Robinsonnades II: The Real Robinson*

In my case there is something crazy, a kind of prejudice.

—Céline, Death on the Installment Plan

1. In which Jean Dubuffet’s career is charted via the detour furnished by a deliberately inadequate metaphor

This person (but from the outset, I insist that the metaphor that likens Jean Dubuffet to an aspect of Robinson Crusoe amounts to hardly anything beyond the fact that it incites the reader to challenge it; as he will likewise condemn the arbitrariness and ambiguity of the terms, concepts, and notions afoot here, which I wish to invite this same reader to take as provisional and somewhat happenstance, and even to deem them improper and of little pertinence, in the manner of a metaphor that can nonetheless instruct in proportion to the distance separating it from its object since it is meant less to help us see the object better than to persuade us that the work of visual accommodation and focus implores recourse to procedures and tools whose instrumental nature should never escape us), this person has inspected his island and taken the compass of isolation’s privileges, as well as the way a well-calculated indigence can fortify the mind against the overflow of its business affairs, its projects, its household—or its very language. (And already what does island, isolation, and indigence, not to mention mind, mean? We each believe that we carry our island with us, wherein we claim to seclude ourselves, but in its own way, society, or culture, is another such island that gathers humanity together and holds it in its grip: in respect to which Robinson’s position is rather equivocal; and as for indigence, as soon as it is calculated, one should not see it as a condition but rather a function, a negative value meant to swell, through the effects of rarefaction, the price of goods and services.)

Certainly not an isolate by vocation or natural inclination, but rather one by choice, resolutely holding himself apart from collective projects and engagements—in his own concern to see as much as possible with his own eyes and not to let himself be blinded or to impose a vision that isn’t his own—he will for some time have claimed to use in his art (as in his meditations and writings) only basic, even elementary techniques, and materials that, if not rubbish, are obviously the simplest and poorest, willingly taking advantage of the type of high bricolage to which the mind is invited when even household tools are missing, at the same time that some sort of turmoil has torn him from his usual place and tossed him onto an unknown soil, about which he can’t tell from the outset whether it’s hostile or friendly. Having saved nothing from the shipwreck (but here the simile is all too apt and perhaps indiscreet: since it’s indeed from a shipwreck that the idea

Jean Dubuffet. Table of Undefined Form. 1951.
will have occurred to Jean Dubuffet, around 1942, the shipwreck of a life, of the several lives he had tried out up to that point) other than a bunch of objects and miscellaneous appurtenances: old boxes and pots, some empty, others filled with glue and varnish, some gesso brushes, a butterfly net, scissors, quantities of canvas and paper, some ink, some books torn into fragments, and—we need to add—an immense quantity of tobacco, enough to last several years. Of weapons of self-defense, he is soon able to convince himself, there is no need: a good cudgel, which the painter’s correspondence clearly shows he knows how to use skillfully, will suffice.

And no sooner occupied with exploring the shores and their surrounds, than he is anxious to discover a human footprint in the sand (or to inscribe his own trace there?). Then, having found shelter, summoning in effigy, on the far-from-Platonic walls of his cave, his friends and acquaintances and also several female nudes, as though he wished through the power of images to ward off a solitude he foresees as irremediable. But getting beyond this shamanistic mood—to come back to it another time, when the memory of the city and its walls and shop fronts will be too insistent—turning to make up some tables according to his conception and custom, indeed the most constant of all companions, first foundation of the labor of philosophy, before leaving his cooking pot and setting out for the discovery of his realm, with the idea of making an inventory of its sites and keeping a record of its soils and inhabitants, mostly those that chew the cud, and the intention of perhaps establishing a secondary house in a choice spot in the interior, where he could pass the harshest months of the year if he pleased (and further increase the solitude to which he was reduced?).

