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*Photography/Post-Modernism*



# PHOTOGRAPHY, POSTMODERNISM; CONTRADICTIONS

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"The paradox is unthinkable, and yet love persistently attempts to think it."

Kierkegaard,  
*Either/Or*, Vol. I.

Given the looseness of the label, "Modernism," "Postmodernism" is bound to be looser. The labels are stuck onto a confusing array of activities. Some critics apply "modernism" only to those formalist art works that fall under Clement Greenberg's theories of purity and taste or José Ortega y Gasset's theory of dehumanization. Articles in recent periodicals on postmodernism reveal an equally confusing array of theories that emphasize allegory, semiology, or a plurality of copies. None can embrace the range of artistic activity in this century, but they do serve to illuminate important aspects of their subjects. However loose the terms remain, I think of modernist and postmodernist art as related situations.

To find oneself in a situation that is new is to be modern in its common sense. The surprise it provokes relates to contradictions that newness and progress imply. To see a new thing, one understands it in so much as it is at all visible, but fails to understand it in so much as it presents the never-before-seen. Jean Jacques Rousseau's writings express the ethos of newness with tense, alternating values: stability/perversion, progress/tradition; innocence/corruption, nature/civilization.<sup>1</sup> Near the beginning of the twentieth century, Mallarmé questioned the certainty of existence. Picasso and Braque fractured perspectival space and scrambled verbal and pictorial signs. And the influence of primitive art made modernism a paradoxical progressive-retrogression. Paradox riddles the modern situation.

In retrospect, Robert Smithson likened it to Zeno's tortoise and hare paradox.<sup>2</sup> He perceived the classical modernism of the early twentieth century as various coterie who saw the newness around them and decided that their art had better catch up to such hares as Einsteinian relativity and Freudian unconsciousness. Of course, as the paradox states, they can draw closer and infinitely closer to that newness but never arrive. The avant-garde futilely chase a newness one micro-step ahead.

The effect of the paradoxical chase has been to pull the existential ground from beneath us and to prompt deeper questioning. But the cutting edges of paradox dull; logicians reveal their fallacies and find missing information that makes their truth uncontradictory. So too our avant-garde's project becomes, according to Greenberg, a "holding operation" to maintain "quality."<sup>3</sup> The holding operation arrests the impertinence of paradox and crystallizes ambiguous structures. Par-

adox becomes pertinent only to the work's closed, isolated museum/gallery situation.

The postmodern sensibility in art opens the impertinent paradox and applies it to our life. It is a refinding and renewal of the original instability and riskiness of modernism. The riskiness arises from the two opposite properties of the paradox itself: the paradox of the paradox as such. Impertinent to reason, we exclude it from everyday life, yet its profound pertinence to thought forces us to admit it. We must find again the pertinent impertinence of paradox.

As a finding device, postmodern artists have placed photography importantly within their strategy. As a most pervasive means of private and public communication, photographs make distant realities seem immediate and immediate experiences distant. They seem capable of picturing the world as it looks without a looker. Yet the "photographer's eye" must be present to the scene to photograph even though it can be a detached presence. As the culminating technique of linear perspective, it pictures a vision that conceptualizes the world as a perspectival picture.<sup>6</sup> Photographs create a world in harmony with an imagination that has been conditioned by photography, and through this cultural imagination we live life by proxy. Still, a life lived by proxy is a real situation. By exploring the real paradoxical sense of our photographically conditioned imagination, the photographic series "Imitations" by Ann Wulff and "LAX NAZ" by John Divola exemplify postmodern art's dizzying circles of paradox in the experience of self and situation.

The possibilities for human consciousness to reflect create the first circle. In reflective awareness, the self makes the self its own object of thought. Reflectivity in this primary sense stands more exclusively in Wulff's project of self-portrayal. Self-portraits result from the artist's making him or herself the subject (object) of picturing. The portraying agent portrays itself, thus self-portraits are portraying-portrayed and seeing-seen (Merleau Ponty's *voyant-visible*).<sup>7</sup> Contradiction lies in the development that to see one's own sight means "visible blindness," as Smithson said of his mirrored enantiomorphic chambers. It makes little logical sense to say, "I see you seeing the sunset," yet self-portraits prompt our readiness to assert such nonsense as "I see seeing seen."

