for Breton, surrealist art had to take as the only viable approach that of the *modèle purement intérieur*. In the art of the Czech surrealist Toyen, for instance, which draws upon Lautréamont's depiction of murderous urges toward adolescent boys on the edge of sexual awareness, this terrain of childhood is explored via a division between the desire to acquire the powers of childhood and a murderous refusal of the narcissism of the child-in-the-family as a species of death. The meeting ground of the varying conceptions of childhood within surrealist thought is pre-eminently the *récit de rêve*, and what Giacometti's writings share with other surrealist dream accounts, such as those of de Chirico and Renée Gauthier in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*,[30] is precisely an imagery and imaginary dominated by the parental

imagos in situations of anguish relative to recollections of childhood. For example, de Chirico writes:

> It is my father who appears to me in dream and yet when I look at him he is not quite as I saw him when he was alive, in the time of my childhood. [...] I have the impression that my father is no longer in the patisserie, that he is fleeing, that he will be pursued like a thief, and I awaken into the anguish of this thought.[31]

Gauthier's dream, situated at the level of hearing and acoustic shadows (the most archaic of capacities), reads: 'Jim and I move towards this side to see what is going to happen. When we get to the passage, we are pushed back, thrown to ground, literally swept by a *guard of the gallery*.' She then adds the following note:

> This is a mystery of my childhood. My mother often frightened me by telling me how she heard the noise of the *guard of the gallery* and has never been able to explain to me of what it consisted. According to her, they are these enormous, deafening sounds of the men and monstrous beasts which pass in the winds at a certain time of the year. When you hear them you must stretch out flat on your stomach and block your ears.[32]

Such *récits* are dominated by the object-relations of neurosis and the question of the power of sex that structures repression, hence the tendency towards obsessional neurosis in which the imaginary of perversion is most pronounced, and often in an incestuous manner. In distinguishing between the function of symptoms in hysteria and obsessional neuroses, Freud had observed that, whereas in the former, symptoms have a positive role in wish fulfilment, in the latter, it is the negative, ascetic aspect that prevails, that is, the perversity of the imaginary.[33] One may go further, in relation to Giacometti, and point out that within obsessional neurosis, not only is perversity pronounced, but it is accompanied by the thought of itself: the pleasure, *jouissance* of thinking itself, since the end can never sate the pleasure (only the psychotic thinks that such might ever be the case, with murderous consequences). As Wladimir Granoff comments, in his seminar on 'La question du dehors et du dedans':

> If in the work of Freud the structure of hysteric neurosis attests to the potency of the question of sex, in order to trace a parallel we shall say that it is in the obsessional structure that the power of thought is attested. Power which must be without limits. That is why, and here is the heart of the question, of vital importance for this thought will be the conditions of its setting to work [*sa mise en œuvre*] and of its exercise. Power of thought which must be unlimited in order not to be unequal to the task, which is its 'what to do with the mother'. Delicate material. Not to say brittle. In the sense in which the question has a shattering force. In it becomes focalized initially, thereby durably, every violence, including all the violence of love, of which the insult is the socialized form.[34]

What, indeed, to do with the mother? This particular form of neurosis, especially in the case of Giacometti, in its aspect of perversity accompanied

by the sense of *triumph*,[35] congruent with the thematic and object-relations of the surrealist *récit de rêve*, is also linked to the capacity for playfulness. Giacometti's sculpture-objects become in this respect an exploration of the affect associated with object-relations – skin, breast, surface – accessed through dreams and the symptomatology and dramaturgy of neurosis. It is therefore not surprising that Giacometti's prose poetry of this period, especially in 1933, should return through the underside of dark play to the language of childhood and the maternal space, a language in which desire, guilt and obsessional rituals intermingle in the intense imagining of anguish and lack. 'Hier, sables mouvants' opens on a childhood memory: 'Being a child (between 4 and 7 years old), I saw in the exterior world only objects that could serve my pleasure. They were above all stones and trees, and rarely more than one object at a time.'[36] The development of this passage, moving from the fixated attention characteristic of the child (rarely on more than one object at a time), opens onto a theatre in which unfolds an intense awareness of attraction and motivation (through projective identification) attributed to two objects which are quite clearly maternal in conception: a large stone and a cave. Of the former, it is said 'It was my father who, one day, showed us this monolith.' The intensification of attention upon the path leading to this monolith is of the same order as that described in 'Objets mobiles et muets', suggesting not only how the path may be abstracted into a line (*un fil*), but also how the path becomes like thread (*un fil*, that is, in the order of the imaginary) and leads, perhaps, to an Ariadne within the labyrinth: 'From the house I saw it [the stone] in its slightest details, as well as the little path, like a thread, which led to it.' When the habit of attraction for the gilded cavern, the other 'maternal' object, began to wane, he wandered further, onto higher ground:

> In front of and a little below me, amidst the undergrowth, rose an enormous black stone shaped like a narrow and pointed pyramid whose sides fell almost vertically. I cannot express the feeling of sorrow and confusion I experienced at that moment. The stone immediately struck me as a living, hostile, menacing being.[37]

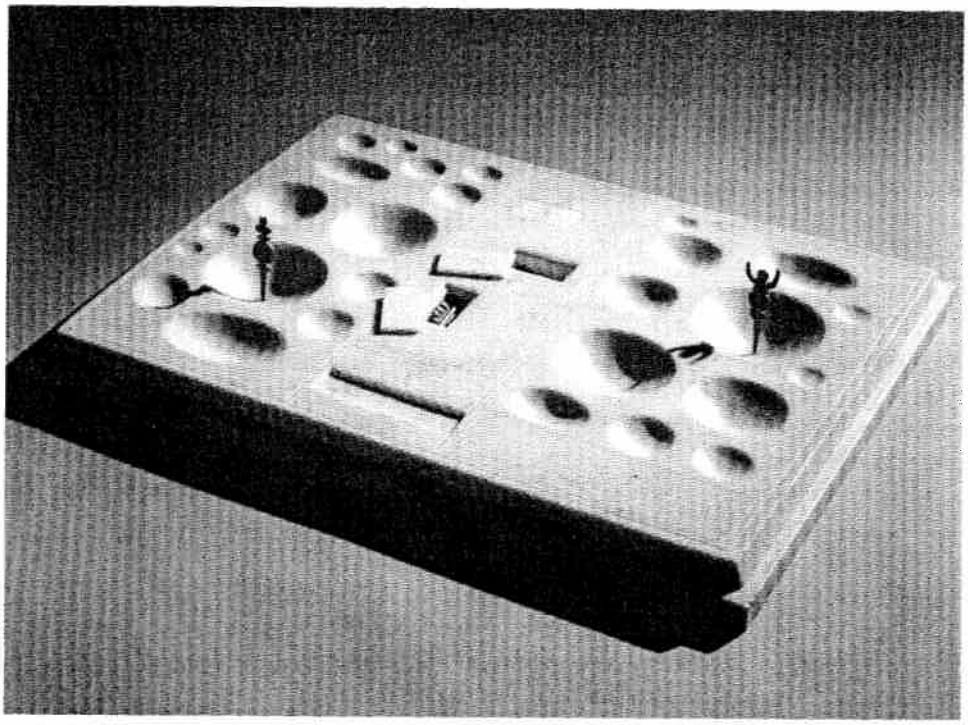
The description of the experience of this menacing, black presence is also to be found in Giacometti's textual presentation of *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, in a manner that makes clear the underlying object-relations, both in terms of the archaic imagery of the maternal, and the equivocal forms of identification by projection that centre on the relation of ocular contact between infant and mother:

> From the other side a statue of a woman came to be placed, in which I discover my mother, looking just as she marked my earliest memories. The long black robe which reached the ground disturbed me by its mystery; it seemed to me to be part of her body and that caused in me a feeling of fear and disarray; everything else was lost and escaped my attention. This figure is silhouetted against the same curtain repeated three times and it is on this curtain that I opened my eyes for the first time.[38]

