SERGE GUILBAUT AND
JOHN O'BRIAN, EDITORS

BREATHLESS DAYS, 1959–1960

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following a productive graduate seminar at the University of British Columbia called "Breathless Days: Art in Europe and Las Americas, 1959–1960," we decided to probe deeper into the pivotal postwar years of 1959 and 1960. Visual artists, filmmakers, writers, and musicians at the time found themselves grappling with a rapidly accelerating world in which the old political orders were fracturing and the threat of nuclear confrontation was rising. The intersecting cultures of Western Europe and the Americas were on the boil.

We are grateful to the Fondation Hartung Bergman, Antibes, for offering to host a three-day symposium on the theme of "breathlessness." "À Bout de Souffle" brought together scholars from Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, France, and the United States to discuss what was at stake in the transformations under way in 1959–60. The atmosphere at the Fondation was congenial, but the discussions were sometimes tense. We would like to thank Éric de Chassey, Andrea Giunta, Juan A. Gaitán, Jonathan Katz, Hadrien Laroche, Richard Leeman, Régis Michel, Antonio Eligio (Tonel), and Cecile Whiting for their generative insights on the subject. We would also like to thank the staff of the Fondation, in particular François Hers, director at the time, and Bernard Derderian, curator of collections, as well as Hervé Coste de Champeron, Marcelle Driesen, Marianne Le Galliard, and Jean-Luc Uro. They not only provided us with access to the Fondation's remarkable archives but also encouraged a critical approach to art history.

After the Antibes symposium and its attempt to make sense of the two-year period, we realized that more work had to be done. We decided to organize a public forum at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver,

which took the shape of a conference accompanied by an online component (and later a web archive) to facilitate the exchange of ideas. We are indebted to all those who participated in the forum, in person or online, and especially those who presented papers that opened up the field of investigation: Bruce Barber, Carla Benzan, Clint Burnham, Jill Carrick, Allison E. Collins, Marcia Crosby, Tom Crow, Blair Davis, Éric de Chassey, Mari Dumett, Aldona Dziedziejko, Steven Harris, Mona Huerta, Hadrien Laroche, Susan Lord, Tom McDonough, Régis Michel, Ann Reynolds, Kjetil Rødje, Tyler Stovall, and Angela Zhang. The conference and its digital extensions received financial support from the university, notably the Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory and the Faculty of Arts. We also received support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences), the Consulat général de France à Vancouver, and Pacific Cinémathèque.

The Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery mounted an exhibition during the forum called *Breathless Days 1959–1960: A Chronotropic Experiment*, which explored artistic exchanges between British Columbia and California. Organized by graduate students enrolled in art history and curatorial programs—Carla Benzan, Allison E. Collins, Shaun Dacey, Aldona Dziedziejko, Darrin Martens, and Sarah Todd—it functioned as a case study on the theme. We extend thanks to Scott Watson, director of the Belkin, and to Shelly Rosenblum, curator of academic programs, for their enthusiastic participation in the venture.

Graduate students have been involved in all aspects of the "Breathless" project, including the book. Those in the seminar assisted in the organization of the Vancouver conference and the website. Thanks to Abram Dickerson, Aldona Dziedziejko, Karl Fousek, Asato Ikeda, Matt Lewis, Rebecca Lesser, Fan-Ling Suen, and Angela Zhang, as well as to Bill Matthews for his design expertise. Our greatest thanks are owed to Carla Benzan, who assumed responsibility for countless aspects of the project. She was its star, as it were, its Jean Seberg. We are also grateful to Molleen Shilliday for translating the French contributions to the book into English with elegance and skill, to Eva Tweedie for securing copyright permissions, and to Christopher Pavsek at Simon Fraser University for discussing early Godard with us. Jeff O'Brien was involved in the preparation of all aspects of the book manuscript leading up to its presentation to the publisher. He was Benzan's costar, Belmondo to her Seberg. (If Godard could turn the gangster film inside out in *À bout de souffle*, we can also turn his actors inside out.)

The book benefited from the advice of two anonymous readers of the manuscript. They approved of the book's premise and offered cogent suggestions for making the contents better. Finally, we wish to extend our deep appreciation to those institutions and funding bodies that supported our research: the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the Brenda and David McLean Chair in Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver; the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown; the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; the Fondation des Etats-Unis, Paris; the Fondation Hartung Bergman, Antibes; the Hampton Research Grant UBC, Vancouver; the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris; the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa; and the Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago.

FIGURE I.1 Robert Bos, *Homage to Yves Klein (Coming In)*, 2015. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.

Serge Guilbaut and John O'Brian

INTRODUCTION

Patricia to Michel: "I want to know what's behind that mask of yours."
—Jean-Luc Godard, *À bout de souffle*, 1960

If Patricia wanted to know what was behind Michel's mask, *Cahiers du Cinéma* wanted to know what was behind Godard's *À bout de souffle*. The magazine asked Godard during an interview why the critical attitudes expressed in his writings were at odds with his insistence on improvisation in the film. Godard admitted he had improvised while shooting *À bout de souffle* in the late summer of 1959—it "was the sort of film where anything goes," he said—but he also emphasized that he had started with a plan and had stuck to it.[1] Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg's dialogue was written, not made up as the film went along. Locations were scouted ahead of time. "What I wanted was to take a conventional story and remake, but differently, everything cinema had done. I also wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of filmmaking had just been discovered or experienced for the first time."[2] The use of a handheld camera as well as sharp jump cuts in the editing contributed to the film's critical success and notoriety. Along with François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*, Godard's *À bout de souffle* was a message from the present to the future. A general reorganization of art and politics was under way in 1959 and 1960. This book focuses on precisely these years and is written, with the exception of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, from the vantage point of the present moment. "The past is the fiction of the present," Michel de Certeau observed, by which he meant that historians

