

WILLIAM ANASTASI

**Sonnenfelsgasse 8
Bäckerstraße 7**

9. April – 31. Mai 1997

**Galerie Hubert Winter
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William Anastasi

Galerie Hubert Winter April/Mai 1997

Sonnenfelsgasse 7:

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, 1965

Magnetic analog tape 194 x 110 x 5 cm
(zuerst ausgestellt New York 1966, Virginia Dwan Gallery)

Issue, 1966/1997

Wall displacement, 316 x 11,5 x 0,6 cm und 70 x 18 x 8 cm
(zuerst ausgestellt New York 1970, Virginia Dwan Gallery)
Variante mit Sockel in der Permanent Collection The Philadelphia Museum of Art

Sink, 1963/1997

Baustahl, Wasser 48 x 48 x 1,5 cm
(Die erste Version dieser Arbeit im Format 20x20x1/2 inches befindet sich in der Sammlung John Cage)

Untitled (Subway Drawings), 1997

Graphit auf Büten; je 19 x 28 cm

Bäckerstraße 7, 2. Stock:

60 Minutes with Yellow, 1996

gelbe Kreide auf schwarzem Papier, 500 x 130 cm
(zuerst ausgestellt Krems/D, 1996, Dominikanerkirche)

Reading a line on a wall, 1967

(zuerst ausgestellt New York 1968, Virginia Dwan Gallery; danach Stuttgart 1978, Hetzler und Keller;
Düsseldorf 1979, Kunstmuseum; New York 1981, Whitney Museum)

9 mounds/9 holes, 1997

Zement, Urin; je 36 x 36 x 6 cm

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ANASTASI'S PRESENCE

Eileen Neff

One can hardly approach William Anastasi's richly complex and purposefully contradictory body of work without a close study of "A Conversation," an exchange between Anastasi and art critic Thomas McEvelley, recorded and published in 1989. Its stated intention, to begin to fill the void of critical discourse that has long surrounded this work, is realized with remarkable range and penetration; as such, it becomes invaluable fertile ground, an inevitable source from which further inquiry may grow. And as one might expect from works whose critical contributions are significant, subtle subtexts also emerge and provide additional insight into the bigger picture being drawn.

WHO'S ON FIRST

Early in "A Conversation," McEvelley attempts to establish a relationship between Anastasi's first unsighted drawings,² *Constellations* (1963, cat. 4), and abstract expressionism, and, in particular, Jackson Pollock's method, "a certain eschewal of control" in the drip paintings. Anastasi, in response, ultimately acknowledges the connection but can not resist making a conversational leap, suggesting, instead, that perhaps they go back to the randomly splattered technique that Whistler used in his painting *The Falling Rocket* (1874), identified by Ruskin as grounds for fraud. On reflection, this casual comment becomes telling, nearly classic Anastasi, for he does not miss an opportunity to pass by the obvious authority or source to reveal one even more original.³ (You cannot talk with Anastasi about the work of Marcel Duchamp without him reminding you that it was Alfred Jarry who was the source for many of Duchamp's unaccountable inventions, who was "on first"—a point of view Anastasi has developed into a unique scholarship as well as a new body of work.)

In a similar regard, one may begin to understand a story Anastasi tells about his first experience with art schooling. Primarily a self-taught artist, Anastasi's interest in art and in being an artist (a source of endless parallel preoccupation for him) goes back as far as he can remember. As a preschool memory, he recalls thinking that the best thing you could be was an artist, and, therefore, he concluded, he was not one, an expression, perhaps, of some childhood diffidence. Larger than his shaky self-confidence, though, was his certainty that he loved to draw. When he was twelve he joined the Saturday art classes at the Fleisher Art Memorial, a Philadelphia landmark for aspiring artists since 1898. The story goes like this:

They put me into a class with kids from twelve to sixteen, a big class with four teachers and an enormous room, and I stayed there the whole Saturday afternoon. The first day, they gave us a big piece of paper and pastels and a subject. The subject was the jungle, and I did my stuff—with tigers and lions fighting in the foreground, big leaves, sunset, monkeys swinging. After about four hours of this, each instructor picked out the one he thought was the best from his section and put it on an easel. My picture ended up there. Then the best picture of the day was selected, and it was mine. Well, my feeling about art was so intense, I felt like I had never lived before. I floated home and could hardly wait for the next week.

The next week came, and the same size paper, and the subject was the circus. And I thought, that's better than last week. I'll have the same cast; now the lions and tigers will have cages; instead of monkeys, I'll have trapeze people, I'll have clowns, I'll have everything! Well, it must have gone to my head because the instructor came by and, not remembering my fame of the earlier week, started tearing my drawing apart. When he was finished, I said, "Don't you know who I am?" I didn't go back until much later, to just do models. I thought I could meet girls there.⁴

1. Thomas McEvelley, *William Anastasi: A Selection of Works from 1960 to 1989* (New York: Scott Hanson Gallery, 1989).

2. These were drawings Anastasi made either blindfolded or with his eyes closed.

3. A game, it should be noted, McEvelley was quick to join in, citing an earlier Greek model of such randomness.

4. This story was recorded during one of several conversations the author had with Anastasi in the spring of 1994. These recollections and other insights quoted throughout this text were generously offered by Anastasi and are gratefully acknowledged.

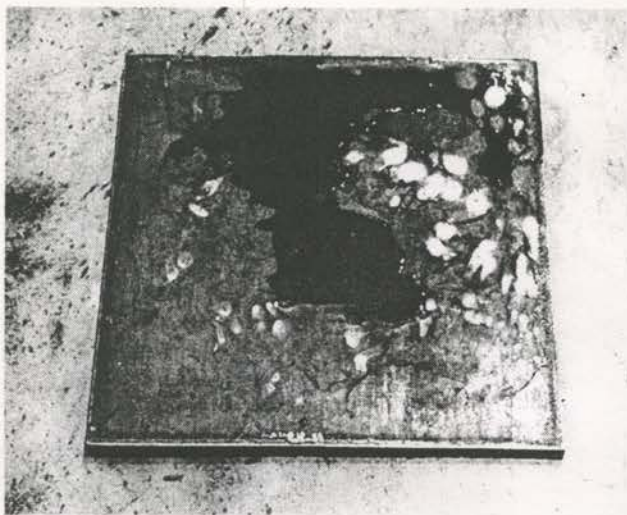


Figure 1

Sink II, 1963/1991

rolled steel, water

19" x 19" x 1"

Photograph: Cosimo DiLeo Ricatto

A retrospective view of William Anastasi's history as an artist reveals the periodic acknowledgment of his creative output as well as the inconsistent regard with which it has been held. One discovers that the very nature of the artist's development, the various positions in which Anastasi has placed himself before the activity of artmaking, speaks not only of the time, the art in the air, but also of this individual's beating heart, an irrepressible spirit capable of nourishing itself when public response and opportunity are not forthcoming. For Anastasi, it has gone many different ways.

By the time he was thirty, he had married, fathered three children, and been divorced. The brick-business partnership he started with his father, in Philadelphia, had been successful but would not hold him to his hometown. Since the midfifties, Anastasi had been covering the walls of his apartment with Skira reproductions, in an attempt, as he says to McEvilley, to immerse himself in these images much as he did with repeated listening to favorite pieces of music. The immersion must have worked; in 1960, he began signing some artworks, and by 1962, ready to announce himself an artist, he moved to New York.

His earliest works included circular paintings, hard-edge abstractions,⁵ collages made by ripping and refolding used cardboard boxes (cat. 3), Donald Duck paintings on corrugated cardboard, paintings of the words "Tic Tac Toe," and an early process piece entitled *Sink* (1963, cat. 5 [fig. 1]). The circular paintings were exhibited in Anastasi's first group show, at the Betty Parsons Gallery, in 1964, shortly after a chance encounter with Philip Guston, who introduced him to the gallery.⁶ His first solo exhibition, at the Washington Square Gallery, on La Guardia Place, that same year, displayed all of

this work except for the circular paintings. Such diversity prefigures the pluralism of ideas and styles usually associated with the range of artworks created since the seventies. Already lacking the unifying principles of the modernist canon, the mood of investigation that characterized the sixties was itself a prelude to the multiplicity of production that was to come. Accounting for the various directions in his own work, Anastasi is as quick to disclaim particular influences of the most pressing contemporary movements⁷ as he is to acknowledge the early impact and unfolding source of inspiration that Marcel Duchamp⁸ has been for him; in the same regard, in the sense of the great freedom Duchamp represented, so was Anastasi gifted by John Cage—first, as an early influence and, later, as a close friend.

Many of the new developments that replaced the authority of abstract expressionism assumed Duchamp's anti-art position and learned, as well, from Cage's conceptual aesthetics. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were direct heirs, bridging the gap between abstract expressionism and purer forms of pop art. Assemblage and Happenings in the late fifties represented the most radical move away from the traditional relationship between the artist and the object of art. In Europe, the New Realists—Yves Klein, Arman, and Jean Tinguely—were breaking similar ground; proto-Fluxus activities, embodying the socially conscious wing of neo-Dada (an umbrella term for much of this concurrent, experimental work), had surfaced in America in the fifties and made their first European appearance, in West Germany, in 1961. Paralleling this surge of creativity were the logical, reductivist moves found in primary structure works and minimal art; by the midsixties, conceptual art had let the object go, allowing the idea to rise as the true object of its concern.