The self-portrait thus by nature contradictorily sets the reflective consciousness in a vacillating, alternating role. In Wulff's two-picture works, she presents an informal family portrait, then she portrays herself in another picture adopting, as closely as possible, the former subject's dress, position, posture, and expression. As if re-enacting the "mirror-stage" hypothesized by Jacques Lacan, she seems to see her photographic reflection

*Solitaire: a game for one, learned through imitation, we emulate our ancestor's actions.*



*Though each individual is an unique configuration, the self is a collection of other selves.*



*In the game we assume characteristic roles, selected like playing cards to follow suit.*

ANN E. WULFF. Imitations #2. 1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)

as another real person, another person not quite real, and herself as that not-quite-real other. She emphasizes by her self-portrayal-as-another the contradiction of the reflective consciousness that thinks of itself as another.

Divola does not involve contradictions of reflectivity directly but suggests them through implied mirrors. Throughout the series, centrally placed doors and windows hallmark his pictures. The imagination links doorways, windows, and mirrors as a multi-leveled passageway. Doorways open the body to other spaces, windows open sight onto an adjacent space, and mirrors open sight onto and back onto the same space. As Robert G. Cohn said of Mallarmé's windows, there is in the progression—doorways, windows, mirrors—a growing arrestation.\* Divola's pictures clearly imply sight's ultimate arrestation at the mirror

level by the way his doors and windows invite the passage of sight but ultimately stop it and turn it back onto itself.

His doorways are ambiguous doors/windows, either sliding or curtained. Wooden boards nailed to a broken door visually suggest a drawn, open curtain. Sliding doors (picture windows turned on their side in the vocabulary of suburban architecture) announce their ambiguity more loudly with curtains. If his doors and windows share each other's identity, may they not play in concert with the third member of the trio? Divola formally conspires that they should.

His photographic flash often equalizes the tonal values of the room with those of the window scenes, which baffles our expectation of daytime, bright windows within dark interiors, and nighttime, dark windows within lighted interiors. Gradients create the illusion of pictorial depth, and the balance thwarts the gradient of tones that frequently opens up the pictures spatially. The openness and space offered by his doors and windows becomes illusive. Like reflective mirrors, where we expect to find such balanced values, they become paradoxically closed and open.

Closure/openness associates with another duplicity of reflectivity: interior/exterior. Divola's pictures deal with this duplicity as literally as Wulff deals with portraying self/other. The series has both interior and exterior views that are not qualitatively different. (The exceptions are a few long-shot exterior views that function to establish context.) Exterior views are also softly lighted with doors/windows centrally placed. Just as three converging lines can represent alternatively a box corner from either an outside or an inside viewpoint, Divola's apparent interiors seem outside and his exteriors inside. As ambiguous as the ruins of antiquity or a bombed village, the walls and facades share a precarious existence that could topple to reveal an all encompassing exterior or reveal an all encompassing interior. Both reflective possibilities fall toward the viewer.

Switching polarities seem to extend to the relationship of pictures and the world in Divola's representation of battered homes. My reading of Rudolf Wittkower's essay, "Brunelleschi and 'Proportion in Perspective'" reversed for me the relationship of architecture and perspectival picture-making. Brunelleschi's building plans derive more from his methods of systematic picturemaking than the character of actual three-dimensional space. In effect, Wittkower sees the buildings as representing pictures.<sup>9</sup>

Divola's sites seem made for their picturing, too, but their dilapidated state makes their photogenic character perverse. We recognize the homes as the type developed to look like pictures in *Better Homes and Gardens*. Yet the broken dereliction seems only suited for the police-reportage style of photography Divola affects. The photographs are analogous to a harshly lighted scene in a 16mm film that shows Rock Hudson stripped naked and beaten. Divola photographs the typically photogenic stripped of its typical photogenic qualities.

Before stripping, the photogenic interiors enlisted images of decor to help blur the boundaries between pictures and architecture. Space-revealing wallpaper, op-art curtains, graphically bold upholstery, and framed visual art conspire to make most homes floorless jungles of visual illusions. Now, the visual jungle has been cleared of natives and left to become an eyesore paradoxically because of technology's sound (LAX NAZ is an acronym for The Los Angeles International Airport Noise Abatement Zone.) Under the roar of jet engines, wall marks left by ripped out appliances are like the tracks put down by

a crude erasure. Marks left by vandals make palimpsests of the remaining bits of design decor. Divola's noisy sites are "image-zones" that he depicts oddly rezoned.

