
Cracked Fillings



Alexi Kukuljevic





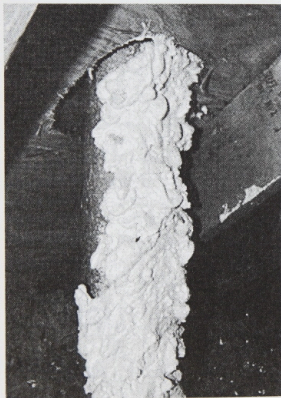
He marvelled at the fact
that the human being has
two holes cut in their skin
precisely where the eyes
are to be placed.

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

Alexi Kukuljevic
CRACKED FILLINGS

Occasional Texts and Images

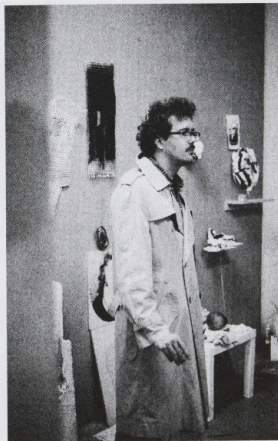


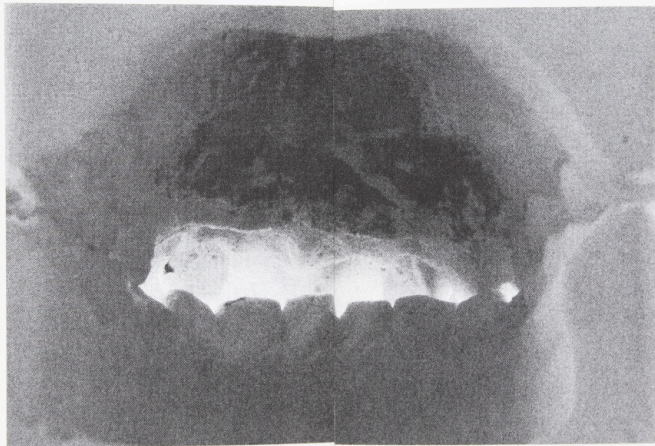


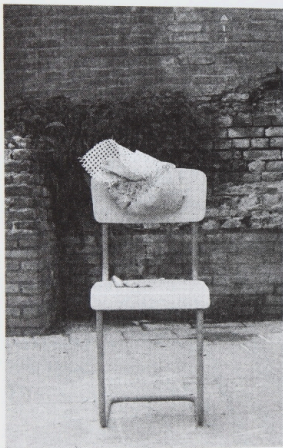
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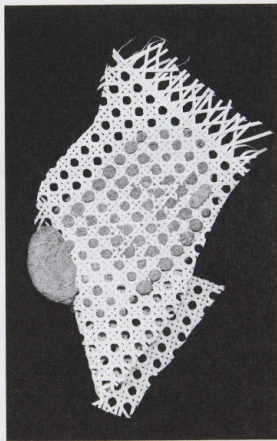


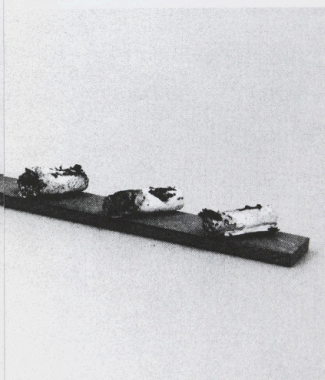
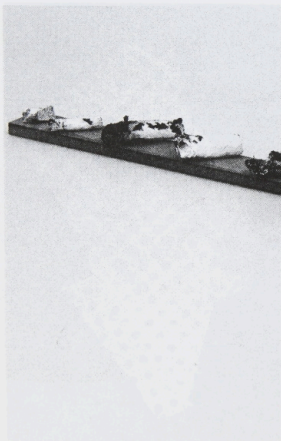