5. He often refers to these as part of his "old-fashioned work," even though they represent an early moment in a continuous flow most recently manifested in his *Abandoned Paintings* (1994–95, cat. 44 [fig. 14]).

6. Anastasi recognized Guston (from a photograph in a Sidney Janis catalog) in a Chinese restaurant, introduced himself as a fellow artist, wound up giving him a ride uptown, and showed him some drawings that were in the backseat of his car.

7. He does not acknowledge, for instance, the influence of pop art on the Donald Duck drawings but identifies them, instead, as related to an image he learned as a child and, as an adult, could draw from memory, a kind of automatic drawing. Again, we witness Anastasi citing an "original" authority—in this case, his own childhood.

8. Anastasi had discovered the Duchamp collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art as a teenager.



ON THE ROAD TO PRESENCE: ON THE WAY TO THE WALL

Cézanne, we remember, is the very personification of the phenomenologist's "now," the artist who was able to outwait appearances so that the meaning of depth could well up within him.

—Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*

Meditation is something artificially put on; it does not belong to the native activity of the mind. Upon what do the fowl of the air meditate? Upon what do the fish in the water meditate? They fly; they swim. Is that not enough?

—D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*

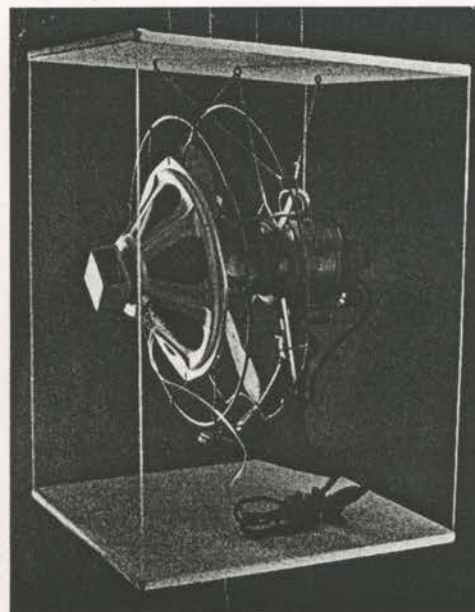
By 1966, when Anastasi had his second solo exhibit, the first of four at the Dwan Gallery, his focus had become considerably sharpened and revealed his developing interest in an analytical approach to the physical world.

Sound Objects (1964–65, cat. 7 [fig. 2]), displayed thirteen common objects and their accompanying sounds.⁹ Among the group were a deflated inner tube and a speaker playing the sound of the air coming out of it; a pulley and the sound it makes; an electric fan and a tape of the fan's sound. The structure of this last piece—the two round faces of the fan and the speaker in contact with each other—reads like a conceptual kiss.¹⁰ In most cases, however, one is struck by the literalness of these objects, each one possessing the quality Anastasi refers to as "dumb." True analysis is in its early stages here, the weight of investigated territory falling on the side of recognition or consciousness of one's experience; here is the object and here is its sound. On one hand, we are reminded how differently each sense contributes to our experience, and, for a moment, metaphor slips in, identifying the objects as dead and the sound as an echo or memory left behind. Ultimately, though, we are brought back to what we already knew,

9. Examples, perhaps, of Anastasi's version of Duchamp's "assisted ready-mades."

10. An interpretation possibly encouraged by Anastasi's remarks on his 1967 proposal for ceiling track lights shining down on track lights mounted to the wall: "And their light beams kiss." ("A Conversation," 37).

Sound Objects, 1964–1965
Installation view, Dwan Gallery,
New York, 1966



Sound Object, 1964
Electric fan, speaker
19 x 16 x 12 inches

in some basic, tautological, common sense. This is what Anastasi loves; quoting himself from that time, he wrote "One, just one. And simple. As simple as simple. Even dumb."¹¹

While the artist's intentions may be stated in this relatively single-minded fashion, much in the work places it within a broader aesthetic context: in the commonness of the objects; by the tight circle of self-reference that they draw; in the sense that the sight and sound separation announces an inquiry into categories of "knowing," which includes a critique of our experience as part of our experience. In these ways do these works resonate with others of the same period.¹²

A comparison can also be drawn with the earlier philosophical investigations of René Magritte, who worked from the premise that reality was paradoxical and that language arbitrarily fixes our experience through logic and limitation. In *La trahison des images* (1929), the image of the pipe with the words denying and in *La clef des songes* (1930), where in only one of four cases does an image "match" its corresponding word name, Magritte uses his literal depictions to challenge both our certain knowledge of the world and the layer of language that seals our certainty.

These *Sound Objects* represent an early stage of Anastasi's phenomenological propositions. They catch us in that "dumb" stare before the object of our experience, representing one of the first suggestions by the artist that such pure presence might be wonder enough.¹³

11. "A Conversation," 12.

12. Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961) draws a particularly relevant parallel to this work.

13. This idea has deep roots in Zen teachings, which Anastasi did not have direct knowledge of until 1977 when he became close friends with John Cage. By the time these works were produced, however, Anastasi was familiar with Cage's work and, by association, with the basic concepts that informed his practice.

WALL WALL

Not how the world, is the mystical, but that it is.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus 6.44

Every night I stand naked against the glass wall and gaze at my image glued close to me, standing in the liquid sea. There is an inscription upon the wall stating that whoever passionately kisses his Double through the glass, for them the glass comes to life at one point and becomes a sex, and person and image make love through the wall.

—Alfred Jarry, *Days and Nights*

For his second exhibition, "Six Sites," (cat. 12 [cover]) at the Dwan Gallery, in 1967, Anastasi hung on each of the six walls a photo-silkscreened mural of itself. For practical purposes, to leave the outlets and air vents exposed, each image was reduced by ten percent. In classic conceptual form, Anastasi created, with a definitive leap from the tautological issues only touched on in the *Sound Objects*, a strangely "final" gesture, a work that summarily declared the reductivist path of modernism behind it, the dead end of the moment at hand, as well as the endless possibilities of what might lie ahead. In his discussion with McEvilly about the wall pieces, the mood of the sixties was considered in light of the violent legacy of the first half of this century—World Wars I and II, the monochromatic art activity that paralleled each war, and the more recent threat of nuclear power. Anastasi reflected:

So it was as though for a moment, as an artist, I had sensed a little bit of the morning, the day after. I thought, you show me a wall and I'll show you a beautiful work of art; you show me a place where you want art to go and I'll show you the place itself as art.¹⁴

14. "A Conversation," 19. In a similar regard, Brian O'Doherty, in his seminal text on the gallery space, "Inside the White Cube: Notes on the Gallery Space" (*Artforum* 14, March 1976), considered Anastasi's wall-on-the-wall pieces, and wrote: "For me, at least, the show had a peculiar aftereffect; when the paintings came down, the wall became a kind of ready-made mural and so changed every show in that space thereafter," 30.

René Magritte
L'imprudent, 1927
 oil on canvas
 39 3/4" x 28 3/4"
 ©1995 C. Herscovici, Brussels/Artists
 Rights Society, New York



With this work, Anastasi had placed his art practice within the discourse of dematerialization, a phenomenon that characterized the invisible heart of conceptual art. Robert Rauschenberg, as early as 1951, had painted all-white *White Paintings*. Abandoning such traditional ground, a radical expression of dematerialization was made by Yves Klein in 1958. At the Galerie Iris Clert, in Paris, Klein presented *La Vide* [The Void], an all-white empty gallery in which the essence of aesthetic experience might be had without interference from the material world.¹⁵ Albert Camus signed Klein's guest book, "With the void, full powers," announcing, in Zenlike fashion, the duality of the new situation. Anastasi's wall-on-the-wall pieces engage the same transparent line, proposing, in the absence of the traditional object of art, the pleasure of presence as its inverse issue.

Absence as a physical phenomenon, a poetic notion, a concept central to Eastern philosophy, is one of the richest ideas offered by the multiple readings of this work. Absence of image or traditional content also parallels Duchamp's well-known (apparent) renunciation of art activities—not acting, being still, making no image but for a few and one in particular, hidden, on the other side of the wall.

John Cage's 4'33" (1952), a very early and radical exploration of absence by silence, encouraged by Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, was also known by Anastasi at this time. For Cage, too, the reality of all that would fill up the silence of this piece was central to its meaning; in the absence of art, as we knew it, the

world entered. This was conceptual art's real legacy, not turning its back on art as the term anti-art might suggest but directing its analytical eye beyond the traditional boundaries of both the art object and the institutionally determined presentations that informed its making.