FIGURE 1.2 Jean-Luc Godard, *Breathless*, 1960. Publicity still.

turn to earlier epochs to address what they cannot always say about their own time.[3]

À bout de souffle took the gangster film and turned it inside out, making the genre count in new ways. As Godard was preparing to make the film, Buddy Holly died in a plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa, while on tour in the American Midwest. Fans propelled the song "It Doesn't Matter Anymore" to the top of the pop charts, reversing the message conveyed by the title. His death did matter, and the public response to it reflected the temper of the times. The mood in most Western countries was far more somber than it was nonchalant. After a period of postwar reconstruction, the Cold War had entered a zone of intensifying fear and anxiety. Even President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a five-star general in the United States army during World War II, felt it necessary to warn against the threat of the military-industrial complex to which he was connected.[4]

Fred Kaplan characterized 1959, in a book that took the date for its title, as "the year everything changed."[5] The *Wall Street Journal* called 1959 "an authentic *annus mirabilis*" in a review of the book, but it could just as easily have called it an *annus horribilis*.[6] The invention of the birth-control pill and the microchip, along with cultural developments such as Pop Art and Nouveau

Réalisme, were only half the story; the other half involved the rising threat of nuclear confrontation and the first American casualties in Vietnam. In addition, old political orders were crumbling. Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, and Charles de Gaulle took power in France. Political realignments were the talk of the moment, and cultural redefinition was occurring around the globe, while the hands on the clock of postwar modernity moved faster and faster. During the years 1959 and 1960, visual artists, filmmakers, writers, musicians, and thinkers found themselves grappling with a rapidly accelerating world. The changes left them gasping for air—"breathless."[7]

Looking behind the mask of contemporary scholarship, this book explores how the history of postwar Western art is constructed and written.[8] Writing does more than record history by putting events into words; it *produces* history. The grand narratives of aesthetic and cultural development, from modernism through postmodernism, have lost much of their exegetic power in recent years. The same can be said of national narratives, including Kaplan's monograph on 1959, which concentrates primarily on the United States. Grand narratives and geo-egocentric histories lack the explanatory force of histories that are multipronged. We are therefore interested in providing a heterogeneous account of how culture was produced in different locations under the sign of escalating globalization and of the militarization of everyday life.[9] In *Strange Rebels*, Christian Carryl examines key political events in 1979 and argues the year was more significant than 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall that defined it.[10] We are also arguing for the significance of 1959 and 1960, though we stop short of claiming the years eclipsed 1968 in their importance, and for a better understanding of the ideological alliances and frictions between countries and artistic movements.

The chapters collected here excavate a brief period of historical time. They provide thick descriptions of the years 1959 and 1960, in Clifford Geertz's sense of "thick," by drilling down into layers of artistic activity in Western Europe and the Americas.[11] The results resemble those of an archaeological dig—"archaeology of the present" was a catchphrase at the time—sometimes revealing gold and sometimes rubbish, what Clement Greenberg identified as *kitsch* in his 1939 article on the subject.[12] The chapters examine both the gold and the kitsch, what shines and what does not. By focusing on the crucial years of 1959 and 1960, the writers bring to light lateral and often surprising connections between divergent artistic milieus. In the exploration of cross-disciplinary topics on art produced in Western Europe (primarily France and Italy) and the Americas (primarily the United States, Brazil, and Cuba), the

goal is to remap the cultural and geopolitical commonalities and differences that define each region and national situation. We want to produce a new critical cartography, a multilayered understanding of a pivotal cultural and political moment during the Cold War.

Another reason for providing a series of focused studies on specific events and works is to unravel the complex layers of signification involved in their production. Marcel Duchamp's *With My Tongue in My Cheek* does not look the same after reading Hadrien Laroche's account of it. Not only are *With My Tongue in My Cheek* and other works analyzed in dialogue with their own period problems, but they are also analyzed as landmarks in the chaos of everyday life. As we see it, the works crystallize historical issues at the same time they address the culture that produced them. In 1959–60, art in Paris, New York, Havana, Milan, and São Paulo was being produced in a proliferation of styles, all of which were jockeying for position with one another. The variety of styles makes sense only if they are understood as having emerged from a cauldron of disagreement that was on high boil. Works of art are always submerged in the antagonisms of their time. They speak it and are spoken by it in a process of becoming. Art not only gives us something to look at but also something to read (perhaps especially something to read).

Cold War scholarship on the decades following World War II has tended to focus on the immediate postwar period from the mid-1940s to the early 1950s and on the revolutionary years of the 1960s. By comparison, studies of 1959 and 1960 are few in number and seem unsure whether they should be looking backward to the 1950s or forward to the 1960s, as if mesmerized by an arbitrary dividing line between the two decades. Instead of marking an end or a beginning, we see the historically decisive period as representing a pivotal moment that speaks to our own times. By engaging in a collaborative examination of political, social, cultural, and aesthetic phenomena, the book shows how new ways of thinking and acting materialized during the timeframe. Eleanor Flexner's 1959 feminist call to arms, *Century of Struggle*—a history of the suffrage movement in the United States—was followed a year later by the Food and Drug Administration's approval of "the pill."[13] At the same time, and not by coincidence, skepticism about binary classifications—straight/gay, white/black, male/female, colonized/colonizer—and about modernist claims to absolute truth intensified. Changes that occurred during the period anticipated developments in subsequent decades.

