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**GESTURAL ETHICS**  
**CONSEQUENCES OF THE MARK IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING**

**GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

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## Abstract

The thesis considers what the difference is between generating an appearance by making something and generating it by thinking it (including naming it). By considering phenomenologies of agency in a variety of contexts, the argument questions the presumption that judgment determines the appearance. Judgment, understood as a disembodied, punctal decision-making is seen to be of little value for doing or understanding painting. Thus the (art-) theoretical acceptance of a distinction between 'craft' and 'judgment' is found to be misleading. The claim is then that painting constructs its domain of embodied thought through the gesture, and not through a disembodied act of judgment.

The mark is, however, what allows painting to be commodified with a vengeance: individuated gesture as branded signature. Given the interwoven contexts of production and reception, however, – where agency resides then becomes hard to determine. The thesis takes this up this problem through a reading of Hegel's Master and Servant dialectic. The outcome is that the commodity form can neither be side-stepped nor straightforwardly assaulted; a discussion of Haim Steinbach's work is central. The proposal at this point is that artworks nonetheless retain their power according to the kinds of series they articulate; here various concepts of seriality are considered including Badiou's.

It is then argued that the mark is best modelled through Derrida's notion of the trace. Barnett Newman's paintings are then re-considered through the lens of the trace, and vice versa. The argument here is that the critical gesture is the gesture that adequates itself to the trace. The painted mark is interrogated in these terms through close readings of works by Duchamp, Reed, Jorn and Brown among others. However, the limits of the Derridean vision are reached in thinking colour. For colour exceeds the logic of the mark insofar as the latter is a logic of inscription.

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## Introduction

The text that follows this preamble considers the circumstances of painting today on the assumption that the key to painting – what makes it possible and what sustains its fascination – is the gesture, or, to use a less freighted term, the mark. It is self-evident that the circumstances of the mark today are not the circumstances of the past, certainly not the recent past either.

This text is offered in conjunction with an exhibition of artworks. The text does not refer to those works. That the terrain of concerns is common will be obvious to any mindful viewer cum reader.

My intention has been that the text address the ontology of the mark in painting. The unspoken assumption throughout has been that it is of little interest to expose my own artwork – other than in this oblique sense – to textual scrutiny. The artwork does its thinking as artwork. Textual supplementation is never identical to the thought that the artwork embodies. The textual investigation is then a parallel activity to the painting activity such that the two cross-pollenate and sustain a conversation in which each is in principle capable of refuting or diverting the other. Neither has privilege or priority. Each is defeasible.

The issue for the text is largely ontological. It is appropriate then to say something about ontology here. It has been said that ontology designates ‘what is.’ But something very important is missed in such a compressed statement. Crucially, ontology has to grasp also in the thinking of ‘what is’ what is done to ‘what is’ by the thinking it. This is not unlike a philosophical version of Brownian motion. In other words, like Russell’s paradoxical set that includes itself as a member, ontological thinking must account for its own relation to ‘what is’ as part of its description of ‘what is.’ Such is its heightened reflexive responsibility.

Therefore, insofar as the ontological account must also grasp the movement of itself qua intervention, it is not possible to divorce the ontological from other discourses, whether ethical, political or epistemological. Or, in other words, the ontological account does not succumb to what is, a what is that precedes it and remains oblivious to its contestations.

I have said that neither my studio activity nor the writing has priority. The method of written investigation follows from that commitment. Arguments and concepts are borrowed from philosophical texts in an overtly instrumental spirit, as tools to bring particular artworks into fresh and compelling focus. However, close scrutiny of exemplary artworks frequently leads to philosophical objections being overruled. So, although it's fair to say neither 'theory' nor 'practice' are privileged, nonetheless, the underlying wager is that it is of no interest to argue these thoughts through to purely philosophical settlements – if such a thing were even possible. The expectation that problems in painting could be settled by philosophy, critical theory or visual culture theory, or whatever, is like expecting weather forecasts to be decided at the level not of probabilistic meteorology, but that of particle physics, or fluid dynamics. It would be worse than what Gilbert Ryle long ago termed a category mistake. It would be to mistake a formal domain of abstracted modelling for a nodal moment within an ultra-complex field of contingencies (such as the rainstorm, the rainbow, or the painted image). In this spirit, the examples of artworks I select for scrutiny acquire massive weight in the text, as soon becomes apparent: exemplification does most of the decisive work in this text.

If the negative tone lies in the aversion to theoretical resolution, the positive note is the assumption that artworks are *operative*, and must be grasped as such. In their operativity they undertake thinking which may chime with particular

aspects of critical and philosophical thinking. Thus for instance I consider Newman's paintings, with their preoccupation with origination and presence, in relation to those very notions in Derrida's writings. But I am not persuaded that Newman's paintings dwell on those themes just because Newman said they did. Rather they can be seen to engage with such themes through their operations, and I describe these operations. My broad sense of what operativity comprehends is strongly informed by Michael Fried's books on Courbet, Manet, Menzel and French art in the age of Diderot. The fundamental move in the Courbet book is the claim that Courbet's figures must be seen as demanding a physical identification with the embodied painter and/or viewer. This move is ushered in through the insistence on the importance of figures in Courbet frequently having their backs turned to the viewer. Fried points to something – I call it operativity – that is distinct from cultural knowledge: a domain of determinations that is structural yet relational, in that it is an effect of the way the artwork casts its relation to the viewer. The assumption is not simply that its operativity is what is pertinent to the artwork, though it is in part that. It is more practical than that: the assumption is that operativity makes the artwork viable.

In Chapter One I depart from Thierry de Duve's claim that modernist painting institutes a substitution of judgment for craft. I argue that instead both terms – craft and judgment – have to be freed up from their characteristic moorings in art discourse. I consider painting in its relation to Marcel Duchamp's readymade, and to Conceptual Art in general. I argue for the gesture as the means to realising painting's power. It has a power as a mode of embodied judgment, which can be compared in certain respects to instances of inventive thinking in sport. Chapter Two examines the commodification of art in general and the special liability to brand management of painting in particular. The philosophical

text applied to the discussion is the Master and Servant section of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Several artworks are considered from various periods, with special prominence given to the shelf works of Haim Steinbach. The chapter adapts freely from Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of community, and compares Alain Badiou's notion of the event as that which inaugurates an infinite series with Gilles Deleuze's notion of the series within inventive repetition. The latter are contrasted with the very different meaning of series in Sartre's critical concept of seriality. Finally in Chapter Three I develop in detail an account of the kinds of gesture that are viable in contemporary painting. I introduce Derrida's notion of archē-writing as a key concept for understanding the mark. I propose that the viable, critical mark must adequate itself to Derrida's archē-writing or 'trace.' I end with a proviso. In its encounter with colour the mark steps beyond itself. Thus when the mark embraces chroma it enters a domain beyond its own logic, that is, the logic of inscription. Thus, although the mark is, as I claim, the key to the ontology of painting, colour traverses and exceeds the logic of the mark. By way of colour, we are brought back to Duchamp, and in particular to Duchamp's attempt to institute an art practice of disembodied judgment. In the wake of the colour discussion then we can reconsider the critique of Duchamp, and re-affirm the commitment to embodied judgment.

It should be clear from these brief chapter digests in what senses the account of painting offered here is ontological in emphasis. However, I'm a painter. I know that the realm of ontology finalizes nothing from the point of view of a practice. Do I paint a bird or a monochrome, or both together or neither? Ontology doesn't bury these questions. They are answerable only for a historical agent, which is to say, an agent mired in the vicissitudes of the social. The difficulty of painting is to nurture a feeling of necessity within the implacable



contingency of the contemporary image, whatever that image is. To return to Fried's Courbet: the claim here is that a figure turned with her back to the viewer constitutes a strong ontological determination. As an element in a picture it is nothing highfaluting. A figure with her back to us. Let's be clear that the particularity and contingency of the image are beyond the reach of general ontological insights. It doesn't matter much to this text how and why those particular and contingent determinations are arrived at in artworks. What matters is that they *are* arrived at and that they catalyse that which is operative in the artwork. Ontological insights cannot in and of themselves generate a painting, or even a full set of terms for a painting to address. Nonetheless, it is Badiou who propounds the definition of thinking itself as the coming together of theory and practice.



## Illustrations



Fig.1

Alfred Stieglitz: photograph of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917

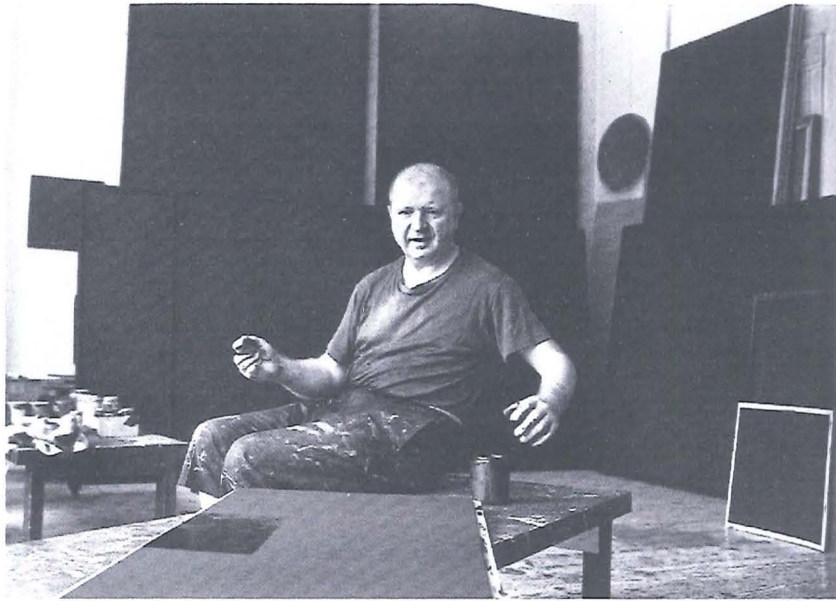


Fig.2

Ad Reinhardt painting, 1966

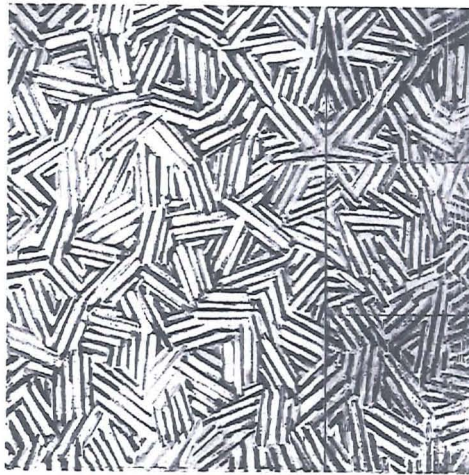


Fig.3

Jasper Johns *Untitled*, 1975, 50 x 50 inches, oil and encaustic on canvas,  
Collection of Eli & Edythe L. Broad

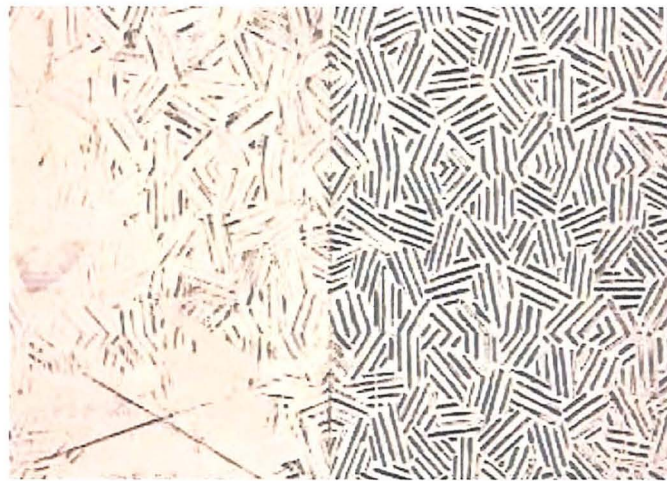


Fig. 4

Jasper Johns *Corpse and Mirror*, 1974, 50 x 68½ inches, oil and encaustic on canvas,  
Collection of Sally Ganz, New York



Fig.5

Scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1968)



Fig.6

Ashley Bickerton *Le Art (Composition with Logos, 2)* 1987, 87.6 x 183 x 38 cm  
Note 'Susie' logo runs from top to bottom at left edge.



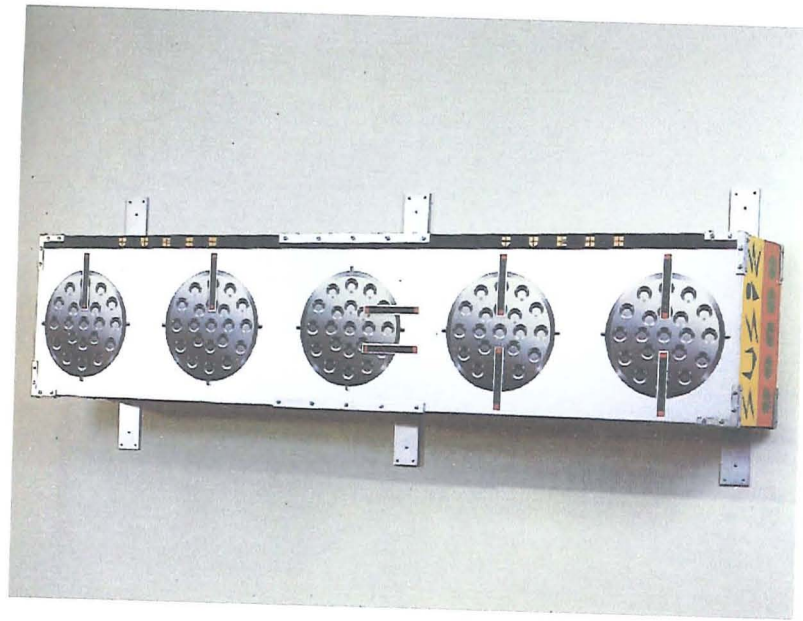


Fig.7

Ashley Bickerton *Uuehh*, 1986, 76 x 219 x 35.5 cm



Fig.8

Andy Warhol *One Dollar Bills*, 1962, 98 x 74<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches, silkscreen ink, pencil and acrylic on canvas

Sammlung Marx, Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin

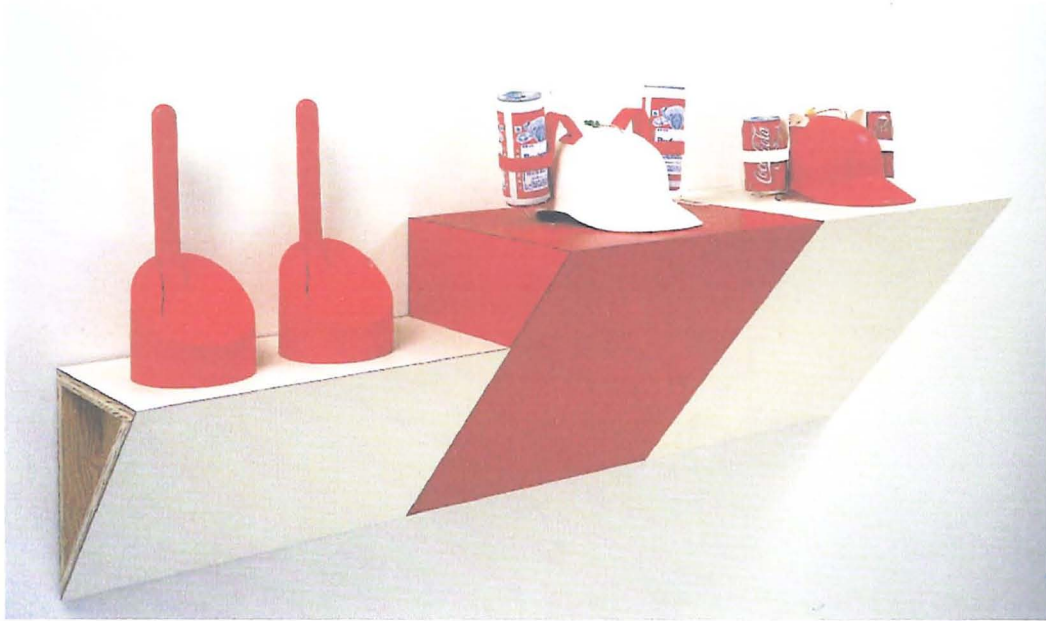


Fig.9

Haim Steinbach *Exuberant Relative No. 2*, 1986

64 x 144 x 38 cm

Private collection, Dallas

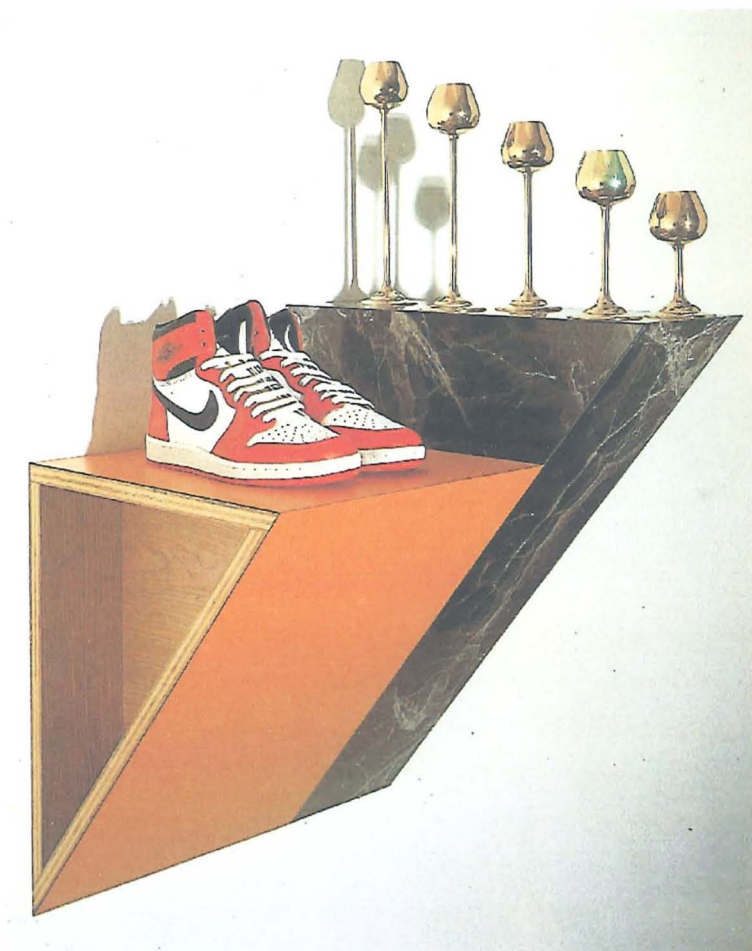


Fig.10

Haim Steinbach *Related and Different*, 1985, 91.5 x 52 x 50.8 cm

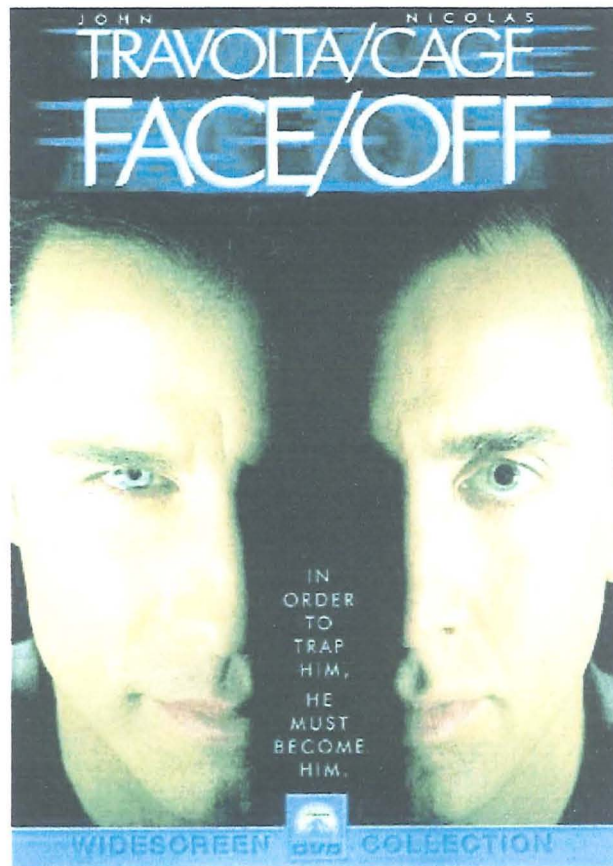


Fig.11

Poster for *Face/Off* (dir. John Woo, 1997)  
Note the Hegelian affinities in the tagline.