Perhaps more oddly, Wulff's reflections claim the *self* as an "image-zone" for depiction. Her project of self-portraiture has common portraiture at its base. Usually, the "model" and "subject" of a photographic portrait are one and the same individual, unlike traditional visual art or advertising photography that can use models in place of the picture's subject. An authentic photographic portrait shows its model/subject confronting the picturing process.<sup>10</sup> In other words, he is pictured in his awareness of being pictured. In that kind of awareness, the subject, with the photographer's cooperation, controls his appearance according to pictorial conventions.

The examples of this kind of paradoxical reflectivity are bountiful. We show sunny smiles, while nineteenth-century bourgeoisie look as stern as rock. Wulff's contemporary, American subjects are as made for snapshots on Kodak's brightly colored paper as Brunelleschi's vistas are made for his perspectival drawing. In very self-aware guises of "unaware," nonchalant reading, open, "spontaneous" smiles, and forthright camera gazes, the subjects model themselves and make themselves what for us they in fact are: figures in pictures.

The doubling that Wulff effects in the alternating pictures then redoubles the contradictory sense of a portrait subject. She is not merely using herself as model for another subject. For the sake of an artistic picture, she imitates how she as photographer saw the subjects or models make themselves appear "as pretty as a picture." Both Divola's and Wulff's pictures compound the paradoxes of reflectivity and form compelling examples of postmodern art.

Adjusting our look at reflectivity slightly, we see a vast arena of spectacle, the theatre, which involves a host of other paradoxes that Divola and Wulff exploit. Their work, of course, does not constitute theatre literally but more craftily implicates theatre and its paradoxical association with the real world. Wulff does not use actors, stages, or props, but her real characters, actual home scenes, and objects all become theatrical. Divola does not overtly fabricate his scenes in this series, yet they are stage-like. All the world for them has become a stage, but, as we shall see, in a very non-Shakespearean way.

The simplicity of means required for the setting of the stage makes me wonder. It is obvious that Wulff simply changes clothing, but what a wealth of consideration that change entails. Ann Hollander saw that dress, whether in reality or in a picture, is a form of visual art: a creation of images with the visible self as its medium.<sup>11</sup> Hollander's position that ongoing pictorial conventions demonstrate what is natural in clothed human appearance gives us deeper insight into the reversibility of pictures and reality.

With the mind's reflectivity enlarged to a theatrical spectacle, the imaginary possibilities of dress become more complex with dress-up. Hollander defined two types of dress-up: theatrical costumes that expand the performer's own self, and dramatic costumes that transform him completely into a character.<sup>12</sup> Jean Paul Sartre sums up the perplexing consequences of an actor's complete transformation in *L'Imaginaire*, "It is not the character who becomes real in the actor, it is the actor who becomes unreal in his character."<sup>13</sup> In so far as Wulff becomes unreal or is cancelled by the dress-up, her costumes are dramatic, yet from another perspective the clothes do not cancel her at all, and they are theatrical. For one thing, sometimes they do not

*Mirrored counterparts, in their androgynous form, genetic son and daughter, polar opposites in character.*



*Politely indifferent siblings, both desire to be the sole child, Protagonists in divergent novels.*

ANN E. WULFF. Imitations #4. 1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)

fit quite correctly. They do so enough to sustain an initial illusion of cancellation, but the measure of the actor's discrepancy from the clothing's fit sets a measure of the actor's redemption from nothingness. To the extent that the dress-up fails, the actor is redeemed.

She succeeds to some degree to act-out through her dress-up a sense of her "true" self, a self that plays at being others. Here is an application in life of classic paradoxes involving truth and falsehood such as the lying Cretin's true statement that philosophers mull over. The simplest structural condensation is to consider the paradoxical truth of the sentence, "This sentence is false." If, as it says, it is false, then it is also true of itself.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in so much as Wulff's pictorial dress-up as another confesses that she leads a false, dress-up existence, she is being true to herself. Yet, in the clutches of the paradox, we must again consider the original negation of herself.



JOHN DIVOLA. LAX NAZ #3. 1976–1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)



JOHN DIVOLA. Forced Entry, Site #2, Exterior View. 1976–1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)



JOHN DIVOLA. Forced Entry, Site #3, Interior View. 1976–1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)



JOHN DIVOLA. Forced Entry, Site #7, Interior View. 1976–1982. (Courtesy of the artist.)