Cognizance of the ultimate
 vapidness of the world, disgust
 with life, hatred of the existing
 state of things; such attitudes are
 the armor with which the pessimist
 clads one's self. The eternal optimist's
 irritant, its null and irascible partner,
 the pessimist never tires of pointing to
 the holes in the fabric of things, the tears
 and hiatuses that mottle the picture. As
 an attitude, it is a subjective disposition
 that sharpens its critical blades and is a
 necessary supplement to the intellect's
 harsher virtues. If the pessimist favours
 rituals of dissolution, awkward gaits,
 steps that stumble, hiccups, broken
 cadence and characters that do not
 praise consistency, it is because she no
 longer puts faith in human musculature,
 the moral fiber it excretes, or bones that
 stand the human up straight. Having

lost its faith in self-abandonment and its extravagant optimism, the pessimist rather treats the self as a wall that must be built brick by brick, knowing full well that there is no mortar that does not crumble. No stranger to forms of self-mastery, suspicious of "empty revolt" and "mechanical disobedience," and attuned to the fact that "ideas are born into a world that is dangerously receptive, with a truly excessive capacity for absorption," the pessimist cloaks one's speech with the thick hatred of cigar smoke that ruins the palette and stains the tongue. Transparency is the pessimist's ruse. His glass is etched with sharpened nails. He is distrustful of the sacred.





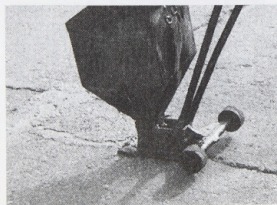
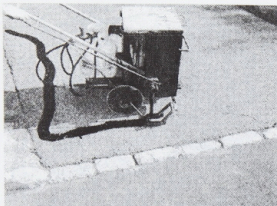


Almost nothing. Infra-thin. Marcel Duchamp maintained that *infra-mince* could not be strictly defined. Its sense rather is built through the enumeration of examples. *E.g.*, the interval between the sound of a gun firing and the hole made by the bullet, the difference between a freshly pressed shirt and the wrinkles that form upon its impact with the body, the stain of the mouth on the cigar smoke as it is exhaled and the trace impression of the mouth on its form. Less than an idea, but inaccessible to the senses. The back cover of the special issue of *View* magazine, March 1945, edited by Duchamp, offers the following example already hinted at above: "When tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhaled it, the two scents are married by the *infra-thin*." It is the tiny gap

between distinction and indistinction, composition and decomposition whose trace tends toward imperceptibility. Like Thomas Hobbes' erroneous attempt to conceive of the materiality of a mathematical point, giving it a minimal extension, infra-mince is a slip, a thin border, whose extension can only be detected in that which it registers, in its almost imperceptible impact. It is a subject that only exists in and by its registration of an object. It neither precedes the object, nor can it be reduced to it. It is a pure effect whose sense can only be thought, so thoroughly does it evade the threshold of human all to human sensation.

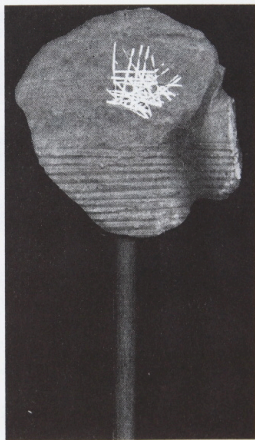


X



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XI



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Cuckoo [ˈkū-(-),kū,]:

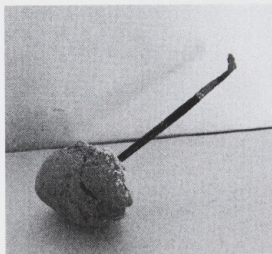
1. a largely grayish-brown European bird (*Cuculus canorus*) that is a parasite given to laying its eggs in the nests of other birds which hatch them and rear the offspring
2. the call of the cuckoo
3. a silly or slightly crack-brained person

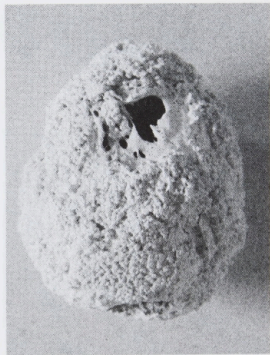
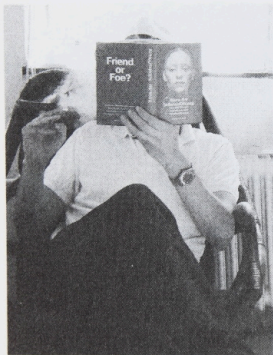
A few suggested synonyms:

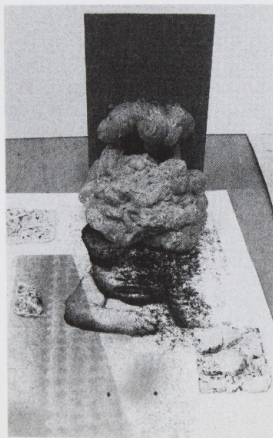
birk, booby, charlie, fool, ding-a-ling, dingbat, dingdong, dipstick, doofus, featherhead, git, goose, half-wit, jack-ass, lunatic, mooncalf, nincompoop, ninny, ninnyhammer, nit, nitwit, nut, nutcase, simp, simpleton, turkey, yo-yo.

Consciousness is a cuckoo's egg. It cannot be approached directly, since it thrives on its misrecognition. Consciousness is neither its own proprietor nor its own progenitor, and its transparency is a ruse. "I am my own experience." Such "primitive certainties" must be questioned. It is not easy to separate the I from the proprietary claims of consciousness. One finds oneself saying things like,

“spirit is bone,” treating consciousness as one of nature’s greatest cons, a vast, elaborate and ingenious hoax, the most original imposture, and art itself as one of its fermenting fruits.







Our imaginary yields now as if by reflex to apocalyptic musings. The spectacle of catastrophic ends appear to be one of the inexpugnable theological vices of the modern. Although this imaginary too can become a potent weapon, one has to be wary of its allure. As Charles Darwin warned,

so profound is our ignorance, and so high our presumption, that we marvel when we hear of the extinction of an organic being; and as we do not see the cause, we invoke cataclysms to desolate the world, or invent laws on the duration of the forms of life!

Extinction should thus be differentiated from the allure of the catastrophic.

The end is much more palatable – no matter how horrible – if it is awash in fireworks and other spectacles that dazzle, and even shock, but do not churn

the stomach. We can learn and see that oceans shall indeed rise and that cities shall fall, as long as *hope* remains. Yet, if Darwin is so scathing of such devices, the stuff of blockbuster taglines, it is because he is suspicious of the imagination and its ability to inoculate our critical faculties against the truly corrosive effects of enlightened reason.

Extinction, i.e., the complete annihilation of a species, is after all and for the most part quite banal, exasperatingly commonplace. It is profoundly unapocalyptic. 99.9% of all species that have ever existed are now extinct. The situation is all the more bleak when one turns one's gaze toward the future. The unrelenting expansion of the universe over the course of trillions upon trillions of years will produce conditions absolutely inhospitable to

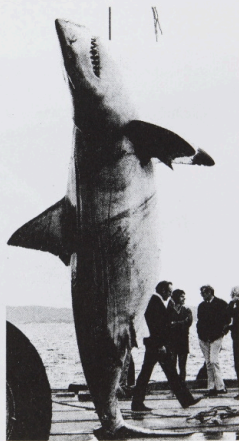
even the most elementary forms of life.

Life is the most catastrophic of ruins and its destiny marred by irreparable desolation; the concept of extinction registers a ubiquitous carnage. And yet its ubiquity is matched only by its banality. More radical than the concept of death which the life of the mind quite easily turns into the motor of its machinations, extinction presents thought with its own fatal and exhaustively mute nullity.