This curtain is the same brown curtain of the poem 'Le rideau brun', published in May 1933 in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, with 'Poème en 7 espaces' ('Poem in 7 Spaces') and 'Charbon d'herbe' ('Coal of Grass'):[39] the cross-referencing of archaic imagery and diphasic movement in these works continues the imagery of veiling, surface, feminine and maternal projection, now become part of an economy for unmasking the real, that which remains irreducible and which, in the language of Serge Leclaire and J.H. Prynne, resists: 'The real? It is that which resists, insists, exists irreductibly, and gives itself in withdrawing itself as jouissance, anguish, death or castration.'[40] Whence the 'drop / of blood / white spiral / of blustery wind on / two breasts / crying'[41] from 'Poème en 7 espaces', finding its echo in 'Charbon d'herbe', where 'the invisible white thread of the marvellous [...] gives life to life and the glistening games of needles and turning thimbles happen and follow one after the other, and the drop of blood on the milky skin, but a shriek suddenly rises up that makes the air vibrate and the white earth tremble'.

The developing imagery of surface in Giacometti's poetic works – the skin, the surface, modulated into vibration (the air produced by contacted skin or surface), or centred on breasts or milk – *the milky skin* – here corresponds to what is one of the central, perhaps the crucial, surrealist images for the relation to a world at once transcendent and immanent, external and internal: the capillary tissue depicted in Breton's *Communicating Vessels* (1932) which permits the reversibility of embodied hearing, interiority and the world. This imagery is played out in the paintings of Joan Miró, for example, *Kiss* (1924), or *Painting* (1931) in the Menil Collection, Houston, inspired by listening through the skin of his pregnant wife to the pulse of the nascent yet unborn child.[42] For Giacometti in this period, in both poetry and art, the imagery of skin is that of a tension between internal and external worlds extended into psychic motion, for in these prose poems the imagery of motion and tension (trembling of surface, wind, breast, blood and drop of blood on the milky skin) fits into an economy of obsessional ritual. The affective space becomes 'the yellow / field / of / madness' (colour marking the condition of the insensate), thereby preparing a void to meet the attack upon the maternal space, the content of dream-space:

> As regards a certain mental solicitation, recurring and of the same order, I recall that at that same time, for months, I could not sleep in the evening without imagining that I had first crossed, at twilight, a thick forest and reached a grey castle which rose up in the most hidden and unknown place. There, without them being able to defend themselves, I killed two men, one of whom, about seventeen years old, always looked pale and frightened, while the other wore armour with something on its left side shining like gold. I raped, after ripping off their robes, two women, one aged thirty-two, all in black, with a face like alabaster, and then her daughter, around whom floated white veils. The whole forest rang out with their cries and groans. I killed them too, but very slowly (night had then fallen) often next to a lake with green, stagnating water, which lay before the castle. Each time with slight variations. I then burned the castle and fell happily asleep.[43]



2.3 Alberto Giacometti, *No More Play*, 1931–32, marble, wood and bronze, 4.1 × 58 × 45.2cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of the Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher Collection, Dallas, Texas, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art © ADAGP/FAAG, Paris and DACS, London, 2009

Thus closes 'Hier, sables mouvants' and Giacometti's gearing of the imagery of murderous incestuous phantasy onto motility as manifested through the feminine and maternal body. These five poetic prose works constitute – in tone, imagery, theme, modelling and treatment of the object which seeks to satisfy the drive – one seam of work. In each case, as with 'Objets mobiles et muets', the language of the work is one of affective movement in which the opening up and overcoming of distance is conveyed in terms of affective spatiality and stasis, that is, immobility confronted with anguish, guilt confronted with the movement of pleasure and encountering the primary instance of pleasure: the imaged movement of the mother and her copy, the daughter/sister, the triumph which is the 'satisfaction of lusts that are cruel and horrible or would even have to be called unnatural'.[44]