Finally, by dint of patience and ingenuity, having assured himself of the elements necessary to live on, extending industriousness to the point of reconstituting all around himself the appearance of the fittings of civilized (if not bourgeois) existence and reuniting—in order to use them in his own way, which is that of imagination or, as he has aptly put it: of utopia—a number of utensils, scales and wheelbarrows, tools of every kind, bottles (which he doesn’t care to cast into the sea), teacups, clocks, coffee pots, and so on, even—in order to pretend to yield to it, all the better to scuttle in himself the desire to escape—a kind of ship: Robinson Crusoe once again, cutting down his island’s most beautiful tree to make a canoe out of it and, stripping it, hollowing it out, building it on the spot at the cost of an immense labor—everything else being put aside—before finally discovering that it is impossible to get it to the water.¹

¹ The trajectory Jean Dubuffet has followed in his work is easy to recognize: from the Marionnettes de la ville et de la compagne (1942–45) up to the Hourloupe (beginning in 1962), passing by stages which have as their titles, for example: Mirobolus, Macadam et Cie (1945–46), Plus beaux qu’ils croient (portraits, 1946–47), Paysages grotesques (1949–51), Corps de dames (1950–51), Tables paysagées, Pierres philosophiques (1950–52), Lieux momentanés (1952–53), Les phénomènes (1958–63), etc. See the Catalogue des travaux de Jean Dubuffet, ed. Max Loreau (Paris: Minuit, 1964).
2. Some other serious reflections and several questions about Robinson's story

Doubtless Robinson would not willingly have relinquished the extreme joy this work instilled in him, no more than the satisfaction of having the means to embark about which he understood that, in order to have it attain a size large enough to withstand the ocean, it was necessary to build it in the depths of the forest, at a good distance from the shore, and without hope of being able to use it except in his thoughts or imagination. But perhaps the isolate didn’t want to leave his island otherwise than figuratively, if it is true—as seems to be the case from the preface to the *Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe*—that it wasn’t up to him to break up his isolation or to put an end to his forced retreat. Robinson’s story, if it is real and true *despite its allegorical character* (as Defoe puts it), has doubtlessly been decided by Providence, or—which amounts to the same thing—by its author himself, which is to say Robinson, the one who judged that human existence was and shouldn’t be anything but a single, universal act of solitude and that the isolation of a man abandoned on a desert island was nothing compared to that of which the mind is capable. (And we will concede that in this case Robinson knew what he was talking about. But what was he, then, that he needed to exercise—or force on himself—the test of a life so perfectly silent and solitary and to find no remedy against isolation other than in its *excess*?)

And what if Robinson had wasted his life? If in the final analysis this incredible test to which he was fated hadn’t been anything but theater: comedy (or more specifically, tragedy, since it is a matter here of returning to the originary ground of an individual defined and fashioned as such by culture)? If the fiction in which Robinson would have chosen to fold himself during twenty-eight years, two months, and nineteen days hadn’t any other purpose or outcome than to extract him from human society so as to confine him in a state of nakedness and forced isolation in which he could not know the meditation proper—as he himself will say—to the condition of retreat? If this *figure* had so well obscured the savage, natural *ground* it seemed constructed to reveal that Robinson wouldn’t be able to perceive it (except during his moments of despair) during the whole time he would live alone on his island and, even when he will have made Friday his slave, he will continue with the greatest seriousness to play master and lord of the earth, man of culture and of history—to the point of finally discovering, once returned to human society, that such an isolation has nothing to do with the true means, resources, and ends of solitude, which are those indeed of the mind?