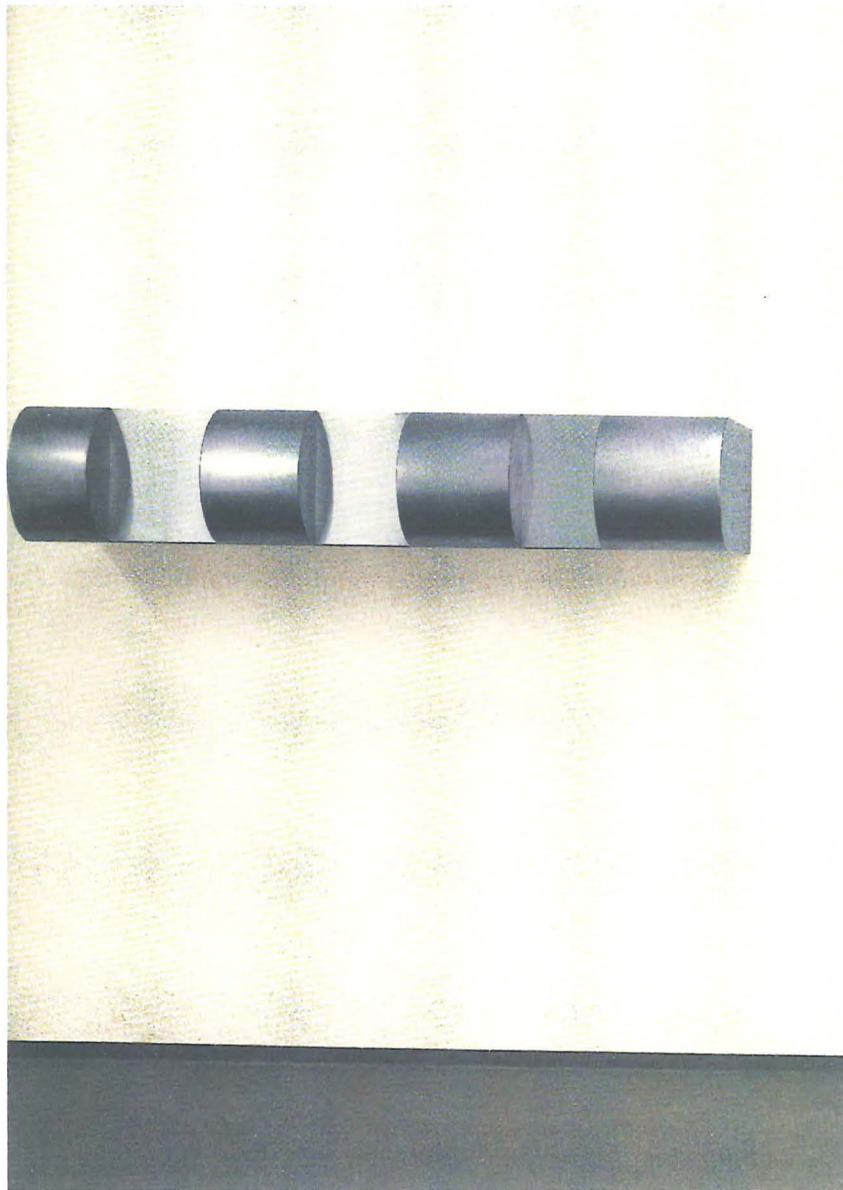


Fig.12

Donald Judd *Untitled*, 1966, stainless steel, 36.8 x 194.3 x 64.8 cm  
Museum Ludwig

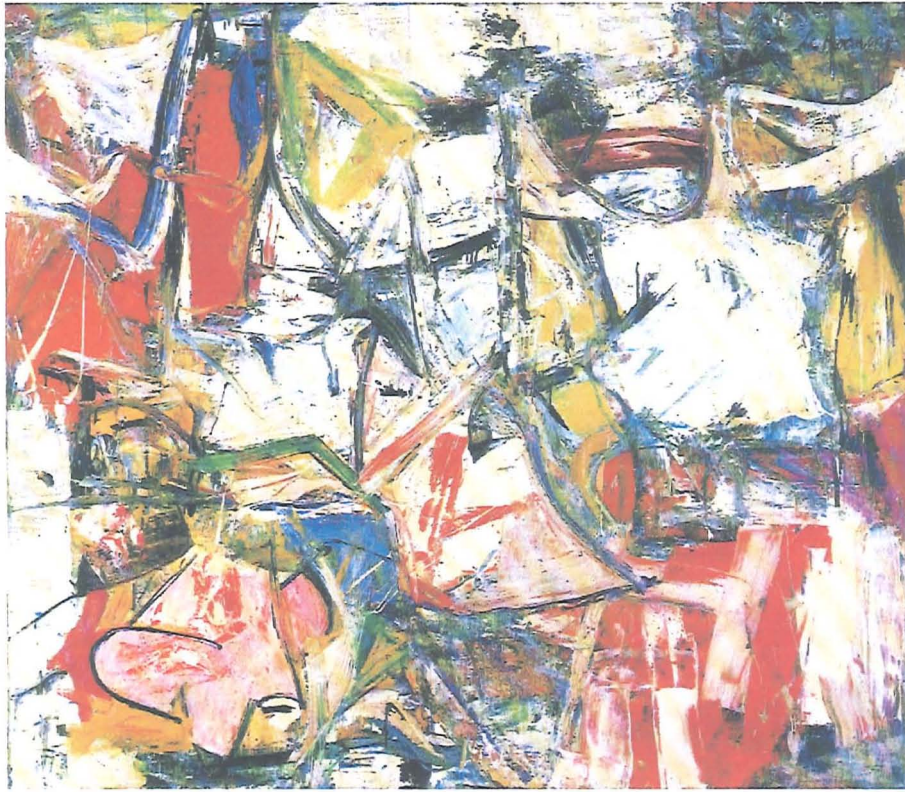


Fig.13

Willem de Kooning *Gotham News*, 1955-56, 69½ x 79¾ inches  
oil, enamel and charcoal on canvas  
Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo



Fig.14

Gerhard Richter *Impainting-Grey*, 1972, [Richter number 326-3]  
oil on canvas, 250 x 250 cm  
Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt





Fig.15

Barnett Newman *Uriel*, 1955, 96 x 216 inches, oil on canvas,  
Collection Onnasch



Fig.16

*Uriel*: installation view circa 1971

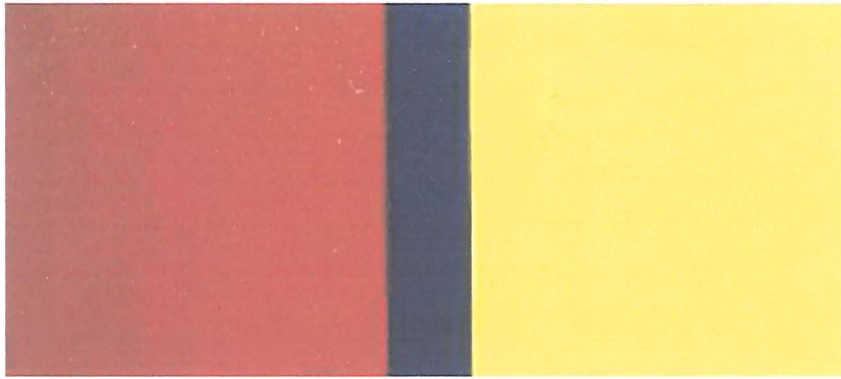


Fig.17

Barnett Newman *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue #4*  
1969-70, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 238 inches,  
Estate of the Artist (as at 1971)

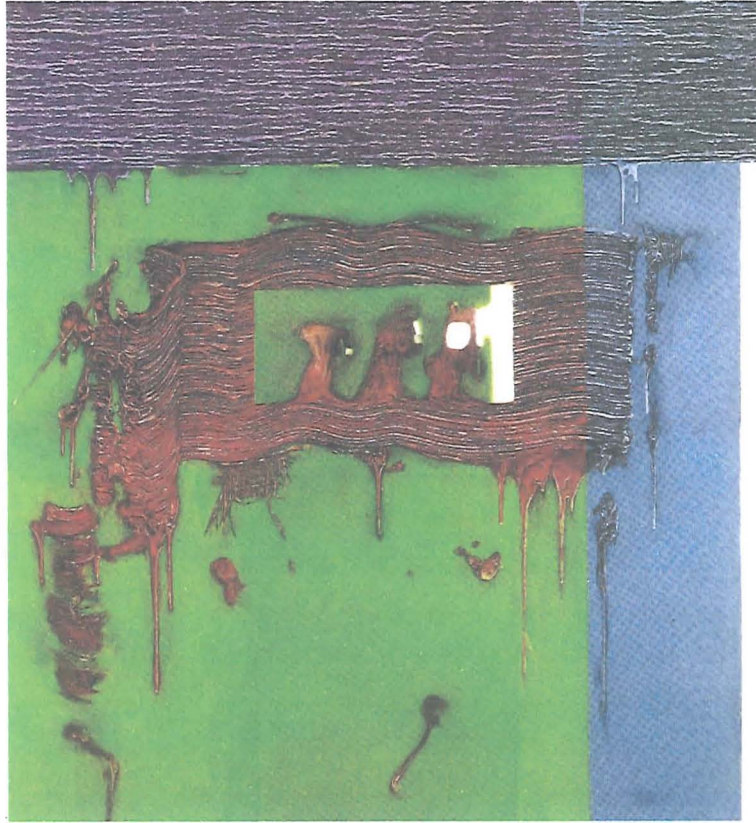


Fig.18

Fabien Marcaccio *Paint Zone #11*, 1994-95  
162.5 x 152.5 cm, oil and collograph on canvas



Fig.19

David Reed # 367, 1996-97, 32 x 48 inches,  
oil & alkyd on solid ground  
Private collection



Fig.20

Marcel Duchamp *Pharmacy*, 1914, 26.2 x 19.2 cm,  
gouache on printed image (chromolithograph)  
Arakawa Collection, New York



Fig.21

Asger Jorn *Hirschbrunft im Wilden Kaiser*, 1960  
90 x 120 cm, oil on canvas  
Nationalgalerie, Berlin

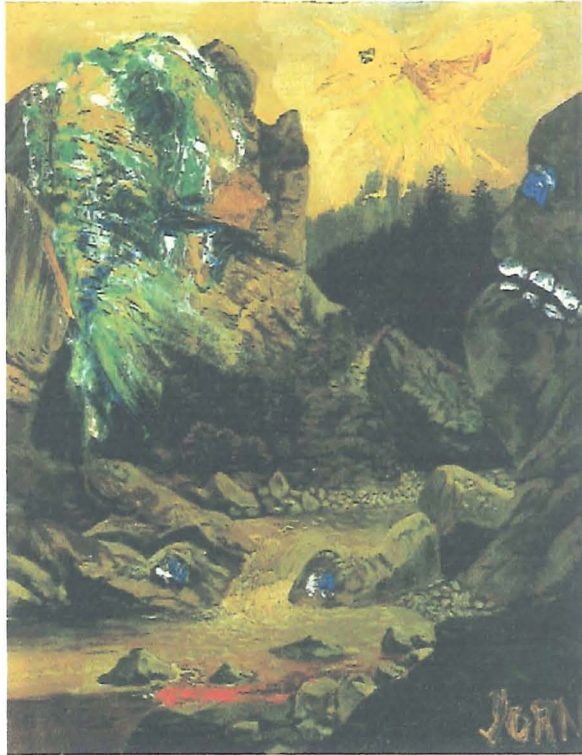


Fig.22

Asger Jorn *Abendstandschen*, 1960  
55 x 40 cm, oil on canvas  
Galerie van de Loo, Munchen

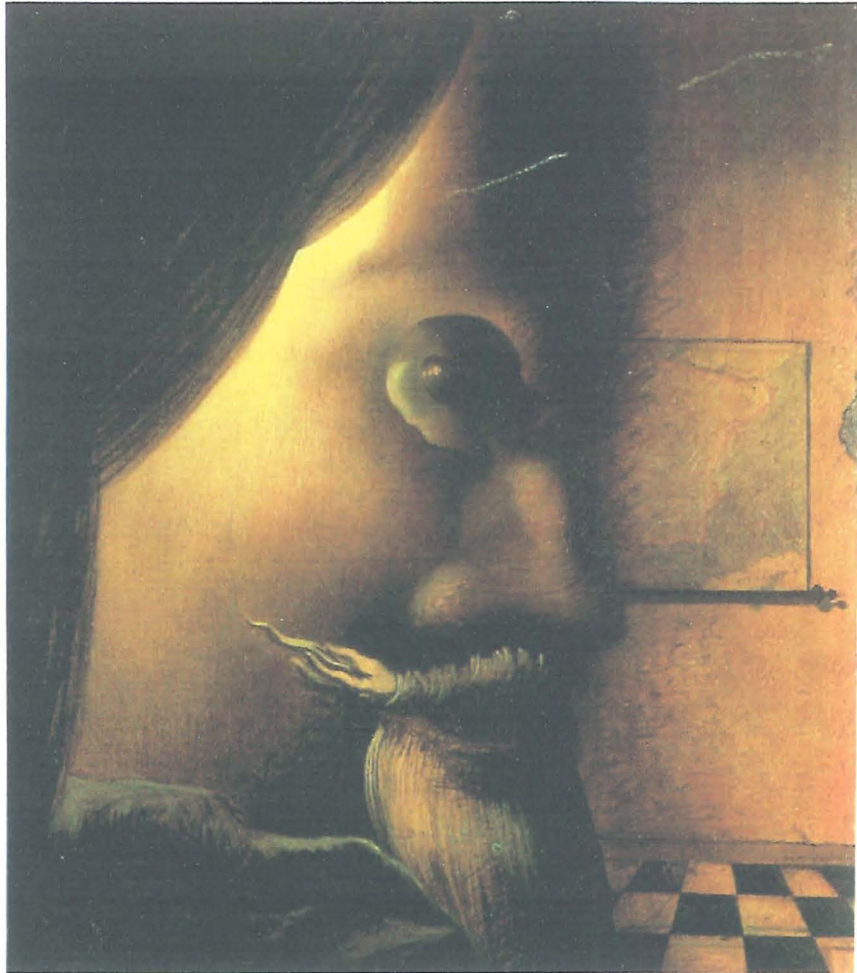


Fig.23

Salvador Dalí *The Image Disappears*, 1938, 55.9 x 50.8 cm, oil on canvas  
Fundacion Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueras



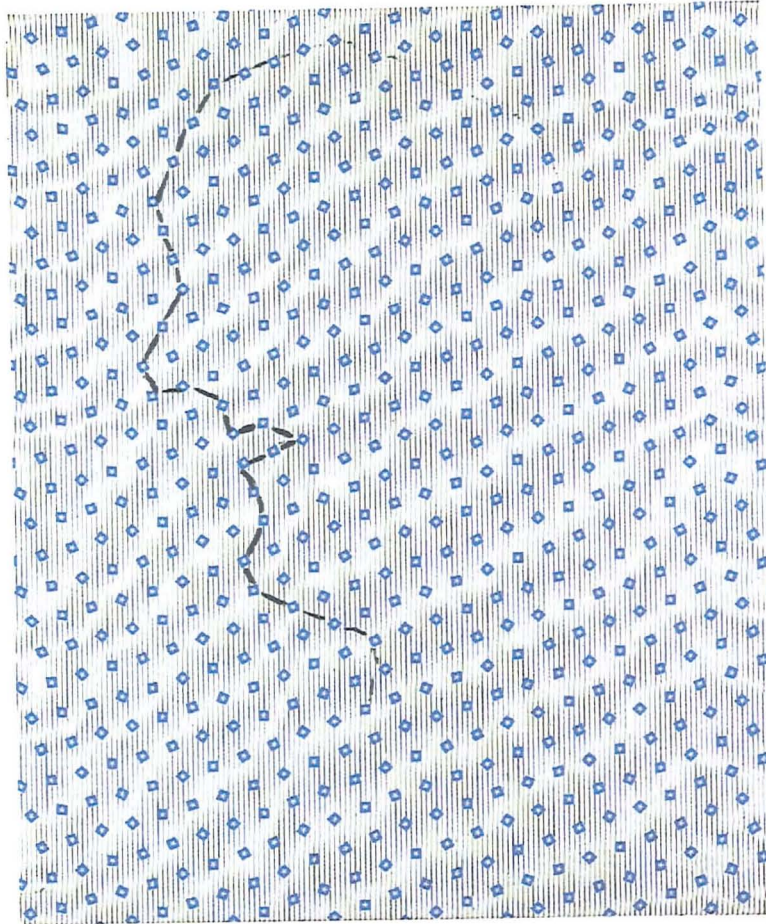


Fig.24

Sigmar Polke *Profil*, 1968, 90 x 75 cm, dispersion on fabric  
Fröhlich Collection, Stuttgart

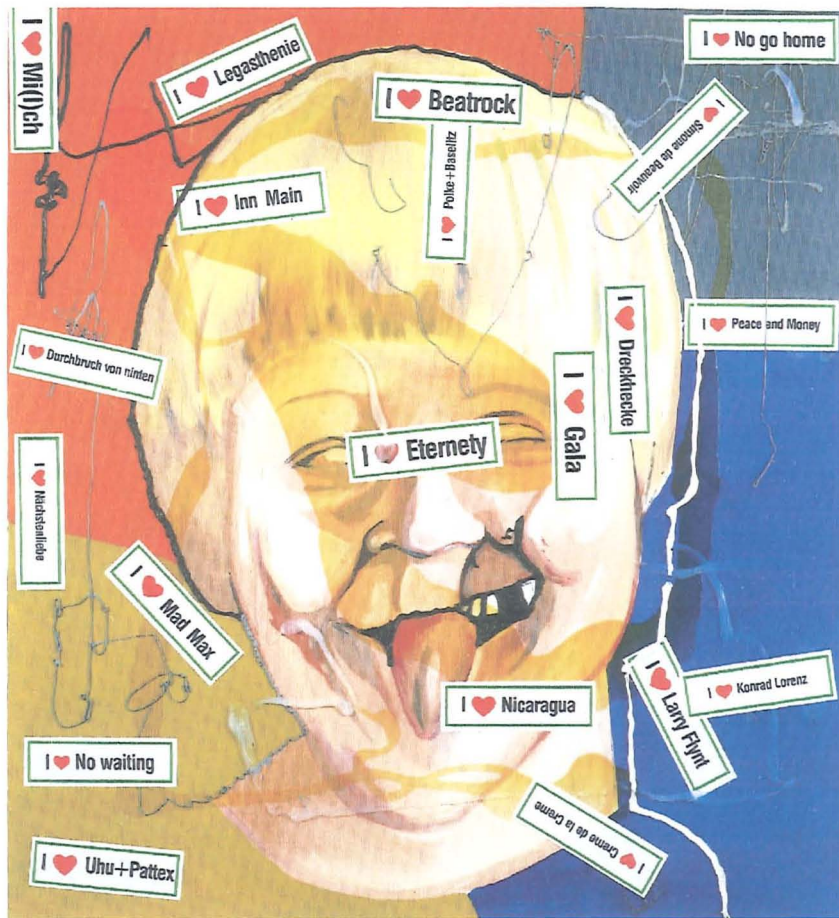


Fig.25

Martin Kippenberger *Kaputtes Kind*, 1985, 130 x 120 cm,  
dispersion, silicone, stickers on canvas



Fig.26

Malcolm Morley *Racetrack*, 1970, 170.2 x 220.3 cm, acrylic on canvas  
Ludwig Museum, Budapest



Fig.27

Gerhard Richter *Mädchen Baker*, 1965, 32 x 26 cm, oil on canvas  
Collection Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden

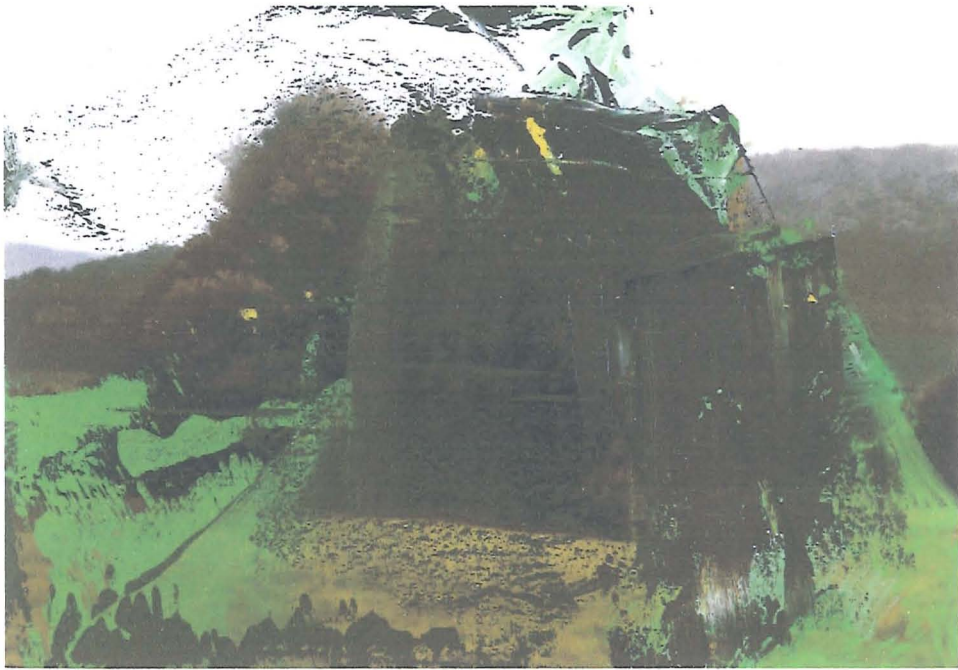


Fig.28

Gerhard Richter *Baumgruppe*, 1987 [Richter number 628-1],  
72 x 102 cm, oil on canvas  
Tommaso & Giuliana Setari Collection



Fig.29

Gerhard Richter *Venedig*, 1986 [Richter number 606-3],  
86 x 121 cm, oil on canvas  
Frieder Burda Collection



Fig.30

Glenn Brown *Kill the Poor*, 2000, 71 x 57 cm, oil on panel  
Private collection

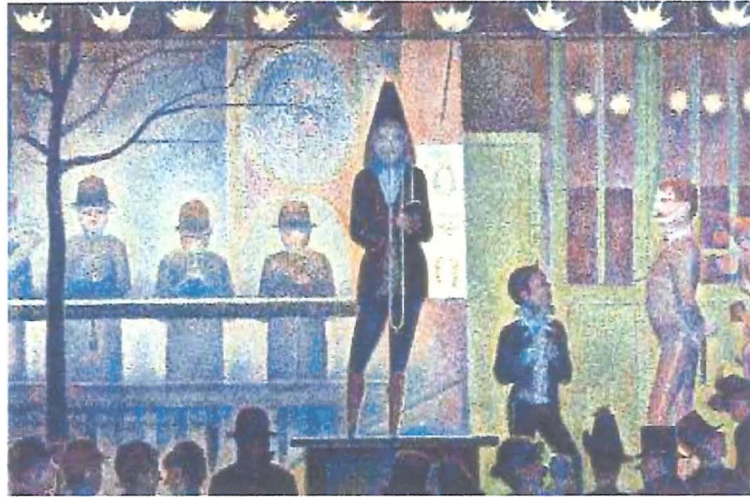


Fig.31

Georges Seurat *Parade de Cirque*, 1887-88,  
100 x 150 cm, oil on canvas  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York





## Chapter 1 Embodied Judgment

### 1.1 Making Making the issue

It sounds an innocent question. But in the swelling corpus of so-called ‘art theory’ it doesn’t get asked. The question is this: What is it to make an artwork? To say it more precisely and to bring out the stress on the making: What is it to generate an appearance by making it? And how is making it different to thinking, conceiving or nominating an appearance? Put like that, the set up already beckons us towards a showdown, featuring a quasi-artisanal, getting-the-hands-dirty posture on the one side, pitted against a keeping-them-clean Duchampian conceptual lineage on the other. That showdown features as a central scene in this chapter. But that’s to look forward to. Before we can push the plot along in that direction we must establish a milieu, compose a set of circumstances in which the necessary tensions can take root and find their rightful agents.