If one pursues the mode of anachronisation made possible through regression, then it is clear that the question, for the child, as for the adult, is that of origins, the place of places – for which Giacometti's *No More Play* becomes the type (Figure 2.3). Giacometti's works of this period unavoidably

imply the position of the child and that they may be taken as toys for a certain kind of child. For all the sculpture-objects of this period – *Circuit* (1931), *Point to the Eye* (1932), *Woman with her Throat Cut* (1932), *No More Play* (1933) – can be seen as theatres of projective identification. The form of board games, the moving parts as temptation to touch – with touch, as in many a children's game, functioning as a medium of transfer – the moments of suspension, the concern in each of these works with tension, a field upon which literal and implied movement are articulated, the positioning of the works in relation to the ground in ways that not only impose a change in the typical axis of adult movement in relation to sculpture but also recreate an affective aspect of the textured visuality of the child's perspective, all these qualities point to a preoccupation with movement in terms of memory and distortion, childhood violence and desire. Above all, these are surrealist toys for a new childhood. 'As children,' wrote Breton, 'we had toys which today would make us weep with pity and rage. Later, who knows, we will again see, like those of our childhood, the toys of our whole life.'[45] Again, after the surprising experience of Picasso's work for the ballet *Mercure* (1924), Breton would note: 'We grow up to a certain age, it appears, and our toys grow with us. As a function of the drama whose only theatre is the mind, Picasso creates tragic toys for the purpose of adults.'[46]

Giacometti's sculpture-objects are tragic toys for the purpose of adults produced within surrealism, where thought (psychic automatism) and play (chance) are never apart. So overwhelming is the movement towards horizontality and the ground in Giacometti's surrealist works (*Woman with her Throat Cut*, *No More Play*) that Georges Didi-Huberman has argued that these works impose the question of place, not only as the other scene of dream, but as a 'displaced presence' in a work of emptying and hollowing out (*un travail de creusement*):

> Ground, under-ground, stele: in looking at *On ne joue plus* [*No More Play*], here we describe only the shape of a cemetery. But a cemetery quite overturned, phantasmatically placed with its underneath above ground, suddenly open to the resurgence of buried bodies. Yves Bonnefoy has very well understood the powerful link which united this work to the iconography of the Last Judgement, of which Fra Angelico perhaps provided the most telling version, because it is the most radical, the most powerfully geometrical.[47]

In short, the movement to the ground, for the child as for the adult, places the support in absence, where the question of origins is inescapably linked to an emptiness inseparable from finitude. It is not simply that finitude shapes the presentiment of death; the feeling of finitude is not here disconnected from the confusion of passion and tenderness, from the feeling that desire should not be unequal to its unlimited task. Is the marble hand in *Caress* (1932) emerging, or is it caught, like a fly in amber? And is it merely a record,

a fossil as image of the archaic? To which *part* of the body is it near? And would it be possible to distinguish the interaction of these part-objects – the hand and that towards which it reaches, or that which is encountered (the absent breast?) between hand and presence – in terms of interaction with and between different feminine registers?[48] It is in *The Invisible Object*, for Breton almost the incarnation of fragility, that the most poignant testimony is given of this dimension of finitude and absence implicating the question of place through what it is not touched, yet which is given as though already with form: a negative space of, or for, the lost object, a 'feminine' space and yet more than that, the very principle of reversibility in Breton, 'The very emancipation of the *desire to love and be loved* in search of its veritable human object [aim] and in its sorrowful ignorance'.[49]

All the possibilities generated by these works are held within the double of play and thought. Here David Sylvester, who has written with such insight on Giacometti, is assuredly mistaken when he says at the end of a very fine analysis of the sculpture-objects that 'The element of play is a sort of bait',[50] before, even more surprisingly, going on to say that it is 'contemplation' that these works demand. On the contrary, we could read play in Giacometti, and above all in *No More Play* – an inadequate translation of 'On ne joue plus' – through fragment 51 of Maurice Solovine's 1931 translation of the Heraclitus fragments which all the surrealists read: 'Le Temps est un enfant qui joue en manoeuvrant les pions; c'est le règne d'un enfant.' (Time is a child which plays by manoeuvering pawns; it is the reign of a child.)[51] Play belongs to the fabric of things. The only question is whether or not it be understood in cosmological terms, though still in terms continuous with some conception of unconscious activity. And supposing 'Time is a child [...] the reign of a child'. Then surely *No More Play* would at the very least mark the coincidence of the womb and the tomb in the end of time, *à la fin du jeu*. Play is the very matter and form of things – and Giacometti knew this when in 1934 he wrote the following declension in his notebooks:

> Go further, re-start everything: *sculptures, drawings, writing.*
> Absolutely independent activity: *Poetry.*
> Poetry
> Heraclitus
> Hegel
> One descends and one does not descend twice the *same river.*[52]