Physically, "Six Sites" reads like a thin skin, a solipsistic stutter, sandwiching identity and resemblance to the point of near invisibility. Magritte's *L'imprudent* [The Imprudent One] (1927 [fig. 3]) takes an earlier look at what cognitive and poetic value such mirroring might bear. An image of a man with his arm in a sling is painted next to what appears to be an identical double. Magritte has written:

*[If I must] interpret this image, I would say (for example) that the appearance of the figure rediscovers its mysterious virtue when it is accompanied by its reflection. In effect: a figure appearing does not evoke its own mystery except at the appearance of its appearance.*¹⁶

It is as if Anastasi presented the wall works to reveal the wall. It is as if our very consciousness depended on its reflection to be conscious. It is the story of Narcissus as Oscar Wilde tells it, with an added inversion of its own:

*When Narcissus died, the flowers of the field asked the river for some drops of water to weep for him. "Oh!" answered the river, "if all my drops of water were tears, I should not have enough to weep for Narcissus myself. I loved him!" "Oh!" replied the flowers of the field, "How could you not have loved Narcissus? He was beautiful." "Was he beautiful?" said the river. "And who could know better than you? Each day leaning over your bank, he beheld his beauty in your water...." "If I loved him," replied the river, "it was because, when he leaned over my water, I saw the reflection of my waters in his eyes."*¹⁷

15. Two years later, in the same gallery, Arman filled the space to the ceiling with garbage in an installation he called *Le Plein* [Full-Up], answering Klein's celebratory call to absence with an overabundance of material presence—in this case, pure junk. Empty or full, the gallery had been reidentified as an independently significant image, part of the new aesthetic that included the critique of art practices as part of its content. "Show me the place where you want the art to go and I'll show you the place itself as art." The viewer, too, has been repositioned by these extreme moves; with *La Vide* [The Void], he is all approach with no apparent object for his encounter; in *Le Plein* [Full-Up], he is up against a new wall, this time an impenetrable wall of "unlikely" art.

16. Suzi Gablik, *Magritte* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1970), 142.

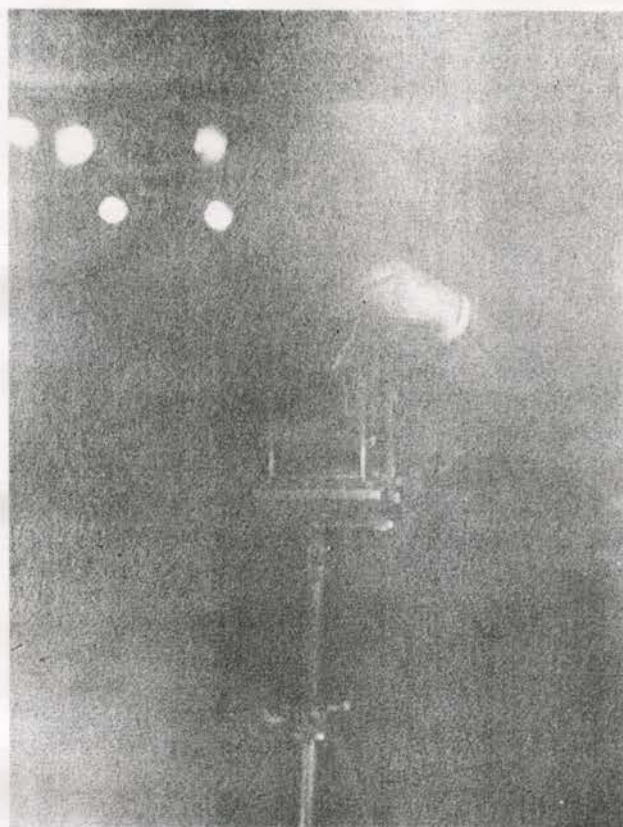
17. André Gide, *Oscar Wilde, In Memoriam de Profundis* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), 3.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC TRACE

As photographically derived physical objects, "Six Sites" fits neatly into Rosalind Krauss's treatise on the index, that unifying principle that held together the apparent diversity of art images and objects created during the seventies. According to Krauss, indexes, distinguished from symbols by their direct, physical relationship with their referents, "are the marks of traces of a particular cause and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify."¹⁸ Citing footprints or shadows as commonplace indexical signs, she ultimately develops her thesis around the expansive use of photography, from Man Ray's photograms to the widespread dependence on photographic documentation so characteristic of the period.

In Part Two of "Notes on the Index," Krauss discusses "Rooms," the inaugural exhibition of P.S. 1, in Long Island City, in 1976, citing several works that fit the indexical model.¹⁹ In the particular way these examples engage the exhibition site as content, so do they resonate with the memory of Anastasi's investigations in "Six Sites" some ten years earlier. Especially revelant was the work of Lucio Pozzi, which consisted of small painted panels serving to both identify and replicate the specific walls to which they were attached.

It is not without some sense of irony that one considers the ongoing life of such ideas whose tautological commentary seems, each time, to be the last word. As a more recent example, in the 1993 summer edition of *October*, Krauss explores the work of Sylvia Kolbowski, whose practice is rooted in an idea of site specificity that involves an investigation of the material and sociological conditions of representation and display. As a densely layered analysis, which includes texts that address



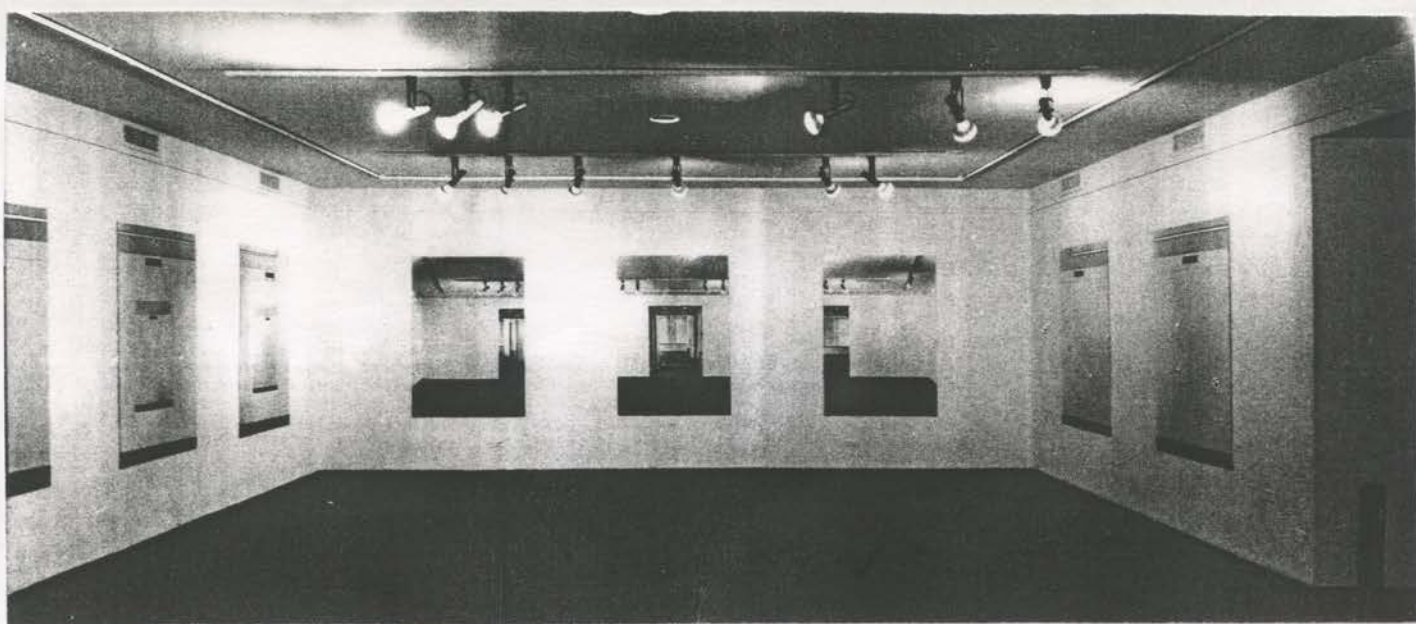
Plastic Coincident, 1966
photo silkscreen on Lucite
23 1/4" x 18 1/4" x 1/4"
Photograph: Walter Russell

gender issues as well as ideas of space beyond the present walls, Kolbowski's *Once more with feeling* (1992) renders the relative simplicity of "Six Sites" in classical light. It would take Anastasi, himself, to out-simplify Anastasi, to create work that would make "Six Sites" "downright fussy by comparison."²⁰

18. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 210–19.

19. Anastasi installed a photographic site work at P.S. 1 in 1977.

20. A phrase Anastasi uses in "A Conversation," comparing "Six Sites" to his surface removals.



Continuum, 1968
black and white photographs mounted
on aluminum
each 65" x 48"

installation view, Dwan Gallery,
New York, 1970
Photograph: Eric Pollitzer

OTHER LAST STOPS: "WE KEEP TRYING TO MAKE THE VERY LAST WORK OF ART."