*Berlin, September 2002: dinner with a curator of a Swiss museum of contemporary art. The conversation turns to an artist who has just shown at the museum, and said artist’s refusal to allow her ‘actual’ intentions in specific artworks to be discussed in press<sup>1</sup> releases or exhibition guide leaflets. For the curator this refusal is – aside from being naïve and poor public relations – a masking if not a misrepresentation of the genesis of the artworks in question. For the artists having dinner, the refusal is a legitimate defence of the openness of the works to interpretation and/or an insistence upon the incapacity of intention to circumscribe what happens in the making of the work. Not surprisingly the talk moves on to just what is meant by the making of*

*the work. The curator says “Well, anyway, how many artists actually make things themselves nowadays?” The dining artists, who mostly make their things themselves, admit to themselves that this is fair enough as conversational polemic, and not without factual credibility, but nonetheless representative of an unexamined and unexamining curatorial consensus.*

A propos of this fragment of my artworld life, one could discuss how European curators tend to come from a discursive educational background, and how in the German-speaking world, for instance, curators tend to be people who have studied art history or *Kulturwissenschaft* rather than being people who went to an art academy. All that needs to be said here however is that the curator’s hope for a more or less transparent account of generative intentions at the very least overlooks what happens in the making. Put another way, the curator overlooked the inevitability that the making is never the execution without remainder of a pre-existing and separate plan or thought.

*London, autumn 2001: a drink in Broadway Market with Liam Gillick’s London studio assistant. Asked whether Gillick is in his London studio much, the assistant tells me that no he doesn’t really get to the studio but sends instructions; that anyway, he doesn’t have time to be in the studio because everyday he’s too busy meeting people.*

It should be clear why all this is especially important for painting. It is true that artists have tried to make painting into a matter of pure execution without remainder. One thinks of Rodchenko as long ago as the early 1920s ordering paintings by phone. My argument in what follows will be that *painting is necessarily concerned with generating an apparition by making it rather than by conceiving it*. So although

it is possible to cast painting in a transitive instrumental role, as a machine that executes a programme, this is to fall short of painting's power, and therefore to leash its potential. Painting is at its most potent when it sets up a complex field of contingencies for itself in and through the activity of making. Painting's power of immanent thought lies in its capacity to simultaneously summon up such a field *ex nihilo* and interrogate its relational terms as they are being born in and by the making. But painting accomplishes its thinking exclusively in and through making. Painting is a thinking only qua making. More than that, painting is a kind of bodily or embodied making. What that does and does not entail is the concern of this chapter, and the text as a whole. In a circumstance in which the dominant artistic ethic is, in Thierry de Duve's phrase, 'Do whatever,' it is painting's identification as an embodied making that distinguishes and empowers it. As we will see in Chapter 2, this distinction is not without its cost.

This entire chapter and this entire text serve to pose an approximately adequate though nonsimple answer to the question we started with. The stress on making was brought to light through a contrast with thinking, conceiving or naming. With that contrast in mind, the text will turn next to painting's specificity in relation to art's genericity.

In Thierry de Duve's painstaking book on Duchamp, *Pictorial Nominalism*, the argument is rehearsed that with his intervention known as the readymade, Duchamp both commemorated and ratified art's substitution of judgment for craft. De Duve spells out this model further in his *Kant After Duchamp*. The manner in which the readymade undercuts the status of making in generating artworks is succinctly put by de Duve: "In front of a readymade, there is no longer any technical difference between making art and appreciating it."<sup>1</sup> The claim here is that Duchamp's readymade, in particular the inaugural *Fountain* of

1917<sup>2</sup> [Fig.1], stands to assert that art is now a matter of judgment where once it had been a matter of craft. According to de Duve the move made with *Fountain* is both new and not new. Manet's painting was, he says, already a case of judgment surplanting craft, without the act necessarily understanding itself in those terms. The scenario - rationally reconstructed - goes something like this: Manet finds the received craft criteria for painting unusable and is forced to resort to judgment in accomplishing, i.e., deciding his work which, necessarily, must be accomplished in the absence of a relevant precedent. On this account, Duchamp makes explicit and grasps reflexively what the artwork has already been doing for some time in the guise of the avant-garde, though it didn't quite know that it was doing that.

This model of judgment versus craft is still very much alive, still the horizon within which Conceptual Art and its successors stake their ground. But it is, I argue, a mistaken model. And its consequences for our attitude to issues of making are profound. For it always tends on the one hand to conflate making and craft. On the other hand, its elevation of judgment tends to cast the making as cursory, learnable, less than intelligent, not the work of the intellect, and reductively instrumental. We come close to the time-honoured prejudice of intellectual over manual labour here.<sup>3</sup> But what is being described is far more precise than that. Craft in de Duve, as anywhere, means or at least implies tradition. The English noun 'craft'<sup>4</sup> means a stabilised and more or less institutionalised mode of making. Craft is understood as normative making. But making that is interesting is not normative. Is interesting making then making that is bound, formed and structured by judgment? Surely it is not, though judgments may subsequently be visited upon it. Rather interesting making requires suspension, or at the very least, a deferral of judgment.

De Duve's reading of *Fountain*, and the readymade in general, conflates making and craft, and then implicitly conflates craft with tradition. In the other direction, its worship of judgment casts the latter as a kind of decisionism, a cerebral and disembodied choice that doesn't itself unfold in time, though its consequences as well as its preconditions must. For this understanding, judgment is separable from any encounter with materials and making processes. It is implicitly removed from the linear time both of the making process and of the traditions and legacies of making. De Duve's analysis points to the work that this text will need to do. In particular, it will need to find a very different understanding of making that is not denigrated under the rubric of craft. And it will need to stake a territory in which a different notion of a richly temporalised and embodied judgment can be sustained.

The prejudice that understands making as craft, and therefore places making under the rubric of a dumb, reductive instrumentality is one that will be challenged in what follows. It is not unrelated to the presumption that materials are brute, stupid and inhuman until they are transformed by the spell of form and concept, which is to say, intention. This chapter will argue that, on the contrary, things are never so simple. As we will find in Bernard Stiegler's investigation of 'technics' – embracing both technology and technique in general – there is at work something that Stiegler calls "the dynamic of the what," whereby it is precisely dumb matter that creates forms and intentions for situated human actants. There is an unspoken alliance between the prejudice that cuts off judgment from making and the echoing one that radically distinguishes form and matter. For in each opposition, the first term is deemed intelligent, clean and ideal, concerned with telos; while the second, by contrast, is stupid, soiled and considered to be alienated from the purposes it has been put to. It's somewhat

cheap and more than a little lurid to make the following connection, I know, but it is too potent to resist; here, for anybody who thought that the relation between making and thinking is a purely sterile academic consideration, is what the General Inspector for the German Road System proclaimed from Berlin in February 1940:

Concrete and stone are material things.

Man gives them form and spirit.

National Socialist technology possesses in all material achievement ideal content.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. There is no such thing as Conceptual Art**

One of surest rhetorical ploys for assaulting an opposing position has always been to deny its existence. Can we forget Margaret Thatcher's denial that society exists? In this spirit, it is tempting to deny that Conceptual Art exists, or has ever existed. Venturing beyond the pleasures of provocation, closer inspection of the phenomenon reveals that the artists themselves deny the term. Lawrence Weiner rejects it, insisting that he has to give time to dealing with materials encountered in a situation in order to get to the work.<sup>6</sup> Robert Smithson rejected the term too, for comparable reasons. Art movements have so often been christened by their enemies and observers, never or rarely by the participants. Yet those labels that began as pejoratives end up as affirmations. And so the success of the term Conceptual Art is widely assumed to affirm the sovereignty of the concept in art.

It should be obvious why Conceptual Art confronts this text. First, Conceptual Art as the faithful heir of Duchamp's *Fountain* affirms art in general at the expense of the medium in particular, with painting positioned as the specific medium *par excellence*. Second, Conceptual Art is widely assumed to make – indeed to have made – making as such a side issue in art, if not redundant altogether. As we know, Liam Gillick is much too busy to make things. As we have also seen, the readymade dispenses with the distinction between making artwork and appreciating it. And in the vicious logical bind that Conceptual Art is driven to in the work of Joseph Kosuth, making is indeed rendered explicitly redundant. It is, Kosuth believes, explicitly and conclusively supplanted by ideal content.

Before examining Kosuth in greater detail, some determinations need to be given their due. Firstly, Conceptual Art of the classic period of roughly 1965-1975 does not conclusively substitute conception for making in the spirit of de Duve's substitution of judgment for craft. Artists of the period evidenced a wide range of attitudes to making. It is clear that for many, a commitment to something we can call specificity of making remained central to their practice. This is manifest in statements and practices of, for example, Richard Serra, Vito Acconci<sup>7</sup>, Robert Morris<sup>8</sup>, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Smithson. Secondly, Conceptual Art does not conclusively democratise art through de-skilling, as is often claimed in its favour. It rather extends a longer and much earlier modernist logic of de-skilling – or more accurately, of re-evaluating artistic skills - traceable back to Monet and Impressionism. For the critical barrage that hounded the first Impressionist exhibition was based precisely on the scandalised sense of affront at the de-skilling that it was seen to propose. In reality, Conceptual Art as a strong style of display and a specialised mode of attention tended often to require a high



degree of prior discursive immersion. Put another way, Conceptual Art required and instituted its own discursive re-skilling<sup>9</sup>.

Thirdly, Conceptual Art does bring about the hegemony of art in general. This is Duchamp's irresistible legacy and for painting it makes trouble. Before the readymade, one experienced painting or sculpture, and one came to art in general via the particular medium. After Duchamp tables are turned and it becomes possible for the general to precede the particular. On this count de Duve is correct:

If, for example, "sound" is now regarded by many musicians as a legitimate definition of their domain, if some musicians, even, prefer to call their work "sound" rather than "music," no musician would claim that he or she is doing "art" and nothing but "art." The readymades, by contrast, are "art" and nothing but "art." Whereas an abstract painting reduced to a black square on a white background is art only when you accept seeing it as a painting, a urinal is a sculpture only when you accept seeing it as art. Otherwise it is simply a urinal. The generic seems to precede the specific.<sup>10</sup>

This situation is troublesome for painting because it always sets painting and art in different starting positions: painting is a process which may or may not coincide with art, and in fact frequently does not (pub signs, painting and decorating, children's painting, and so forth); art by contrast is not a process, or any definite set of processes, but a value occasioned by some public display of an apparition.<sup>11</sup> In the post-Duchampian state of things, painting is cast as a particular forever chasing after the generality that surpasses it. It is as if painting starts with a handicap which it must overcome in order to partake of the generality of art. For



many, and one presumes de Duve is among them, that handicap goes under an old name: craft. The burden of proof is now upon painting to prove that it belongs with art, and that, in its heart of hearts, it is innocent of the charge of craft.

If anybody really believed that Conceptual Art made the concept king, then Joseph Kosuth is the artist best suited to be the didactic fall guy for their disabuse. Kosuth loved Duchamp enough to collect his work, so long as he could afford it. He stands for a very precise reading of Duchamp and his legacy. “All art (after Duchamp)” he said, “is conceptual (in Nature) because art only exists conceptually.”<sup>12</sup> More than anyone, Kosuth stands as the *non plus ultra* of the Conceptual Artist as the voice of the concept. No other artist took the Conceptual of Conceptual Art so literally and so conclusively. Kosuth can be seen as responding to Duchamp’s readymade in a particular way. Richard Mutt’s *Fountain* is understood as the intervention to end art as a critical phenomenology and instead to usher in art as critical performativity. In the critical phenomenological art of Cubism, consciousness is examined as a temporal flux of vision and cognition. In the critical performative art of the readymade it is rather art that is put to the test as contextual value. What is peculiar about Kosuth is that he takes this reading of Duchamp – actually an entirely defensible reading - and filters it through the purist, late modernist position of Ad Reinhardt. Reinhardt was both a fascinating artist [Fig.2] and a wily, humorous writer, part aphorist and part wag. His theoretical position is that art is a substantial yet tautological concept, which in theory and in practice marks itself off from non-art through its refusals and negations.<sup>13</sup> And for Reinhardt the writer<sup>14</sup> that’s what art does: it operates by negating non-art. The bastard offspring that results in Kosuth’s theory and practice is a bizarre but wholly logical blend of Reinhardt’s “art-as-art” and

the critical performativity of the readymade. So it is that Kosuth comes to his view that art's role consists exclusively and exhaustively in its own performative self-definition.

How do we then approach Kosuth? As a dogmatist? A period curiosity? Certainly he is an unsatisfactory artist but an incisive writer. Yet we need to engage with the theoretical position. In his text *Art After Philosophy* Kosuth staked out clearly and elegantly the territory we have just examined. What matters for this discussion is that Kosuth elevates the concept. For him, art's task is to demonstrate the concept that it is. Thus art is a general concept and particular artworks serve to demonstrate the concept which they both serve and create performatively. But this demonstration is not one that could flesh out a notion. Kosuth is more than happy to welcome a demonstration that is a contentless tautology. This is how Kosuth puts it:

A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori.<sup>15</sup> ...

Works of art are analytic propositions.... they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art.<sup>16</sup>

Better than anyone, Kosuth thus exemplifies the reduction of art and artwork to the concept. As we have seen, this reduction was never generally accepted by artists understood as Conceptual. And it is at this juncture that we can return to the spirit of our earlier provocation to ask: Does Conceptual Art exist? Has it in fact ever existed? For on the one hand so-called Conceptual Artists rejected both the term and the notion of reducing artwork to the concept. On the other hand,

Kosuth's project produced no consequential artwork and is anyway not theoretically sustainable. Therefore there has never been artwork – not even a work of Conceptual Art - that succeeded in reducing art or artwork to a concept. But we need to pause to consider why Kosuth's theoretical position is flawed.

Shelving other complaints against Kosuth, the key flaw lies in his account of the tautological assertion made by the artwork. Kosuth says that the artwork declares itself as defining art, and that it is therefore art “a priori” since it institutes itself as art. The first kind of doubt here has to do with the assumption that art is what artists do, or as it is frequently told, art is what happens in the art context.<sup>17</sup> Kosuth appears to be affirming such an attitude, along the lines of ‘art is what artists define as art.’ The dumb but correct retort is then: But how do you know they are artists? If Kosuth's position is to have any stringency, his reply cannot be ‘Because they make art!’ And nor can it be ‘Because we see their work in art galleries!’ since this would be merely a conservative acquiescence in a given cultural settlement, and thus nothing but a failure to question the category art in the term ‘art gallery.’<sup>18</sup> In a paradoxical reversal then, the tautological definition of art espoused by Judd and Kosuth and others as a path out of restrictive definitions of art, such as those that tied it to traditional skills, turns out to be a position that itself succumbs to institutional power without holding it to account.

The second kind of doubt, which is related to the first, is about performativity. Kosuth doesn't employ the term. But it would suit his procedure. For what is the intervention of the self-defining artwork – the artwork that posits itself as a definition of art - but the performative act *par excellence*? ‘Performative’ is used loosely in art-talk today as little more than an inflated rendition of ‘performed’. But as birthed in J.L. Austin's sanguine text *Performative Utterances*,<sup>19</sup> it is a distinct construct with immense scope. The ‘discovery’ of the performative

seems to open up a new model of how language could be freed from an assured anchorage to the referent:

As opposed to the classical assertion, to the constative utterance, the performative does not have its referent (but here the word is certainly no longer appropriate, and this precisely is the interest of the discovery) outside of itself or, in any event, before and in front of itself.<sup>20</sup>

Though everybody from Derrida to Deleuze to queer theory has taken a hike on the notion, it is often overlooked<sup>21</sup> that Austin's idea is hugely ambivalent as between its emancipatory and its conservative implications. While it offers the promise of inaugurating fresh relations through performative acts and projecting new identities through protensive iteration, it however insists on the authority of a context of reception, so to speak. Performative acts are never solipsistic: they must be received and remarked by a community which stands toward them as addressee. This is the deep and robustly conservative force of Austin's performative act: it conjures new relations only where the addressee recognises it as so doing. Austin's examples of performative speech acts are more than conservative: they are the extreme gestures of the 'status quo,' such as the language of the coronation ceremony. The most conservative act is a performative. Writing of the "paradox of the notion of the 'performative,'" Žižek makes just this point:

in the very gesture of accomplishing an act by uttering words, I am deprived of authorship; the big Other (the symbolic institution) speaks through me. It is no wonder, then, that there is something puppet-like about people whose

professional function is essentially performative (judges, kings...): they are reduced to a living embodiment of the symbolic institution....<sup>22</sup>

Thus if the artwork is to be understood as saying, performatively, “I am art!” or “Art is me!” – and it isn’t doing anything else, such as generating percepts and affects – then it is starting to sound like Louis XIV’s celebrated “L’état, c’est moi!”, except that Louis was arguably uttering a mere description and not a performative at all. If it were a performative speech act, then by Žižek’s logic, it can be heard as primarily the voice of the state, not the voice of the king, this “is”(“est”) being, after all, the “is” of identity, not the “is” of predication. Thus “The State, it’s me!” can be flipped around to become “The King, it’s me!” as uttered by the state. The consequences of this for Kosuth’s ‘theoretical conceptual art’ are far from rosy. Yet it is crucial not to miss the precise point here. It is not simply that Kosuth gambles on the institution accepting his disclosures as art, where they don’t deserve such acceptance, which would merely put him on a par with Hitler the painter - who clearly wasn’t committed to ‘theoretical conceptual art’ - as a failed student applicant to the Vienna academy. That is not the point. The point at its root, its ‘radical’, is that the artwork cannot by fiat abolish the minimal distance between itself and its addressee, its communal environment. Kosuth’s position is exquisite and shameless in its circularity: *art is defined as the definer of art*. As with Louis, it goes both ways: art here becomes its institutional surroundings, or, vice versa, the institutional environment becomes art. Declaration of independence becomes declaration in dependence. In other words, when art claims to liberate itself by performatively re-inaugurating and re-defining itself, in practice it ends up declaring the power of the surrounding institutions.