January 1, 1959, began with a Cuban bang, and soon after the United States and the international community recognized the newly formed Castro govern-

FIGURE 1.3 U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon (*center*) and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev (*left center*) are engaged in a discussion as they stand in front of a kitchen display at the United States exhibit at Moscow's Sokolniki Park, July 24, 1959. While touring the exhibit, both men kept up a running debate on the merits of their respective countries. Standing on the right is Khrushchev's deputy, Leonid Brezhnev. AP photo, © 1959 the Associated Press.

ment in Havana. The Cuban revolution had succeeded, and another transformation occurred a week later when Charles de Gaulle was proclaimed president of the new Fifth Republic in France on January 8, thereby replacing a parliamentary government with a presidential system. In Moscow, the famous Kitchen Debate of July 24 between American Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev appeared to announce a more relaxed and humorous relationship between the two superpowers, but on September 19 Khrushchev was denied entry to Disneyland, the American dream machine, when security forces declared the Magic Kingdom out of bounds to him. The premier was furious and asked if the United States was keeping "rocket-launching pads there."[14]

Although Western economies continued to expand, Cold War pressures and new political alliances were upsetting traditional ways of seeing and understanding. With the formation of the Fifth Republic, artists in France began to create new models of cultural activity that redefined what cinema, literature, and art could be. They addressed the exigencies of everyday life in Cold War consumer society with a formal inventiveness that challenged traditional procedures. "New" was the operative adjective: *la Nouvelle Vague, le Nouveau Roman, la Nouvelle Génération, le Nouveau Réalisme*. The emergence of *Nouvelle Vague* or New Wave cinema, which was indebted to Italian Neorealism and American cinema, soon became a powerful example for Third Cinema, the anticolonialist and anticapitalist Latin American film movement. Meanwhile, in the United States, while the ethos of Abstract Expressionism and its emphasis on individual freedom was being vigorously exported, Pop Art was starting to critique it. The revival of the American folk movement as a major cultural and political force also dates to the period—the Newport Folk Festival was founded in 1959—and along with jazz opened up new possibilities for reimagining an increasingly complex society.

The new models of art and culture helped to inject Western culture with utopian ideals. Jazz was pivotal in France, and played a key role in how the country set about refashioning its postwar image. As Ludovic Tournès explains in his chapter, jazz was also pivotal in the reconfiguration of boundaries between high and low culture. After being banned by the Nazis during the war, jazz was associated with resistance and subversion and widely celebrated following liberation. Although jazz remained politically and artistically significant, it also ignited a fierce debate. The French felt they had to choose between two types of jazz, traditional New Orleans jazz or the more transient Bebop, and the choice became a major symbolic issue. The practice of New Orleans jazz, considered by many as the "authentic" form, was aesthetically opposed to fast tempo Bebop and Cool jazz, with their intellectual leanings.

The debates around jazz were complicated by France's ambivalence toward the United States. The critics Hughes Panassié, Boris Vian, and Charles Delaunay often characterized the birthplace of jazz as racist and reactionary, pointing to events such as the 1959 beating of Miles Davis by New York City police between sets at the jazz club Birdland. Vian, a major voice in the debate, insisted early on that the French were better able to understand American culture than the Americans because of the supposedly progressive political views and open-mindedness of the French. African American writers such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin were invited to Paris by the

French government, and Duke Ellington and Miles Davis were also accorded official recognition. Public discussion of Miles Davis's interracial affair with the Saint-Germain-des-Prés singer and poet Juliette Gréco revolved around a supposed lack of prejudice exhibited by Parisians. During this period of the Cold War, Paris wished to be seen not only as free-spirited and innovative but also as a center for the appreciation and international distribution of an American art form often discriminated against at home. In the years leading up to his death in France in 1959, the American jazz saxophonist Sidney Bechet became as well known on the French Riviera as Picasso. Bechet's celebrity status reflected not only the significance of jazz in France but also the symbolic battle being fought around it.

John Coltrane's desire to be photographed at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, in front of a painting by the French abstract artist Pierre Soulages was not by chance. Coltrane's selection went against the grain of the American avant-garde who were not only suspicious of "classical" tendencies in contemporary French art but also critical of Frank Lloyd Wright for designing exhibition spaces in the museum that they considered to be dysfunctional. Soulages's *paintings*, Wright's *museum*, and Coltrane's *music* were all engaged in the expression of an intellectual modernity that rejected notions of violence and existential angst. Coltrane wanted nothing to do with the clichés surrounding black jazz as instinctual, archaistic, and close to nature. His music, exemplified by the album *Giant Steps* from 1960, was a fierce manifestation of intellectual freedom in an urban environment that paralleled the controlled rage of the Civil Rights movement. Coltrane's appearance at the Guggenheim in front of a Soulages painting was a clear message that the times were changing.