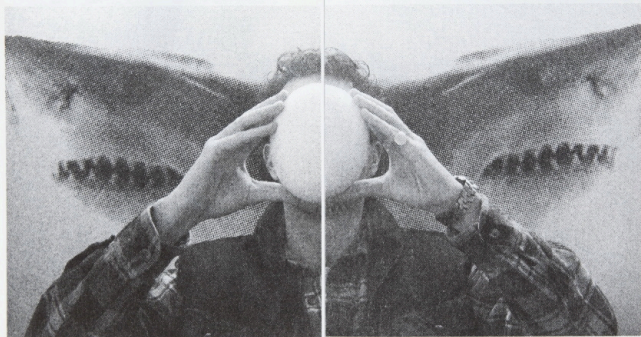
This is the hard kernel of Nietzsche's infamous fable concerning the intractable mendacity of the human intellect, which is helpful to recall:

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most

arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. – One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened. Oceans will indeed rise and cities shall fall. And hope will not survive. This is the truth of extinction, which forces us to think out of the utmost extremity of despair.

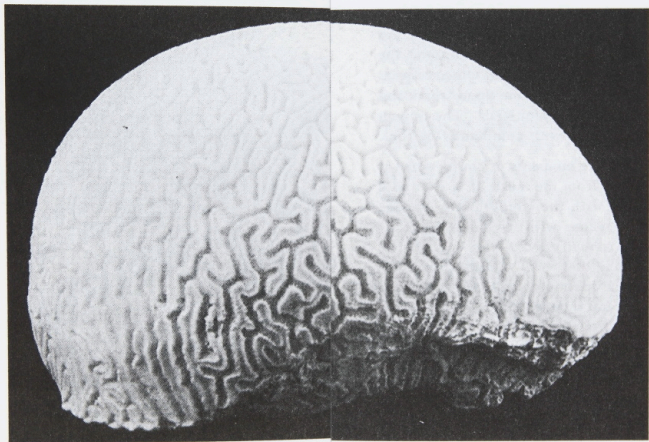


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There are many creatures that engender fondness. There are parrots that sip champagne, the donkey and the black cow. Others respect: the vulture, the white tipped shark and above all the stonefish. The human being, however, commands neither.

There are moments of course when it climbs from the muck. It is after all a being with the strength and courage to dispense with itself, the inventor of Ardbeg, cravats and cod pieces, a being that leads with its chin, at its best a dilettante, malignantly enticed now and then by whim to throw itself into the depths. But the universe would be preferable if this bit of filth was wiped from the cosmic floor.

A sentiment that has never been particularly popular. Such cosmic

pessimism is hard to swallow. One's guests get lockjaw. The cocktail party runs afoul. The throat constricts. Going to pieces is uncouth. It's all so awkward, isn't it, for the company and all?

*when life and property are threatened
all distinctions come to an end*

Despite the corrosives imbibed over the centuries, the human being remains a master of propriety. For all its squalid excess, this liquidation world has not yet dispensed with its molds. These lads do still hope for heaven. Decorum. Routine. The furrows of habit still protect the eye from the dirt that clogs the pores, the grim reality that we are surfaces speckled with black holes, hair follicles all dammed up with debris. Who suffers today from an over-acuteness of the senses?

This is no lament. I'm all for a good colon cleansing, squeezing a few black heads, softening up the skin. I too know the virtues of soap and study the properties of its dissolution, but I prefer the murky cloud of pulverized stone. I prefer impassivity and those that appreciate the properties of substances indifferent to human life.

I am no advocate of expressive fits, violent brush strokes, or the temper tantrums of the rich and odious. Let us not whine about the stench of King Augeus' stable. Cold and aloof we must not grow dizzy from our snuff.

Brood in silence. Be done with the squalid penury of existence. Learn from the ash of your cigars. Reach the point when life is drained of its colour and the whole future seems a single grey.

Maxims to be tattooed above one's arse.

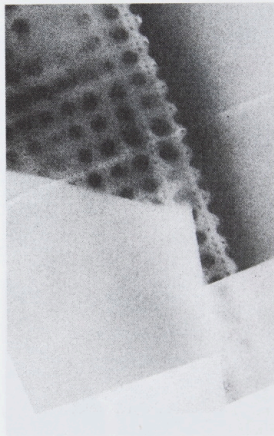
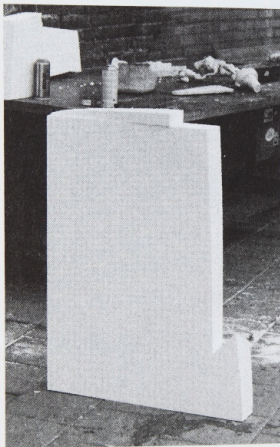
For my part, I'll do my best not to reflect the penury of existence or its cloistered luxury.