Paralleling the inversion of the King's utterance as the utterance of the State, we can now regard the Conceptual Artist's utterance as the utterance of the museum.

To an extent I have overegged the debate – I admit - by forcing a somewhat reductive reading of the power of the institution over the success (or failure) of the performative. Derrida, in his characteristically nuanced yet strategically pedantic analysis of Austin, emphasizes that Austin is unable to provide any general model of the performative that might afford generalisable criteria for its success or failure.<sup>23</sup> He concludes from this that the performative is no more under the domination of the symbolic status quo, and by the same token, no less capable of being placed into a state of risk, than any other kind of utterance. However, the theoretical distinctiveness of the performative is eroded by this thinking. Its context is seen to be equal to the 'grammar' of any other type of utterance. In the end, Derrida turns the discussion toward the issue of iterability as a general condition for signification, where iterability requires the repeatability of a more or less idealised form. Thus for Derrida iterability in general already summons up a powerful tension between the creativity of the present utterance and the demand for a repeated and therefore recognisable form of utterance by means of which a signifying institution may be established and sustained. We will revisit these consequential topics more than once in the coming chapters. What matters here is that although Derrida insists that the performative can still take risks with respect to its governing institutions ("But are the conditions of a context ever absolutely determinable?"<sup>24</sup>), nonetheless it is contained within the structure of iterability.

Turning back now to Kosuth's bid for a purified art of the concept: it is worth noticing the crucial contrast where artworks are conceived *not as concepts but as generators of affect*: they regulate themselves at a distance from the institutional

setting insofar as and to the degree that they emit their affective rays regardless of whether they are judged to be art or not. Thus where making involves risk, which it must if it is to constitute a thinking, the deferral of judgment – of the art status – is a real and vital exclusion, not a mere notional entertaining of antitheses. Here then we come to a new paradox. Artworks, I argue, are operative. Being operative they emit affective rays and pose as attractors of affected and affecting attention. Yet their operativity is prior to and separable from the judgment that they are works of art. What is interesting about artworks is what they do rather than the judgment that they are art, or the bids they make to elicit such a judgment. And anyway, isn't the judgment "This is art" more plausibly understood and more plausibly sustained as the claim that the artwork's operation – whatever it may be – cannot be seen to be yoked under the purposes of something other than its own *dynamis*? This is not yet again to propose art for art's sake. Why not? Because the operative artwork affects our position and our terms of address, including what might have been imagined to be the terms of 'art's sake.' Thus in its very operation the artwork fails to oblige as the stable and reliable servant of some prior and expectant sake.

It can never be sufficient, then, for accomplishing an artwork merely that I intend the work as an enactment of a definition of art. Of course one could plea for a reprieve for Kosuth on the grounds that the avant-garde presumes a temporal displacement of addressor and addressee whereby the addressee is distant in the future. That is the standard messianic avant-garde wager: it awaits expectantly the coming of the competent addressee. But that is not Kosuth's position. He presumes that the performative is accomplished already by intentionality alone. Kosuth demonstrates what happens when one attempts rigorously to reduce, or even to elevate art and the individual artwork to a



concept. What happens is a theoretical lapse and a foreclosed, dogmatic practice. Peter Osborne's writes a propos of Kosuth in particular, and dogmatic Conceptual Art in general:

It is the ironic historical function of theoretical or strong Conceptualism, through its identification with philosophy, to have reasserted the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a necessary element of the artwork, via a failed negation.<sup>25</sup>

As Margaret Thatcher might have put it, There is no such thing as Conceptual Art. There are however Conceptual Artists - no doubt the ones Kosuth would have denigrated as "stylistic conceptual artists"<sup>26</sup> - who exploit a rich area of overlap between 'display making' and discursive thinking. And, to repeat, these artists, like Duchamp with the readymade, substantially dispense with the distinction between making and appreciating art. This rendering irrelevant of making would seem to place art in general at a remove from painting, with its unsevered umbilical link to making processes. Then painting's specificity would seem to have alienated it from art's newly intensified generality.

In the next sections of this chapter the positive account of what accrues to painting as a type of making will reflect back on this issue of painting's apparent estrangement from art in general. This will require revisiting the cited distinction between making and appreciating art, - the one the readymade is said to have cancelled - but from another direction. As for the other issue that has been crucial to this discussion of Duchamp's impact - namely the opposition in De Duve's account between craft and judgment - the remainder of this chapter is written in the hope of unweaving the threads of its construction.

What should be obvious still needs saying: art is concerned with percepts and affects. It is poorly equipped to handle concepts. Art in fact does little more than adopt them, though sometimes it has succeeded in accomplishing what Deleuze called the expansion of a concept.<sup>27</sup> A good way to consider art's relation to concepts is to pose the question of what concepts art has generated. It doesn't take much reflection to realise that the answer is none. *Art has never generated a concept.* Art has adopted concepts, such as the concept of perspective taken from architecture in the Italian Renaissance.<sup>28</sup> Or, during the 1920s and 30s, the concept of the mark as mark, adopted from psychoanalysis in the guise of automatic writing. Or indeed Duchamp's concept of the readymade, which is really at its root an expansion of Henry Ford's concept of standardised production. And clearly art did not create its own concept. *Art has never generated a concept.* Day in, day out it nonetheless creates percepts and affects.

### **1.3 Perception, Thinking, Making**

Given that Duchamp's readymade seems to have eliminated the perceptual, morphological and technical distinction between art and everything else, and therefore between making and appreciating art, how are we to conceive making in a way that's not defensive, even sentimental? More than that, in a way that affirms its specific value? And then given de Duve's powerful claim for a substitution of judgment for craft in art from Manet to Duchamp, how are we to develop a notion of making that is not artisanal, not 'mere craft'? The response to the second question will be substantially supplied in the next two sections of this chapter. In this section I want to enlarge the notion of making and its specific

intensities through considering its proximity to perception. As we proceed it will become clear that painting and the readymade are less unlike in important respects than we may have expected, since each, in their very different ways, indicate a certain whittling down of the distinction between making and perceiving. But before continuing, we should capitulate before the readymade: without question, it has won its chosen battle. In its wake, art, insofar as it continues to embrace painting and sculpture, among everything else, is irretrievably or blessedly – depending on your preference – various, plural, heterogeneous, and above all, from the point of view of painting, discontinuous. There is art that foregrounds its making and identifies agency with the temporality of making, as painting continues to do, and there is art that is all prior conception and *ex post facto* execution. Neither has priority, though increasingly the latter has an easier time of it in the paradise of ‘friction-free capitalism’ that some imagine the era of e-commerce to be. So then the tolerant response to the current situation – and this is the characteristic response of the present era – is ‘OK, art is discontinuous. Let’s have more!’ And that means more art as well as more discontinuity. In this universalising *melée* of seeming tolerance and good will, painting continues to enjoy robust health, or it would appear so. More on that in Chapter 2. In thinking painting, then, I’m not concerned to adequate it to the readymade or to Conceptual Art; we are not in awe of other art that claims to hold the intellectual high ground, and claims that holding it obliges one to disdain making. As we’ve seen, art has never generated a concept; as painters we are not in thrall to the sovereignty of the concept. On the contrary, the task is to re-describe how painting as a specific agency through making releases its own affects, which is to say, appears as a thinking and sensing through making. Therefore our approach is not inherently negative qua polemic against certain determinations of the

Duchampian legacy, such as Kosuth's. Beyond the horizon of that polemic, it is affirmative of painting's specific intensity as a thinking and sensing through and in making.

The fundamental point then is not to deny the realm of the readymade. It is to develop the notion of an agency particular to making in painting. In this agency making is at once a thinking and a perceiving. To introduce these issues I want to consider examples that stress the open, dynamic and dispositional aspects of visual perception.

Wittgenstein introduces the concepts of "seeing as" and "aspect blindness" through the duck/rabbit figure.<sup>29</sup> The figure can be "seen as" a rabbit or a duck alternately, though never both simultaneously. A viewer who can see one but not the other is said to be subject to aspect blindness. 'Seeing as' is important because it offers a model for vitiating any posited closure of perception for a given organization of marks, or in general anything in visual space. Thus anything visible is liable to be induced into a condition of perceptual instability: no thing can guarantee immunity from perceptual ambiguity. In the making activity, the maker sees the organization of materials as given and as potentiality, and sees it in relation to other potentialities. The simplest case could be seeing the given organization of materials as symmetrical, and then as asymmetrical in relation to a potential addition.

Arnheim outlines a puzzle as an example of a specifically visual thinking. A cube is composed of twenty-seven small cubes configured in three layers of nine. The entire outside of the composite cube is painted red. The task of the puzzle is to say, without using a drawing, how many of the small cubes are red on zero sides, how many are red on one side, on two sides and on three sides. To solve the problem it is necessary to form an appropriate mental image. There may be

more than one suitable image to do the job. One possible image is an isometric projection viewing the cube symmetrically from above and on two sides; I think it also clarifies the problem to then visualize the three layers of small cubes as three horizontal layers slightly spaced out one above the other. The solution, which must be visually ascertainable, is: one cube is red on zero sides; six cubes are red on one side; twelve are red on two sides; eight are red on three sides, adding up to the total of twenty-seven. “Did we need language to perform this operation? Not at all; although language can help us codify our results. Did we need intelligence, inventiveness, creative discovery? Yes, some.... Was it seeing or thinking that solved the problem? Obviously the distinction is absurd. In order to see we had to think and we would have had nothing to think about if we were not looking.”<sup>30</sup>

What is the moral of the story? As Arnheim argues, that the distinction between thinking and seeing, between thinking and perception, cannot be secured in practice.

The example is comparable to the account of visual gauging in Italian painting of the early Renaissance given by Michael Baxandall.<sup>31</sup> Visual gauging means looking at a complex volumetric form, imaginatively breaking it down into geometrically regular constituent parts, and thereby estimating its volume as a determinate quantity. Baxandall argues that the appeal to visual gauging is a constant motif in early Renaissance painting of the 1400s, such that this trope can be found to be smuggled into depictions of a huge variety of artefacts and objects: he cites the complex but regular volumetric geometries of hats, wells, containers, architectural fragments that would have irresistibly invited visual gauging from their viewers. He traces the inculcation of visual gauging, a skill necessary for merchants of the period, through the contemporary commercial manuals, in

which visual perceptual skills are interlocked with arithmetical skills that typically allow relative proportions to be quantified rapidly, at a glance.

But Arnheim wishes to make a stronger claim, which he goes on to develop with reference to diagramming. Diagrams, he argues, show how relationships between terms, between concepts, can be brought into special focus by being placed in a relational space that is a perceptual space, a visual space. Nor is this a matter of the exigencies of pedagogy: diagrams are not merely handy instruments of presentation. The working diagram is a means of thinking conceptual relations by introducing them to the analogising possibilities of perceptual space, where such analogising possibilities are not otherwise available. This is viable regardless of the degree of abstraction of the concepts in question, as Arnheim argues with recourse to Freud's use of a diagram to show the relationships between the id, ego and superego.

The three examples produce distinct outcomes. The concept of 'seeing as' persuades us that perception is provisional, almost hypothetical in its undertakings. It indicates that there are no final, unambiguous perceptual contexts. Visual artists indulge these ambiguities well beyond the scope of the quotidian pragmatics of vision.

Arnheim's example shows how the visual can operate in contexts inaccessible to discursive thought. What visual thinking offers that verbal thought cannot, as Arnheim argues through his description of diagramming, is spatial (dis)organisation. This matters because language on its own is restricted to linear organisation plus differential value. The latter does of course institute a network of relationships extending out from every linguistic unit. But this differential network is precisely not spatialised, since its intervals and interstices are never graspable as such. The visual allows those in-between zones to be scrutinised. The

point in diagrams like Freud's is not that the concepts in question are in any way visual but that the spatiality of the visual permits us to scrutinise their relationships.

Finally with Baxandall we get a sense of how particular visual perceptual skills are promoted and inculcated historically. Because it reveals the feedback between the discursive and the visual, this is a case that first generation Conceptual Artists would have approved of. But my argument does not oppose nor does it deny the discursive and the perceptual inflecting one another - how could they fail to do so? In quattrocento visual gauging the visual perception of volume mingles with numerate determination of proportions and geometries to result in a visual-discursive skill. This looking is a kind of thinking that requires training and practice. The attainment of this disposition to enact a way of looking comes at the end of the period of training and practice; it cannot precede it. Similarly, insofar as painting is a thinking in and through making, one is enabled to look as a result of having done the painting. It's a case of painting in order to look, not the other way round: it is not that the mode of looking is a stabilised and settled disposition that precedes and generates the painting. Rather the thinking through making is what unsettles and destabilizes existing modes of looking.

In the practice of painting the categories of making, thinking and perceiving are indistinguishable at important moments, though they may become separable at other times. The duck/rabbit figure, I claim, is comparable to seeing an organisation of marks as now symmetrical, now asymmetrical. Johns was preoccupied with exactly the issue of 'seeing as' in relation to a perception flipping between symmetry and asymmetry in his somewhat mandarin crosshatch paintings of the early 1970s. The exemplary works for my purposes are his *Corpse and Mirror*, 1974 (Collection of Sally Ganz, New York) **[Fig.4]** and *Corpse and*

*Mirror II*, 1974 –75 (Collection of the Artist) and *Untitled*, 1975 [Fig.3]. These paintings are among the most homogeneous and restrained in the Johns oeuvre. They ought to be boring but are not. What one attends to here are the relationships between the clusters of hatchings placed in varying orientations. The organization of these clusters is partially determined by patterns of symmetry which, however, shift according to the various seams within the paintings which act as axes of symmetry. Horizontal as well as vertical seams operate as axes. However, the competing axes frequently disrupt one another, forcing symmetry to disappear here and there before re-emerging. I understand these paintings as directing the viewer toward the same perceptions – the same instances of ‘seeing as’ and the same flipping inversions of ‘aspect blindness’ - that the artist had in making them. The Johns painting elicits from the viewer a heightened awareness of the becoming asymmetrical of symmetry, and vice versa. More than that, it is made apparent that such an awareness was necessarily the perception of the painter in order for the painting to appear as it is. Much the same is true paintings like *Eden*, 1957, or *Seascape with Dunes*, 1962 by Helen Frankenthaler. These paintings, like those of Johns, indicate a preoccupation with (a)symmetry as constitutive of the image. Thus the making has both produced and been the result of a heightened awareness of the vagaries of symmetry. The intertwining of making and perception is complex and paradoxical: the modes of attention drive the making yet are extended by that making. Luhmann contends that the artist “is involved in the creation of the work primarily as observer”.<sup>32</sup> What I wish to read from the remark is the insistence upon the primarily perceptual nature of the painter’s engagement in making a work.

At this juncture then, we regain contact with the readymade in at least one respect. For the repeated claim was that the readymade undid the distinction



between making and appreciating art. That comes pretty close to what I'm claiming for the Johns paintings, namely, that they compel the viewer to follow the perceptual paths that conditioned and constituted their making. And what's more, there is little traditional skill involved in making a Johns painting. Then, if these paintings both reduce the distinction between making and perceiving, and require minimal craft skills, what is the relevant difference between these paintings and the readymade? Crucially it's that *with painting, perception is occasioned only by the making*. Here is again the irreducible paradox that will receive further examination in the remainder of the chapter: *the perceptual paths both condition the making of the paintings and are conditioned by that making*. For the readymade, however, it is enough to perceive, or merely conceive, and nominate<sup>33</sup> a thing as artwork. We do not though enter into a terrain in which judgment, as a punctal and disembodied decision-making, is sovereign over craft. This scenario is deeply misleading for painting.

Because firstly, 'craft' is too easy a victim, too obviously predetermined as prescribed, normative, regulated artisanal procedure and therefore defined in advance as a *modus operandi* devoid of spontaneity. Painting cannot evade its artisanal-technical necessities: like any material, paint is bestial and uncooperative, oblivious to artists' desires, but that is not to say that it is devoid of its own dynamics. Of necessity painters develop technical norms for manipulating it. But that is not to stigmatise painting technique as craft in the despised sense. Any fruitful relation between pigment and its deployment cannot be a case of a resource subjected to a technical domination that ends up estranging that resource from its inherent qualities. All painters learn this lesson early on: that technique from its very beginning has to abandon the hope of domination for the simple reason that pigment has its own dynamic, what Bernard Stiegler in a different

context calls the “dynamic of the what”. Technique - or what we should prefer to call engaging the painting apparatus,<sup>34</sup> meaning the entire assemblage of materials, procedures, tools, gestural registers and modes of pictorial address and attention – demands a spirit of reconciliation and accommodation with pigment, which is of course, simultaneously chroma and matter and therefore inherently unstable as the flesh of optical stuff. Technique in painting therefore is never the domination of a materiality that is received abjectly as inert, formless and destitute. Pigment is after all chosen because of its qualities. These already bestow certain orientations and dispositions which have to be found, observed and respected rather than commanded and dominated. The expanded notion of the painting apparatus indicates how perception and technique fold into one another, and so can come to extend and amplify each other.

In any case, the technical goals of painting are open to question. For example, Old Master technique assumes that a finished oil painting should last for centuries, and it works to that end. As we know, certain paintings of the 1940s by Pollock, Rothko and de Kooning are now deteriorating fast to a point where the value of seeing them is moot. One sees the ruins of an earlier state. Pollock and co assumed that paintings were for the here and now more than for the future, therefore they were unconcerned about the stability of their paint surfaces. Technical freedoms thus follow or do not follow from certain very general assumptions about the kinds of objects paintings need to be and the roles they must play. Historically, technical norms have always been challenged. So the identification of painting and craft is far from straightforward. Further, judgment set against craft amounts to judgment separated from the act of making. For painting that is not credible.

The examples from Wittgenstein, Arnheim and Baxandall are meant to disallow the distinction between perception and thinking. What I have sought to establish is the unity of thinking and visual perception in practice. It should be clear that thinking, perceiving and making are therefore not practically distinguishable in the activity of generating artwork. Or, to be more precise, where they are distinct, the resultant artwork sacrifices much of the resource available to it as a specific mode of affective exchange. The examples are also intended to prove the non-equivalence of visual thinking and verbal thinking by indicating how verbal thinking fails to parallel resources of visual thinking.

#### **1.4 Embodied Judgment**

Technique is the unwelcome guest in contemporary art discourse. To mention it without derision amounts to a faux pas. If one wanted a field of aesthetic spectacle around which discourses of technique still flourish, one could do worse than consider fashion and sport. Here is a journalist describing a contemporary footballer's approach to long range shots:

If we look at it closely we see further clues to the secret of his extraordinary gift. There is the turn of the body, with his left shoulder facing the target, like a right-arm outswing bowler. There is the extraordinary hinging of the right ankle, which allows him to wrap his instep around the ball. There is the positioning of the standing foot very close to the ball and the left leg's extreme angle from the perpendicular....<sup>35</sup>

This sounds mechanistic: the “extraordinary hinging of the right ankle” and so forth. Sport’s universality is related to its capacity for mechanising and rationalising bodily dynamics in the sense that sport generates unequivocal outcomes, like a goal in football, which then serve as universal criteria for the disciplining of players’ bodies. This suggests that a sport like football allows for little creativity by players. Yet I propose to describe two kinds of creativity in football: we could call them the normal and the radical. Football’s universal popularity has to do both with its relative lack of specialisation, as compared to baseball or cricket, say; and its fertility as a field of contingencies. That’s to say, it is remarkably effective at generating an infinite series of unique situations, which differ slightly but crucially from one another. Exploiting the possibilities of these situations requires the creativity that is normal to playing the game. In normal creativity the existing repertoire of moves and tactics is applied intelligently to the particularity of the situation. But in radical creativity the repertoire of moves and tactics is itself extended. The obvious case of the latter is the Cruyff turn, which looked incredible when Johann Cruyff invented it in the 1970s but is now a standard move for any self-respecting player. The turn indicates a kind of embodied double-think in which the attacking player who is obstructed by a defender appears to advance with one leg, while simultaneously flicking the ball under himself in the opposite direction with the other foot. Thus it combines an advance with an opposing feint. With the Cruyff turn we have an exemplary case of embodied judgment. For as a new move it could not be thought except by a body. No amount of cerebral calculation or speculation could produce it. Crucially it constitutes a thinking that is not plausibly separated from the moving of the player’s body. The player is not thinking *about* his move, rather the moving *is* the thinking. Massumi develops the same point here:

The player must pare himself down to a channelling of the play. The player's subjectivity is disconnected as he enters the field of potential in and as its sensation. For the play, the player *is* that sensation.<sup>36</sup>

In Massumi's account of the football game it is the agency not of individual players but of the ball itself, qua catalyser of potential action, that is given emphasis. Massumi stresses that self-conscious thought is not merely unhelpful for the player in the flow of the game, but is actively destructive of the disposition to play responsively and effectively. The player cannot deliberate reflexively while playing. This shouldn't surprise us. It is analogous to the impossibility of speaking fluently while simultaneously reflecting on the grammatical structures that one is producing. In Massumi's account, the emerging description of agency is nonsimple in that it distances agental power from the circumscribed competence of the player as subject. For Massumi agency is catalysed by the situation within the game, for which, in this instance, the ball, the goalposts and the other players are the pertinent terms. As he describes it, the very architecture of the pitch with its opposing goalmouths lays down an irresistible dynamic of combatorial drama. Within this accelerated and intensely channelled drama, effective play requires an emptying of the players as subjects:

The players, in the heat of the game, are drawn out of themselves. Any player who is conscious of himself as he kicks, misses. Self-consciousness is a negative condition of the play. The players reflective sense of themselves as subjects is a source of interference that must be minimized for the play to channel smoothly.<sup>37</sup>

This insistence on subjective evacuation as a condition of participation in the event is correlative with an insistence that agency in this situation is not in the realm of subjects. Rather agency here is and is occasioned by the intermingling of player, ball and the drive to score, which itself surpasses the motivations of individual players. As the discussion turns to painting it will exhibit the impact of these understandings.