At first glance, Alex Katz's work of 1959–60 does not appear to have caught the message that the times were shifting. But first appearances are sometimes deceiving. Éric de Chassey argues that while Katz is often designated as proto-Pop given his associations with the world of fashion and consumerism, his work refuses such easy pigeonholing. It is not "proto" anything. To grasp what is distinctive about Katz's work, it is necessary to recognize that his use of photography and cinema paradoxically freed his paintings from considerations of reproduction. Rather than tying the image to the referent, photography and cinema provided Katz with the kind of autonomy he needed to introduce into his work a different kind of reality.

During the race for global hegemony between the United States and the Soviet Union, France succeeded in forging close ties to Latin America in the backyard of the United States. France used its state institutions to reestablish

FIGURE 1.4 William Claxton, *John Coltrane at the Guggenheim, New York City (in Front of a Painting by Pierre Soulages)*, 1960. Gelatin silver print. Photograph by William Claxton/ Courtesy of Demont Photo Management.

the cultural influence it had wielded in Latin America before the war. Modern art was a particular point of friction between France and the United States in the postwar period. In 1947 the wealthy Brazilian collector Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho spurned offers from the United States to collaborate on the creation of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art and chose instead to work mostly with France. At the time, Matarazzo was on the International Council Committee of the Museum of Modern Art, chaired by David Rockefeller. Instead of buying American art for the new museum, Matarazzo purchased French art. The art critic Léon Degand was given responsibility for selecting and transporting across the Atlantic several crates stuffed with modern paintings made in Paris, mainly works of geometric abstraction. At the same time, the future art dealer Leo Castelli was asked to select abstract American paintings for the opening show but after a series of missteps the United States section was canceled and New York artists such as Jackson Pollock and Theodore Stamos were not represented in Brazil.

Degand's emphasis on geometric abstraction helped to introduce a new visual language into a country that was rapidly modernizing, as discussed by Aleca Le Blanc in her chapter on Brasília and the invitation to the International Association of Art Critics to visit the country. As a measure of its influ-

ence, the Neoconcrete group in Rio de Janeiro, which included Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, split in 1959 from the Concrete group in São Paolo, which had developed a distinctive form of geometrically based painting and sculpture. Neoconcrete, which was also indebted to the example of geometric abstraction, wanted to introduce more sensuality into its work. Paris continued its strong relationship with Latin American artists after 1959–60, including those artists who moved to the city to escape authoritarian regimes, and who were involved in transforming geometric abstraction into entertaining Op Art.

In the context of political change in Latin America it is vital to look at Cuba and evaluate the revolutionary euphoria that swept the country in 1959–60. It was a fragile moment. The chapter by Antonio Eligio (Tonel) underscores the diversity of the art that defined revolutionary change while also insisting upon the inextricability of the weave between aesthetics and politics. The first few years of postrevolutionary culture in Cuba are less well known than they ought to be. From the start of the new regime, the art community questioned the socialist dream being offered up for collective consumption. In popularly accessible media such as film, graphic satire, and cartoons, artists addressed the existential difficulties that troubled individual lives in Cuba, while at the same time remaining attuned to international discourses in art, including those of contemporary art. The work of the graphic artist and cartoonist Chago, who had joined the rebels in March 1958, is instructive. His comic strip *Salomón*, which features a confused intellectual, provides a compelling image of the uncertainty that characterized Cuban everyday life immediately after the revolution. When Chago decided to produce a book of satirical drawings a few years later—"humor that makes people think"—it was censored by authorities.[15]

Two major technological developments of the late 1950s and early 1960s, satellite communication and the microchip, became pivotal in the acceleration of transnational flows of information and capital. Following the launch of Sputnik in 1957, and later of the robotically guided missions of the Luna program that began in January 1959, new Soviet space-age technologies produced intense anxiety in the Western world. Developments in culture must be understood in the light of these phenomena, as cultural producers of all kinds had to deal with the repercussions. Several contributors to this book observe that beneath the surface of Western consumerist bliss lay the haunting specter of nuclear confrontation. In 1959–60, fears of atomic annihilation kept families awake. The situation became even more tense when France became a member of the "nuclear club" with the explosion of its first atomic