Better to grow dim, to conceal oneself in the Cuban smoke of a fine exhale. If the eye stings, then pluck it out. Its complex architecture cannot be our concern. It is not an impregnable fortress. It is no vulture's eye.

All bluster and pretense, the soul like silt too shall settle.









Everyday they recite their I-lesson.
Julien Torma

The I is a habit, perhaps grammatical, uneasily unlearned. Sincere efforts to shatter its grip have failed. Suicide, too terminal. Schizophrenia, too romantic. Insincerity bears more fruit. Cf. Fernando Pessoa, Marcel Broodthaers. Consciousness is a poor starting point, so desperate is its desire to order all its loose threads.

The I is to be sought elsewhere. Better to begin with the detritus over which consciousness stumbles, the crud in *Geist's* finger nails or what the alchemists used to call the *caput mortuum*: the worthless residue that is the mere bi-product of the chemical process.

Nothing makes thought stumble

like its own "dead-head," or as Hegel would have it, its skull-bone.

Consciousness cannot see itself reflected in the nullity that encases it, and it trips over this blind-spot. Let it trip. When the skull smacks the concrete the light goes out.

The artist reads the fault lines of the fracture as the phrenologist studies the hollows and bumps of the cranium. And draws a conclusion. I am bone.

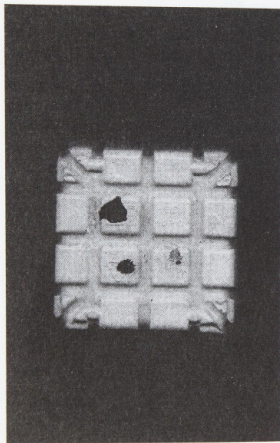
One cannot so easily dispel art's alchemical longing. With the work, a subject appears that both is and is not a thing among things: an ornamental self, whose artifice remains like a stain, a bit of scum on the surface, or like a wrinkle in a cravat. A residue.

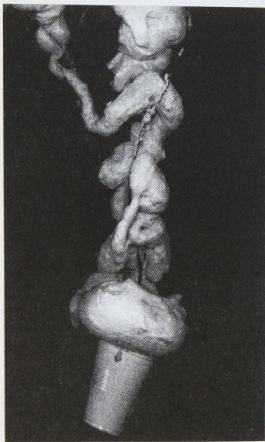
Can we do away with the consistency

business? The philosopher clenches one's fist. The brain swells. The artist in me reaches for the trepanner.

If art is medicinal, it is a species of trepanation. And if spirit is bone, then aesthetic ideas are little else than the fine dust thrown from the trepanner's drill.







From one artist to another. Yes, you, like me, are an artist. We are all artists. You have talents, you have self-respect, decency, earning and eating potential and know how to have a good time. You like a party. I like fun. You like fun. And you can dance.

Dance! You poor, indecent, you grotesque and magnificent creature. Look at him dance. Oh how cute. How full of esteem. How she dances with that ball. Look. She is tossing the ball. Toss the ball. Now do it again. Look how IT can catch.

Scum! You are Scum. He, She, It are scum. That is what you are. It is what I am, after all. You, We, ALL. Scum.

Grin! Loosen up the cheek. Don't let it go into spasm. You can't be too serious after all. Where's the fun in that! Can't you take a joke? Let's see

some teeth. Look at those buck-teeth.
How quaint. How wretched. How
crooked. Keep your tongue in your
mouth. Now here's some soda pop.

I find it difficult to say, to enunciate.
You find it difficult to say, to enunciate.

But do it all the same. Clear the throat:

— S — C — U — M —

My mouth is full with wax. My teeth
all covered in a sticky film. The
taste of my tongue makes me vomit.

S C U M

It reads!

Why do I find you so utterly repellent?
Perhaps it's your ailing faculties, the milk
in your eye, or your stench. You smell a bit
inhuman. Fecal. Sleep in the stable. You
know what you are? Scum. You are scum.