The fact is that the mind isn’t only capable of *retreat*; the natural movement of reflection, of meditation, and—more generally—of its own operations, easily lead it to the farthest limits of solitude without entailing that it break all ties with society. But what are we to say about the one who wants to doubt not so much the reality of the external world nor his own existence as the usefulness or efficiency of the tools and instruments he has inherited from traffic with his fellowmen and who undertakes if not to construct others that would be better, at least to assume a distance from those he has available whose use he understands as an insider, or to
put it better, as a mere spectator who is more interested in considering the workings of the mind and the genesis of its operations than its result and the works themselves? Valéry alerted us to this: someone who appeals to such a mood quickly becomes a kind of Robinson, an intellectual Robinson in fact exposed to all kind of excesses, disturbances, and aberrations. It is hard to measure the joy—once again—that seized Robinson once, by dint of time (but what did this mean to him?) and by applying the resources of his reason, he solved a work or project whose basics he didn’t know: but clearly we can’t expect him to try to invent objects and tools from scratch, nor to claim to discover unknown routines or food-stuffs by means of his intelligence, having all he can do in the situation to which he is reduced to provide himself with the traditional gear capable of satisfying the basic (after those of life) needs of the species—among which there don’t seem to have figured basic philosophy, literature, or art itself. But perhaps, in the matter of art, literature, or philosophy, we don’t know what we’re talking about? Perhaps these notions are themselves fallacious, as can be those the mind uses to designate its realms and faculties, or to define and class goods and products whose nature it believes itself to have recognized and to be able to dispose at leisure, that it believes itself to possess? Perhaps (since we must insist on it) Robinson was a past master in these things, as in many others, but he didn’t set them up in the place where we install them with far too great solemnity? Perhaps this solitary existence would have been so imbued with philosophy and aesthetics—isn’t playing at being Robinson the very pinnacle of art or philosophy each one of us tries for?—that the concern about the work or the system would have been out of place there (even though late in life—and this should give us food for thought—he was eager that such a display of wonders should not remain a dead letter and that their narration should serve in the instruction and entertainment of others)?

3. Art and the cultural perspective

If we now ask: why this metaphor (inadequate, remember, since Robinson claimed no more than to have reconstructed his own culture from scratch so as to experience the costs and necessity of doing this in all their rediscovered freshness; whereas the one who occupies us here would be more tempted to demonstrate that the culture that is our lot has no necessity and that it had to have been, it certainly should have been, founded on entirely different principles), and why so many detours—I would answer that these questions, along with several others, are the fodder on which Jean Dubuffet ruminates, the daily alimentation of his mind. And if culture, if our culture, were so made as to prevent us from recognizing, from perceiving art where it really occurs? And if art (as Thomas de Quincey nicely put it) couldn’t be reduced to the catalogue numbered by the Muses? Or further: if art (it being understood that the word here only has a provisional and hypothetical validity, as does the word culture, and shortly, that of nature), if art didn’t like to sleep—as Dubuffet puts it—in the beds made up for it, or to live in
the habitations built for it, or to be organized in the enclosures assigned to it? How could art put up with remaining in the place indicated by all the converging notices, arrows, and signposts culture has at its disposal for holding creator and consumer alike in its web, how could art agree to stay there, accustomed as it is to going out gallivanting, to playing hookey and covering its tracks, to leaving every fixed trail the moment it gets reconnoitered and blazed? But even worse: art no longer recognizes itself in the mirror culture now holds up to it, and it supports the trappings its priests and doctors weigh it down with, the official cult whose object it is, with ever greater impatience. The fact is that it suffers badly from being the pretext for gatherings and ceremonies of every type—although always funerary. And, more deeply, the fact is that it knows all too well—having learned this at its own cost—that once culture claims to have reduced works of art to the status of museum objects, ones which will form the matter of inventories and catalogues, it aims at nothing so much as clipping their wings and pulling their claws, so as to deprive them of their full repercussions, to cut short their effects, or finally, by means of a decorous lighting system, to block the luminosity inside them that works obstinately to surge forth: to see art as an object of study or of curiosity (and first and foremost of this degraded and caricatural form of knowledge that is connoisseurship—the false erudition, the show-off learning of those “in the know”) is to forget in a way that is the most definitive and efficient (as well as the most dangerous (because deliberately obscurantist), that fundamentally art is knowledge and the very business—the first, at least chronologically—of the mind.