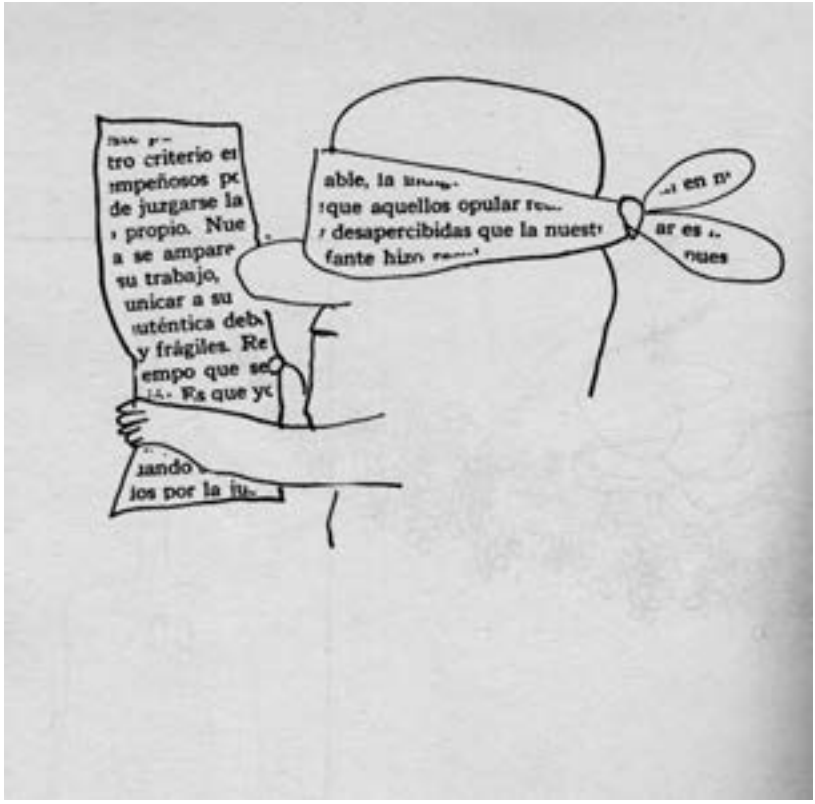

FIGURE 1.5 Chago (Santiago Armada), from the series *El humor otro*. Drawing/collage. Cuban art collection, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba.

bomb in the Sahara on February 13, 1960, during test Gerboise Bleue (Blue Desert Rat). The use of the Algerian Sahara for the atomic test while the Algerian war was still in progress was, one might say, a bellicose signal from the de Gaulle regime.

"The possibility of doomsday," Hannah Arendt observed in her book *On Violence*, was the sixties generation's "first decisive experience in the world."[16] It was also the first decisive experience of the fifties generation, who practiced Duck and Cover drills in the United States and Canada, watched the film *On the Beach* (1959) at drive-in movie theaters, and participated in antinuclear peace demonstrations. Doomsday scenarios were not unique to the sixties generation. Kjetil Rødje demonstrates how doomsday fears fueled the horror genre in ways tinged with irony and humor in his text on Hollywood

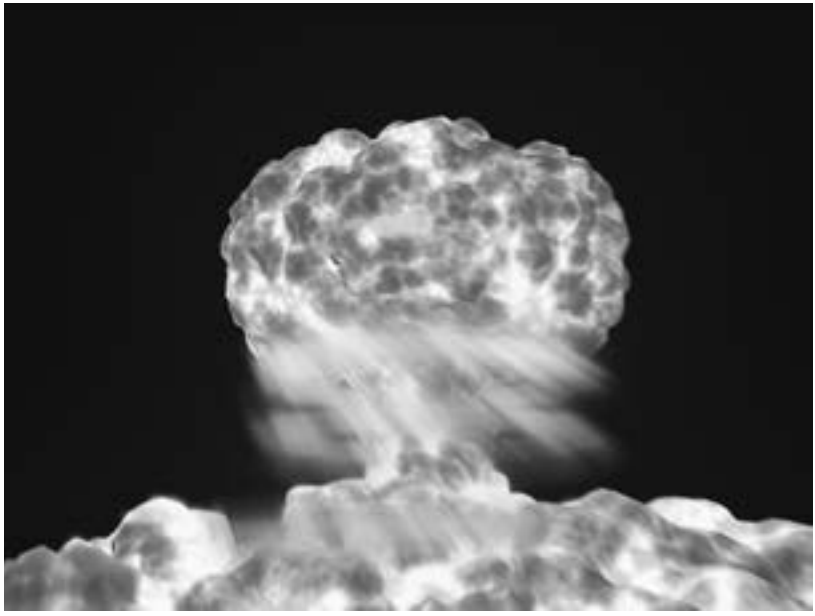

FIGURE 1.6 Michael Ransburg, *Gerboise Bleue (French Atomic Explosion in the Sahara)*, 1960. Courtesy of Fotolia.

exploitation films. Taking William Castle's cult thriller *The Tingler* (1959) as a case study, Rødje discusses not only transformations in American filmmaking at the time but also how Hollywood became a mise-en-scène for the unstable American unconscious. In concert with other films by Castle, Vincent Price plays the role of a mad scientist. Price is researching the "physiology of fear" when he finds a parasite in human beings that feeds on the emotion of fear. *The Tingler* is rife with gimmicks, including electric vibrating devices inserted into the seats of theaters where it was screened designed to produce a shivering sensation in the body. Viewers were instructed to scream for their lives when they experienced the vibrations—to violently wake up, as it were, from the American Dream. Although some artists of the time were representing the atomic age with subtlety and sophistication—the film *Hiroshima mon amour* by Alain Resnais, the Auto-Destructive art of Gustav Metzger, and the book *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller Jr. all appeared in 1959—Castle deployed crude techniques to agitate spectators accustomed to the passivity of television. The film literally propelled viewers out of their seats and forced them to respond to their fears. At the end of the movie, as

FIGURE 1.7 William Castle, *The Tingler*, 1959. Publicity still.

FIGURE 1.8 Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959. Publicity still.

audiences were getting ready to leave, a strange cloud invaded the space of the theater. The cloud was a primal reminder that a miasma of radioactivity could arrive in their midst at any time. From high to low, from Resnais to Castle, the mushroom cloud was inescapable.

Gustav Metzger and other visual artists rendered doomsday symbolically. In 1959 Metzger began producing Auto-Destructive art in London by spraying acid on stretched nylon surfaces while audiences were invited to watch the action paintings consume themselves. The work relates to the slashed paintings of Lucio Fontana, the fire paintings and "Anthropometries" of Yves Klein, the shooting paintings by Niki de Saint Phalle, and the self-destroying machines of Jean Tinguely. Metzger feared the possibility of nuclear war; Auto-Destructive art, he argued, was a political weapon against the social systems that made atomic weapons thinkable.