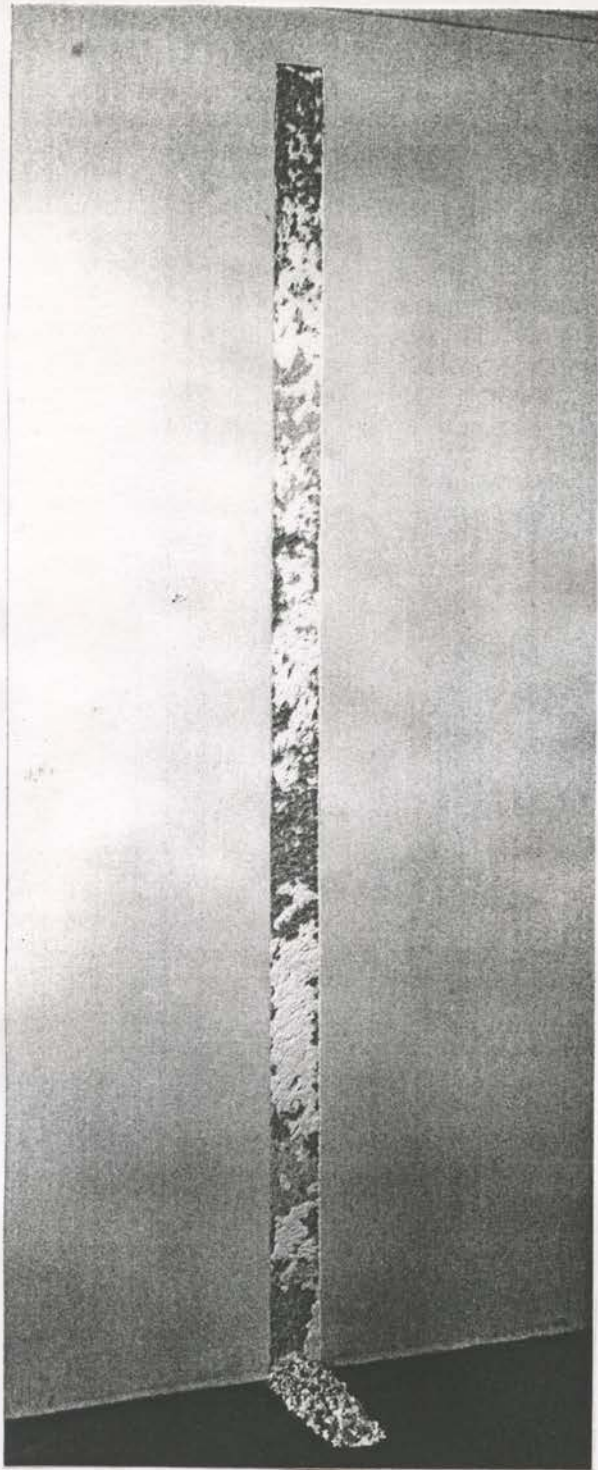
Despite its apparent silence, "Six Sites" spoke anyway, saying (among other things) that the mysterious pleasure of being here in the moment, consciously present, was not only enough but possibly everything. *Tabula rasa* became *carte blanche*. Perhaps, paradoxically, it was the scope of this recognition that drove the compulsive outpouring of similarly self-reflexive works following "Six Sites." Of course, there is also Anastasi's game-like pursuit of the "dumbest" image to consider, a notion he and McEvilley tossed around in their conversation. Whatever the driving force, Anastasi would not let the implied finality of his first wall work thwart his greater instinct to make art.

Untitled (1966) closely mirrors the wall-on-the-wall work as a photo silkscreen of a piece of paper is mounted on the same paper; in one version, the silkscreen is a ninety percent reduction of the original, recalling the necessary adjustment in "Six Sites"; in a second version, the scale is identical, the body and its skin are one.

But with a group of large, wall-related works produced after "Six Sites," Anastasi extended his investigation of the wall/gallery space to include (by exclusion) the viewer and, in some cases (by proxy), the artist himself. Surveying these extensive variations, one is struck by a parallel expansion of explanatory descriptions necessary to say how each work functions, leading to the conclusion that it is easier to see than to "say" these works, although seeing, itself, has its own confoundment. Rather than Anastasi's original interest in pure presence, in "seeing the nose on your face," these works remind us that our eyes are only before us; although we move in a far more complex space, we encounter it one direction at a time. Subtly, yet significantly expanding his project, he metaphorically engaged the reflective properties of "mirroring" by photographically inverting the space under consideration, placing the area behind the viewer in front of him, nearly collapsing the deep space of the gallery and disappearing the viewer all at once.

Variations of these ideas appear in *Terminus* (1966) and *Plastic Coincident* (1966, cat. 10 [fig. 4]). For *Terminus*, Anastasi positioned two framed pieces of glass-covered masonite to face each other on opposite walls. With the camera between the panels, each was photographed, and the full-scale images (including the reflection of the camera and opposing panel) were mounted on each corresponding masonite board. In *Plastic Coincident*, a single panel of Lucite holds a photo-silkscreened image of itself and the wall behind, as well as a reflection of the photographer's hand working the camera. *Through* (1967, cat. 21 [fig. 16]), shifts the photographic/wall practice by symbolically penetrating the wall (the skin or body of the gallery) with a photograph of the cityscape that lies behind it. *Collapse* (1966) pushes the practice beyond the gallery walls, using both sides of a bus kiosk to frame its photographic puzzle, which introduces the illusion of real time into the image.

Even as these artworks deepen in their philosophical investigation, both considering and confounding the viewer, they remain in keeping with the literal display of representational elements that "Six Sites" had revealed. Even the introduction of the camera, the mechanism of representation, posing like a surrogate artist, fits Anastasi's discourse on presence and perception. Its recurring appearance reads, in retrospect, like a prelude to the physical self Anastasi would ultimately engage directly in his later work. As an early phase of this idea, *Maintenance I, II, and III* (all 1968; *Maintenance III* cat. 23), single out the camera-body relationship for a closer investigation. *Maintenance I* employed two Hasselblad cameras, with one identified as the model for the other to photograph; the resultant image, printed to scale, raised questions of identity and resemblance again. In *Maintenance II*, Anastasi's eye became the predominant image, with the shooting camera reduced to a small reflection within it. As if to confirm the camera-body thesis, in *Maintenance III* (another photograph of Anastasi's eye), the reflected camera is replaced by an image of the artist's face.



Issue, 1966
wall displacement
102 1/2" x 4 1/2"
installation view, Dwan Gallery,
New York, 1970
Photograph: Eric Pollitzer

In a group of Polaroid works from 1967, the camera is often a predominant figure, and, in some cases, the artist "pictures" himself as well. In *Nine Polaroid Photographs of a Mirror* (1967, cat. 18), the wall is covered by its own image, and the camera slowly disappears.²¹ Another version of this work (cat. 19) includes Anastasi in the image, as does *Untitled* (1967, cat. 20), a Polaroid photograph of the artist's hand mounted next to a second Polaroid photograph of the artist's hand holding the first Polaroid photograph, supporting the proposition that it is harder to say than it is to see.

STILL/LIVE

Changing his strategy with the introduction of the video camera, Anastasi simplified the image again, letting the technological difference add its own unique twist. *Free Will* (1968), records the corner of the room behind the monitor that plays back the corner image. Simultaneously a live broadcast and a still image, this work recharges Anastasi's tautological practice once again. *Transfer* (1968, cat. 24 [fig. 17]), a variation on this variation, plays a live, life-sized, image of the wall outlet into which the video camera and monitor are plugged.

The most stunning version of this still/live paradox must be *viewing a film in/of a gallery of the period and audition* [fig. 15], a film installation presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1979. Created as a proposal for the Museum of Modern Art in 1967, this work illuminates the central idea of "Six Sites." A silent color film of the wall was projected onto the wall. The projector stood where the camera had been, with the artist removed one more time. During the real-time projection of the film, the spectators added a level of their own presence and sound, completing this work much like the audience of Cage's *4'33"* must have. Ideas of time, space, and spectator are aroused by unexpected encounters with each other. Here, as in "Six Sites," the simplicity of its classic conceptual form resonates even in the telling.

The fundamental methodology of moving film, the linear, dependent succession of still images that Anastasi had rendered absent in the Whitney film installation, makes an improbable appearance in *Continuum* (1968, cat. 26 [fig. 5]). Produced for the Dwan Gallery in 1970, this work extended the aesthetic territory delineated in "Six Sites." As the artist describes it:

*Each wall had a silkscreened photomural of the space directly behind the viewer as he or she looks at the photograph. Each wall reflects the one opposite it. Since each photograph was mounted before the next one was made, the early ones show a blank wall opposite them; the later ones show the opposite wall with a photograph of the first wall-already on it.*²²

In addition to reading the progressive relationship of these images, one also had the changing "reflections" of the opposing walls to experience and the viewer's invisible status recalling *Terminus* and *Collapse*, among others. The relative simplicity of the indexical presentation of "Six Sites" was enriched both by the spatial inversion and the complexity of the physical trace that now included the element of time.

