



The Missing Pieces (Semiotext(e))

Henri Lefebvre

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- A boarder for two years following a national funeral, Mirabeau is removed from the Pantheon and transferred to the cemetery of Clamart when his pornographic novels are discovered
- A photograph taken by Hessling on Christmas night, 1943, of a young woman nailed alive to the village gate of Novimgorod; Hessling asks his friend Wolfgang Borchert to develop the film, look at the photograph, and destroy it
- The Beautiful Gardener, a picture by Max Ernst, burned by the Nazis -- from *The Missing Pieces*

The Missing Pieces is an incantatory text, a catalog of what has been lost over time and what in some cases never existed. Through a lengthy chain of brief, laconic citations, Henri Lefebvre evokes the history of what is no more and what never was: the artworks, films, screenplays, negatives, poems, symphonies, buildings, letters, concepts, and lives that cannot be seen, heard, read, inhabited, or known about. It is a literary vanitas of sorts, but one that confers an almost mythical quality on the enigmatic creations it recounts -- rather than reminding us of the death that inhabits everything humans create.

Lefebvre's list includes Marcel Duchamp's (accidentally destroyed) film of Man Ray shaving off the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's pubic hair; the page written by Balzac on his deathbed (lost); *Spinoza's Treatise on the Rainbow* (thrown into a fire); the final seven meters of Kerouac's original typescript for *On the Road* (eaten by a dog); the chalk drawings of Francis Picabia (erased before an audience); and the one moment in André Malraux's life in which he exclaimed "I believe, for a minute, I was thinking nothing." *The Missing Pieces* offers a treasure trove of cultural and artistic detail and will entertain even those readers not enamored of the void.

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