The negation reconsidered asks us what the dress-up negates in the first place. Does the actor possess a natural self subject to annulment in character acting? Are there innate dispositions that initiate expressions and personality as directly as heartbeat regulates pulse? Does the actor have a soul to cancel? With these questions Wulff's stage becomes non-Shakespearean, for whatever complexity and suffering the possession of an Elizabethan self brought forth, there was surely a self to suffer. On the postmodern stage, there may be no original self to act.

As origins are concerned, Wulff's no self of subjectivity relates to Divola's no place of home. Traditional, functioning homes are sites for the imagination to take root just as the traditional soul took root in the body. They amplify the original sense of existence from being-in to being-familiar-to. Dwelt-in homes like natural souls are a familiar, expanded inside, a counter-universe in opposition to a collapsed, unfamiliar outside. Homes are places to concentrate reality.<sup>15</sup> Abandoned as Divola found his houses, the life has gone out of them as air from a balloon. Only fragmented tokens of familiarity remain, and they are only mocking reminders in the face of the grim unfamiliarity and outsidedness that has taken over. The sites are familiarity taken over to stage strangeness.

And as stages, they are stranger anti-stages. "Anti" because they do not seem to be so much scenic supports for present actors, but stages acted upon by absent actors. We see no actors upon Divola's stages, only the aftereffects of their actions. Vandals act only offstage and before the rising curtain. In that past, they act as on a stage, because the abandoned homes deprived of function do not seem real. The destruction Divola shows, the broken glass, broken doors, and defaced surfaces, are doubly unreal for us in so much as they are unreal to the perpetrators. Kids find stages that allow them to act as vandals where their actions seem to have no real consequence. Divola's acted upon stages have consequence solely within the imagination.

Of equal consequence to the imagination, Wulff's form of theatrical discourse seems to take the form of a paradoxical soliloquy. The spotlighted action creates a sense of isolation. Her brother and herself-as-brother read a book. The very same book that involves their simultaneous gaze paradoxically cannot be read or experienced together. The arched bed-back-board isolates their solo reading performance like the proscenium frame of a miniature theatre. Wulff's written words which frame the pictures identify the mini-actions as soliloquy. As "genetic son and daughter" they are cast in the same biological book of life, and their contrasting identities are sustained as "polar opposites in character." Yet, both "desire to be the sole child," and the *one* who speaks of the other. The novel they read has no fixed reciprocal relationship of antagonist to protagonist, and each character clamors to be the *one*.

Wulff plays out the theme of one in imitation of her grandmother's solitaire game. For solitaire, there are generally established rules to which the individual continually refers for each card's distribution. Like solitaire players, we learn the game of being from others, from ancestors. As Wulff's text suggests, we "follow suit" or imitate to act according to the rules. Yet, the particular cards that turn up and the meaning of following suit can be for no one else but the player. The collection of selves that, like spread out cards, compose the individual may or may not be unique. The meaning of the

contradictory composite for each solitaire player is certainly unique.

Most games, even games of solitaire, mean amusement, and Wulff's pictures do carry an element of comedy. I laugh at first sight of the pictures. The pictures base their gag on a form of parody, mockery. The gag jolts, surprises, and humors when we discover an inconsistency to an apparent consistency. She wreaks her mischief as impersonator with personal access to all the props—the clothes, the setting—of her masks. I enjoy the congruity and incongruity of the disguise as much as I enjoy hearing a record of a parrot mimicking the bark of a dog. It is funny because the dog's bark (the appearance of others in the case of Wulff's photographs) becomes doubly displaced. Parrots by expectation parrot human speech; amateur comics by expectation imitate Jimmy Cagney. Wulff comically imitates the unexpectedly comic subjects of her everyday life.

The comic imitation has tragic elements to it also. In typical comedy the joker makes a game of others using the self. Untypically, Wulff's mimicry also makes a joke of herself using the masks of others. By the doubling that I described of reflectivity, the *tableaux vivants* she enacts are really parodies of herself imitating others in actual life. She makes herself the mark of her own comedy routine.

Also typically, a trickster does not face up to reconciling the inconsistencies of his own nature. A trickster looks at others for traits to lampoon and cultivates skills for capturing the look of others. Lonely as jesters may be, they are completely dependent upon the others of the court. Without them, the jester would disappear, and literature rarely presents them as asserting their own existence. Wulff's jester has an assertive dimension that involves a reflective look at that comic/tragic self.