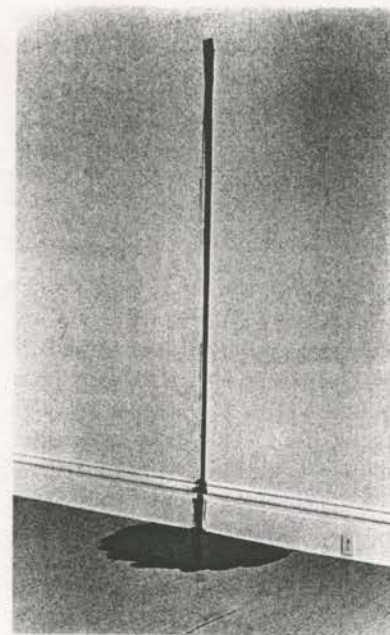
21. The idea of infinite regress, originally suggested by "Six Sites," turns up in many of Anastasi's wall works and is reinforced here by the successive accumulations in time. The small size of the Polaroids promotes a reading of these images as documentation of the concept, as opposed to, for instance, the experiential proposition one encounters in *Terminus*. The concept itself represents a heightened consciousness of time as a serial phenomenon that includes the spectator as one who simultaneously observes and observes himself observing. When Hamlet watches the play within the play, the frame of artifice is shifted from him to the players. But how are we framed as we watch him? Henri Matisse taps into this circularity in some of his drawings, which include his hand drawing the drawing within the drawing. Magritte's interest in hidden truths often pictures such layered realities as in *La condition humaine* (1933), a painting of a canvas on an easel, holding the same landscape that is depicted outside the window behind it. "Visible things always hide other visible things" (unpublished letter from Magritte to Felix Fabrizio, 3 September 1966, private collection). As it is true for the painting, why should it not be true for the landscape itself? The possibility of what hides what becomes infinite. This idea also resonates in *Through*.

22. "A Conversation," 25.



Untitled, 1966
One gallon industrial high gloss enamel,
thrown
Dimensions variable
Installation view, The Mattress Factory,
Pittsburgh, 1989

Untitled (one gallon of industrial high-gloss
enamel, poured), 1966
dimensions vary
installation view, Mattress Factory,
Pittsburgh, 1989
Photograph: Dove Bradshaw



THE WALL ITSELF

We shall not have succeeded in demolishing everything unless we demolish the ruins as well. But the only way I can see of doing that is to use them to put up a lot of fine, well-designed buildings.

—Alfred Jarry, *Prologue, Ubu Enchained*

The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.

—Douglas Huebler

Between 1966 and 1968, when the abundance of photographically derived wall-on-the-wall variations were being explored, Anastasi was also addressing the wall directly, as a physical site in which he might physically intervene. *Trespass* (1966) was the title of a whole series of removals, most of which were seventeen by fourteen inches, a standard drawing-pad size. His approach to these works is reminiscent of the blind drawings, in which he also imposed a prescribed set of controls to achieve the desired random results. For the removals, he would rub the wall as hard as he could with a stone, keeping his eyes closed. This laborious method could only hope to remove a layer of skin and reveal another layer of material presence. Bypassing both the autonomous physicality of the art object as well as the world of illusion it might bring, these works represented the purest construct for presence and perception. Turning the idea again in *Incision* (1966, cat. 15), Anastasi described a rectangle with a thin line cut into sheetrock or a plaster wall. The line frames; the wall inside of the line is as imageless as the wall outside of it, but the line frames, the last sign of the long tradition these works leave behind.

Pushing even further, *Issue* (1966 [fig. 6]), forgoes the rectangle as a four-and-one-half-inch-wide line of plaster is chiseled out of the wall, the displaced particles piled neatly before it, like a foot at the end of its leg. As an art practice, it fits Robert Smithson's category of "unmaking," which, in the late sixties, Smithson and several others explored out of the gallery, "in the field," as land displacements. When, on occasion, nature was brought into the gallery, it seemed a fitting possibility,

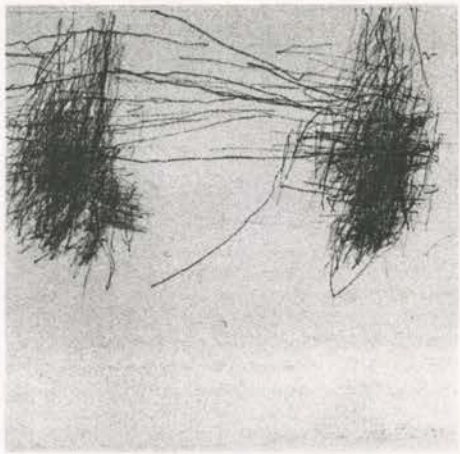
since artists such as Anastasi had been metaphorically chipping away at the gallery walls.²³ *Issue*, in fact, identifies the gallery as the site of displacement as well as what is displaced, collapsing in a single image the distinction created by site/nonsite works.²⁴ As an alternative to removing the surface or penetrating the wall, Anastasi's paint throws and pours (1966, cat. 16 [fig. 7]),²⁵ are body-related gestures that reclaim the wall as art's receptive surface.

These works remind us how it was that Anastasi continued to forget art yet make art anyway. Working the wall as his raw material—the literal core of his project—he investigated the physical site of art, exploring those elements usually considered as contexts or conditions rather than artworks themselves. With this in mind, one can read an untitled work from 1968 (cat. 25), in which Anastasi diagonally positioned a row of nails whose shadows, cast from a single gallery light, filled in the gap between each nail to draw a straight line. Anastasi's incorporation of the reflective qualities of glass or Plexiglas, a common annoyance for most artists, also fits this model of working at the edges of traditional practice. From this position, he can draw circumstance and chance into the conscious frame of his considerations.

23. Lawrence Weiner listed "A removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wall board from a wall," in *Statements* (1968).

24. Another penetration of the wall is found in *The Fumes and the Hopes* (1987, cat. 35), in which 102 drilled holes were randomly charted by throws from the *I Ching*, each hole seared by a burning cigarette, which was then removed. The field of small open circles with their smoky trails offers a celestial read, an ironic footnote to the literal text that inspired the work—the smoking-related deaths of two close friends.

25. In these works, executed at several sites, Anastasi pours or throws one gallon of black industrial high-gloss enamel on the gallery wall.



Untitled, 1989
(Subway drawing)
Pencil and paper
11½ x 11¾ inches

CONTINUUM

For Anastasi, 1970 marked the exhibition of *Continuum*²⁶ and the subsequent closing of the Dwan Gallery, which, since 1964, had nearly functioned as his extended studio, given the gallery-driven investigations of his primary work. The closing represented a significant loss, and began a sixteen-year period during which Anastasi would be without consistent gallery affiliation. Throughout these years, he continued working on projects that focused on the gallery as the self-conscious site of art experience, projects that, for the most part, remained in model or proposed forms. By the late seventies, his tautological interests shifted away from the photographic image to drawings and paintings of words, recalling some of his earlier paintings and Dymo label works from 1966. A typical example of the phrases embossed on plastic strips is, "This is what I am doing." These works were characteristic of the branch of conceptualism that presented language-based propositions as artmaking activity. Many artists experimented in this way, and some, like Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, developed these ideas as their primary practice. An overview of Anastasi's oeuvre identifies this thinking as an early strategy and also suggests how likely it is to discover individual works that read as signs—original traces of ideas that grow in significance over time.

Constellations, the original blind drawings from 1963, harbinger a significant body of unsighted work that came to the foreground in the late seventies and holds a unique place in Anastasi's oeuvre, officially introducing the artist's body into the circle of consideration. As Anastasi tells it:

In 1963, I did drawings in india ink that I called Constellations. I did them blind, closing my eyes and listening to Wanda Landowska's recording of The Well-Tempered Clavier, not following the sound, but just doing it as a period of time so I would know when to stop. I did

26. A second, back-to-back exhibition with "Continuum" was "Steel Rods," a group of sculptural works that shared a familiar aesthetic with other sculpture of the period but represented a departure from Anastasi's self-reflexive concerns.

*ninety-six, one for each prelude and one for each fugue. The drawings were made of dots. I found that if I didn't look where I was putting the dots, it turned out better than if I did look. By 1964, I was doing gestural line drawings with graphite in a lead-holder. They ranged in dimension from 11 x 8" to 45 x 35". My intention was to forget drawing, to forget art, to forget myself, if possible. I have continued this work to the present and have found that the distancing ability improves steadily. The activity affords minutes or hours of greatly appreciated tranquility, and I am left with an object that is a kind of literal record of what my hands and arms were doing during that interval.*²⁷

These undirected drawings share some ground with the improvisational, abstract images of an early phase of surrealist painting. In the spirit of the more prevalent examples of automatic writing, varieties of automatic drawings were also practiced by several artists, with a particularly concentrated effort found in the work of André Masson in the early twenties. These were not blind drawings, per se, but unprogrammed excursions into what might happen if, mindlessly, he started to draw. This practice, like most surrealist automatism, distinguishes itself from Anastasi's unsighted work by its ultimate urge to discover images that might be revealed unconsciously in the drawings, viewed as places to begin rather than significant acts in themselves.

Anastasi's intention is nonintention.²⁸ He hopes his would-be disabling strategy of drawing "blind" will, instead, enable him, eliminate a major mind-sense distraction, and help him achieve the selfless state he desires. In the large blind drawings made on paper or directly on the wall (cat. 47), he predetermines the duration of the drawing as well as the particular density of

27. *Mattress Factory: Installation and Performance 1982–1989* (Pittsburgh: Mattress Factory, 1991), 194.