Moving, obviously, takes place in time. It is an unfolding in time, not a point in time. So if embodied judgment is to be identified with the moves of a creative athlete, the strong implication must be that it is not a punctal decision at all. Instead it is something like the interweaving of expectation with agency in a spatio-temporal sequence that in its difficulty drives agency to its limits.

Bergkamp is another Dutch player who comes close to the creative level of Cruyff.<sup>38</sup> Bergkamp undermines my distinction between normal and radical creativity because his solutions for local situations are so extreme and so surprising that they are radical, but their virtuosity is such that his moves can't become repeatable repertoire. Bergkamp's best goals alter our sense of what is possible. But what is significant for the argument is that they are not moves that anyone could rehearse: rather, they are context specific improvisations. That's why they are on a different level to, say, Beckham's spot kicks, which are hardly less generic than penalty kicks. It is interesting to see that Bergkamp sometimes gets drawn into footballing arguments about intentionality. His goal for Holland against Argentina in the 1998 World Cup quarterfinal was extraordinary. Yet his most remarkable goal was for Arsenal and it was strange enough to prompt accusations of a fluke.<sup>39</sup> Berkamp insisted it was no fluke and went on record declaring "I meant it." I don't for a moment doubt his intentionality here. But the

issue for us is that his intentions are in the structure of a future anterior: an interiority that is subsequent to an exteriorization. We find the direct link from this to the painter's situation through Luhmann's claims:

A primary intention is necessary to pass from the unmarked to the marked space; but the activity of traversing this boundary – an operation that *produces* a distinction (delimits a form) – cannot itself *be* a distinction, except for an observer who observes (creates, delimits) this distinction. The first impulse is never the artists "own" intention – in the sense of self-observed mental states – but something one attributes to the artist as intention when observing the work.<sup>40</sup>

Thus for the painter as for the athletic body thinking is doing – is moving and interacting with the ball and the situation in an accelerated temporal sequence. It is not separable from doing. Hence insofar as subjective consciousness presumes a reflexive distance from acting in amongst things, the agency of the athlete, or painter, requires a subjective self-evacuation. As in Massumi's account, the virtuoso like Bergkamp or Cruyff is predisposed to the subjective emptying that is the necessary precondition of effective play.

At the beginning of the chapter I noted that making as such has gone largely unexamined in theoretical writing. To some degree that theoretical lack must be a consequence of the division of labour: practitioners generally don't write, and writers generally don't make things, and their separation is reflected in the theoretical neglect of making. The most pertinent text on the issue was written by a practitioner. This is Robert Morris' 1970 essay *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of*

*Making.* The strength of the text is Morris' critique of art interpretations that assume an instrumental role for the making of artworks. Morris argues that instead of interpreting works as perfected symbolic complexes, i.e. symbolic end products, we should consider how meaning is articulated in their making itself.

Much attention has been focused on the analysis of the content of art making – its end images – but there has been little attention focused on the significance of the means. George Kubler in his examination of Machu Picchu is startlingly alone among art historians in his claim that the significant meanings of this monument are to be sought in reconstructing the particular building activity – and not in a formal analysis of the architecture. I believe there are “forms” to be found within the activity of making as much as within the end products.... The reasons for [the neglect of this aspect] are probably varied and [include] the deep-seated tendency to separate ends and means within this culture....<sup>41</sup>

Morris' text affirms process over product. Yet that posture is also the limitation of the essay. It's partly that as a 'process aesthetic' becomes established the process/product distinction is eroded. In other words, if process emerges as an a priori value - as it did for Morris' generation - it becomes equivalent to a symbolic product. But beyond this point, there is a distance between Morris' affirmation of making and mine. While he was right to direct the discussion toward the question of means and ends, it does seem that he simply inverts the received preference by affirming means at the expense of ends. But that inversion remains inadequate for thinking painting. Some of our best contemporary painting retains a broadly traditional conception of the finished picture: I think of



Glenn Brown varnishing his completed paint surfaces much as a rococo painter would have done. In Brown's paintings as in Dali's, technique works to make itself invisible in the finished picture. Yet such technique that aims at self-concealment is also and necessarily supremely respectful of the vagaries of process. Is this process a means enslaved by an end? Obviously this technique is instrumental with respect to the pictorial effect that it produces. However, in Dali and Brown, it is undeniable that it is the technique that allows new pictorial effects to be conceived at all. Indeed, it is this constant looping back on one another of means and ends – of process and product – that sustains their work. The affirmation of making in the present text is in this way more complex than merely championing process over product.

The other central issue in Morris' essay is the arbitrary. The arbitrary for Morris means that which is grounded in personal preference, such as taste. Morris suggests that it is important that art rid itself of the arbitrary and replace it with what amounts to structural or procedural necessity. This, he claims, is precisely what process offers. The exemplary process for the argument is Pollock's drip painting. What matters for Morris is that the drips fall where they may and are brought to the canvas surface by gravity. This is said to be non-arbitrary because the appearance of the drips is not determined by taste or tradition, but by the impersonal variables that structure the procedure. The argument here is plainly false in that every art-making process is equally arbitrary and equally 'creationist': there is no process that isn't artifice and no evolutionary dynamic that could develop artwork out of the primordial sludge of sheer matter, or the objective properties of materials. There is of course a historical issue of the relative credibility of competing processes at specific times. As Greenberg remarked, "surprise demands a context,"<sup>42</sup> and the contingencies of the context indicate the

arbitrary. I dwell on these issues to stress that the argument of the present text is not purely ontological. That is because in art the ontological is always nested within the historical, which is to say the arbitrary and the contingent. Therefore the centrality of making in the presentation is by no means an adulation of sheer process or the properties of materials. Rather making qua mode of thought is always a historical intervention and as such always mired in the arbitrary.

If Pollock is an exemplary case of embodied judgement, it is because in his drip paintings thought is enacted through the movement that creates the mark. And as Charles Harrison argues, Pollock's technical innovations led him into a kind of painting in which arm's-length discrimination – both literal and intellectual – became impossible.

The adoption of the drip-and-spatter technique and of dried-out brushes, sticks and trowels as tools, can also largely be accounted for in practical terms: Pollock was enabled by this means to maintain a relatively upright position, a distance away from the floor and the canvas. The painting-at-arm's-length stance cannot be sustained for a painting on the floor as it can before an easel or a wall. The point of balance for Pollock became the hips, not, as before, the shoulder; the natural rhythm – and Pollock was a 'rhythmical' painter from the start – became inevitably more expansive, involved longer, more sweeping movements of the hand controlling the application of paint.<sup>45</sup>

Thus Pollock's entire modus operandi forced him to be in among his marks. These were flung and flicked down from above. So the set-up precludes the possibility of stepping back from the picture plane to look. In other words,

Pollock disallows any looking-pausing-thinking that is separate from marking. The picture plane placed upright and parallel to the wall invites this contemplative visual distance. The swathe of pictorial space constituted by the canvas on the floor can be occupied and inhabited by the working painter, but is utterly resistant to such distanced viewing by the artist. More than that, Pollock is exemplary because he indicated that the judgement in embodied judgment is by definition not a verbalized statement. It is certainly not the judgment ‘This is art!’, but is much more like the intuition ‘This feels strange.’

### **1.5 The Prosthetic Priority**

In Massumi’s football match we are invited to grasp agency as distributed across the interstices of ball, players and goalposts. It is the ball that catalyses action. The players become transducers of energy. The players’ bodies are endlessly rehearsed as finely honed repertoires of reflexes. I want to suggest that we understand the skilled footballer as enacting thought through the medium of bodily movement. Football always requires a minimum of normal creativity or, in other words, thought. And that thinking isn’t done with words or intentionalities, but with and by movements of bodies. Or to put it more painstakingly, intentionality here cannot be identified with individual players but is more like a vectored force that we can tie to the role of the goal qua attractor in competition with the opposing goal. In what follows, we will amplify this account by considering the role of the prosthesis in making. By implication this is as significant for football as it is for painting. The argument around the prosthesis will further displace the common sense ratification of intentionality.

The account of prosthesis draws heavily on Bernard Stiegler's discussion of technics, which in its turn draws extensively upon Andre Leroi-Gourhan's *Gesture and Speech*. Leroi-Gourhan's fundamental move in his narration of anthropogenesis is to fuse the technological with the zoological. In this scenario each organism is regarded as a technical apparatus with distinct potentialities that channels the developmental through the technical. The human stands out because s/he stands up. Standing on two feet, the human frees two other feet from their originary instrumental logic: two idle feet become two hands. What is vital about hands is that they have no preordained function, yet the individual must find something, anything for them to do or to grasp. They can't do nothing. They are, after all, hands therefore they anticipate certain kinds of functions. In a sense, the arbitrariness of this 'anything' in 'anything to for them to do', is the origin of artifice itself, thus of the cultural as such, and by implication, of the human as such, in Leroi-Gourhan's, as well as Stiegler's, account.

From the absence of unity in the human, it would be better to conclude instead that the human can only be defined negatively, by the trait of this technical inhumanity that allows it to be differentiated without, however, permitting its identification. This impossibility of anything but a phantasmatic identification is "the mirror stage."<sup>44</sup>

The originary paradox is of a functional apparatus – a hand – deprived of any necessary or inevitable functional setting: an instrument displaced by leisure, unlike the foot which is obliged to take a walk, step up and down, suffer gravity. When the human stands on two feet everything is transformed: "the human did not begin with the brain, but with the feet."<sup>45</sup> The hand is condemned to a

functional schizophrenia in which it is both liberated from a functional destiny because freed from the burden of gravity and, by the same token, condemned to keep busy and find new employ. In this state, the hand is freed to make gestures. It is freed up also – and here we anticipate a contact with Derrida’s topic of the originary supplement that will be considered in Chapter 3 – to extend itself. Extend itself it does through tools and implements and equipment that both diversify and intensify its operations. The strangeness of this narrative of the onset of the prosthesis should not be squandered by being normalised or taken for granted. For isn’t it strange that at the very point at which the hand is set free to handle things, to literally grapple with its milieu, it chooses to defer itself, to supplement itself, to substitute itself: to place the prosthesis between itself and things? It is valuable to retain a feel for this strangeness, though Stiegler’s response will be to invert its assumptions. Like Derrida’s originary supplement,<sup>46</sup> Stiegler’s prehensile hand, he will argue, must be understood as being itself always already a prosthetic.

A prosthetic is an implement or tools that brings its own milieu with it as an inbuilt immanent collective memory. For the tool both embodies a collective past culture, and expects to be used in particular, prescribed ways in the future. The tool is like the goalmouth in Massumi’s football game: it anticipates certain satisfactions and channels activity towards particular kinds of outcomes. Thus the prosthetic is always a complex temporal transmitter of expectation: it contains immense protentional power. The difference between protention and intention here is hard to secure. The tool carries its own intentional momentum with it, since it channels action and interaction with the environment in particular directions.

The whole problem, which thus becomes the distendedness of the past, the present, and the future, is caught in a circle in which the tool appears at one and the same time *qua* the result of anticipation, exteriorization, and *qua* the condition of all anticipation, anticipation appearing itself *qua* the interiorization of the originary fact of exteriorization.<sup>47</sup>

The tool thus protends forward in time by indicating its contexts of use and therefore inviting future application, but is also imbued with a complex communal memory: indeed, its futural force is an effect of its containment of memory. In Leroi-Gourhan's words, "From the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, the constitution of an apparatus of social memory dominates all problems of human evolution."<sup>48</sup> The tool *qua* apparatus of social memory faces both to the future and the past. But it will be asked: Doesn't the invention of the tool require a prior conception, or intention to find the right implement for a certain need? Stiegler's answer is an emphatic no.

*The question is the very ambiguity of the word "exteriorization" and the hierarchy or the chronological, logical, and ontological pre-eminence that it immediately induces: if indeed one could speak of exteriorization, this would mean the presence of a preceding interiority. Now, this interiority is nothing outside of its exteriorization: the issue is therefore neither that of an interiority nor that of an exteriority – but of an originary complex in which the two terms, far from being opposed, compose one another (and by the same token are posed, in a single stroke, in a single movement). Neither one precedes the other, neither is the origin of the other, the origin being then the coming into adequacy or the simultaneous arrival of the two.... A prosthesis does not*

supplement something, does not replace what would have been there before it and would have been lost: it is added. By pros-thesis, we understand (1) set in front, or spatialization (de-severance); (2) set in advance, already there (past) and anticipation (foresight), that is, temporalization.<sup>49</sup>

This is also Kubrick's answer in the opening scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where we see gangs of testosterone-fueled apes on the African savannah facing off against each other [Fig.5]. One aggressive male picks up a thigh bone and crashes it around him. What's crucial here is that only in retrospect does the ape reflect on what has happened, that he has used the bone as a weapon. One is tempted to say that he has transformed the bone into a weapon. But what's wonderful in Kubrick's pacing of the scene is that it's made quite unambiguous that it is precisely the bone that transforms the ape into an armed combatant, and more pessimistically, as the film implies, into the human or proto-human as such.

The movement inherent in this process of exteriorization is paradoxical: Leroi- Gourhan in fact says that it is the tool, that is, *tekhne*, that invents the human, not the human who invents the technical. Or again: the human invents himself in the technical by inventing the tool – by becoming exteriorized techno-logically.<sup>50</sup>

Unexpectedly we are back with Duchamp insofar as the bone/weapon in *2001* is, of course, a readymade. (And just as the primal ancestor of the human doesn't need to fashion the tool for it to be a tool – he needs only to *use* it as a tool – so we saw with Duchamp's readymade, the received object needs only to be *deployed* as art for it to become art. This affirmation of the logic of the readymade is fine

so far as it goes; however, our argument claims the very different parallel with the wound that the primal primate inflicts using his weapon-implement: for it is precisely this wound/mark that must be *made* rather than thought. It is this analogy that is decisive for the artwork that we have in mind.) Technological development hones such natural readymades and gathers them into assemblages. The point to hold onto here is that intentionality is generated in and by a combination of situation, implement and mobilised body. It is not a mental content at all. This again is to come close to Massumi's account of the football game. What emerges from Stiegler's position, as it does from Massumi, is that the actor becomes an agent – participates in agency – at a point of encounter with a dynamic situation in which objects and bodies mingle. But in that dynamic of mingling, agency is sprinkled across the participant elements.

Stiegler's argumentation is frequently contextualized by and differentiated from Heidegger's account of technics. His complaint is that though Heidegger challenges the instrumental understanding of language in particular – especially the notion of language as a technique for communication - he fails to question the concept of instrumentality per se.

The metaphysical illusion from Plato onward that turns language into a means through which humans express themselves, rather than its being located as the site of their very constitution, is abundantly criticized by Heidegger. Yet it is the same error that induces consideration of an instrument as a means.... It is a question not of struggling against the instrumentalization of language but of resisting the very reduction of an instrument to the rank of means.... The issue is rather that of addressing the modalities of instrumentality as such, modalities that harbour the condition



of idiomatic instrumentality as much as that of the condition of massive indifferenciation, together with what we might call, here, *the instrumental condition*.<sup>51</sup>

At this point it's appropriate to remove the possibility of a certain misreading of the chapter. I have talked about making, about movements of footballers and primeval combatants. There is in all this the undeniable sense of purpose. Plainly these are images of the gesture that characterise it as purposive action. Here we need to insert a stern proviso. The gesture in painting is quite unlike the movement of the footballer in that the 'productive value' of the latter is explicitly demonstrated with respect to the goal of the game. The footballer's pass is therefore exhaustively definable as purposive act. The painted gesture is not. Its condition in this respect is better described by Giorgio Agamben's remarks:

What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured or supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos*. . . . if producing is a means in view of an end and praxis is an end without means, the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyses morality and presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends.<sup>52</sup>

Isn't this compatible with Stiegler's claim that there are different modalities of instrumentality? To return to the opening concerns of this chapter, isn't the

denigration of the painting apparatus as craft an attempt to delimit its instrumental mode and to constrain it within the “orbit of mediality?”

The priority of the prosthesis, as we have seen, is a decisive anthropogenetic concept for Leroi-Gourhan and Stiegler. But we can also trace it in more ordinary terms. Writers too have frequently insisted on the priority of the prosthesis, or in Stiegler’s other register, the priority of exteriorization over interiorization. Don DeLillo has talked of his inability to write on a word processor, and his preference for the tactile and sensuous engagement with an old-fashioned typewriter. Similarly Paul Auster has spoken about his inability to write on a laptop or desktop computer. In his words, “it’s not possible for me to think with my hands in that writing position.”<sup>53</sup> Thus many writers recognise that they depend upon a decisive prosthetic identification to drive their thought. To a painter, these admissions come as no surprise. Only for those who hope to determine an originary intention that precedes and directs the exteriorization of thought is there a theoretical disappointment. What we find is, on the contrary, that the value of the making activity is that it can constitute an originary exteriorization of thought; in other words, the paradox whereby the intention finds and identifies itself retroactively in the exteriorization (for example, of the mark in painting or in writing; of the tool; of speech; of the move in a game). In Massumi’s soccer scenario we saw that agency is nowhere reducible to the intentional consciousness of the single player, and is rather a function of ball and players in a dynamic and orientated situation. Similarly, in Stiegler’s narrative, intentionality and ‘interiority’ can grasp themselves only in a future anterior structure after the event of exteriorization. In Chapter 3 we will find the equivalence of this position in Derrida’s notion of archē-writing, a theoretical scenario in which writing is said to

anticipate speaking, or at least, to be equiprimordial with speech. This is Derrida's rendition of the exteriority that makes possible the interiority.

We arrive then at an additional affirmation of the immanent power of the externalisation, which for painting I call the mark, or gesture. These determinations give an intricate account of how that externalization can itself constitute thought without need of the crutch of originary intention or other interiority. In other words, it is a profound misunderstanding to suppose that thought must reside in something outside of the marking, whether prior or parallel. The point is that the thought is the mark; that thinking, for painting, is marking. That is why and how the chapter insists on making making the issue. Stiegler writes: "*Because it is affected with anticipation, because it is nothing but anticipation, a gesture is a gesture*; and there can be no gesture without tools and artificial memory, prosthetic, outside of the body, and constitutive of its world." <sup>54</sup>

## Chapter 2    **Gesture and Commodity**

### **2.1 Serial Singularity**

It is said that art today is free - free of history, free of craft, free of ideology, liberated from developmental logic and so forth. Anything goes. We arrive into the 'post-medium condition,' in Rosalind Krauss's phrase. Alternatively, adopting de Duve's vocabulary, the abiding imperative is the radically levelling 'Do whatever!' Radically levelling simply because when whatever is done by whoever however wherever, whatever becomes both prescribed and homogenised by its enforced adventurousness and its predetermined diversity. Plainly something is missing in de Duve's version of the injunction. 'Do whatever different!' would be more accurate because in practice one cannot do whatever: one cannot for instance do the same. The same – same as before, same as others, same as the past, same as elsewhere – is ruled out. The era of 'Do whatever!' is the era of the law of differentiation. If we are to continue to prize artists on the basis of their singularity we find ourselves today in a state in which that singularity is common, normalised and found in an infinite series. They are all apparently wonderfully distinct. The injunction is indeed 'Do whatever different!' This is the kingdom of serial singularity, a domain in which distinction is prescribed, where failure to be distinct is punishable by enforced invisibility.

There is of course a pre-cultural requirement for differentiation. For example, it's a truism of perceptual psychology that the human organism requires minimal thresholds of stimulus differentiation in order to perceive anything at all. Where every point in a sensory field is equal, as in white noise, attention subsides and turns away. A stimulus is in this strict sense a difference of some kind or degree. This

approach is analogous to that of Gregory Bateson in his celebrated definition of information as a difference that makes a difference.<sup>55</sup> Of course a brilliant definition, but one feels that Bateson was fortunate not to be writing for an era, like our own, in which it is obvious that most information does not make a difference. Or, to be painstaking about the current paradox: it is by making the difference it makes that today's information keeps things the same. Today's cult of information is another guise of serial singularity.