The comic element of Divola's "LAX NAZ" series does not grip one immediately with a belly laugh, but the serious theme of vandalism does have a perverse humor. Grab a kid by the ear who has just thrown a brick through your window and ask why he did it, and he may well answer, "for fun." How can that be fun? Look at the torn down curtain in Divola's picture. Can one not see it as funny in the same way that the terrible effects of the Katzenjammer Kids are funny, or that a hat knocked askew is funny? Moralists call such mischief "wanton," but one sense of that word means to be excessively merry or frolicsome. Merriment and humor lie at the severe heart of the destructive impulse.

The possibility for strange humor in a theatre-like existence claims the attention of postmodern artists like Ann Wulff and John Divola, but questions must be asked how they raise paradoxes that apply to the actual behavior of society. Their representation of life-as-theatre is not a special case peculiar to Wulff's problematic self and Divola's uprooted homes but is a general characteristic of life. Their paradoxes undermine basic themes of actual human behavior: normalcy/deviancy, self-knowledge/self-deception, sincerity/bad faith.

Some issues within Erving Goffman's writing set the tone for Wulff's dealing with the actual paradoxicality of self-hood. Goffman describes all human interactions as a kind of information game where individuals employ diverse, complicated tactics to control the impressions others receive of the interactive situation.<sup>16</sup> There are sincere, honest performances and false performances; there are actual social identities (personal biography) and virtual social identities (one's "face"). Perform-

ers can be taken in by the act, and individuals can think they assert their personal identity. But for Goffman, each behavior is just another flexing of society's muscle.

Wulff's series paradoxically sets being-for-others within isolated acts and games of solitaire and undermines the one-sided view of sociologism. Existence is coexistence, but the individual can distance him or herself from social display behavior and decide what it means; as Wulff is ultimately doing with the series. She contradicts the view of social determinism though she depicts herself trapped in accordance with it.

To seem to be in social accordance, one common strategy is to convey a misleading impression that one is "like" the other. In the imaginary exchange with her father, she says, "imitating his facade, she forges his name." One can imagine that she learns to forge his name to garner rewards, in this case probably the rewards of the checkbook. What kid does not act like a chip-off-the-old-block in order to gain direct rewards or a sense of worth. As aspects of universal behavior, it is normal.

But paradoxically, Wulff puts that normalcy on trial as deviant. The photographs display her awareness of the situation and unhappiness with it. In the text about father, placating statements to please move to phrases of "plots, disturbances, and rumbles." The motivation to normalize does arise from love as well as the will to gain rewards, and it makes the sting of refusal to exist as a "shadow of expectations" all the more painful. Normalcy, designed to please, deviates from the love that may have prompted it.

Normalcy/deviancy plays on the greater stage of sexual behavior and feminism. Goffman argues that we can learn more through a study of behavior as it relates to gender than any other social division or class. He shows that in commercial advertising, women, much more than men, are portrayed at a psychological loss, at a remove from the situation, as playing at being serious, as not really in command of themselves.<sup>17</sup> Wulff suggests that through whatever source of behavioral imagery—magazine pictures, animals, or family—images cast the mold of female normalcy. Normal female eyes should reflect rather than look at the world.<sup>18</sup> But behind normal images of a reflecting self, the deviant, acting self lurks.

Divola places deviancy to lurk up front. After all, what do sociologists look at when they study common forms of deviancy? . . . Vandalism of course. They do not go to middle-class homes and ask why little girls and boys smile sweetly in spite of darker propensities. They try to read the graffiti on the wall and decide whether it is the confusing, unstructured nature of environmental squalor or the cloying, over-structured nature of "ideal" communities that promote deviancy.<sup>19</sup> In any case, the unreal, abnormal behavior is a general feature of our situation.

How can we know about deviancy when all we see are normal sociologists and, as Divola's pictures attest, never see the vandals.<sup>20</sup> Like Wulff's intimations of personal identity, they are always somebody else. Like phantoms that assert their existence only through the effect they have on something else and by the trace they leave, vandals vandalize and leave vandalized property. Divola shows their essence in showing only the effects of their deviancy.

The vandal's ghost-like figures are limned by the holes Divola presents. One apparition takes its form from the irregular shards of glass remaining in the sliding door. Another from the smashed-out door panels. Like detectives, we reconstitute their actions in imagination. I see a flying projectile crashing

through glass in one case, a dull screwdriver prying open latches in another. Whatever the shape of agent or instrument used, the vandal is a penetrating, violating force. His intrusion points out the disturbing inconsistencies of possession and property. Owning property does not necessarily mean to be in full possession of it when vandals are about the neighborhood. For a society that values property rights and the sanctity of home, the invasion of home by unseen, foreign forces is evil itself.