28. A contemporary exploration of blind drawings was made by Robert Morris, who used the technique for a different range of intentions. Working with his eyes closed and his fingers directly delivering the (sometimes oiled) powdered graphite, he began, in 1973, several series of unsighted works. The original *Blind Time* drawings were based on simple graphic tasks within preestimated time frames, concentrating on the tactual experience. In the later series, Morris included associative commentary and task descriptions as well as Donald Davidson's philosophical texts, which served to critique Morris's stated intentions.



William Anastasi executing unsighted wall drawing, 1992
Anders Tornberg Gallery, Lund, Sweden
Photographs: Dove Bradshaw

the graphite used. Sometimes, the size is given by taping the paper ground or discovered by the reach of the artist.²⁹ The resultant image shifts between a suggestion of landscape and the humanistic stretch of Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*.³⁰ Leonardo's well-known advice for stimulating the imagination by closely observing a wall is inversely configured here as Anastasi, in an action that is as much calisthenic as it is meditative, blindly makes his way through these drawings. Pictured so, outstretched before the wall, blanketing the drawing with his moving body, we recall the early, empty wall work by its difference.

In 1977, Anastasi began making blind drawings on the subway, between 137th and 18th streets, traveling to and from his chess-playing visits with John Cage. Not only had Anastasi and Cage begun their friendship but the Duchamp connection, by association (Cage had known Duchamp, played chess with Duchamp), was also growing. One place where the Cage and Duchamp influence overlapped—their parallel rejection of individual taste, expressions of personality, and value judgments—is evidenced during this period in the primacy of the unsighted works and the language that Anastasi uses to describe them. With Cage's encouragement (he once rode with him to watch), Anastasi developed the subway drawings (cat. 30–32 [fig. 10]) into a regular practice—ultimately applying to all of his subway travel—refining the techniques through the years. At this time, for instance, to reduce the number of variables, he always sits with his left shoulder facing the direction that the train travels. Since Cage's death, in 1992, the drawings “to and from” a particular destination are created on top of each other, producing an image that is doubly dense. Marked with both hands, the subway drawings are already about “doubles,” like fraternal rather than identical twins, offering their subtle difference in over a thousand examples, as with leaves fallen from the same tree.

29. Tom Marioni used his body to determine the boundary of a drawing activity in *Drawing a Line as Far as I Can Reach* (1983).

30. John Zinsser, in his review of Anastasi's 1988 exhibition at the Bess Cutler Gallery, first made the connection with da Vinci (*Art in America* 76, November 1988: 182).

One of the unanswered questions raised by the subway drawings concerns the act of performance and how little stock Anastasi puts into it. Who can imagine, sitting on a New York subway, soundless earphones on, eyes closed, hands and pencils poised over the drawing paper mounted on its board—who can imagine that the element of performance would not figure in?³¹ Anastasi could. Situated thus—Duchamp's *Sad Young Man on a Train*—it is his intention to empty his mind of his mind (including art, art history, the other passengers) and become a neutral receptor, a transmitter of the subway energy passing through him. Not yet “pictured” in the picture, the body of the blind drawings has traded places with the camera's symbolic presence—has become, in effect, the mechanism of representation, the indifferent machine.

The indifferent machine had its literal embodiment in Jean Tinguely's *meta-matics*, the painting machines first presented at the Galerie Iris Clert, in 1959. Operated with a set of variables including the distance between the marker and paper, the type of marker used, the texture of the paper, and the duration of the drawing time, the results were, like Anastasi's subway drawings, the unique literal traces of the accumulative effects of the given controls. Tinguely's relationship with his mechanical inventions, however, was one of poetic collaboration, a way for him to throw off antiquated notions of art and experience joy, which, for him, meant freedom; Anastasi, projecting his body in a machinelike way, speaks of tranquility, which, for him, also means freedom.

31. Other visual artists had used their bodies during the preceding decade, expressing a wide range of motives. For example, Bruce Nauman's *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square*, one of the 1967–68 films of himself in the studio, reads as a burlesque commentary on the extent as well as the exhaustion of creative possibilities left for artists in the late sixties. Walking over an image of so much recent reverence (the square), presented as a masking-tape drawing on the floor, the artist brings himself to this flattened altar as if looking to discover the very self Anastasi wishes to lose. The situations appear more related than not when one considers the relatively lean time this was for Anastasi, how his subway drawings might also represent, despite all claims of desired indifference, a way of working anyway.



Delay, 1989
Cibachrome, acrylic paint
41" x 35"

Du Jarry (Jarry in Duchamp) and me inner-man monophone (Jarry in Joyce), 1989–93
ink on 1700 sheets of notebook paper
each page 10 1/2" x 8"
installation view, Sandra Gering Gallery,
New York, 1993
Photograph: Scot Cohen



CHANCING NATURE

Put another way, the unsighted drawings are an expression of how art can, in the words of the Indian scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy, imitate nature "not in appearance, but in operation,"³² a possibility Anastasi had always valued and found reinforced in his association with John Cage and Eastern teachings. Long ago, he had accepted the paradox of believing in nature's superiority over art, in light of his desire to be an artist. In *Sink*, he poured water on a steel slab to observe the patterns of oxidation; in keeping with nature, he produced *Relief* (1961, cat. 2), his first recorded body work, in which he urinated into a newly poured concrete slab.³³

These nature-dependent art acts have a tradition of their own: Duchamp (again) created (by proxy) his *Unhappy Readymade* in 1919 when he instructed his sister, Suzanne Crotti, to place a geometry book outside and subject it to the elements, to the rain and wind, which ultimately destroyed it. In 1960, Yves Klein's *Cosmogonies* exposed paintings and raw pigment to the chance operations of atmospheric conditions. In the same year, Piero Manzoni created hydraulic works whose coloration was determined by the influence of the weather. The most comprehensive investigation of nature-inspired art of the time was found in the hydraulic works of Hans Haacke who, since 1962, experimented with the properties of various liquids as well as the effects of meteorology on his airborne sculptures. Much of his work expressed the anti-art aesthetic that valued the demystification of artists and art objects; Klein and Manzoni, on the other hand, developed their practice around a remystified idea of the artist as an illuminated being with metaphysical powers. Although Anastasi would not name himself as such, he identifies an ever-growing sense of correspondence and revelation in his

life and work. The blind drawings that physically locate him in the center of his practice serve also as a spiritual link to the greater energy around him. In alliance with nature, it is the accidental aesthetic that Anastasi most trusts. When, paradoxically, he expresses preference for some blind drawings over others, we are reminded of how difficult abandoning the "self" really is, not to mention ideas about art. We are reminded, too, how such contradictions will appear in Anastasi's practice almost as a philosophical principle.

As the unsighted works had early roots and represented one particular thread of continuity for Anastasi, so did his love of drawing and painting—first expressed in his "old-fashioned" work—persist throughout and eventually find its public voice. The conceptual investigations of the seventies, which shifted the original focus from site-specific photographic images to language works, represented yet another example of an original interest resurrected at a later time.³⁴ In 1981, with the first drawing from a series of paintings featuring the word "Jew," Anastasi signaled a shift in content as well as form. The self-referential territory he had been exploring was suddenly asked to carry a complex cultural weight. On an earlier photograph of himself triggering a remote shutter release to take his own picture, Anastasi (who was brought up as a Catholic) painted the word "Jew" across the image; the cool field of philosophical discourse had been culturally critiqued and emotionally charged.

Perhaps the most dramatic conflation of the past and present surfaced in a series of paintings (begun 1986, cat. 34) based on the one-hundred-letter word

32. *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Donen Publications, 1934), 11.

33. In the same year, Andy Warhol made what he referred to as "the piss paintings," in horizontal tribute to Jackson Pollock's drip paintings on the floor.

34. In 1979, Anastasi exhibited a group of works entitled *Coincidents* at the Kunstmuseum, in Düsseldorf, Germany. Included was *Untitled (A WORD/words)* (cat. 29), a two-part piece in which one image of the phrase "a word" was captioned with "words" and a second image of the word "words" was captioned "a word." Another language work consisted of a list of every title Anastasi could remember of his own works. A second version of *Coincidents* was presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in 1981.

ink on notebook paper
10 1/2" x 8"

right: page 550 from *me innerman monophone* (*Jarry in Joyce*), 1993
ink on notebook paper
10 1/2" x 8"

[illegible]

"bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronnonttonnerronnntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntooohooor-denenthurnuk..., "³⁵ found on the first page of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which Anastasi had been reading (aloud) since he was twenty.³⁶ The first painting from 1986 includes the first four and a half letters, blown up from the type of the Viking Press edition, and painted over a variously colored field of blind marks, made with randomly selected oil sticks, and finally worked over with opened eyes.³⁷ The paintings are all the same height, one hundred one inches, but the width varies; Anastasi imagines it will take about thirty paintings to complete the word/work. Handmade, partially unsighted, sound-related, language-driven, literature-inspired work, this series holds the complex accumulation of Anastasi's practice. He also used *Finnegans Wake* as a source for other word paintings. By 1989, as he explained in "A Conversation," he divided this work into three categories: "words that are in the book, words that are not, and words that are in it only once."³⁸

Apparently, Anastasi's lifelong reading of *Finnegans Wake* had a reputation of its own. In 1988, art historian Charles Stuckey contacted Anastasi to talk with him about approaching this text. Mentioning some parallels

he saw in Joyce and Duchamp, Stuckey suggested that Anastasi investigate the work of Alfred Jarry in relation to Duchamp. It was this suggestion that Anastasi ran with, creating an ongoing body of amateur scholarship and personal work that has an inevitable quality about it, as if it were waiting to happen—as if, through his knowledge of Duchamp, Anastasi had anticipated Jarry, and already knew him, too.

