



TIM HEAD, Toxic Lagoon, 1987

dicted, Signs of the Cross with the joins, rust, and screwheads still showing. His transcendentalism can never achieve its goal, because the marks of the profane world will always pull down the objects' flight into the heaven of Symbolism. No failure, this; on the contrary, his prefigurations are perversely Sublime. His junctions, splits, denials, deleted insignias, and faded signs are scars on a male subjectivity, places of intense anxiety and associations of childhood loss.⁷ Once more the catastrophe is no recent socio-economic one; the disaster occurred long ago, in infancy.

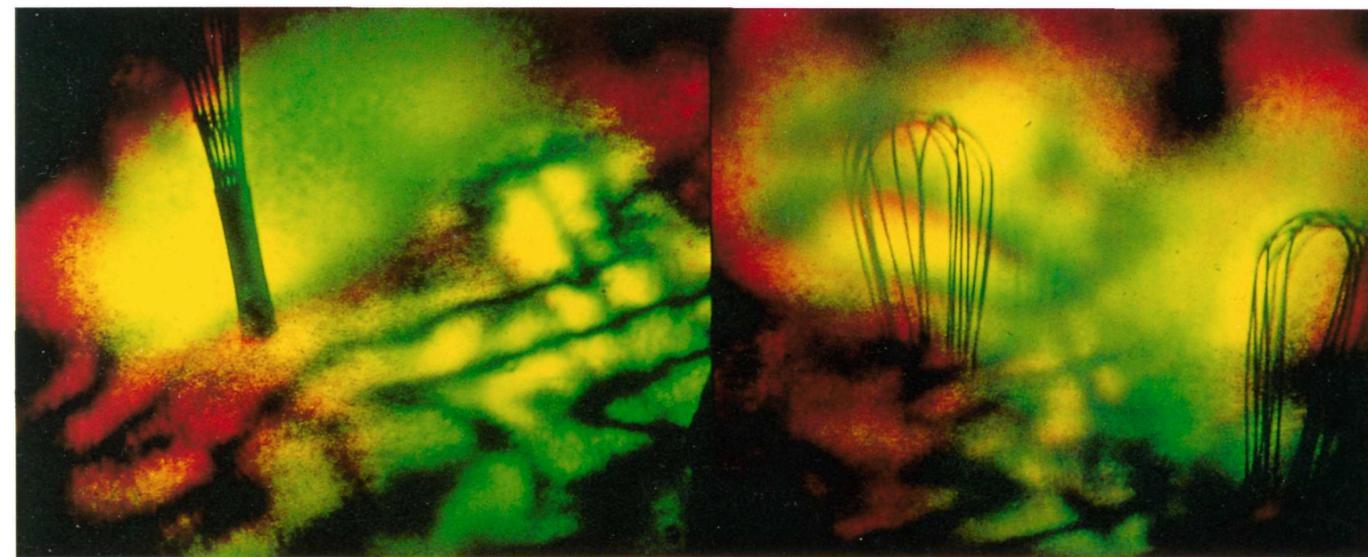
While artists like Susan Gamble and Michael Wenyon (or, in a different way, Adam Füss) confer a denatured technoformalism on products, Fraser lends them *stimmung*, pathos. Again at night on the margins of the transport systems, this time on the "Outskirts, Hirwaen" (1985), Fraser is searching in the motorway car parks, between high-sided lorries; a pilgrim, like the kilted Action-Man of Colvin, Fraser has photographed the ancient way to Glastonbury. Here between the juggernauts of Dunlop, the numinous is

only a vestige of the passage into hyperspace mimicked by the blast of electronic flash on the steep-perspective sides of the lorries. We are somewhere in interstellar space, between two touching nebulas; the stars are suddenly illuminated rivets, and beyond is a gulf as dark as the abyss in Jackson Pollock's "The Deep" (1953). (Here again is Fraser's iconography of the dolorous junction, the cut.) Fraser's perspectives open onto some ominous, antipastoral Unknown Region, the photographic equivalent of Vaughan William's lyric nihilism in *Symphonia Antarctica* (1953), a musical narrative about the extinction of the heroics of male-Britishness amid blank, subzero spaces. In the lorry park at Hirwaen, the ice-blue cold clamps down.