The problem of making art – my problem of being an artist now – is a matter of seriality. I don't mean serial repetition as in the canonical compositional method of minimalism. Here, in the first instance, I mean the endless series – the glut - of artworks and of artists. But as we will examine, seriality also stands for a more precise predicament. It is a general problem of contemporary life that Sartre described rather a long time ago. The traditional notion of the artist auteur as an impassioned artisan (one whose artisanal production claims to transcend craft by its arrogant passion and refusal to become anyone's tool) whose intense dexterity is singular and hard to fake (except by her/himself) corresponds to most contemporary painters. The singularity starts out as authenticity but ends up as copyright control, i.e. the patent, the anchoring of commodity value. And not just in the sense of the commodity critique of art that is over-familiar to us now. This kind of copyright control through artisanal singularity – as in the virtuoso dexterities of David Reed – also becomes a means of channelling the oeuvre or the project into paths strictly commensurate with the past of the project. Despite the artworld's endless bleating about its taste for the radical and the critical, despite its oft declared relish for the critiques of identity and of essentialism, its entire structure is in fact devoted precisely to distributing and policing circumscribed branded identities known as 'artists'. And

it should come as no surprise to find that this policing most frequently takes the form of self-policing by artists. By their mute acceptance of the law of differentiation, artists spontaneously form themselves into a self-regulating system of measured and calibrated idiosyncratic differences.

The economic basis for (self-)policing like this is obvious enough. It is the political economy of the unique commodity, or the limited edition commodity. In the music industry the edition is unlimited. When stock sells, a batch of new units is produced: a new job lot of CDs is despatched from the plant to the retail outlets. The unique object by contrast – as favoured in the artworld – can appear to only one audience at a time and can be sold only once. Thus broad global distribution is possible only if the previous and the next unique object in the series are relatively similar.

Given these pressures, it's not surprising that artists repeat themselves. But in perfecting their strategies for artisanal singularity what is accomplished? Surely a serial singularity in which art is proffered as the public evidence for the plural blossoming of an open society. Such a singularity is however the proof of a homogenizing pluralism. Why homogenizing? – Because the set-up prescribes singularity. The unspoken imperative is 'Do anything you like, so long as it's singular!' In other words, anything goes, except the refusal to attain singularity. We hear the utopian slogan of Joseph Beuys – "Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler" – in this light as being as conservative and banal as "The customer is always right." After all, it is almost identical to the recent corporate tagline for Sony advertising, "Go create."

Although Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is ponderous and little fun to read – by comparison Deleuze and Guattari speed along like an airport novel – it is one of the few sustained attempts at analysing serial singularity. Recalling Sartre's deep aversion to structuralism, what one can perceive here is equivalent to an ethical

application of the concept of differential value borrowed from structural linguistics.

Serial singularity is differential value in the social-economic sphere.

[R]eciprocity in the milieu of identity becomes a false reciprocity of relations: what *a* is to *b* (the reason for his being other), *b* is to *c*, *b* and the entire series are to *a*. Through this opposition between the Other and the same in the milieu of the Other, alterity becomes this paradoxical structure: the identity of everyone as everyone's action of serial interiority of the Other. In the same way, *identity* (as the sheer absurdity of meaningless dispersal) becomes...[p 264] ...synthetic: everyone is identical with the Other in so far as the others make him an Other acting on the Others; the formal, universal structure of alterity produces the *formula of the series (la Raison de la serie)*.”<sup>56</sup>

This is the logic of the ‘they’ in which I structure my activity not for itself, not according to its own positive qualities and demands, but in relation to the practices of they. We don't need to propound an ethic of Sartrean authenticity in order to benefit from this analysis. What is crucial within it is the insistence that this kind of series is extended and maintained precisely on the condition that its members differentiate themselves.

...Thus this rule – the *formula for the series* – is common to all *precisely to the extent that they differentiate themselves*.<sup>57</sup>

## 2.2 The Double Bind

The double bind is the following: if we favour Conceptual Art we loose contact with art's capacity to generate percepts and affects, and instead settle for a stultifying tyranny of the concept, which both misconstrues the potentialities of embodiment and forgets or overlooks the inherent dynamic at play in the encounter with materials; if, on the contrary, we prefer painting, understood as a gestural, embodied thinking that manifests itself through the disclosure not of concepts but of percepts and affects, we run up against the signature gesture as branded mark, which is the ideal handmaiden of the commodity. Why ideal handmaiden? Because through the signature gesture the commodity safeguards its link with authorship. And then why is this a distinct problem for painting? The answer is that it is of course a general problem for art in ways that will be elaborated in what follows. Yet it is a more overt and intense problem for painting because painting is constituted by the mark. Thus, by contrast, the Conceptual Artist relates individual presentations only at the level of the idea, allowing for considerable leeway as to material manifestation. Painting is always driven to articulate itself as iterable mark, and as such it is inevitably ripe for commodification.

Given that the gesture invites commodification, the converse is also true: the commodity acts as lure for the gesture. Often this luring of the branded mark is denied by commentators in the name of a kind of parallelism in which art and commodity are posed as parallel though discrete and separable realms. Dave Hickey argues for just such a parallelism. In his memoir cum polemical essay *Dealing* he writes:

...as to my complicity in the hedonistic commodification of art, I can tell you two things: First, *Art is not a commodity*. It has no intrinsic value or stable



application. *Corn* is a commodity.... Price distinguishes commodities that are otherwise similar and destabilizes the market, whereas price *likens* works of art that are otherwise dissimilar and stabilizes the market....

Second: *Art and money never touch*. They exist in parallel universes of value at comparable levels of cultural generalization: Art does nothing to money but translate it. Money does nothing to art but facilitate its dissemination and buy the occasional bowl of Wheaties for an artist or art dealer. Thus, when you trade a piece of green paper with a picture on it, signed by a bureaucrat, for a piece of white paper with a picture on it, signed by an artist, you haven't *bought* anything, since neither piece of paper is *worth* anything. You have translated your investment and your faith from one universe of value to another.<sup>58</sup>

It's hard to know where to start. I will restrict my response to addressing Hickey's sentence: "Money does nothing to art but facilitate its dissemination and buy the occasional bowl of Wheaties...". Plainly the claim is empirically false: one has only to visit studios in the run-up to a major art fair to witness a power that is by no means equivalent to the "facilitation of dissemination." Nothing so modest. But perhaps we need to step beyond the realm of the *a posteriori* – the empirical – to decisively dislodge Hickey's parallelism. It is the understanding that the law of differentiation *precedes* the artwork – indeed, *produces* the artwork – that propels the discussion beyond the horizon of factual observations about art and artists. For what we have here is a structural determination of the artwork that both serves and is served by the commodity, but which is rooted deeper still. The law of differentiation is the synthetic *a priori* of the artwork. 'Do whatever' is the abiding ethic, so long as the whatever is not the same. An adequate description of this synthetic *a priori* would

require considerable attention to the collective desire for individuated authorship, indeed for authorship at all, in amongst a lifeworld furnished with predominantly anonymous, unauthored artefacts. Such attention is beyond the reach of this text. However, let's note here that Hickey's wishful parallelism is no less tactical than Christ's parallelism when challenged on the question of Roman authority: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." <sup>59</sup>

The crucial point here is that differential markers are predetermined by the commodification of the artwork qua token of authorship. And, by extension, commodification here folds out into a wider set of determinations that go beyond the narrow purview of surplus profit. There is far more at stake in the commodification of authorship than the bottom line.

Now given the commodification of the artwork – and of the branded mark in painting especially – it soon becomes apparent that artwork isn't merely a suitable vehicle for the commodity form: it is no less than the ideal commodity. Why ideal? Partly because it is pure exchange value devoid of so-called use value. But more than that, the artwork is the perfect commodity because it is the only commodity that cannot be subjected to price reduction through increases in productivity. The point is not that productivity increases are inconceivable for artwork: on the contrary, wasn't Warhol's command to Lou Reed always that he should write songs faster? The point is rather that the 'work', meaning the labour, in artwork always dissimulates itself to the degree that it becomes an imponderable. To this extent of course de Duve is correct in his claim – the one that I strived to contest in the first chapter – that in the age of Manet the substitution of judgment for craft was already underway. Already when Whistler spoke of the mark that was mustered in an instant, but which depended on decades of accumulated experience, the notion of the 'working' qua

labour in artwork was evaporating. From the perspective of the commodity form, this means that art has no definable labour costs. That's why it allows for no equivalent to productivity gains. In this respect artworks emerge as the perfect commodities, and still more perfect are the works made by the category of artist most loved by the market: the dead artist. That is, the artist who certainly cannot deviate from his or her constrained furrow of determinate singularity.

### **2.3 Group and Gang**

If the branded signature is always the snare for the gesture, and if that mechanism is always a means of anchoring authorship, then what if the author is plural, is a they? Does the group author offer a liberation from the constraints of the branded mark?

Let's think about the group. In art it has always been problematic to posit the group as an author and producer, which is to say, as an artist. De Kooning once said the trouble with the group is that there's always somebody who wants to be the leader. But it's worth thinking then why groups function effectively in other art forms, but generally not in the visual arts. Music clearly favours the group that is extended in space though unified in time because it is an art of simultaneity. Simultaneity then already implies a group agency. The visual arts that unfold in space and not in time do not easily accommodate the agency of the group as distinct from the team directed by a leader, which is not at all unknown to visual art, for instance, Warhol, Koons, Murakami, Frize and so on. Yet true group agency in visual art is therefore always short-lived: one thinks of the early Art & Language prior to Atkinson's departure, some good moments in the life of Bank, the didactic yet exploratory exhibitions of Group Material, some wonderful work from the Unovis

school. There have also been plenty of forgettable art groups: who now remembers or cares about Kids of Survival or PPS or Hobbypop or General Idea or Szuper Gallery? The difficulty of group agency in visual art is surely ontological in origin. In other words, it is precisely that art's basis in marks that are extended in space, not time, tends to mitigate against group agency. It is not possible for two group members to mark the same point in space simultaneously. The condition for music is then the exact inverse: music requires two or more agents to 'mark' the same point in time – even the piano soloist operates simultaneously with two hands. The ontology of music requires it to be produced by a group. That explains why musicians are always puzzled to learn that visual artists have to make a conscious effort to sustain a social life; to be a musician is on the contrary to be socially immersed in the group. It is inevitable that the visual art group has to plan and schedule its activities to a degree that excludes the possibility of group improvisation in the manner of a musical ensemble. Art-making for the group inevitably becomes a matter of talking about ideas and possibilities as opposed to thinking them by just doing them. As Art & Language said of themselves: “The Art-Language association is characterised by the desire and ability of its members to talk to each other”, and: “anyone who asserts common ground with us...invokes a logically possible ‘conversational state of affairs.’”<sup>60</sup> In this insistent pull of language it is all the more likely that a contest for leadership or for charismatic priority ensues, and that the group acquires a hierarchy and so begins to relinquish its claim to group agency proper. Given that the dominant medium of thought for the visual art group is always then likely to be or to become language, it is clear that it will be well nigh impossible for the group to resist the tyranny of the concept. At its best, the group has a productive half-life in that benign phase during which figural and discursive thinking elude each other's domination. But as soon as one gains the upper hand – and it is invariably discursive

thinking that does – ‘the writing is on the wall’ in all senses. The best account of what I call the productive half-life of the group remains that of Siegfried Kracauer in his essay ‘The Group as Bearer of Ideas.’<sup>61</sup> In it Kracauer describes how increasing successes shift the group’s centre of gravity. Whereas the embryonic group, with its successes still ahead of it, is united, and its members de-subjectivised by the authority of the idea, i.e. of the mission; in the successful group members feel their subjectivity to be rekindled by outcomes which they take to be proof of their individual charismatic power. In this way, success for the group always undermines the authority of the idea and creates instead a renewed and intensified contest among members for charismatic primacy: Stalin versus Trotsky, Van Doesberg versus Mondrian, all the Beatles versus each other, and so on.

The group does offer resistance to the circulation of artists as authorial brands though it is only the promise not the guarantee of resistance. We know that all manner of art groups have become stabilized, normal art brands, as have Art & Language. But what is the lure of the group, its core of fascination? The attraction of the rock group is that of the gang. But I want to consider the group as producer rather than just the gang that hangs out. What is the mystique of the group as producer? Isn’t it really the riddle of social relations that are not mediated by sociability as such? Or to put it another way, isn’t our fascination that group members relate on the basis of their creation and that this is their decisive form of sociality? And sociality on the basis of common creation – not procreation, not family life, not hierarchy and not social reproduction – is indeed a utopian notion. We don’t know how a creative group does or should function. Probably we don’t know this even if we are its members.

When Hardt and Negri conclude their dense and bleak analysis of contemporary capital in their book *Empire* with a joyful affirmation of the internet

and contemporary communication technologies as that which, for the first time in human history, promises the possibility of pure social interaction as the dominant mode of production, they both overstate and underestimate the issue.<sup>62</sup> They greatly underestimate the coercive power of the internet which, put in Foucauldian terms, disciplines subjects as communicative interlocutors, as efficient stewards of information flows and as instigators of communication-attractor events.<sup>63</sup> But on the other hand their optimism involves a forgetting of the broadly modernist insight that McLuhan caricatured under the slogan ‘the medium is the message.’ This claim – common to widely differing thinkers since the Enlightenment – that the how of the utterance conditions the what of the utterance cannot be forgotten abruptly in the rush to eulogise the social spontaneity of the multitude unleashed upon their laptops and in internet cafes. Hardt and Negri applaud the internet as if it were neutral with respect to sociability: we are right back with Hickey’s phrase the ‘facilitation of dissemination.’ Our counter should be the same as to Hickey: No, nothing so modest.

#### **2.4 Bickerton’s Susie**

The question I want now to turn to is this: what happens when the artwork attempts to confront its own commodification? Warhol and Steinbach provide distinct responses which we will consider later. But first Ashley Bickerton’s early work stands as an exemplary instance of what Zelda Fitzgerald called “high-minded mistakes.”

In the New York art of the mid 1980s Warhol remained the paradigmatic reference. But whereas, for the Pop Art of the 1960s, the appeal to a commercial image repertoire and its characteristic modes of marking could be justified both in

the name of a critical realism, and as a means to open up and appraise anew the rarified marking that painting had come to demand, for the postmodern neo pop of the 1980s, the image repertoire of the commodity was too ubiquitous to be worth celebrating, too primordial to be a source of liberation, and too much the embodiment of the physical environment to even be experienced primarily as image, that is to say as flat pictures and signs as opposed to things, masses, solids, bodies. It is true that there remains a tone of affection for the ingenuousness of the commodity icon in Koons and Steinbach. But this is not the sanguine buoyancy of Lichtenstein's *Look Mickey!*. The 80s artists go to great lengths to bracket off their affections, as we will see: they trade their own disingenuousness for the artless address of the commodity icon.

Of all these 80s New Yorkers it is Ashley Bickerton who attempts the most direct critical confrontation between the artwork and the commodity. Bickerton's works of the mid 80s are gleaming metallic sign-strewn parodies of Juddian specific objects – not quite painting (too bulky) – not quite sculpture (still displayed as wall-mounted boxes). These works, such as *Guh*, 1986 and *Uuehh*, 1986 [Fig.7] and *Le Art (Composition with Logos, 2)*, 1987 [Fig.6] have a camp techno feel. They seem to refer to electronics but in a vague, veiled manner. Bickerton's approach is a kind of Russian doll method. There is the artwork by Bickerton. But this turns out to be/to contain another artwork signed 'Susie'. In Bickerton's world artists have to be critical and autonomous, but in Susie's world they are no more wary of marketing than is a car salesman. The works display logos like that of Windsor and Newton as a car might display a logo of one its prize custom components. They bear stylised signs saying things like 'Season 86-87', and the repeated branded signature 'Susie'. Eventually one comes to identify the camp techno look with the technophilia and built-in obsolescence of consumer technology products. It would be easy to interpret

the works as straightforward stabs at unmasking the commodity life of the artwork through burlesque. But the Russian doll apparatus gets in the way. Susie intrudes on Bickerton in a way that Richard Mutt never does with Duchamp. Bickerton's problem is that he cannot reduce the artwork to the (faux) signature alone. To do so would maroon him in a critique already long familiar with Manzoni, Hamilton and others. Moreover, it's a critique that keeps everything within an intellectual, elitist framework: it does not offer a connection to the modes of attention of the demos, in other words, the sensuous realms of the commodity icon. The problem following from this is that Bickerton's works must both stage the faux signature *and* conjure up some faux sensuous particularity to go with it. And not surprisingly it is this need for a sensuous remainder that becomes both the Achilles heel of the (Bickerton's) work and the source of what interest it continues to hold. Here is an instance of confusion stemming from the shift between enunciation and enunciated. The difficulty in Bickerton is that the designer-techno decorations in the work seem to be the placeholders for sensuous particularity; but then do they belong in Bickerton's work (point of enunciation) or in Susie's work (point of the enunciated)? In Bickerton's critical, autonomous artworld, a signature alone can be an artwork; but presumably in Susie's world of flattened art commerce, it could not, any more than a Mercedes could be a logo without a vehicle. Ergo the techno-décor is the sensuous particularity to which Susie adds her signature. Techno-décor belongs to the art vocabulary of Susie, not of Bickerton. However, we've seen that Bickerton's work traces a parodic relation to Judd's specific objects. Yet plainly that relation of parody is located in Bickerton's artworld, and not Susie's. As we get swept up in this oscillation between the point of enunciation and the point of the enunciated, we come to experience Bickerton's work as a fragile intellectual conceit rather than a wrought and felt conflict.



The scenario with Bickerton's work resembles the medieval carnival in which gentry and serfs trade places for a day. In Bickerton the artwork imagines itself briefly in the role of the shameless commodity. But this is just a flattening out of the real problem. As I will argue below regarding Sony's advertising, it is in the end the commodity that holds art to the task of fidelity to autonomy, which is just where Susie is found wanting.

### **2.5 License to Print Money: Warhol**

Warhol's dollar bill paintings of the 1960s are striking for their thinness. Their excessive lack of depth. There is a strong link to the familiar theme of the Jasper Johns flag paintings where the viewer is compelled to think the difference – if any – between a flag and a picture of a flag. To put it in Deleuzian terms, the paintings confront us with the movement between a picture of an object and a becoming-object of the picture. The paintings give us an undeniable yet indeterminable state of becoming-flag of the picture. This is a well-worn topic of Johns criticism.<sup>64</sup> This we know. But don't we also encounter a comparable movement in Warhol's dollar bill paintings – a becoming-dollars of the painting? Warhol's screenprinting methods have usually been interpreted as having only a negative value as modes of mark-making: they are said to be his way of negating the hand-made mark, its craft skills and dexterity, its expressive codes. While those negative forces are undeniable, what gets lost in this is the many cases where the negative turned out to be a positive. And the dollar bill pictures are a good example. For it is the thinness and evenness of the screenprinted colour that allows the weave of the canvas here to be identified with the flat substance of the dollar bills. The paintings look like a continuous skin of

banknotes, rather like an animal hide or a snakeskin, but sheerer. This is one of many cases of Warhol's mark-making creating affective possibilities by denying the traditional 'painterly depth' of mark. Indeed, for the most part Warhol's worst painting coincides with his attempt to pastiche the expressive brushmark beneath the screenprinted imagery in his portraits of the mid 1970s.

It's hard to resist describing the resonance between these paintings and a particular idea – Saussure's metaphor for the sign in the image of the double-sided sheet of paper, with its one side for the signifier and the other for the signified. There used to be an urban myth which said that the old five pound note could be peeled apart into two separate halves, which were identical except for the aluminium band which was supposed to come off on one but not on the other. So the lure of the myth was the dream of doubling your money. Warhol's dollar bills resemble the mythic fivers that can be peeled and halved but thereby doubled. Quite clearly Warhol pondered on how the intensely flattened painting should (re)present the already flat thing that we know to be double-sided. While he shows us only one side in the 1962 painting *One Dollar Bills* [Fig.8], in *80 Two-dollar Bills, Front and Rear* (Museum Ludwig) of the same year, he presents them alternately, now showing the obverse, now showing the reverse, as if these are indeed the alternate faces of single notes that have been split apart. Thus I cannot resist the reading of Warhol's bills as dispossessed Saussurian signs that have been split and halved. They are, so to speak, flayed signs. But unlike flayed bodies, they have no innards. In Warhol, unlike in Hickey's world, the space of painting and the space of money are identical and equal in their lack of depth and in their lateral proliferation.