Allen Ginsberg's poems "Howl" and "America," which were written in the midfifties, struck a particular chord with young socially conscious American audiences in the period under discussion. These audiences were no longer prepared to smile and leave it to Beaver. They wanted to hear Ginsberg read in person and to listen to his refusals of nuclear insanities as well as to his frank presentation of homosexuality. "Listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox," they identified with the anxiety and anger in the poems.[17] Along with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), "Howl" and "America" are defining works of the Beat movement. In his chapter for this volume, Clint Burnham discusses *Naked Lunch*, which was published in Paris while the author was living at the Beat Hotel in the Latin Quarter, in relationship to *Seminar VII*, which was delivered a few kilometers away by Jacques Lacan over the course of several months in 1959–60. Like the authors themselves, both of whom had a penchant for scandal, the book and the seminar were sharply at odds with conventional wisdom and mores, including the admonition to love one's neighbor. "The neighbor remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes me," declared Lacan.[18] Burroughs was no more inclined to normalize the concept of the neighbor than Lacan, whether it was in the form of the family next door or of Cold War nations facing off against one another. What is horrible in our neighbor, Lacan and Burroughs concluded in their separate ways, is also horrible in us.

The Beat movement was quickly transformed by the mass media into a trendy avant-garde. It was analyzed, dissected, and criticized in magazine articles such as "The Beat Mystique" in *Playboy* (February 1958), by Herbert

Gold; "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" in *Esquire* (March 1958), by Jack Kerouac; and books such as *The Holy Barbarians* (1959), by Lawrence Lipton. It even became fashionable to rent a Beatnik to attend select parties for a fee of forty dollars a night, according to a report in *Life* magazine.[19] Fred McDarragh, a photographer who specialized in the Beat scene, came up with the idea, and *Mad* magazine countered with a proposal to rent a "Square" for Beatnik parties, complete with polka dot bow tie, white-on-white shirt, blue serge suit, and saddle shoes.[20] Meanwhile, *The Subterraneans* (1960), a movie based loosely on the novella of the same name by Kerouac, trivialized both the book and Beatnik life. Beatniks were becoming last week's news and being supplanted by a different type of cultural formation, fueled by consumerist desires and demands. The 1958 film *Les tricheurs* by Marcel Carné represents a heroine, Pascale Petit, who desires a Jaguar sports car so much that she is prepared to sacrifice what she loves for it. The film is a parable of logo culture, in which the automobile as the ultimate sign of postwar modernity kills the person who wants it most. *Les tricheurs* became a symbol of freedom and sexual liberation for a generation of French adolescents attracted not only to fast cars but also to the jazz sound track featuring Roy Eldridge, Stan Getz, Dizzy Gillespie, Coleman Hawkins, and Buddy Rich. A decade earlier, Simone de Beauvoir had published *The Second Sex*, an analysis of the oppression of women that anticipated the theatricalization of female sexual freedom in films starring Pascale Petit, Françoise Sagan, and Brigitte Bardot.

During the long period of reconstruction following World War II, Paris worked hard to restore its image as the universal art city. The problem, as discussed by Richard Leeman in his chapter, was that the French art establishment improperly evaluated the cultural changes occurring in the Western world. Paris tried to reconstruct its image based on prewar values, on the reputations of contemporary old masters such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, without exhibiting younger artists in its museums and without understanding the challenge posed by New York. The French were stubborn when confronting the United States, as stubborn as the comic-book hero Asterix in his confrontations with Roman power. The first episode of *Asterix* was published in the magazine *Pilote* in October 1959 and rapidly became the humorously self-critical symbol of France—a new France, but still a France unable to shake off some of its old clichés.

After the American Mark Tobey won the International Grand Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1958, Will Grohmann wrote in *Der Tagesspiegel* that "the unwavering fortress of the French school was shaken."[21] Two years later, how-

FIGURE 1.9 Jazz at the Philharmonic, *Les tricheurs* (sound track from the film), Barclay, 1958–59.

ever, the Venice prize was divided between Jean Fautrier and Hans Hartung, who was working in France. This permitted the French to believe that they were still running the show. They failed to see how rapidly the world and international communications were changing. While contemporary American art had been shown in Paris during the fifties—Jackson Pollock's black-and-white paintings had been exhibited, for example, at Studio Paul Facchetti in 1952—it was not until the end of the decade that American art flooded into Europe. The second iteration of Documenta in Kassel, organized by Arnold Bode and Werner Haftmann in 1959, was devoted exclusively to American abstract painting, and in the same year two exhibitions, *Jackson Pollock* and *The New American Painting* organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in conjunction with the U.S. State Department, toured Europe. Leeman describes the exhibitions as a "war machine" in the battle for cultural ascendancy.