Your wandering eye. How it dances
across the page, eating up line by line.
How it indulges the glories of syntax.
Read on. It stitches like a seamstress.

But where is the sense? SCUM.

Y o u v o m i t t o o m u c h .

Do you want to make a confession? I'll
make it for you. This eye scares me.
Oh how it wanders. It lacks attention,
it drifts, it creeps, it sickens. It gets
caught up in processes it doesn't nor
wants really to understand. I have
never been more terrified than when
attending to this reading eye. Its
woeful inadequacy induces a shutter.

It doesn't dance, it jerks. Its
movement is all frantic unease. And
look now how it drifts in and out
of attention. Lethargic like an egg.

Can I poke it? Don't poke it.
I don't see a soul within. Do you?
There's too much muck on this
window. It's all caked up with filth.
Can't you scrape away that grime?

All scum. Everything scum.

You think you too can be famous?
Where's your glamour, your prestige,
your talent? Bleeding from your
ass is no talent. You're a clown.

I'm a clod.

Scum. I can see it. It is
dripping from you. Scum.

Why play the clown! I have already
pulled the rabbit out of the hat. I
have sawed the pretty girl in half. I
have sucked my own cock. I have
mowed the lawn, stained the deck.

Yes, he's a funny one. We need
our funny men. It is so valuable.

You scum. [All gasps] Scum.

A bit of flotsam on the surface of the
planet. Adrift. Surely there's a market for
that too. Here, have some pez, sweeten the
tooth. Here's a mattress, a studio, a brush.

Scum. Swallow. Scum. Deepbreath. Scum.







The decrepitude of life—the sole form of recognition that clings to the bottom lip of the one enunciating *Pessimismus*.

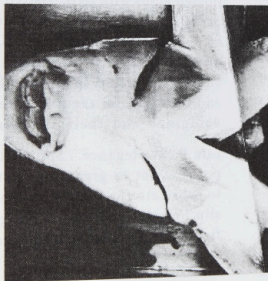
No, not hatred of life, which has its delicacies. I chew the butt end of my cigars and wash down the blood of my flossed gums with J&B. Hatred that life has become the occupation of imbeciles, of wretched incompetencies. One can no longer take a stroll without a lance and an ice-cream spoon for the boils and the cysts, for the fine tastes of the debrained and their silk garments.

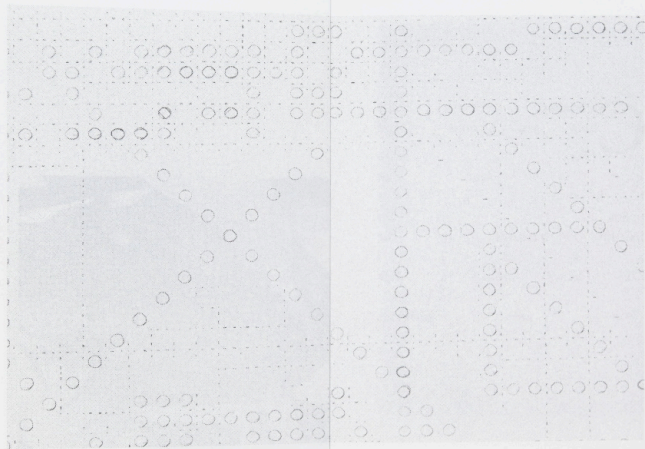
Life lacks elegance. Spit little. The point is not to grease one's step, but to lubricate the dagger so that it can slip between the ribs of the present, finding its place without too much fuss.

Spittle forms like last words. Words

that misdirect the blood's usual
ambulation. The unnoticeable froth
that builds as the sentences pile. The
mortar of this vast wall that we must
construct to show our contempt.

We will need it
to protect our stolen caviar.