There, they will say (but it’s been done for quite a while—since of course Dubuffet, as Céline before, exaggerates), you have a case of a bad mood and of a very bad, extremely unwholesome tone—equivocal, suspicious—as all attacks mounted against culture can be. However, it doesn’t seem that the doctors and priests I spoke of have been so affected by the aggression against modern art and its wildest works, those most contrary to order and polite custom, that totalitarian regimes have conducted in the name of supposedly “cultural” politics: under its most brutal forms the Inquisition had the reassuring quality of simplifying the possibilities of circulation, leaving no choice but that between the light of the pyres and the darkness of the cellars, between the destruction of works and their being kept in hiding. But that culture should be directly put into question, its personnel and its institutions threatened in the name of art itself, and that art brut should be preferred to cultural art, that art created by people innocent (insofar as that is possible) of all artistic culture should be placed in the balance with works by specialists and art professionals, is what’s intolerable. Here’s proof, if we still needed to be persuaded, that the lesson that includes Hegel’s Aesthetics hasn’t been understood, that it can’t have been since in order to express it Hegel used the voice that will be Nietzsche’s:

But precisely because our culture is not characterized by an overflow of life and because our mind and soul no longer derive the satisfaction provided by animate objects, we could say that it is no longer by placing
ourselves in the standpoint of culture, of our culture, that we will be able to appreciate art at its true value, to realize its mission and its dignity.2

Hard words to have to hear which—perhaps—can’t, shouldn’t, reach us: how could the mind break out of the circle of culture, out of its point of view, if—as Hegel thought—culture exists at a higher level than art in the hierarchy of the mind’s expressive means? Born from reason (it’s Hegel who speaks here), culture constitutes a screen: it hides the true function of art from us, its necessity, something that is its very reason for being. But don’t we see (this language, we will have understood, being adopted figuratively here) that such a screen is the obverse of the mind’s work, the condition of its progress, the barrier it sets up between its present form and its earlier ones, in order to set aside the appeals from and the weight of its own past, in order to prevent their eruption into the point at which we’ve arrived in the history and development of the Idea? Whatever the relations art might have with nature, and even if art as such only exists to the degree that it participates in mind, the philosophy of art—aesthetics—has less to do with the reign of the concept and with universal intelligence, with the beyond of spirit, than with its before, with the animal order within which consciousness is still enclosed in its particularity, with the primordial ground that constitutes the work’s field of origin. So alienated still is the spirit from culture that henceforth it tries to forget everything of its past, of its prehistory, and—pretending to have inspected itself and exhausted its own possibilities—wants to know about no other future than that of the concept. Art then becomes an object of mere representations and loses its fullness, the reality it had possessed at the time of its first flowering. Worse, its reign having been completed, it tries to prolong it by working not for its own account but for that of cultivated thought, submitting itself to the order, views, tests, critique of the latter and, upping the ante on the latter’s claims, going so far as to put its own necessity, its own legitimacy into doubt. We will willingly grant that the circumstances for it are hardly favorable today; and as for the artist, he or she is only distracted and contaminated by the ideas formulated ever more loudly by everyone, by everyone’s opinions and judgments on art and its works:

Our spiritual culture is such that it is impossible for him, even by an act of will and of decision, to abstract himself from the world which buzzes around him and from the conditions in which he finds himself engaged, unless he goes through a reeducation and withdraws from this world into a solitude within which to rediscover his lost paradise.3

A few would be so tempted, fleeing all the way to the South Seas and Tahiti to rediscover the truth of art, which is a savage truth, among the Polynesians: too late, perhaps... For already we don’t see Robinson retaining art, at least the fine

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2. G. W. F. Hegel, Introduction à l’esthétique (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1964), p. 34. [Assembled posthumously from his students’ notes, Hegel’s Aesthetics exists in widely different versions and this passage (and the one below), appearing only in the French edition, is translated into English here. Trans.]