The seeming purposelessness of the invasion makes it so evil. Its motive is unknown, it has no rhyme or reason; it seems to have no meaning.<sup>21</sup> We are relieved if we can attribute the misacts to political unrest or the effects of poverty. With no attribution of cause, how can law and order forces or social programs respond except with their occasional oppressiveness or futility? Divola's pictures are unconsoling dumb. They offer no information to make any definite statements on the causes of vandalism. Purposeless, they remain disturbing enigmas.

Undaunted, sociologists try to find purposes for apparently motiveless behavior that even the subject himself may not know. The kid, as I mentioned before, will say he did it for fun, or he just wanted to see what would happen. Such reasons are unsatisfactory, so one hypothesizes a motive behind the stated intentions as if the kid is lying to himself. Self-deception is fraught with paradox. To lie is to know what one is trying to hide, and as Sartre put it, "how can we conceive of a knowledge which is ignorant of itself."<sup>22</sup> As a result of self-deception, Divola shows us paradoxical wreckage.

Self-deception as it links with sincerity and bad faith brings us to crucial paradoxes, hinted at before, operating in Wulff's photographs. Not to exist in self-deception is to know oneself, and sincerity is to act according to that knowledge. It is "to be true to oneself." Conversely, bad faith takes consciousness in flight from the self. It is to play at being and say, "I am other than what I am."

In her pictures, Wulff portrays herself as insincere in social interaction: as someone who is not, for herself, what she is. As an artist, she admits her insincerity in order to be no longer insincere. Here is the contradiction at the heart of sincerity that occupied Sartre, "How can one admit oneself to be the thing [insincere] in order to be no longer that thing [sincere]."<sup>23</sup> Even in sincerity, escape is the goal, thus both bad faith and sincerity are games of mirrors. Wulff courageously positions her photographs and herself between those inescapable existential mirrors.

Where does Divola place himself and his project between the mirrors? In contrast to Wulff, he remains as far offstage as the vandals or the noisy jet airplanes. I imagine his invisibility in relation to the invisibility of the vandals as, in linear perspective, sight point is related to vanishing point. As an unseen being, is he and his photography a case of vandalism on the other side of the looking glass?

The question ultimately arises from the dialogue of behavior/misbehavior that each artist suggests. Wulff's project by depicting her good behavior, her desire to please by conforming to others' expectations, ultimately becomes a project of personal misbehavior in the realm of art. Divola depicts misbehavior, so called crimes against the social environment, but perhaps he is on his best behavior with his phantom vandalism by conforming to an art world that coddles *enfants terribles*. Art-making raises unsolvable contradictions of behavior/misbehavior.

The contradictions Wulff and Divola pose do not just apply to a convoluted art world but characterize a postmodernist perspective that views paradox as fundamentally pertinent to life. Whether the paradoxes apply to a subject's experience of identity or situation, the condition is summed up in Sartre's formulation, "I am not what I am, and I am what I am not."<sup>24</sup> Paradox is not a fluke of nature, a flaw of reasoning, or a puzzling trick to be isolated, polished, and exhibited in a gallery like a two-colored creature from far-away. It lies at the heart of being.

The postmodern perspective views experience through a wider scope than traditional Humanism and may even suggest a shift from its basic tenets. Man is not necessarily fixed enduringly at the center of his universe, his history, and his self. Postmodernism's images of human subjects and dwellings do not reflect centered entities but beings and situations created in the fissure of a split (to use terms familiar to Jacques Laçan's writings). The fulfilled identity and its rooted dwelling taken together is a mirage arising when the subject forms an image of itself by identifying with others' perception of it. Concerning the Humanists' ideal of self and home, the postmodernist claims, there is none such.

To see the absence at the heart of being is to exercise a peculiar human freedom. Human beings, as Sartre said in the opening of his chapter on bad faith, "are also the only ones who can take a negative attitude with respect to themselves."<sup>25</sup> "To be not what one is, and to be what one is not" indicates that there is no point of certainty, truth, or security. In the absence of final guarantees there is the responsibility to freely choose. By taking negative stances to projects of self-definition and dwelling, Wulff and Divola assume human freedom in its difficulty.

## NOTES

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