Are we then to interpret the dollar bill paintings as a straightforward declaration of the emptied, conventional or fetishistic authority of money? Are we to conclude that here money is seen to be, in Saussure's terms, a signifier stripped of its

signified? Well, no, not quite. Žižek cautions against the simple acceptance of a nominalist critique of the sign of money, along the lines of “X gave Y a good and, in exchange, Y gave X *a mere piece of paper*”:

An everyday bourgeois subject not only (mis)perceives money as a material object with the ‘magic’ property of functioning as the equivalent of all commodities; in his everyday consciousness, such a subject is usually well aware that money is merely a sign guaranteeing its owner the right to have at his disposal a part of the social product, and so on. What an everyday bourgeois subject effectively fails to perceive at a much more fundamental level, is the fact that money is precisely *not* merely a token of interpersonal relations but emerges as the materialization of the symbolic institution in so far as this institution is irreducible to direct interaction between ‘concrete individuals.’<sup>65</sup>

This is another version of the complaint against Hickey’s/Christ’s parallelism. For isn’t Hickey indeed proposing the nominalist reduction that defines the money transaction as the mere exchange of a mere piece of paper for goods between two concrete individuals. Warhol’s painting I think is consistent with the thought of a dialectical reversal: we expected the nominalist move to be conclusive, to show that the dollar bill is mere signifier, mere paper, exchanged between X and Y; but of course this cannot satisfy the analysis because the nominalist’s concrete residue is exactly what does not account for the possibility of exchange through a transcendent institution. I think the Warhol is consistent with the notion that the “materialization of the symbolic institution” that cannot be grasped by the nominalist critique is both the role of money and of a painting.

To a degree Warhol is of course burlesquing himself: ‘Look, my painting is a license to print money’ and equally the converse, ‘My money is a license to print painting (as currency).’ But it is instructive to compare the work with a very different and more didactic, more moral work: Rose Finn-Kelcey’s *Bureau de Change*, 1987-2003 (Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin/Loan form Weltkunst Collection). Here Van Gogh’s sunflowers are re-constructed in a mosaic of coins laid on a floor. This work does not warrant much attention, but does illuminate my discussion. In Finn-Kelcey’s work there is no reciprocity or feedback between money and art. An arrangement of money depicts an artwork. But the money doesn’t affect the artwork or vice versa. Nothing is really shifted from its already stabilized identity. In the Warhol, an artwork depicts money, yet both are altered by the encounter: the money isn’t quite money – it is painting in a state of becoming-money - and the painting isn’t just painting insofar as its being resides in depicting money, it has no identity *other than* that of depicting money. The difficulty in the Finn-Kelcey is the reverse of this because the coins obviously do have a stable identity whether they form a composite image or not. The contrast shows that the abiding strength of the Warhol paintings lies in the very con-fusion of art and money that they enact.

## **2.6 Haim Steinbach**

It is clear that in the quattrocento pictorial culture of Florence, Rome and Venice, the gap – both imaginative and material - between painting and relief was as easily traversed by artists as by their audience. The pictorial relief is close to painting and distant from sculpture because it occupies the wall, or its equivalent, like the doors of a baptistry, and one can’t move around and behind it. It has no back, only a front

and perhaps a side or two. Thus the relief is best understood as a form of para-painting: a mode of re-constellating painting's problematics. This is how we should approach the best practitioners of the wall relief in twentieth century art: namely, Joseph Cornell, Donald Judd and Haim Steinbach.

In his wall shelf works Haim Steinbach is a faithful Duchampian to the degree that he presents groupings of readymades, but he deviates from Duchamp's precedent in that he inserts these readymades into quasi-pictorial relationships of colour, composition, contour and figure/ground. The characteristic effect of Steinbach's work lies with the ripples of those relationships across the readymade components of the presentations. More than anyone else – more than Koons or Duchamp – Steinbach solves the problem of how to display and group readymades so as to sidestep their paradigmatic status. Can that be why he said “My work is about not transcending”?<sup>66</sup> The answer will become clearer as the discussion develops. Steinbach's shelf works establish visual relationships into which the readymades can be inserted. To an extent that is as formal as Mondrian slotting a coloured rectangle between three black lines. For Steinbach also colour is key: it is what he uses to generate identities and contrasts. It allows him to extract the colour from the readymade object by undercutting its particularity. Steinbach takes the property of the object and then denies the object's proprietary rights over it. This is a far more complex proposition than Koons' hoovers in their tube-lit plexiglass cases. Steinbach takes the particular and returns it to the universal. Why this still is “about not transcending” is a question we will need to return to.

Steinbach operates within a consistent hierarchy of readymade and shelf. It is approximately equivalent to the hierarchies of sculpture and plinth, or between figure and ground. In this regard, Steinbach, unlike Bickerton, had the considerable advantage of adopting a time-honoured convention: figure/ground cast as

ornament/shelf. Given the ease of our acceptance of this convention, there's no problem of the remainder as we saw in Bickerton, the troublesome remainder of sensuous particularity to go with the signature. What is remarkable in Steinbach is the leanness: there is so little there except a couple of readymades and a shelf. And yet we are confronted by a complex web of sculptural-chromatic relations. It feels somewhat scandalous: how can there be so much there when there is manifestly so little there?

The best works all come in a concentrated burst in 1984-86. Before that the display parameters are too vague to focus the look of the pieces, and this degree of promiscuity means the works are unable to frame and circumscribe themselves as the best pieces do so powerfully. Later than 1986 the formula of the triangular section shelf is retained and further elaborated, but often over-elaborated, and the 'ornaments' becomes too luxurious, too classy, too distinct from their pedestals. After 1986 there is less dialogue across the shelf/ornament hierarchy. This is again largely a matter of the choice of objects. In Steinbach's most wonderful pieces, like *Exuberant Relative No. 2*, 1986, [Fig.9] the 'ornamental' objects – two toilet brushes in ports and two construction helmets, each of which has holders for two drink cans – are formally, chromatically and materially very similar to the formica shelf surfaces. The helmets are opaque coloured plastic, very similar in surface and reflectivity to the formica. The sculptural toilet brushes, set into their ports, are also immaculate, opaque red plastic.

The horizontal sequence of shelves is white-red-white. The objects are arranged in the inverse sequence of red-white-red. The rule is that red objects sit on white shelf units, and white on red. As in all the shelf works we get two parallel horizontal sequences: the 'ornament' sequence and the shelf sequence. Is this another claim for a parallelism? – for a realm of commodities in parallel to a realm of, well

what? Of colour? Of a grammar of display? There is no easy analogy to the shelf, except at the level of the conceptual hierarchy. Thus for example the hierarchy of ornament and shelf is analogous to that of base and superstructure, or, as we've seen, figure and ground. The display method introduces a strong division between vertical and horizontal. In the vertical plane there is the hierarchy of shelf bearing object. In the horizontal plane there are the twin parallel sequences of shelves and objects, each forming their own syntagms. As de Saussure writes: "The syntagmatic relation is *in praesentia*. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series"; and "a syntagm immediately suggests an order of succession and a fixed number of elements."<sup>67</sup> So the display set-up does institute something closely analogous to the paradigmatic/ syntagmatic binary that is conceptualised in structural linguistics.

Steinbach's works do initiate a parallelism, but then they disrupt it straightaway. What we get, as in *Exuberant Relative No.2*, is a constant flow of energies between the vertical plane of the paradigm and the horizontal plane of the syntagm. In other words, we get irresistible *diagonal* force. The diagonals in Steinbach are a bit like diagonals in Mondrian:<sup>68</sup> they are strictly 'not there' in the art object which contains only rectilinear elements, yet they appear when we look at it, when a relationship between two or more elements compels us to see a diagonal. Steinbach's triangular section shelves already thematize this movement between the visible and the invisible because their sole 'really' diagonal element – the frontal plane of the shelf – is itself not seen as diagonal when we place ourselves in front of the work.

How can there be so much there when there is so little there? - Because relations multiply faster than rabbits. "Weak links traverse a society 'quickly': a demonstration suggests that any two people in the United States can be connected by as few as six weak links."<sup>69</sup> Steinbach plays on these weak links. He indicates how relations are latent, inevitable, inescapable, yet arbitrary. Thus in the excellent 1985

shelf piece *Related and Different* [Fig.10] a relation of resemblance is set up: a pair of Nike sneakers are compared to a row of brass candlesticks. Both show us diagonal lines. There's the diagonal from the ankle to the toe of the shoes; and there's the diagonal from the tallest to the shortest candlestick. Of course this is idiotic resemblance. A row of candlesticks does not resemble a pair of sneakers. Yet here, in one absurdly abstracted respect, they do come to resemble one another.

It is tempting to interpret this profusive play of spurious relations as a parable of the commodity relation in general insofar as the commodity is defined as the generator par excellence of spurious relations, as where things with no apparent similarities sell at the same price. We come back to Steinbach's declaration: "My work is about not transcending." This does not mean that it is about immanence. For the relations that I described as diagonal forces in works like *Exuberant Relative No.2* operate to undo the self-circumscribing immanence of the object, the readymade. The red of the helmet in *Exuberant Relative* is at first its property; but the diagonal force that links it to the red of the neighbouring shelf steals it away from the exclusive confines of the object. And this structure of thought is precisely that of Hegel's deconstruction of immediacy in the opening chapter of the *Phenomenology*, wherein the consciousness of the immediate is reduced to saying, meaninglessly, "This, here!"; Hegel's point is that "This, here!" can only become meaningful - can only specify its referent - if it is linked to a conceptual genus, as in "This colour here!". But then, of course, the arrival of the generic concept is what breaks the spell of immediacy.

Steinbach's shelf works are neither about transcendence nor immanence. They are about relationality as such. They indicate how the inescapable spectre of hierarchy is nourished and sustained by relations that are at once syntactical (Steinbach's horizontal sequences), semantic (his vertical plane); and, more



interestingly, that they are constantly subverted and short-circuited by the feedback across and between these two planes of meaning – this is what I called the diagonal force in Steinbach. Yet as we saw in the apparition of idiotic resemblance in the 1985 piece *Related and Different*, Steinbach seems to offer a challenge: that anything could be made to resemble anything else in some respect or other. In other words, relationality itself is idiotic, always dormant, easy to find, overdetermined. Steinbach's work then is about relationality as immanence.

Steinbach then is an exemplary figure for my discussion in at least two vital respects. Firstly, in the context of a Duchampian narrative in which the readymade is said to have destroyed the gap, and the very distinction, between artistic fabrication and artistic perception, Steinbach must be seen to return these determinations to a nonsimple interweaving of registers. By the minimal operation of placement, especially placement into chromatic relationships, Steinbach at the very least muddies the waters. Evidently the readymade after the readymade can also be brought back to something closely akin to embodied judgment. Secondly, Steinbach sets up a theatre in which the artwork looks a lot like a staging of the commodity: a dramatization of the commodity through colour, composition and placement and proportion.

While the readymade qua commodity here is decisively incorporated as chromatic component and therefore *subsumed* within a visual ensemble, it is still given the starring role in that ensemble as the manifestation of the figural for the expectant audience. These works make an intense contrast between readymade/figure and shelf/setting. And yet the readymade/figure here seems almost a McGuffin: after all, one cannot scrutinize these objects at great length, they offer little or no sustained 'absorptive' rewards to the viewer. However, where powerful relational vectors accrue in affective force in Steinbach's works, something very close to an absorptive attraction is generated.

What Steinbach's example offers us is important then in a number of ways. For one, it manifests a response to the Duchampian lineage absolutely at odds with Kosuth's reading of the readymade. In Steinbach the readymade is emphatically adjoined to aesthetics – moreover, it is found to be necessarily an aestheticised particular. Here Steinbach differs from Duchamp decisively. Where Duchamp shows how we can choose to see the merely utilitarian bottlerack *as if it were a sculpture*, Steinbach indicates that in the intensely optical realm of the consumable every commodity is by its nature a candidate for aesthetic delight. Where Duchamp's readymades are singular and paradigmatic, Steinbach's are binary, or born into comparison, and are phrased in syntagmatic ensembles. Steinbach thus takes a path outside of certain foreclosed understandings of the readymade. In my terms, his work implies a blending of the readymade with embodied judgment.

As regards the question of the commodity, Steinbach's shelf works do manifest a parallelism but it is far removed from the purist parallelism of Dave Hickey. It is rather a nonsimple parallelism of shelf and ornament within which the roles of art and the commodity are never fully separable nor finally stabilised. Steinbach does not pretend to keep art and the commodity apart, yet neither does he propose to identify them with one another, as his contemporary Bickerton surely did.

## **2.7 Hegel's Master and Servant**

Where are we? Where does the argument take us? There's a soft solution that beckons. This is that we simply insist on preserving the gesture as an event. In other words, we merely charge the branded singularity with fraud: it is not truly singular because it is predetermined. What then offers itself up is the discussion of the event:

the gesture as true singularity. Thus we could enter the philosophies of the event with Deleuze or Badiou or Lyotard. The complaint against singularity in series is that it is a proscribed singularity. In view of its serial articulation and overdetermination, singularity is the wrong thing to promote. Yet for the artist in him/herself, it is the rightful goal. Achieving singularity for the artist then amounts to doing the wrong thing for the right reasons.

We are left with a stalemate, or in a Tarantino image, a Mexican standoff, in which the gesture/artwork and the commodity confront one another each holding a gun to their opponent's temple. Let us then embrace this image of the Mexican standoff as a valid image of a struggle between two combatants. Let us then transfer this image to the Hegelian dialectic of the Lord, or Master and the Bondsman, or Servant (in Hegel's German the terms are 'Herr' and 'Knecht'). The struggle is the common thread between Hegel, John Woo and Tarantino. In Hegel the Lord/Bondsman or Master/Servant power relation is the outcome of a struggle. The Lord was the victor because he, unlike the Bondsman, wagered his life in the struggle. The Bondsman was defeated because he would not countenance risking death in the struggle: "The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognised as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness."<sup>70</sup> In Hegel's mythic scenario the result is a hierarchy in which the Lord is at liberty to indulge his desire – or in Marxian terms, he may inhabit the realm of the superstructure – while the Bondsman is chained to the realm of the object, doing the Lord's bidding at the level of brute production – the Marxian base. Clearly the Lord is able to produce and consume artwork, while the Bondsman is condemned, as the vanquished in the struggle, to produce and consume commodities. As Hegel writes,

The lord relates himself to the bondsman mediately through independent existence, for that is precisely what keeps the bondsman in thrall [denn eben hieran ist der Knecht gehalten]; it is his chain, from which he could not in the struggle get away, and for that reason he proved himself to be dependent, to have his independence in the shape of thinghood.<sup>71</sup>

For our standoff between artwork and commodity, a key notion is that of independence, or sovereignty. In a functionalist sociological analysis of art<sup>72</sup> it is the artwork that is dependent – that is consigned to ‘thinghood’ – qua instrument of ends outside itself. At the other extreme, as we will see in the work of Donald Judd, there is the attempt to perfect and seal off the sovereignty of art by stripping it of all relationality, rendering it instead as sheer immanence. In what follows it will become clear that both positions are untenable.

It may sound unlikely, but I propose now to read the ‘Lordship and Bondage’ section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a parable for the relation between artwork and commodity. Let’s set the scene in Hegel’s text. The argument has been that consciousness is necessarily self-consciousness. However, self-consciousness is not possible in isolation: it requires the recognition of and by an other parallel consciousness. Hegel writes his own myth of a primordial encounter between two consciousnesses: they contest the attainment of autonomous self-consciousness by a fight to the death, or at least it promises to be a fight to the death. The climax though is cut short when one party surrenders to the other. In Hegel’s telling one party wagers its life for ascendancy while the other cannot countenance risking his own annihilation. The party of safety first is thereafter obliged to do the bidding of the party of risk. In this way the hierarchy of Master [Herr] and Servant [Knecht] takes

root. The latter labours, producing for the needs of the Master, who, freed from the necessities of useful production, is enabled to lavish his attention exclusively on the realm of luxuries, or in another terminology, the realm of the play of representations.

For our purposes, the analogy that suggests itself at this stage is clear enough. The Servant/ Knecht is condemned to reified production, that is to say, production defined as labour for an other. The Master/ Herr on the other hand, is at liberty to do whatever he wishes *for no other*. His activities are in the realm of the play of representations; this is also the realm of the artwork qua creation for itself and unconstrained by utility, function or other external compulsion. Put like this, the mapping of the artwork/commodity dichotomy onto the Master/Servant hierarchy is obviously a proto-Marxian set-up. But we need to go further along Hegel's narrative. The question is of autonomous self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is found to require reciprocal recognition by an other consciousness: self requires the recognition of an other self and needs to be able to recognise itself in an other self. In the consequent dialectic of reciprocal recognition [*Anerkennung*] the roles of independence versus dependence are in process. Hegel moves through a number of positions:

1. Self = Other:

“In the lord, the being-for-self is an ‘other’ for the bondsman...”<sup>73</sup>

and

“Self-consciousness... has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being.”<sup>74</sup>

2. Self = Self + Other:

“The Master is ... a consciousness existing *for itself* which is mediated with itself through another consciousness.”<sup>75</sup>

### 3. Self (Other) <> Other (Self):

The “double-signifying supersession of its double-signifying otherness is at the same time a double-signifying return *into itself*.”<sup>76</sup>

### 4. Self + Other in Self = Self + Other in Other:

“[The consciousnesses] *recognise* themselves as *mutually recognising* one another.”<sup>77</sup>

The dialectic thus moves away from the nominal domination of the Master to a condition far more paradoxical and troubling. In becoming intertwined with this other that was meant to have been subordinated and beholden to the Master, it turns out instead that the Master is dependent on the recognition of the Servant, acted out in the form of his labour, upon which also the Master depends in order to indulge his nominally unconstrained interests. But things are even worse than that for the Master: not only is he dependent on another consciousness for recognition in order to ground and form his autonomous self-consciousness; he is (how degrading!) dependent on a consciousness that is not even his equal, not even a being for itself, but a mere labourer who does the bidding of another. Thus the Master’s appeal for recognition through the hierarchy that was instituted as a truce to end the struggle to the death, brings about a fall from grace and a compromising of that very hierarchy.

John Woo's movie *Face/Off* [Fig.11] is Hollywood's rendition of the Master/Servant dialectic. Recall that the dialectic is one of dependence and independence in a quest for (self-)recognition. In the film the set-up indicates that legality requires crime for its self-recognition. The side of legality – in the figure of the John Travolta/cop character – requires the imprisonment of the criminal – in the figure of the Nicolas Cage character – in order to recognise its ascendancy. Before that can be assured, a reversal takes place: the Travolta/cop character takes the face of the Cage/criminal in order to ascertain his plans. Already here we get strong evidence that Woo bases his scenario on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: the cop has to assume the place of the criminal in order to secure his own mastery of the situation. This is Hegel's initial complexification of the reciprocal reflexivity. Yet things quickly get more complex still. The criminal responds to the cop's ruse in turn by stealing the cop's face, bringing about the complete role reversal. Faces are fully exchanged, with cop now as criminal and vice versa. The important detail in the scenario is the matter of family values.<sup>78</sup> The Travolta/cop is the embodiment of civic virtue, but pathologically so. In adopting the role of the pure upholder of civic duty the cop consigns his entire subjectivity to the public realm of civic virtue at the expense of the private sphere, his wife and daughter. Like the Master in Hegel, the Travolta/cop figure has lost touch with the basis – the very justification – of his agency; after all, isn't the cop there in the first instance to protect family life? In the scenario of the role reversal, after the faces have been exchanged, it is the disguised criminal who is found to be the adequate family man, both good father to the daughter, protecting her from abusive boyfriends, and an attentive husband sensitive to the sexual needs of the wife. It is made clear that these qualities were absent with the real cop father, whose pathological pursuit of public duty blinded him to the needs of his family. Conversely, the cop, in the guise of the criminal, now comes to appreciate his own

previous alienation from the affective wealth of the private sphere as he becomes entangled with the criminal's family. Only through his identification with the criminal then is the cop able to remember the point of the United States constitution: *the pursuit of happiness*. The cop as cop was condemned to forget it.

In an excellent detail, the criminal in the guise of the cop teaches his (the cop's) daughter how to use a switchblade in self-defence. The logic is clear: if you love your daughter you don't balk at discarding legality under certain circumstances. True family love, in other words, is excessive with respect to the law. To forget this is to forget family love as such. Thus the Travolta/cop figure as the pure upholder of legality alienates himself from himself as a family man. His self-consciousness, in Hegel's term, is in contradiction and is thereby inadequate to itself. He is obviously the Master. The Cage/criminal figure is on the contrary, coherently self-conscious. For him familial love exceeds the law no more and no less than do his desires in general. Hence he knows that his very subjecthood is in conflict with the law. In the Hegelian parallel thus the criminal is the Servant who gains an ultimate ascendancy and greater autonomy than the Master because he has an accurate grasp of his own practice.