In an effort to counteract the weakness of the French art establishment, André Malraux, the French Minister of Culture, joined with the writer and

curator Raymond Cogniat in 1959 to create the Paris Biennale, an exhibition restricted to artists under the age of thirty-five. Among the American participants was Robert Rauschenberg, whose "combine" painting *Talisman* made such a strong impression on the writer Alain Jouffroy that Jouffroy concluded traditional painting had become "anachronistic, paltry and pathetically out of touch."[22] Pierre Restany, who coined the term *Nouveau Réalisme* in response to American Pop Art and Neo-Dada, half-jokingly titled an article in *Cimaise* "U.S. Go Home and Come Back Later."[23]

Notwithstanding ongoing reservations in France about American influence, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Leo Castelli's "enfants terribles," helped to forge better connections between Paris and New York by befriending Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle. Mari Dumett discusses the relationship of the artists in her chapter. She observes that Peter Selz, then curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, was the American commissioner of the Paris Biennale, where he met Tinguely and saw his gas-powered drawing machine *Meta-matic No. 17* in action. Like Rauschenberg's combine, Tinguely's machine dispensed with the strict boundaries of medium being insisted upon by Greenberg, whose version of modernism was represented at the biennale by the paintings of Helen Frankenthaler. *Meta-matic No. 17* was also humorous, attracting large crowds. Selz invited Tinguely to make a work, which the artist subsequently titled *Homage to New York*. It was a motorized sculpture fashioned from junkyard detritus that performed its own annihilation in front of a surprised audience in the sculpture garden at the Museum of Modern Art in March 1960. Rauschenberg participated in the project at the invitation of Tinguely by inserting a small money-throwing machine into the sculpture that derisively fired silver dollars at the onlookers.

Tinguely and Rauschenberg were both engaged in redefining notions of art by putting audience participation at the heart of the production. Hollywood films also promoted audience participation and, in a related but different way, so did the *nouveau roman*. The nouveau roman provided readers with a new type of freedom in literature, a way to use the text as a form of self-examination, as a detonator of change. Luc Lang points to the novels *La jalousie* (*Jealousy*) by Alain Robbe-Grillet and *La modification* (*A Change of Heart*) by Michel Butor as proposing a literature not only open to interpretation but also capable of activating an interrogation of the reader's life. In *La modification,* Butor recounts a seemingly banal story of a man traveling by train from Paris to Rome in search of change in his personal life, and in the process makes the reader a participant in the protagonist's transformation.

The reader is invited to think through the issues, not just read about them. Along with the protagonist, the reader is asked to reevaluate his or her life during the course of the twenty-two-hour train trip and the series of mini-events that occur along the way. According to Butor, the mini-events function like atomic bombs that liberate energy to reveal startling viewpoints previously hidden from view. By actively participating in the discoveries, the reader—like the protagonist of the novel—engages in a *prise de conscience*, a raising of consciousness. Reading and looking would never be quite the same again. From erudite novels to visual art to popular films like *The Tingler*, readers and viewers were being destabilized and transformed by means of self-critical astonishment.

Tom McDonough explains the renewed importance of Francis Picabia for advanced art in Paris, Milan, and New York during 1959–60. Younger artists searching for models of social and aesthetic subversion were attracted to Picabia's Dadaist and Surrealist legacy. They saw his work as part of a larger critique of consumerist culture, an attack avant la lettre on the *société du spectacle*, the term coined by Guy Debord in 1957 to describe the rapidly changing circumstances of postwar capitalism. The effects of an accelerating consumer culture were being more and more discussed by the press, which often blamed the United States for the new developments. Debord's films, including *On the Passage of a Few Persons through a Rather Brief Unity of Time* (1959), are instances of cinematic *détournement*. The strategy of subverting an image by placing it in a different context from that of the original, from which different context it draws meaning, was first articulated during the midfifties in Brussels by Debord's colleague, the poet Marcel Marien.[24] Debord's films are Situationist critiques of spectacular society. Although his achievement rests primarily in theoretical and political writing, the filmmaker and the artist cannot be separated out from the writer.[25]

In 1959–60 Cold War anxieties were bound up with a desire for extrication from ideology. They were also bound up with a stage in the development of mass consumption in which the ideal citizen had become conflated with the ideal purchaser.[26] At the core of every sustained critique of Western consumerism were concerns about the pacification of everyday life and its consequences. As was also the case with Pop Art, Jill Carrick observes, most contemporary commentators on the Nouveaux Réalistes interpreted their work as an engagement with the allure and abundance of commodity culture. The French art critic Pierre Restany publicized the Nouveaux Réalistes by mounting exhibitions and writing manifestoes, commenting on their

presentation of objects drawn from the everyday, and in the process helped to inject new vitality into the Paris art world. He also helped to unite a group of artistic personalities as different as Arman, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, and Jean Tinguely. Restany was hunting for symbols—some would say hunting for logos—of a new society. He described the work of the Nouveaux Réalistes as "transparent" and optimistic.[27] In contrast to this strangely upbeat interpretation of an avant-garde movement functioning within bourgeois society, Carrick observes that many of the accumulations of objects displayed by Arman and others were taken from stockpiles of outmoded goods, suggesting loss and melancholy. Her reevaluation connects the work of the Nouveaux Réalistes to issues such as the Holocaust that were still difficult to address in 1960.[28] Régis Michel's chapter, which begins with Klein's leap into the void and Godard's obsession with it, moves in a different direction from Carrick's analysis. Acutely aware of the corruption of the art market and of the exploitation of images addressed by Debord, Michel identifies an iconoclastic trend in European art that was theatrical. "Klein's heritage passes through the *theater*," he observes. The leap made by Klein in Fontenay-aux-Roses parallels the rupturing of conventional cinematic syntax—*À bout de souffle*. Godard's jump-cut editing forces the narrative of the film to explode and gasp for breath. The leap and the film are the opposite of spectacle in their refusal of a society dominated by consumerism and the marketplace. Against accumulation, Klein and Godard opt for erasure.