"AND SUDDENLY
THERE'S THIS WILD!"

The first time Anastasi saw the Duchamp collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, he was thoroughly confused. Not only was the work different from everything else in the museum but each piece was completely different from every other one. That intrigued him, and he kept going back. In a sense, the idea of going back to Duchamp continues for Anastasi. It is evident particularly in his current obsession with Alfred Jarry, who, according to Anastasi, represents an explanation as well as an answer to the question of where "the wild" in Duchamp came from. "There was no wild until Jarry."³⁹

No one ever doubted or questioned Jarry's own wildness. From the start, he lived and wrote as an eccentric, iconoclastic prankster. Duchamp acknowledged his admiration for Jarry, and some Duchamp scholars have noted his bond with the decadent school of French symbolism, of which Jarry was a part. But no one (including the young Anastasi, perplexed before the Duchamp collection) could have anticipated the extensive parallels Anastasi has drawn between the texts and images of Jarry and Duchamp.⁴⁰ The examples most often cited include Anastasi's identification of Jarry as the source for forty-eight of the forty-nine titles in *The Large Glass* (1915–23); a reference in Jarry to urinals unscrewed

35. Joyce's version of a thunderclap, God's voice, or man's fall from paradise, this word, in purely narrative terms, represents the sound of Finnegan, the bricklayer, as he falls from his scaffold. Bricklaying, we remember, was the Anastasi family business.

36. A significant part of Anastasi's self-education was in literature. Before *Finnegans Wake*, he had read much of Joyce, including *Ulysses* (which he also read aloud) and *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. He remembers being grateful that he could read such great literary works in their original language (though he regretted having to read Kafka in translation). He remembers a creative-writing professor from an evening class at the University of Pennsylvania saying that *Finnegans Wake* was the work of a "demented, syphilitic mind." Naturally, Anastasi was interested and wanted to see for himself; he's been reading the book ever since. (Later, he discovered that *Finnegans Wake* was a favorite book of John Cage, who also made work from it.)

37. These paintings do not really look like Jasper Johns's work from the early sixties, but something about the conceptual link to abstract expressionist mark-making and its engagement of the printed word resonates.

38. Anastasi's paintings of the word "Jew" relate to this concordance.

39. Anastasi discussing the radical change in Duchamp's work around 1912 (from recorded conversations with the author, spring 1994).

40. These findings were first published in "Duchamp on the Jarry Road," *Artforum* 30, No. 1 (September 1991): 86–90.



Autobodyography II (full face), 1994
black and white photograph
26 1/2" x 18"
Collection of Barbara and Eugene Schwartz,
New York

from their plumbing linked to Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917); and the idea of preserved layers of dust, described by Jarry and made by Duchamp. The list goes on, written up in a color-coded text, *Du Jarry (Jarry in Duchamp)* (cat. 37 [figs. 11 and 12]) which was exhibited at the Sandra Gering Gallery, in New York, in 1993.⁴¹ At the same time, the manuscript for *me innerman monophone (Jarry in Joyce)* [figs. 11 and 12] was also exhibited.⁴² The combined manuscripts, seventeen hundred pages of notebook paper, covered opposing walls, offering another unconventional experience of the gallery. But for the step ladder (for reading the highest pages), the gallery space, like that of "Six Sites" (and *Continuum*), was apparently emptied once more. Anastasi's obsessive relationship to the issues of origin and knowledge not only drives his scholarship but turns what would be ordinary manuscript materials into aesthetic matter, revealing the complex workings of the artist's mind as the visible object of this endeavor.⁴³ A variation of this interest, focusing more directly on our phenomenological experience of the world, was first expressed in the *Sound Objects*, when Anastasi isolated sight and sound. This approach also occurs in *Drawing Sounds*, a 1993 memorial project for John Cage, organized by Anastasi for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. At his invitation, sixteen of Cage's closest friends and colleagues (including Anastasi) presented drawings accompanied by taped recordings of the sounds of the drawings being made.

41. Since 1991, Anastasi has been showing regularly at the Sandra Gering Gallery.

42. Anastasi's Joyce-Jarry scholarship was presented at the Sorbonne in the spring of 1994.

43. "This was the foaming joy of thinking, riding an informational water slide of pure thought. Anastasi's notational spree worked by establishing connections in front of your eyes. It was like watching a time lapse film of coral growing, an intelligent reef of thought, with fronds of information drifting lazily in the interstices." Matthew Ritchie, "The Word Made Flesh," *Flash Art* (International Edition) 176 (May/June 1994): 71-72.

READING A LINE ON A PAGE IN A FRAME OF YOUNG VIRGINS INTO HIS OLD AGE.⁴⁴

At three a.m. on November 4, 1991, Anastasi woke up with a question on his mind: "Is Jarry a word in *Finnegans Wake*?" The answer was yes, three times, and with that discovery began a companion investigation into the idea of Jarry as an unacknowledged source for James Joyce. Among other citings, Anastasi identifies the character of Shem, generally understood to represent Joyce himself, to be primarily based on Jarry, treated here as his twin or double. Above all the specific relationships that Anastasi references in both Duchamp and Joyce via Jarry, the idea of the double or mirror image (with its implication of inversion reflecting the opposite or other to complete the whole) rises with the most significance and brings Anastasi's own aesthetic into the picture.

Even before Anastasi approached the wall as the primary site for his exploration of presence and perception, he was examining dualities in the *Sound Objects*, in the skewed reflection of the mute objects and their disembodied sounds. With the image of the wall-on-the-wall, the idea of this thin twin stood like a transparent double before us, holding absence and presence in a single glance. In the subsequent wall works, inversion was instrumental in announcing the viewer's photographic invisibility in these conceptual mirrors. Doubleness has another life in the blind drawings, which are usually made with both hands, and reflect, particularly in the laptop subway drawings, the subtle difference that two nearly identical appendages may make.

Inversion takes a more literal form in Anastasi's recent *Autobodyography* series (1994, cat. 38-41 [fig. 13]), which consists, in part, of photographic images of autobiographical text written on the artist's body. The body

44. In this sentence from the drawing *Effigy* (cat. 42), Anastasi incorporates stream-of-consciousness writing with an earlier untitled text piece, *reading a line on a page* (1977).

has been one of many natural subjects or sites for artists to explore in the absence of the traditional art object since the sixties. Anastasi's relationship to the body fits this earlier model rather than the more contemporary examples that concern themselves with body politics. Our retrospective view witnesses the body's evolving presence in Anastasi's practice over the last thirty-some years, thereby dulling the radical difference between the cool, philosophical circle drawn by the earliest works and the confessional posture of these recent body images. But even so prepared, we are left thinking that something else must account for Anastasi's most significant inversion. And it must be Jarry.

As Duchamp was the "permission" for Anastasi in the early years, so does Jarry serve him now, providing, among other things, the courage to invade his own privacy. Borrowing directly from Jarry's character Faustroll, who writes all of art and science on his body, and also from Joyce's Shem, whose body writings include biographical traces, Anastasi has placed himself among this group of fictional body writers. (Duchamp

did not create a body-writing image but certainly provided us with a biographical inversion in the persona of Rose Sélavy.) His process combines stream-of-consciousness writing (at age sixty) with excerpts from a childhood diary (at age ten), painted with body makeup before a mirror.⁴⁵ The body texts are photographed, sometimes upside down, and inversely printed life-size, producing a positive of the negative image. This light-dark reversal adds an x-rayed appearance to these otherwise primitive-looking works, symbolically encapsulating the literal mix of past and present texts of this artist's life. On a broader level, the past and present point to a continuity established with the artists' lives that came before him.

The self that Anastasi strives so hard to lose in the blind drawings is now the "pictured" container of his vision. In the drawing *Effigy* (1994, cat. 42), also from the

45. The text on Anastasi's face is written in reverse, recalling the technique da Vinci used in his notebooks.

Untitled II (*Abandoned Paintings*), 1994-95
oil and graphite on canvas
89 1/4" x 74"
Photograph: John Bessler



Autobodyography series, Anastasi uses the outline of his body (traced on the floor as Jarry wrote on the floor) to frame the text. A section of it includes his 1991 musings on the Duchamp-Jarry connections:

The fact of my having published...a considerably detailed outline of this connection in a magazine of wide international circulation will probably assure that my name will be associated with this discovery in the mind of whatever public is interested. As I'm writing here at the kitchen table at 3:15 a.m. on Sept. 20, trying to perceive what effect this new status will have on my work as an artist and as a writer, in addition, I find myself pondering an even more interesting question: what effect will my discovery of Jarry himself and his pataphysics have on my work in general? It is quite possible that I have been the first artist who, after having spent forty odd years in the thrall of Duchamp and his inventions, finds himself in touch with the horse's mouth. I believe that I am describing a potential personal revolution.... The questions I have about the work I'll be doing around the corner are complete and plentiful.