3. Ibid., p. 43.
arts, within the inventory of the species' natural needs—or as Rousseau would say, its true needs. The question Dubuffet asks is this: if Robinson hadn’t vested all his art and his philosophy in his activities and the carrying of a fur skin umbrella, in the enjoyment of his premises and the spectacle of his provisions, in this or that of his undertakings and observations (like curing earthenware pots and weaving baskets, or seeing with amazement the germination of the seeds he’d stuck in the ground), or in the kind of fantasies that sometimes gripped him with the idea that he was king or emperor of this island and rich from all its future resources, and still other ones of a more vivid and sinister hue that represented to him the condition he’d have been in if he hadn’t grabbed the elementary objects of his subsistence from the ship’s wreckage—the question, I would say, is sophistical, if not perverse (as we could expect from such a philosopher, as I will explain in a moment). For we have to repeat that Robinson was and in his position couldn’t be anything but the man of culture and that in the very extremes of his distress he cared for nothing but trying to preserve the primordial grounds for humankind, and—little by little—even those of the state of culture, of civilized existence. That character was so weighed down by needs that he was, of course, in no condition to recognize or admit those of art, to make a place for it among the “true” necessities of humanity: for it could be that art, as much as establishing the humanness of the species, might have the function of distracting it, of deranging it, of covering the tracks of culture and signaling the—provisional—end of its babble, of claiming its ground and bodying it forth by means of figures, the first of which being that of man (and, we must ask, what would have become of Robinson if he had been delivered over to art and lent to its consequences, since given the absence of the other’s gaze and of society’s censorship, everything was permitted him?).

4. Concerning a philosophy that would know how to make use of the flexibility of concepts and ideas

Nature, Culture: it must be repeated that those are burdensome, ambiguous concepts whose application, usefulness, and validity are not obvious. Parrot-words, chatterbox-words, as Valéry would say, prolix words that swarm on the mind’s horizon (this same Valéry expecting his—intellectual—Robinson to hunt them down and hit a few: for the pleasure of a good rifle shot and the healthy exercise of his faculties). Sponge-words, elastic-words, as Dubuffet also says. But mind, art, and above all: philosophy? . . . “Art should never say its name”; and as for philosophy, the only one the painter wants to know about is an implicit one, even if he likes to surround himself with philosophers (so as to contradict them), even if the philosophers court him, the work of one of them attracting others who also want to be engaged with the business, connected to it, like flies to fresh milk. (Hegel talks like this, with the ferocious sense of privilege of a philosophical aristocrat: but what other artist besides Dubuffet works among us now to preserve the possibility and the future of the work, its truth not so much through its form
as through its necessity and process?) The obsession that drives him to philosophize is the worst fitted to the systematic spirit and conceptual apparatus that defines philosophy as a cultural institution—just as the passion he has for ideas prevents him from tasting those that are so embedded in crust and gelatine that they allow nothing of the anatomy and physiology of the mind that's conceived them to be perceived, or of its operations, or of its moods. It's because he's figured out in his own way, which is that of painting and of the artist, that mind has taken the turn of thinking only through forms, figures, planes, and regular volumes—which would rid us of the Platonic screen, the Hegelian circumference, and above all the Parmenidean sphere?—but that such a plastic practice remains with no purchase at all on the specific space of thought, on its constitutive structures. And we might understand that painting, far from having to study at the feet of the arts of language, can move ahead of them—establishing itself at least through fiction at this mental level where ideas and meanings have their roots, their berth: here perhaps is the painter who, painting and writing as he does, will free us from Delacroix.