Is this to see Giacometti's sculpture-objects as just plastic instances of dream-works, as the model of the *récit de rêve* would entail? Not at all, not least because the type of distance internal to the works – and the affective spatiality of the prose-poetic *récits* – is articulated through an intense imagining *and concomitant enframing* of the act of imagining. It is this reflective moment – in another sense of the feeling of feeling – implied in certain modalities of the

dream as either watching or being watched, that makes the sculptures works of art, since not only do they imply the viewer, they require the viewer to provide the activating frame – *la production de chacun de nous*. Without this there could be no form for the interplay of projection, phantasy, absence and emptiness, the minimal terms for the exploitation of the archaic, fetishism and that intensity called illusion which enables the imaginary object, in the situational complex of group experience, to be an intersubjective phenomenon. The question, therefore, is how we might conceptualise the relation between the viewer, the object and the experience of incompleteness and absence: whether phenomenologically as resistance, or psychically as disorientation, as emptiness, as shock or, even, through projective identification, as a loss and pathological absorption in the object. The issue, in other words, of Giacometti's thinking through the object-sculptures is the opening of desire in the encounter with finitude.

Notes

1. Alberto Giacometti, *Ecrits*, Paris: Hermann, 1990, p. 182 (subsequent references are to this edition).
2. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 142.
3. Cf. José Pierre, '"Objet transitionnel" et "objet surréaliste"', *André Breton et la peinture*, Lausanne: L'Age d'homme, 1987, pp. 160–63; Jean Guillaumin, 'Réel et surréel: Le traitement "poétique" de la réalité dans la cure et ailleurs', *Revue française de psychanalyse*, nos 5–6, 1971, pp. 883–919; and J.-B. Pontalis, 'Le rêve, entre Freud et Breton' (1974), in *Entre le rêve et la douleur*, Paris: Gallimard, 1977.
4. William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968, p. 143.
5. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 135.
6. André Breton, 'Situation surréaliste de l'objet, Situation de l'objet surréaliste' (1935), in Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, II, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p. 475.
7. Breton, 'Situation surréaliste de l'objet', p. 473.
8. Salvador Dalí, 'Objets surréalistes', in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 3, 1931.
9. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 170.
10. See in particular the BBC Third Programme interview conducted with David Sylvester, and published as 'Entretien avec David Sylvester' in *L'Ephémère*, no. 18, November 1971, and in English as 'Interview', in Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996, pp. 125–51.
11. Michel Leiris, 'Alberto Giacometti', *Documents*, no. 4, September 1929, p. 209.
12. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 123. My emphasis.
13. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 123.
14. Leiris, 'Alberto Giacometti', pp. 209–10.
15. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, pp. 2–3.
16. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, pp. 4–9.
17. Giacometti, 'Je ne puis parler *qu'indirectement* de mes sculptures', *Ecrits*, pp. 17–19.
18. 'Now, everyone who has seen this object function has felt a violent and indefinable emotion, doubtless having some relation with unconscious sexual desires. This emotion has nothing to do with satisfaction, rather with irritation, the kind provoked by the disturbing perception of a lack.'

Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Howard with an introduction by Roger Shattuck, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968, p. 188.

19. Cf. Breton's response to the *Morceau de velours rose* as 'à la fois frère et soeur', *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 6, p. 21.

20. André Thirion, *Révolutionnaires sans revolution*, Paris: Laffont, 1972, p. 322.

21. Xavière Gauthier, 'Un poème est un crime', *Surréalisme et sexualité*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 324.

22. Joyce McDougall, *Donald Winnicott the Man: Reflections and Recollections*, London: Karnac, 2003, p. 30.

23. Rosalind Krauss, 'No More Play', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1985, p. 61. The question of Giacometti's many phases of reception is much more complex than Krauss' essay suggests. He definitely was not, as she implies, a half-hearted member of the surrealist group whose work happened to find its way into their publications; as Thirion (*Révolutionnaires sans revolution*, p. 314) makes clear, Giacometti fully participated in the internal life of the group; indeed, he rejoined the group after leaving it in 1932 with Aragon. There are few artists who, in their lifetime, have been taken up by so many luminaries and in such different ways as Giacometti: after the surrealists, Leiris and the *Documents* group, we need to ask if the 'Giacometti' of Jean-Paul Sartre, Francis Ponge, Jacques Dupin and the *L'Ephémère* group is one and the same artist.

