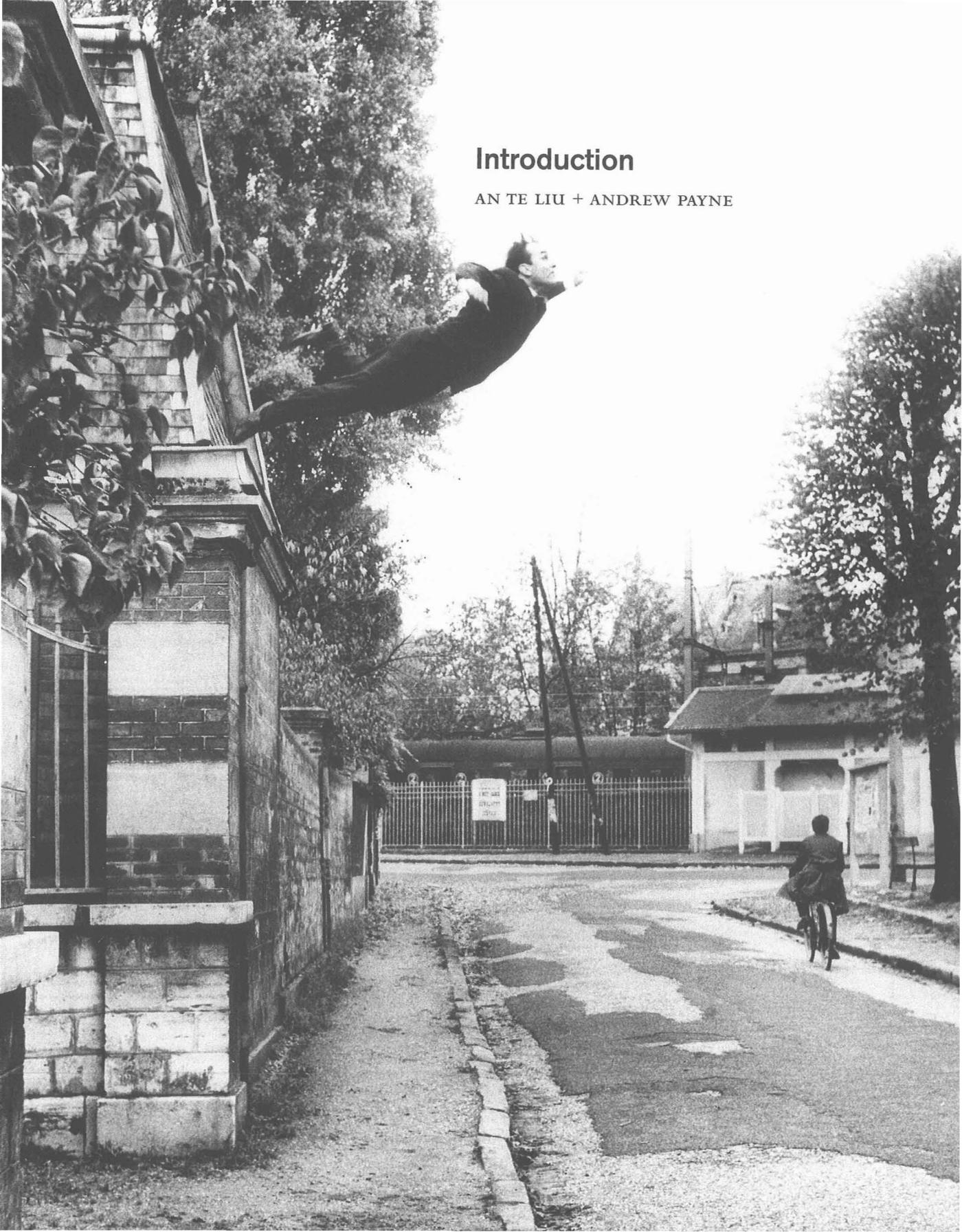


Introduction

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In his *Lectures on Aesthetics* the German philosopher Hegel announced that from the standpoint of the development of the World-Spirit (*Weltgeist*) art is a “thing of the past.” In Hegel’s view, aesthetic production must give way to modern philosophical and scientific enquiry, an enquiry whose ultimate artifact is Absolute Knowledge. A few years later, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel explains that the “sole aim” of this enquiry is “the elimination of chance.” In the event, both Hegel’s prophesy concerning the death of art and the one concerning the elimination of chance have been disappointed. For not only has art survived the modern disenchantment of Spirit, absorbing those very processes of rationalization that for Hegel spelt its imminent demise, it has survived, as often as not, through a set of operations that involve less the elimination than the exploitation of chance. From Stephane Mallarmé’s *Coup de Dés* to the exquisite cadavers of the Surrealists, from Marcel Duchamp’s “Three Standard Stoppages” to the chance operations of John Cage and Jackson Mac Low, art in the post-Hegelian period is defined by its commitment to harnessing the accidental and the unforeseen on behalf of cultural invention. If it was Pablo Picasso who averred: “I do not seek, I find,” it was left to the Picassos’ family physician, as chance would have it a young man by the name of Jacques Lacan, to explicate that cryptic assertion: what is found is found because of the room the finder leaves for the intervention of aleatory events.

This experimental spirit, with its attendant eureka effects, is at least as apparent in the modernization of scientific practice, and not least when that modernization portends the immediate imbrication of theoretical discovery and instrumental application. This role that the aleatory event has in the development of contemporary techno-science has been especially underlined by the architect and theorist of post-metropolitan catastrophe, Paul Virilio. Having reminded his reader that “the cybernetic system of the web was set in place ... to counter the electromagnetic effects of an atomic explosion at altitude and thus to forestall a generalized accident affecting strategic telecommunications,” Virilio goes on to describe our current techno-scientific paradigm with reference to “the extraordinary possibility of a generalized accident which, like a cluster bomb, would embrace a very great range of accidents.” In this issue of *Public*, *Errata*, we seek to essay the role played by the accidental, the erroneous, and the unforeseen in the theory and practice of the contemporary arts and sciences.