Fold over fold: Today the job of philosophy, which is that of art itself, comes down to suggesting another arrangement of folds, of imposing on it an ever newer and more antagonistic type, so that its domain will finally be filled with a thousand networks, meshes, creases, cracks, crevasses, furrows, hollows, pleats of every type. This is how we could imagine a philosophy that would be able to take advantage of the flexibility of the concepts and ideas it uses and of their spongy character—the very one that Dubuffet denounces—and which would take as its object the constitution, by means of the terms whose repetition constitutes its discourse, a certain number of constellations within which certain ones would mean something only through reference to the totality of the others—and nature, for example, only in relation to culture, but also only in relation to art; and philosophy: well, philosophy in its own turn in relation to art, and nature, and culture—all the work of the mind in need of reflection aimed at measuring, by means of a series of fictions and variations, the specific resistance of each of these concepts, its necessity, its elasticity, and its capacity of retention, in order to test the resources of their oppositions and combinations, in order to multiply the shared boundaries and lines of communication among them. What about art, or philosophy, if the recognized extension of culture tends to swell and to block the whole horizon of the concept? What about philosophy, or culture, or even mind, if what's left to art shrinks to the point of taking up only a barely visible margin on the frontiers of thought? And what other terms—work, history...—do we need to introduce into such an arrangement, or to subtract from it, to guarantee its balance, to stabilize it—or overthrow it?

5. How art is always on the side of contrariness

Let the mind pretend that the order imposed on it by culture—our culture—is so broad and so generalized that art is literally deprived of any domain today.
That's the opinion of the Dadaists and first and foremost of Marcel Duchamp, in whose view art ultimately has no other reality or necessity than what culture confers on it, nor any effects but conventional if not illusory ones, all of which are born from a type of collective and deliberate hallucination or aberration, itself attesting to the disciplinary power of social consensus. Witness to this is the fact that any object whatever can take on the value of art if the social body decides on it, conforming to the rigorously sociological definition of order that an anthropologist such as Marcel Mauss has given for the work of art: the object that is recognized as such by a group.4 In such a constellation of thought, the word art preserves a meaning—perhaps entirely derisive; that of work can no longer have one except to reduce the operations of art to the unique selection and chance juxtaposition of elements that are themselves arbitrary (but which are not, perhaps, as much so as it might seem). Wouldn't art become a trivial, needless business? But what would the mind gain by no longer wanting to know of any other necessity but that of nature and to measure everything by the scale of utility, to confound nature and truth and the natural needs of the species with its own needs, which are true needs?

Let's consider hypothetically someone who, to the contrary—knowing nothing about the side of culture, nor even about that of man, if not of "life"—would choose the side of art (whatever we mean by that) and would assume it to the point of its most extreme consequences; a new type of Robinson who, without necessarily cutting all ties to society, but without caring too much about the views and opinions of others, would undertake to transgress the limits of culture so as to rediscover those of art; who would claim to make himself the test of its effects and of an unparalleled necessity, whatever the means and whatever it might cost him; who would deliberately put himself outside the usual circuits of cultural production and consumption and would know how to escape—through his will or obsession-compulsion—from the socialized forms of art and its official norms and methods in order to invent his own tools and materials, his own language, even his own alphabet, and to decide on his own about the forms taken by his inspiration; who wouldn't try to make a place for himself in the museum (which he has possibly never visited), nor to work at the continuation, in the line of succession of a tradition, of a purported historical continuity, but who would make a savage career, one without a point of departure or arrival. Such productions—whether they craze him or to the contrary protect him from the wanderings to which society gives the name of madness—have in common that they expose their author to an unasharable solitude and take on I don't know what feverish, labyrinthine, and strongly repetitive aspect, which nevertheless doesn't lack for illuminating power: for if art is this function through which the mind encloses itself to test its secret resources and the ties that subject it to the world, this need—here's Dubuffet's idea—that he discovers by inventing and perfecting the means of his own satisfaction, this delirium in which

he lets himself be caught in order to rediscover the meaning and the basis of the idea of truth, of his truth, what works are better made to persuade us of the reality, the necessity of this function, of the urgency and truth of this need, than those of the irregulars of art, the buccaneers of culture, the great mental drifters, the hidden creators (as is their art itself) of those works which the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, under the leadership of Jean Dubuffet, has patiently gathered together: images—we have to be careful here—that have nothing “naive” about them, in which lines, words, sentences, colors conjugate in infinite networks, confused webs and chains, traps with no other use than to hold captive—but alive and restless at being so arrested—the impulse that gave them birth.