24. See Jacques Dupin, 'Une écriture sans fin', in Giacometti, *Ecrits*, pp. xiii, xix, and on failure (*l'échec*), p. xv.

25. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 166.

26. Sarah Kofman, 'Œuvre d'art et fantasme', *L'Enfance de l'art*, Paris: Galilée, 1985, p. 118.

27. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* (1924), in *Œuvres complètes*, I, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, p. 311.

28. René Magritte, 'La Ligne de vie I', *Ecrits complets*, Paris: Flammarion, 1979, p. 106.

29. Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris: Gallimard, 1965, p. 7, my emphasis; for the various senses of the archaic at play, cf. pp. 2, 6 and 7.

30. Cf. 'Rêves', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 1, 1924, pp. 3–6.

31. Giorgio de Chirico, in 'Rêves', p. 3.

32. Renée Gauthier, in 'Rêves', p. 5.

33. Cf. Sigmund Freud, 'Resistance and repression', in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth: Pelican Freud, vol. I, pp. 342–3.

34. Wladimir Granoff, 'La question du dehors et du dedans', *La Pensée et le féminin*, Paris: Minuit, 1976, p. 240.

35. See Melanie Klein on obsessional rituals as a defence against paranoid anxieties and the sense of '*triumph*, closely bound up with contempt and omnipotence, as an element of the manic position'. Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921–1945*, New York: The Free Press, 1975, p. 351.

36. Giacometti, 'Hier, sables mouvants', *Ecrits*, pp. 7–9.

37. Giacometti, 'Hier, sables mouvants', pp. 7–8.

38. Giacometti, 'Je ne puis parler *qu'indirectement* de mes sculptures', *Minotaure*, nos 3–4, December 1933, in *Ecrits*, pp. 17–19.

39. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, pp. 4–6.

40. Serge Leclaire, *Démasquer le réel: Un essai sur l'objet en psychanalyse*, Paris: Seuil, 1971, p. 11; J. Prynne, 'Resistance and Difficulty', *Prospect*, no. 5, 1961.

41. For a reading of the three drops of blood in terms of the archaic patterns of fairy-tale, cf. Jean Clair, 'Le résidu et la ressemblance: un souvenir d'enfance d'Alberto Giacometti', in Suzanne Pagé, ed., *Alberto Giacometti. Sculptures. Peintures. Dessins*, Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1991, pp. 29–30.

42. This argument on the skin of painting in surrealism was first delivered at the symposium 'Surrealism Laid Bare', Edward James Foundation, West Sussex, UK, in 2001.

43. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 9.
44. Freud, 'Resistance and Repression', p. 343.
45. Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 6.
46. Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 7.
47. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Le Cube et le visage: autour d'une sculpture d'Alberto Giacometti*, Paris: Macula, 1992, pp. 232–3.
48. Cf. Jean Clair, 'Le residu et la ressemblance', p. 31, where the hand is seen as an allusion to the breast in Rembrandt, *La Fiancée juive*, c.1666 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Giacometti himself wrote in his *Carnets et feuillets*, c.1947: 'Still today I often distance objects from each other and the intolerable sentiment that I feel in front of *L'épouse juive*, one of Rembrandt's last canvases, must come from the same source.' Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 190.
49. Breton, *L'Amour fou*, Paris: Gallimard, 1937, p. 40.
50. Sylvester, *Looking at Giacometti*, p. 62.
51. Héraclite d'Ephèse, *Fragments* (trans. Maurice Solovine), Paris: Alcan, 1931, p. 58.
52. Giacometti, *Ecrits*, p. 170.