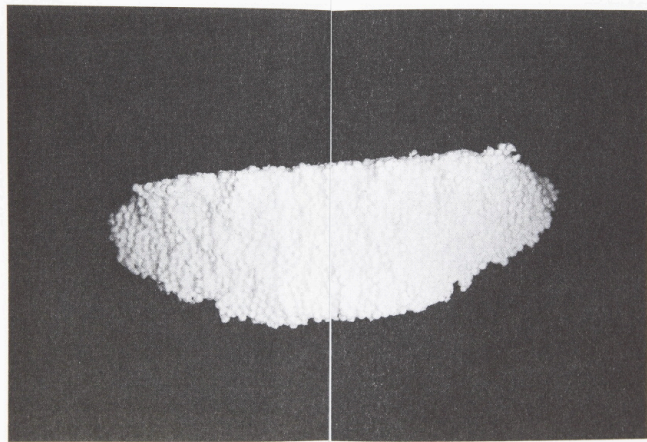
Camouflage covers the
hole in one's head

Like scalp
It is said that
the opening
hair-line fractures in the
skin like a stick

Ideas are garments



XLI



72

XLII

73





Gut ist der Schlaf, der
 Tod ist besser – freilich
 Das beste wäre, nie
 geboren sein.¹

For Roithamer and the Baron von Teive

Nothing without its shell, the human animal is a metaphysical mollusk. Its very substance is built up through countless excretions that compose a surface riddled with cracks and fissures. The ornament of the self. Its form constructed through the infinite task of correction.

Correction does not proceed with an eye to perfection. It is driven by a profound negativity; the need to eliminate the very flaws that comprise it. The perfect can only be sighted through misdirection, the sidelong glance of a wandering eye.

¹ Sleep is good, death is better—clearly / The best would be never to have been born. From the poem, *Morphine* by Heinrich Heine.

Correction is riveted to its imperfections,
the tarnish that focuses the gaze.

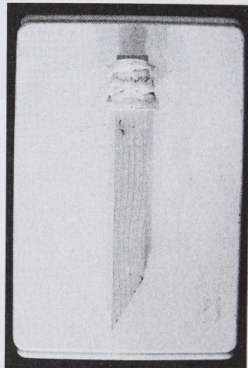
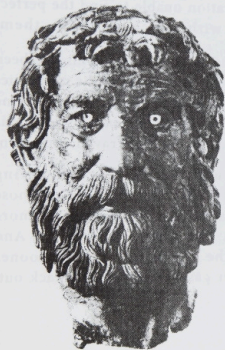
This is no mere dialectical nicety
that the human animal adorns like a
girdle. The corrective impulse is an
eminently violent prerogative and the
animal that seeks it a quintessentially
self-destructive beast. This can neither
be denied, nor avoided. Human
depravity is the price to be paid for the
superlative. A monstrous, *cursèd* gift.

A metaphysical need like no other,
the superlative cannot be dissociated
from exaggeration. The human only
exists through hyperbole. It dreams
of erecting lasting structures nestled
into gorges impervious to mudslide.
It invents Styrofoam. It will destroy
itself over a trifle. Or live on without
purpose. I have seen children unearth

worms from a garden, heaping them
en masse, before getting lost in
deliberation unable to find the perfect
stone with which to crush them.

For once the corrective impulse has been
triggered it eats away at the mechanics
of consciousness like a fetid sore. One
begins to look at humanity as a ruinous
ideal, a tapestry of frayed intention.

The human cannot avoid getting
sucked into the deep. Rare are those
who can hold their breath for more
than a few minutes at a time. And
even the stoutest lung must sooner
or later gasp for breath or black out.





Colophon

Cracked Fillings

by Alexi Kukuljevic

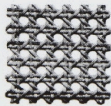
Image page 9: Photography by Jeff Weber

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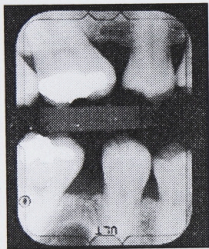


Living is just a habit
like smoking, and now I
am going to kick it; the
short flight will doubtless
be fun, the smack on
the ground like a little
hiccough from the Dear
Lord.

Wolfgang Bauer







One has to learn that on occasion
it is important to bury one's head
in the sand to feel the pressure of
the earth on one's skull.