But what of this person who stays on our side, on this bank of the mind, and who has moreover such a solicitude for the work that he doesn’t confuse it with the strategy of craft and the notion of “fine handiwork” that culture tries to impose on him, such a high idea of art that he hesitates to say its name (because to name art, if the paraphrase is justified, is to declare its death, in and through our language)? What of him, who, working for his own purposes, his own instruction and pleasure, never feels as much joy as when he discovers that his works can have the same purpose and possibility of instruction and pleasure for someone else? Of the one who, careful to observe the operation of art from its beginnings up to its end, condemns himself to remaining this spectator who can’t take part or let himself be blinded by the spectacle, a spectacle which, for lack of being able to grasp anything but its fragments, he ceaselessly works to repeat and renew? The one who, tempted by the mood of the buccaneer and the drifter, nevertheless keeps his feet on the ground even if it angers and saddens him to be tied to the common earth? In one of those
letters that are his specialty Dubuffet says that the expression "to have one's feet on the ground" doesn't mean anything and can't have a meaning except in the vocabulary of the sailor. Are we so sure of this? Isn't the entire work of this painter to convince us that there might be a way—the painter's way—while staying on the ground, of seeing it so well and of reproducing it and of lifting it to eye-level that it is as if we were seeing it for the first time? And culture, likewise, which claims to extend to the horizon and to hide a ground it can't extinguish, isn't this work a means—the means of philosophy, but it's all the same thing—of contesting this, of contradicting it, of denying it, which perhaps could make us feel afresh the truth of its figures? As for nature... But there we have, I would gladly agree, too many balls in the air, it being a matter here of a man who doesn't willingly defer to the order of the concept but prefers himself to stick to the affirmation he feverishly, obstinately, obsessively, repeats: that art can't play Earth or Sea, Nature or Culture, Life or Death, for any side, having no loyalty to anything but contradiction.

Hubert Damisch received the following letter from Jean Dubuffet, dated August 14, 1984.*

—The Editors

Dear Damisch,

This letter comes (in a bottle) from your Robinson, still standing guard on his island, though it's sinking, his feet are now in the water, the sands are ever quicker, thinning out. The stock of tobacco isn't yet exhausted but the lungs are, sucking both vital energy and deadly poison in from it. Negativism acts the same way, both stimulating and toxic. Tobacco and negativism are equally perilous resources. The best and worst of things. One is led to negate everything, to deny understanding any type of relevance, to discard every notion starting with that of truth, of knowledge (it is absurd to imagine that one being could know another), and finally to negate being. No island left at this point. Isle sunken. No more Robinson. Such is the morose message you'll find in the bottle. But I embrace you.

J. D.

* Cher Damisch, C'est votre Robinson qui vous écrit (dans une bouteille) toujours au poste sur son île, mais celle-ci s'enfonce, les pieds maintenant sont dans l'eau, les sables sont devenus mouvants, perdent consistance. La provision de tabac n'est pas épuisée mais les poumons sont exécrés, y puisant à la fois flux vital et mortel poison. Le négativisme a les mêmes effets simultanément stimulants et toxiques. Le tabac et le négativisme sont pareillement secours dangereux. La meilleure et la pire des choses. On est conduit à nier tout, dénier à l'entendement toute pertinence, recuser toutes les notions, à commencer par celles de vérité, de connaissance (c'est absurde d'imaginer une connaissance d'un être par un autre être), finalement nier l'être. Plus d'île à ce point. L'île engloutie. Plus de Robinson. Tel est le message morose que vous trouverez dans la bouteille. Mais je vous embrasse. J. D.