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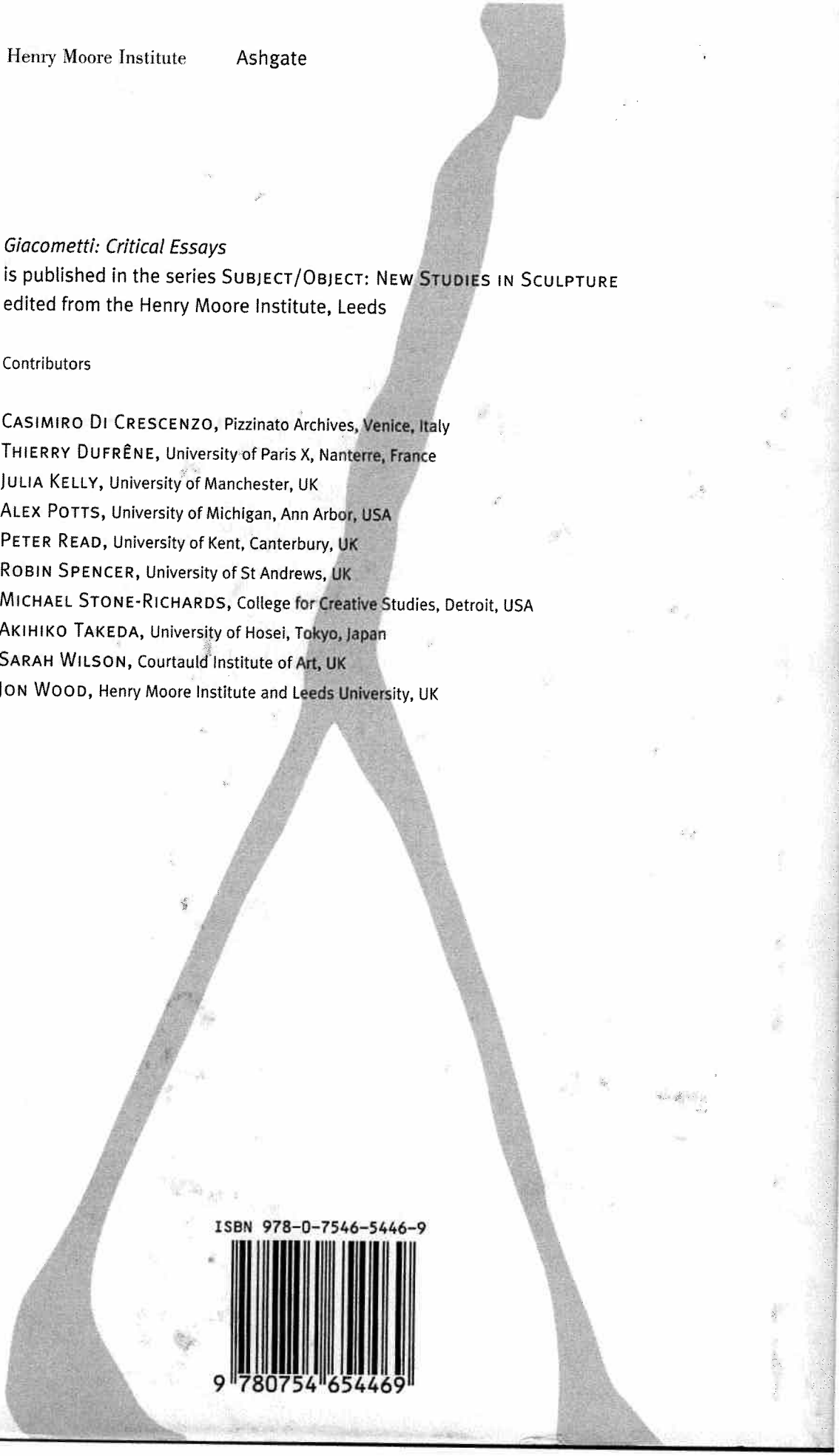
Contributors

CASIMIRO DI CRESCENZO, Pizzinato Archives, Venice, Italy
THIERRY DUFRÊNE, University of Paris X, Nanterre, France
JULIA KELLY, University of Manchester, UK
ALEX POTTS, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA
PETER READ, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK
ROBIN SPENCER, University of St Andrews, UK
MICHAEL STONE-RICHARDS, College for Creative Studies, Detroit, USA
AKIHIKO TAKEDA, University of Hosei, Tokyo, Japan
SARAH WILSON, Courtauld Institute of Art, UK
JON WOOD, Henry Moore Institute and Leeds University, UK



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