Life is Anastasi's primary text and the Gallery his public site of investigation. With the artist's body configured as ground for his diaristic writings, the *Autobodyography* series presents a more intimate, psychological idea of presence and perception than the more distant philosophical position claimed by his earlier works—the difference, perhaps, between the self-reflexive and the self-reflective. Literary considerations are also elevated in this new visual field. And paradox, with its recurring appearance, becomes a familiar, essentially humanizing

characteristic of Anastasi's shifting focus. The most recent turn finds him working on a series called *Abandoned Paintings* (1994–95, cat. 44 [fig. 14]), all-black works that reflect his body in its current dimensions, 89 1/4 x 74", as far as his arms can reach in another Vitruvian stretch. Unlike the noisier *bababad* series, these works collapse all color and create what Anastasi calls "a silent movie." Combining sighted and unsighted gestures, whose placement is determined by the throw of dice, Anastasi forgoes his recipe for closure (when the oil sticks run out, when the allotted time is up, when the train ride is over, etc.) and decides when, as de Kooning would say, to abandon these

paintings. This final, *sighted* intervention, a common practice for most artists, contradicts the exacting set of controls that has framed his work for many years. Although such literal thinking was typical of much conceptual art, a childhood drawing of Anastasi's points to his own inclinations. On the back of a drawing of Joan of Arc, made in 1948 when he was fifteen, he identified the time that the drawing was made, the day it was completed, as well as the day of his birth. Anastasi, we are reminded, had always been interested equally in the existence and production of the artist. In 1960, he laid a large rug on the floor of his studio. It became an "accidental" site for art spills and life spills for twenty-nine years, after which, in 1989, he painted the word "enough" on the rug and took it away for exhibition (cat. 1). Anastasi's practice looks to discover the way this twinned awareness, of being here and being here as an artist, may continue to flow.

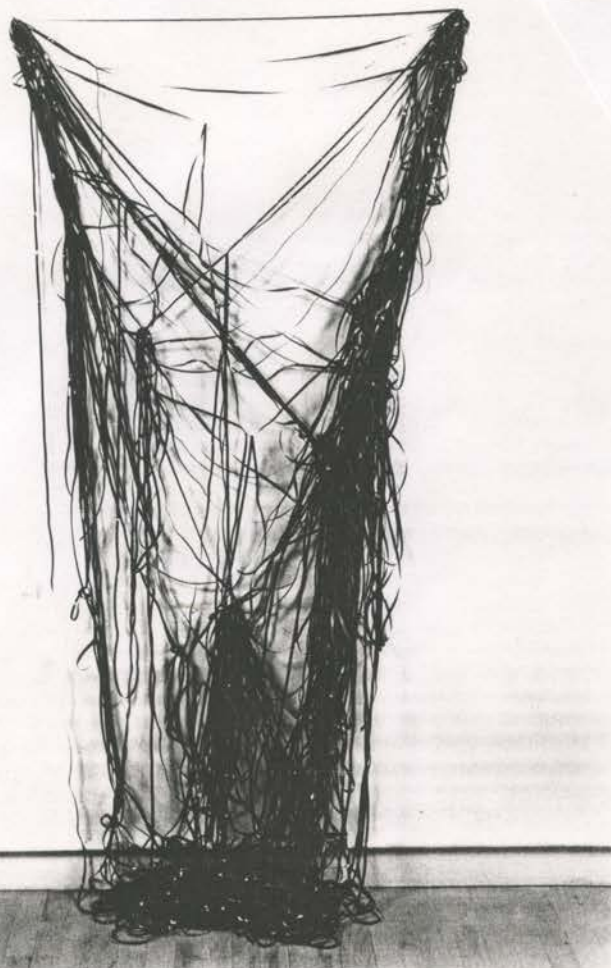
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William Anastasi. A Retrospective 1960–1995

The Galleries at Moore, Moore College of Art and Design
Philadelphia 1995

und

William Anastasi. A Selection of Works from 1960 to 1989
Scott Hanson Gallery
New York 1989



Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, 1965 Magnetic analog tape 73 x 43 inches

In 1967 William Anastasi offered paintings that seemed to acknowledge the obtrusive nature of painting by making paintings of the walls that the paintings were to be placed upon. Thus the "covered up" area - the area that traditionally suffers at the expense of the imperialism of painting - was acknowledged to exist and actually illustrated (via photographic technique)...

In these paintings one tyranny of painting was discovered. The form of painting took a giant step into the present.

Gregory Battcock, 1977

. . .

An image comes to mind of a white, ideal space that, more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of 20th-century art...

Anastasi photographed the empty gallery at Dwan, noticed the parameters of the wall, top and bottom, right and left, the placement of each electrical outlet, the ocean of space in the middle. He then silkscreened all this data on a canvas slightly smaller than the wall and put it on the wall. Covering the wall with an image of that wall delivers a work of art right into the zone where surface, mural and wall have engaged in dialogues central to modernism.

Brian O'Doherty, 1976

. . .

William Anastasi gave four exhibitions at the Dwan Gallery in New York between 1966 and 1970. The era in which those shows occurred - the beginning and height of the classical conceptual period - might be described, without exaggeration, as the most critical or abnormal years in the entire long and wide history of art. Anastasi's work in these shows was a groundbreaking demonstration of the meaning and power of conceptual art and, indirectly, all art that has been made in the late- and post-conceptual traditions.

Thomas Mc Evilly, 1989

. . .

Anastasi's five projects - *Continuum*, *Transfer*, viewing a film in/of a gallery of the period and audition, *Plastic Coincident*, *Through* - are but a sample from the large corpus of his conceptual photographic, film, and video projects of the sixties and seventies. The history of the reception of these works offers an insight into the challenge Anastasi poses to the museum and to the institutions of art history and critical writing. His career articulates what is arguably the most sustained, rigorous, and sophisticated examination of the conceptual basis of the photographic text and that text's engagement of the spectator in the site of its creation and reception...

Anastasi is the Borges of the visual arts who has fulfilled, within the self-referential circuits of a meta-textual narrative, an infinitely retelling interpretation. The rhetorical ploys and play that the art of both Borges and Anastasi share is gleaned from their reading - an interpretive process that uncoils through the circuit and selfreferential logics of art made to be seen and consumed in one gesture. In this process, Anastasi emphasizes the chance play of the viewer and the immateriality of art as a creative process that each of us experiences in the infinite play of daily life. Anastasi breaks the frame of the museum and gallery and asks us to look to what we see: That's art enough.

John Hanhardt

The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994

. . .

His pieces, for all their simplicity, are not mute. They are argumentative; they deflect our energy, and like a ball hitting a wall, they come back at us at a different angle. They are hard to play.

Anastasi has spent a long time at his art. He has made a body of work that is both historically important and esthetically rewarding. He is part of a tradition that continues to challenge perceptual complacency. He is necessary.

Richard Kalima, 1990

. . .

Anastasi's notational spree worked by establishing connections in front of your eyes. It was like watching a time lapse film of coral growing, an intelligent reef of thought, with fronds of information drifting lazily in the interstices...

Anastasi captured... what might be a viable future for conceptual representation - not a struggle pitting Grace against Reason, but a delicate balancing act in which the life of the mind becomes the inner Eden.

Matthew Ritchie, 1995

. . .

Anastasi resists any temptation to be either mainstream or easily explained away with words. Instead, the work - highly innovative and, in some respects, decidedly cryptic - drives you to respond emotionally, intellectually and soul searchingly.

Brilliant examples of conceptual art, Anastasi's oeuvre is eminently compelling and richly memorable. Transcending trivial questions of whether they provoke reactions of being liked or disliked, the works on display rise above such petty issues to stand their ground incontrovertibly, as a body of esthetic forms loyal to the integrity of their own being.

Burton Wasserman, 1995

. . .

William Anastasi has been a significant figure in... conceptual art... since its emergence in the early sixties... His Works (give) evidence of three decades of continual movement, of restless experimentation, of an incisive imagination that brings to light the contradictions at the heart of his subjects, whether religion, politics, or the art space itself.

Duncan McLean, 1995

erratum

Gregory Battcock, "Wall Paintings and the Wall," Arts Magazine, c. 1971
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addendum

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republished in "Inside the White Cube," (book), Lapis Press, 1986

Thomas McEvilley, Introduction, Scott Hanson retrospective catalogue,
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John Hanhardt, The Whitney Museum of American Art,
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catalogue to the Moore College of Art Retrospective, 1995

Richard Kalina, "William Anastasi: Deadpan Conceptualist,"
Art in America, 1990

Matthew Ritchie, "The Word Made Flesh," Flash Art, 1994

Burton Wasserman, review of Moore College of Art Retrospective,
Art Matters, Philadelphia, 1995

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