



## *The Analog Hole* (Or "Abundance")

A window installation by John Neff  
Right Window Gallery  
May 9 – May 31, 2009

Oh, the Humanity

-or-

A Mini Modernist Canon

It was a time when everyone used the phrase, “the body.” There was “the body,” and “the performing body,” and “marginal bodies,” and there was John Neff chain smoking and making a chair out of cardboard for *Intro to 3-D Design*. John had elegant fingers and a palpable enthusiasm for cardboard and masking tape.

We were in a series of white Brutalist boxes known as “Humanities,” which were connected by elevated concrete corridors. The “Humanities” were widely rumored to be the scion of 60s radicalism, in that they were riot proof. They also lacked ventilation, which was tricky for the painters, the ceramicists, the sculptors, the photographers, etc.

Outside of Humanities, John and I walked negatively from one coffee shop on one of campus to another on the other. We preferred the coffee shops of grad students, and we were often taken for a couple. There was an equally nebbish, apparently platonic, or at least passionless couple, that we saw daily at both coffee shops: our doppelgangers. Naturally, we shunned them.

John didn’t need to theorize “the body.” He was confident with a series of complex referents to his own mortal casing. At one point, he was washing his drawings in cigarette ash, old coffee, urine baths, and I truly believe that he truly believed that his own bodily fluids held supernatural alchemical powers.

John has a stylish beauty mark and dressed in classic 1950s masculine attire. Much to my consternation, he did go through a phase of wearing monochromatic “uniforms” purchased at Sears, much as he went through a period of eating monochromatic foods. But this isn’t about John’s eccentricities; it’s about his élan.

To John I owe the nagging sensation that I should appreciate the work of Jasper Johns more than I actually do. He once dumped a guy for reading V.C. Andrews. When I dated an even dumber female I tried to rationalize it, saying that there were “different kinds of intelligence.” John rolled his eyes and said, “Oh please.” with such alacrity that I never seriously considered this notion again.

Libido runs through all memories of this relatively sexless time. John and I read Rosalind Krauss’s *The Optical Unconscious* in tag-team, and serial, multi-porous Humanities also began to take the shape of “a body.”

Inside Humanities, with our impossible nineteen-year-old selves, something had to give. No, not between John and I. (Though he did feel my boobs with his feet once.) No, if something broke, it was more cognitive or emotional, i.e. a *breakdown*. Our friend Adrienne Herman would tell John and I that we seemed like graduate students. At the time, we thought this was a compliment.

One summer, John and I did mushrooms and ran into the doppelganger couple in some main-quadish plaza. (Were they getting coffee this late?) The nebbbs regarded us with terror, and our heretofore-implacable disdain was shattered.

Near Humanities, next to the coffee shop, John worked at a job that we all envied. Just like Andy Warhol had started at Bonwit Teller, so too did John get his start window-dressing. At Goodwill. Even then, he had a real knack for achieving allegory through used synthetic drapery.

Lately, John tells me that the phrase “the violent return of the subject,” gallops through his head. And I think, “Which subject?”

Then, I consider that the erotic poetry that thrums through John’s work is “the body” of Pollock, DeKooning, O’Hara, Ginsberg, Rauschenberg, Johns, Twombly, and early Stella, etc. And that John’s recent nude male figures, depicting himself and his boyfriend Jimmy, stand, in a way, for “the subject.” In John’s work, “the subject” and “the body” analogue “the subject” and “the body” of postwar American art at its apogee.

The cast plaster rolled socks that season the floors of John’s latest installations also suggest bodily equivalencies, and for me, evoke other primitive pleasures.

For example, I imagine being born into a clean, white, limestone cave, no mommy or daddy, only mastodons. And a big fluffy mastodon skin rug. And—no reprobation—drawing in my own scat (well, maybe it’s more of a doodle) on that vaginally smooth, enormous wall. On PBS, I learned that such symbols transmit power.

In addition to referencing primitive figuration as transcribed through modernism, John also scrimps layers of transparent and opaque references throughout his work. Like a mini modernist canon unto himself, or a storefront dressing-room mirror, John Neff reflects and refracts.

Cassie Riger  
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