In the Enterprise Zone

If these are the last days of documentary, then a voluptuous⁸ electric color is alleged to be giving the kiss of life to the genre, galvanizing its ailing body. Mor-

alization and pathos reappear, now recoded as color-satire amid the pristine scenes of service industries and consumption depicted in the photographs of Anna Fox and Paul Reas. Here no surfaces are weathered and broken as a more general token of ruination, for such demoralization is unthinkable—it has been deported beyond the pastel boundaries of the Enterprise Zone. Fox's pictures show a supernormative, high-achieving universe inside that perimeter, a service world of startling, bright transparency which is the new industrial scene. Like John Davies's, hers is an exercise in surveillance of the sites of industry. (But Davies's clarity is only a function of an uncanny afterglow lighting a pacified and colonized once-industrial landscape.) The catastrophe in this case is the happy fall of the reorganization of British industry: to labor in the fields of these electronic workstations, amid these vivid, high-tech Pastorals of bureaucracy. If these are ironic reportage photographs, their satirical tactics uncover as much about the logic of bureaucratic industrialism and the apportioning of regimes of authority



WENYON & GAMBLE, Aerosol, 1985

and gender roles as do Victor Burgin's didactic 1985–86 tableau-meditations based on Edward Hopper's 1943 painting "Office at Night." Distracted, frenetic, and swinish, the office workers and executives are engaged in a Hobbesian war of all-against-all: between the heads of a Hire Manager and an Account Manager, there floats on colored balloons a half-colored (lips, jacket) Warholesque icon of the Prime Minister, Patroness of Competition, the individual, and Enterprise.

Blood at the Triumph of Consumption

In Reas's work, too, this saturated, meaningless color luxuriantly collects like the chemical cocktails in Head's "Toxic Lagoon," escaping signification except as a sign of overaccumulation and excess, preparatory to some apocalyptic burnoff. Like Martin Parr, Reas has a predilection for red, especially in the supermarket, where it explodes his grabbed photographs, blasting and repelling the spectator,⁹ blowing away any residues of formalism. Reas's book *I Can Help* (1988) takes the form of a journey of lost souls

through the receiving circuits of consumption, from supermarket through shopping mall and garden center, and finally to a new, uninhabited housing estate. Just as Walker Evans began *American Photographs* (1938) with a picture of a child gazing upon the world, so Reas takes the established topic of a babe's innocence and then follows the infant into the temples of consumption, the supermarket and shopping mall. This is the schooling of the young consumer; but it is not sentimental, since the child is already corrupt, carnal, cast next to the bloody meat of other animals or induced into gun-culture by his father. And then comes the infant, standing against a red pillar with a transparent bag over its head . . . a pocket of Grand Guignol which terminates on the next page with the baby propped in the shopping cart, again before a wall of red. But now it is a simulated child, a "lifelike" rubber baby. This infant and the dreaming but determined adults are depowered as they float inside the belly of the leviathan of con-

sumption, elements in another scenario (with curious echoes of Webb) of perverse sublimity in a promotional culture.

The Additive Body

More satirical tattoos of consumption are inscribed on the bodies and surroundings of the couples posed in Andy Wiener's photographs. The model consumers are built up from an exhausted universe of clichés, misrecognizing each other from the identity cards they wear—pinup postcards of Madonna and Stallone. A specular dictionary of clichés, roles, and insignias has been assembled: he is garbed in ex-British Army combat vest and camouflage webbing, she in a white lace teddy; together they are surrounded by emblematic products which slip into slang terminology of maleness (beefsteak) and femaleness (crumpets). Between the lovers' bodies is a promissory packet of "Paradise Slices," laid out on that other cliché of the erotic encounter, the leopard-skin rug—while the heat of desire is provided by a '30s electric fire with both bars on. This comic inventory of the body and desire, in "Sex Scenes No. 1"