The questions raised by Picabia, Tinguely, Klein, and Godard about consumer culture and the reification of the art object are, of course, present in works by other artists engaged in reframing art as a philosophical activity central to everyday life. Carla Benzan discusses Piero Manzoni's "meta-artistic commodity critique" following his break in 1959 from the *arte nucleare* movement founded earlier in the decade by Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo. At this transitional moment, Manzoni wanted to escape being boxed in and was looking for larger intellectual space in which to work. He wanted to be able to mediate the complexity of the times with irreverence, humor, and any other strategy that seemed productive. His attacks on visual convention and the commodity, as described by Benzan, walked a fine line between utopic and dystopic positions.

The line drawn by Marcel Duchamp, Hadrien Laroche observes, was between Paris and New York. By the time he produced his three-dimensional play on words titled *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (1959), which is the primary focus of Laroche's chapter, Duchamp's work was undergoing critical reappraisal

on both sides of the Atlantic for the way it had transformed the art object and ideas about art. Duchamp recognized the significance of the audience's share in a work of art, the spectator's participatory role in its completion. "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone," Duchamp stated in 1957. "The spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act."[29] Duchamp deployed deconstructive humor and irony to engage the spectator in his work, which is evident in *With My Tongue in My Cheek* on several levels while also revealing the workings of the art market.

The reorganization of art and politics that was under way in 1959–60, and the speed with which it was occurring, caused Duchamp to put his tongue in his cheek. It is still there. That is one reason why the period we are addressing in this book still seems contemporary. In our present time of permanent war and democratic decay, of financial crisis and the spectacularization of art, of successful tax revolts and not-so-successful spring revolutions, we find ourselves, once again, breathless.

Notes

Finding neither the introduction to this volume nor the chapter on Yves Klein by Régis Michel to his taste, the owner of the Klein archives denied permission to reproduce the artist's work. We have replaced two of the censored images with photographs taken by Robert Bos. They are intended as a homage, with a nod to Gilbert and George, to the in/out/ying/yang qualities of Klein's *In the Void Room*. Another replacement image was pulled from our own archives. It was made at the Tourcoing lycée by a student in 1959, a year before Klein's leap, and flies in the face of copyright oppression.

1. Jean-Luc Godard, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 138 (December 1962), trans. and ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, in *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 173. Reprinted in part in the current book as chapter 1. Page numbers refer to the 1972 version.

2. Godard, "Interview with Jean-Luc Godard," 173.

3. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. T. Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10.

4. Eisenhower's "Farewell Address to the Nation" was written in 1960 and delivered on January 17, 1961. See Charles Griffin, "New Light on Eisenhower's Farewell Address," *President Studies Quarterly* 22 (summer 1992): 469–79.

5. Fred Kaplan used the phrase as the subtitle for *1959: The Year Everything Changed* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009).

6. Edward Kosner, "When the World Tilted—Again," *Wall Street Journal*, June 15, 2009.

7. Kristin Ross also uses the word *breathless* to describe the period. French postwar modernization, she states, was "headlong, dramatic, and breathless." Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 4.

8. This book emerged from focused workshops that took place in France and Canada. The first workshop occurred at La Fondation Bergman Hartung in Antibes in 2009, and the second at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 2010, with scholars from Europe, North America, Cuba, and Argentina.

9. Laura McEnany, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

10. Christian Carryl, *Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century* (New York: Basic, 2013).

11. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), 3–30, used "thick description" to explain not only human behavior but also the context for it.

12. "Memory is not an instrument for surveying the past, but its theater," observed Walter Benjamin, "just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging." Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), xii. See also Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), reprinted in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, *Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5–22.

13. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

14. Matthew Farish, *The Contours of America's Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xi.

15. Lisandro Otero, foreword to *El humor otro*, by Chago (Havana: Revolución, 1963), 6–7. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are ours.

16. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 17.

17. Allen Ginsberg, "Howl," in *Collected Poems, 1947–1997* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

18. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 141.

19. "Beats: Sad but Noisy Rebels," *Life* magazine, November 30, 1959.

20. *Village Voice*, June 16, 1960.

21. Will Grohmann, *Der Tagesspiegel*, September 7, 1958.

22. Alain Jouffroy, *Une révolution du regard: À propos de quelques peintres et sculpteurs contemporains* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 193.

23. Pierre Restany, "U.S. Go Home and Come Back Later," *Cimaise*, series 6, no. 3 (January–February–March 1959): 36–37.

24. See *Les Lêvres Nues*, the magazine edited by Marcel Marien from April 1954 to September 1958.

25. Bruce Barber, "The Artist Manqué: The Case of Guy Debord," unpublished essay provided by the author.

26. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

27. Pierre Restany, "À 40° au-dessus de Dada," in *1960: Les Nouveaux Réalistes* (Paris: MAM/Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1986), 267.

28. Benjamin Buchloh discusses the "collective disavowal of the immediate historical past" at this time in "Plenty or Nothing: From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*," in *Premises: Invested Spaces in Visual Arts, Architecture, and Design from France, 1958–1998* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 88.

29. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" (1957), reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 819.

FIGURE 1.10 Robert Bos, *Homage to Yves Klein (Leaving)*, 2015. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.