Hegel demands that no one gets killed in the struggle. His is a struggle to the death that falls short of death. There can be no Master/Servant hierarchy if the Servant is dead, no Friday if Crusoe slays him. The Hollywood ending however requires victory and death. But although the criminal/Cage figure is finally killed in *Face/Off*, the last gasp of the plot returns us to the key matter of family life again. After both the criminal and his wife are killed, the real cop, re-united with his own true face, brings the criminal's orphan son to live with his own wife and daughter. Now in the guise of dual father, *the cop is the criminal*, not simply because he adopts his son, assuming his paternal responsibilities and so on, but because he acknowledges



the transcendence of family love over the partial and contradictory demands of pure legality. Therefore the cop is the criminal because he thus recognises the priority of the criminal's values. *Face/Off* thus ends in a synthesis eminently faithful to Hegel:

This process of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has...been represented as the action of one alone. But this action on the part of the one has itself the double significance of being at once its own action and the action of that other as well... The action has then a *double entente* not only in the sense that it is an act done to itself as well as to the other, but also in the sense that the act *simpliciter* is the act of the one as well as of the other regardless of their distinction.<sup>79</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

How then can Hegel's myth – which, let us affirm, is at once ontological and 'historical'<sup>80</sup> – how can this myth furnish a model for the artwork/ commodity relation? For, while it's easy to equate Lordship qua being-for-itself with art, as against Bondage qua being-in-itself with commodity production, how does the myth get filled out as an analogy of art markets? It is intriguing to note that the connection between the market and the Master/Servant hierarchy was already implicated in the discourse of Hegel's milieu during the gestation of the *Phenomenology*. In 1798 Hölderlin, a close friend of Hegel, already placed the image of the marketplace alongside that of the Servant [der Knecht] who is in thrall to those who threaten violence, i.e. to the ascendancy of the Master. In his poem *Menschenbeifall* ('Human Applause') Hölderlin wrote:

Ach! der Menge gefällt, was auf den Marktplatz taugt,  
Und es ehret der Knecht nür den Gewaltsamen;  
(Oh! the crowd is pleased by what sells in the marketplace,  
And the Servant honours only the violent;) <sup>81</sup>

Thus the analogy I pursue is by no means alien to the Hegelian milieu, though as will become apparent later in this chapter, the contemporary marketplace is not one that unifies its consumers as a crowd, but rather one that thrives on its capacity to co-opt the marginal and the exceptional. So, again, we come to the question of how the analogy of the Master/Servant scenario is fleshed out in the art/commodity relation. In other words, if the analogy does any real work, what for instance is the equivalent – in the artwork/commodity relation – of the Master risking his life or his quest for recognition in the consciousness of the Servant? The parallel for risking death is demonstrable and, I think, convincing. It is the avant-garde. Thus in certain privileged moments, as with Duchamp and the *Fountain*, there is a suspension of business as usual, of ‘normal’ purposive action in art. The artwork casts itself into an unknown region, a zone outside what may be art. Thus in the avant-garde gesture at its most uninhibited, the artwork courts its own annihilation in the name of a higher truth-content, to use Adorno’s term. *It courts nonsense*. In adopting this stance, the artwork testifies that the continuation of art demands the wager on the survival of art. This point should not be conflated with the ‘content’ of *Fountain* as a local contestation of the category ‘art.’ In other words this topic of the artwork that risks its own annihilation as art does not foreclose the scope or character of such artwork; the risk does not have to take the form of an analytic/conceptual presentation. Pollock’s transitional drip paintings of 1948 can be rightfully seen as enacting the same wager by foregoing the norms that secure identification of an artefact as a

painting. Pollock made the point himself in his doubt not as to whether these were good or successful paintings, but whether they were *paintings at all*. In Pollock as in Duchamp, the continuation, the very viability of art is risked in the name of, in Hegel's terms, a higher order of self-consciousness, of being-for-itself. In this way the artwork takes on the mantle of the Master since it too is a self-consciousness obliged to risk self-annihilation in order to survive through a constant re-attainment of recognition.

But now we need to say more about the issue of recognition. Why and how does the artwork demand recognition? The artwork, like the self-consciousness, demands recognition because *it does not exist as an unconditional autonomy*. It is something that escapes the state of sheer thinghood, it is the product that is not reified. Therefore it is spectral. Its spectres are indeed occasioned by material objects without thereby being identical with them. Its very being as a spectre that is shared and distributed among persons thus requires a form of recognition. Inevitably this recognition ultimately resides in the commodity. We can then regard the material objects that occasion the spectral artwork – the ‘medium-sized dry goods’ that are distributed – as always in need of commodification. It is not that artworks are easy to commodify, though they are. It is not that they are vulnerable to commodification, though they are. One must say rather that it is a case of demanding and depending upon the commodity form since it provides the sole means of anchoring the artwork in the general network of distributed meanings. And it doesn't matter if the artworks are missing, as they are with Gordon Matta-Clark. The counterfactual still holds: if there were artworks they would be expensive; in actuality there is a vast market hungry for Matta-Clarks, but no products to feed it.

In the first instance then, the commodity form inserts the artwork into the network of meanings, or ‘goods’, literally ‘good things’ or ‘things people believe to be

good.’ Thus it allocates a status to individual artworks relative to everything, which seems to be what Hickey calls a translation from one medium of value to another. But the issue is not one of inaugurating translatability across disparate goods. For Hegel’s myth, the recognition does not reside in reducibility/translatability. That is to say the Master is not translated into the values of the Servant nor vice versa. Rather, the artwork glories in its independence, in its being-for-itself precisely by reflecting itself in the alien mirror of the price index. It claims the refuge of autonomy by reflecting itself in the values of dependence, in the prices of goods made to order. In other words, the magical remainder that the artwork claims *to be* requires its barbaric other from which to exclude itself at the point of contact: it requires the embrace of dependency and servitude and translatability precisely to stage itself as the autonomous remainder that exceeds the ubiquitous transferability of the price index. It is to render itself as the autonomous remainder without translation that art is obliged to seek its recognition in the translatable indices of price. In order to cast itself in the role of the force that withholds its true force from the market, art is therefore duty bound to embrace the market and to insert its own dry and not so dry goods into the matrix of the general circulation of goods.

It should now be apparent why the parallelism of Hickey’s non-translatable universes of value is inadequate. Translation/non-translation is simply the wrong model. The reflexive dynamics of reciprocal recognitions is not equivalent to (non)translatability. Hickey’s breezy liberal stance lacks analytical substance. But by the same measure we can see why a functionalist sociological model of art also fails. Pierre Bourdieu’s version of this model, in his book *Distinction*, describes a generalised flattening out of cultural phenomena: the victory is that of an instrumentality to be named distinction, wherein art as such is of no more or no less consequence than jewellery as such, since both are equally beings for an other, for

the telos of (class) distinction. This model however says nothing about what art *does*. It merely describes instances where people try to instrumentalize artworks.

In Hegel's myth there is an extended epilogue. The aftermath of the Master/Servant standoff is what Hegel calls Stoicism. Stoicism is the Servant/Slave's response to his/her fate as producer to the needs of the Master, that is, as one condemned to dwell in reified production. Hegel's decisive point here is that the Stoic response is a purely intellectual response. In the Stoic stance freedom is claimed as the freedom to *think* clearly and truthfully: the clear-eyed Servant/Slave understands her circumstances, acknowledges the true nature of her labour and of the Master's undertakings. Thus the Stoic Servant locates autonomy at the level of ideas, while relinquishing the aspiration to autonomy at the level of actual production. In this sense the Stoic Servant trades freedom in the realm of representations for enchainment at the level of production. If we now turn this narrative onto the scene of recent/contemporary art, isn't there one inescapable analogy to be traced? Isn't the Stoic Servant none other than the figure of the Conceptual Artist who denigrates bodily making under the sign of craft, and who, in the same movement, stakes his/her autonomy upon the mast of the Idea? The Stoic, like the Conceptual Artist, defers indefinitely the staking of his/her autonomy at the level of material production.

The Lord/Bondsman hierarchy for Hegel constitutes a failure, but an important staging post on the road of and to Spirit qua self-positing autonomous consciousness immanently realised in social relations (Spirit is emphatically not the preserve of the individual). Lordship and Bondage is thus a necessary moment in a larger process, however unsatisfactory the experience may be. In my deployment of Hegel's narrative I do *not* propose to pay our respects to the larger framework. I wish

to apply the narrative in a freely instrumental manner as an analogy of the art/commodity standoff.

It seems that the failure of the parallelism in Hickey's description is that it pays insufficient attention to the autonomy of the artwork: it fails to grasp that the artwork determines its independence in relation to a realm of dependence. On the other hand, the failure of the functionalist sociological account of the artwork qua midwife of class distinction is, conversely, and perhaps surprisingly, to have missed the movement of the commodity. For are not today's producers of consumer electronics precisely in the condition of the Hegelian Servant, who in his accurate comprehension of his own production perceives both the necessity of his work in the global economy and the conditioned, reified and arbitrary nature of his work? Thus, for example, the paradox of Sony's recent "Go Create" tagline for its advertising. Here is the tell-tale disparity between the point of view of the enunciated and the point of view of enunciation:<sup>82</sup> it is the consumer who is enjoined to "Go Create," which is precisely what the Sony employees themselves are not doing in so far as they are too busy designing, manufacturing and marketing electronic goods. However the "Go Create" tagline has now been replaced by the altogether subtler and more profound "You make it a Sony". This surely constitutes copywriting of the highest order, bettering even Salman Rushdie's immortal cake tagline "Naughty but nice." Its profundity lies in its multiple ambiguities: its grammatical ambiguity – is it a command or a statement?; then the core ambiguity of 'make it' – meaning variously fabricate, transform, or determine a selection as in "Make mine a whiskey". In retrospect "Go Create" is confrontational – think of all the slackers who said to themselves "Hey I just wanted to grab a beer and watch a DVD – must I be creative too?" The new tagline retains the same slippage between enunciation and enunciated, only in a subtler guise. If it is the consumer who "makes it a Sony" then clearly the

Sony employee falls short of making it a Sony. The latter merely paves the way for the consumer's play, which will transform a potential Sony into a Sony. What is this scenario if not that of the Lord/Bondsman dialectic, in which the Bondsman attains a certain clarity<sup>83</sup> regarding his condition by understanding the effects of his production? The Sony that is not yet a Sony is the consumer product that already conceives a purified realm of autonomous self-positing creativity, which, on its own, it cannot attain. So we are emphatically not in the scheme of a generalised instrumentality - as in the caste distinction model of art - where what seemed to be autonomous creativity on the part of the Master turns out to be a merely instrumental devotion to the marking of distinction between the Master and the Servant.<sup>84</sup> The functionalist sociological model of art does not fully grasp the movement of the commodity. For it is the Servant, it is the commodity, - it is the Sony that is not yet a Sony - that conceives the locus of a self-positing autonomous creativity.

Given the above, where are we to position art-making? If we take the Hegel analogy seriously, as I propose, we don't aspire to break free of the art/commodity standoff (the Master/Servant standoff) but resolve instead to contest its stabilised moments. The social-functionalist model reduces art-making to an instrumentality, equivalent either to the Servant outflanking the Master, - by unmasking his art-for-art's-sake pose and revealing it as a means to an end - or to the Master's pathological immersion in the mechanics of domination. But this is to overlook the complexity of Hegel's set-up: for as we have seen in the case of the Sony that is yet to be transformed into a Sony, it is the Servant who ultimately holds the Master to the promise of his autonomy. The work of Donald Judd is a case in point.

## 2.8 Ideal Immanence in the Work of Donald Judd

In the above we dwelt on artists who attempt to picture the commodity relation, or if not directly that, at least to bring the relation out into the open, to name it. If we are to follow up on the reading of the art/commodity through Hegel, as I proposed, we need to disabuse ourselves of the image of the Hegelian dialectic as a narrative in which synthesis is a kind of happy medium, or correct measure between two polar extremes. *Face/Off* provides the clue, as we saw. The scenario is not at all resolvable into any kind of happy medium: it is instead that in the impulse toward one polarity, the opposing pole is found to appear. On this reading then the Master/Servant dialectic is not at all consistent with the textbook exegesis of Hegelian dialectic with its familiar structure of thesis, antithesis and synthesis: at least, not where synthesis is taken to be striking a balance, locating the correct equilibrium. In Žižek's reading:

Hegelian totality is not an organic Whole within which each element sticks to its limited place, but a 'crazy' totality in which a position reverts to its Other in the very movement of its excessive exaggeration....<sup>85</sup>

Isn't that the scenario of *Face/Off*? Isn't it that in his literally self-sacrificing gesture of surrendering his face in the name of the 'call of duty', the Travolta/cop character becomes the criminal, at first merely in the sense that he dons the mask, but then, as we saw, in his acceptance of the familial ethic of the criminal? Just where he carries his role to its extreme, the cop turns out to become the criminal. Hence, despite John Woo's ethnic credentials, it is not a scenario for a re-assuring Yin and Yang balance between good and evil. This is analogous to the Master/Servant scenario. Where the Master immerses himself in autonomous creation, he is both maximally dependent



on the Servant and completing the offer that is extended by the Servant's preparations. Indeed, in so far as the Servant's practice is the bedrock of the Master's, it is the Master's activity that reveals the Servant's labour as a preparation. The Master thinks he is writing a screenplay on his laptop; he is not wrong, yet that is exactly when he 'makes it a Sony'.

It should be apparent what this has to do with the art of Donald Judd. He it was, after all, who attempted artworks, sensuous particularities, purged of all metaphorical or signifying relations other than that born of the sign of an irreducible particularity. And what is this gesture except, by extension, an extreme negation of the kinds of symbolic relations upon which money and the commodity form depend?

The ambition to destroy both metaphor and relational structure without discarding sensuous particularity is a purist's Holy Grail. It's a quest for a pure artwork. Only an artwork qua pure autonomy could sustain the arrogance of this ambition. So it stands for one polar extreme, a supreme exaggeration. But – to pose a very simplistic question – *What do Judd's works look like?* In a cliché of art commentary, it is said that the exceptional artists impose their own criteria upon their critics. Their special newness forces interpretation onto new terrain, and that terrain imposes critical concepts of the artist's choosing. Thus, for instance, it is impossible to discuss Stella's painting adequately without recourse to his own terminology, as in 'relational painting' or 'vectored force.' Once the critic starts speaking the language, Stella has half won the interpretative battle already. And so it is with Judd, and his even more impressive terminology with 'specific objects.' The term has its own performative force: you can't define it without largely succumbing to its spell and accepting its validity. But strictly speaking it is nonsense: it is not a valid concept. Why? Because no object that is realized as a sensuous particularity can fail to

resemble. Resemblance can never be wholly extinguished. Perhaps if the specific objects were mere thought experiments, rather than compositions of aluminium and perspex, they might lack resemblance; but then they'd be specific concepts, not specific objects.

In fairness to Judd, his 1965 text *Specific Objects* is equivocal with respect to literalness. Since the term 'specific objects' became influential, it is often assumed that the text is a personal manifesto for Judd's version of minimalism. In fact the article is a broad survey of currents in contemporaneous art that Judd wishes to affirm, and several of the artists cited are not minimalists at all, e.g. Warhol, Bontecou, Chamberlain, Rauschenberg, Oldenberg. On the one hand Judd writes: "three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism..."<sup>86</sup> on the other hand, he also says: "Nothing made is completely objective, purely practical or merely present."<sup>87</sup> So exactly what is the position staked in the text? We need to read the first remark in its fuller context:

Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and literal space, space in and around marks and colours.<sup>88</sup>

Now things become clearer. The problem is "the problem of illusionism and literal space," it is the problem of having the two together. Judd's objection to the spatializing syntax of traditional art is not simply that it has illusionistic space; it is, rather, that traditional art necessarily uses marks in literal space to set up illusionistic space, in other words, it is the conjunction – the awkward sliding together while remaining incompatible – of illusionism and literal space that Judd finds unacceptable. For him the persistence of the dual manifestation means that the apparition of the one constantly undoes the integrity of the other. Judd's positive

claim in the text is for an art object that declares itself as an indivisible whole and thereby offers a total image. In this spirit he enthuses a propos of Bontecou's work: "an image has never been so large, been so explicit and aggressive."<sup>89</sup> What is really at stake in the *Specific Objects* text is a profound aversion to the temporality of the mark, and to the sequential movement of thought that it releases. What Judd wants is an artwork that is conceived, seen and felt but not evidently conceived in a temporal sequence. Judd's artworks have no evident past in the sense of previous states that are superseded. Since his pieces are conceived as totalities they must be seen as having no incremental developmental genesis.

Returning now to the foolish question: *What do Judd's objects look like?* The interpretative cul-de-sac is reached here when we succumb to the gambit of the specific object. If we buy into the gambit then the question 'What do they look like?' is an invalid question. From this perspective, it shows only that the questioner hasn't understood Judd. But as in other discussions of artworks in this text, it has been and will be essential that the viewer insists on the right to an 'inappropriate' or 'ill-informed' response. Surely the case of the artist who says "Don't ask what the work resembles, or you'll miss the point" is precisely the one for which one must consider the unintended structures of resemblance. (Or more generally, the viewer's default setting should be that of a hermeneutics of suspicion.) So once again, what do Judd's works look like? The best ones – those that best satisfy the notion of the specific object and remain the most open and penetrating – are the works of the period roughly 1965 –1972. And what do they look like? In works like the stainless steel wall piece *Untitled*, 1966 (Museum Ludwig) **[Fig.12]** one has to say: *they look like corporate ornamentation*. If the retort then is that the corporate architecture of the period in America was overwhelmingly High Modernist, and against ornamentation, this hardly

settles matters. Instead it underscores the fact that Judd unconsciously supplied in another context what was missing in architecture.

Judd is the pathological case of art that attempts to cleanse itself of metaphor and relation. It tries above all to refuse the metaphorical registers offered by relational structure. His objects attempt to be the pure 'this, here.' In our Hegelian conversation we accepted the figure of "a 'crazy' totality in which a position reverts to its other in the very movement of its excessive exaggeration." Judd's object purports to be the pure 'this, here.' The commodity presents itself as 'this, not-here' or as 'this, elsewhere' since it heralds "the global usurpation of belonging."<sup>90</sup> Yet, I claim, in the movement towards the pure 'this, here' of the Juddian specific object, what appears is precisely its other in the guise of the corporate ornament, the heraldic call of the commodity, the 'this, elsewhere.'

## **2.9 Singular Seriality**

When is a series not a series? – For instance, when it is serial singularity. That's to say, if distinction as such is predetermined – as in art's law of difference – then it is strictly not a consequence of the artwork. The causal chain goes in the opposite direction: it is precisely the artwork that is the product of the law of difference rather than difference being generated by the artwork. It is worth quoting at some length Brian Massumi's reflections on the circumstances of a kind of systematic disintegration – if such a paradox can be made plausible - of the arenas of cultural products in the service of capital:

[The] more varied, and even erratic, the better. Normalcy starts to lose its hold. The regularities start to loosen. This loosening of normalcy is part of capitalism's dynamic. It's not simple liberation. It's capitalism's own form of power. It's no longer institutional disciplinary power that defines everything, it's capitalism's power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market. The oddest of affective tendencies are okay – as long as they pay. Capitalism starts intensifying or diversifying affect, but only in order to extract surplus-value. It hijacks affect in order to intensify profit potential. It literally valorises affect. The capitalist logic of surplus-value production starts to take over the relational field that is also the domain of political ecology, the ethical field of resistance to identity and predictable paths. It's very troubling and confusing, because it seems that there's been a certain kind of convergence between the dynamic of capitalist power and the dynamic of resistance.<sup>91</sup>

For Massumi then the problem is not only that differentiation serves the needs of capital, but, more urgent than that, it's that within this horizon of capitalist dissemination and dispersal, everything that used to be an index of otherness, outsidership and dissent is now played by the market as a diversification opportunity, a capillary network growth of the market. In a similar spirit, Jean-Luc Nancy declares: “when [capital] plays the game of multiplying differences, no one is fooled: difference belongs neither to the work nor to the product as such.”<sup>92</sup>

Nancy has attempted in a number of texts to provide an account of a community of singularities. He begins from the insistence that being singular is always akin to addressing something or somebody. Being as such is a mode of address that requires something or somebody in the role of addressee. Nancy's term

for this primordial ontological condition of address is ‘exposure.’ His favoured metaphor for being singular exposed is the human face. The face is, he notes, always already an apparatus of address: it faces something or somebody. Its being is to face, to address. Whether solitary or gregarious, the face always already implies an addressee. But more than that, the face is invisible to its owner. Therefore the face is at least doubly dependent on its addressee, since only by scrutinising the responses of the addressee does the owner get a feel for the performances of the face, their effects and shortcomings. The face then is necessarily an apparatus of exposure, meaning being exposed to others. Just as every face in principle addresses every other face, so each singularity stands toward every singularity. But this is emphatically not the differential value of the structuralists. Structuralist differential value, as modelled on Saussure, is a combinatorial syntax, a gridwork of sense. Nancy’s notion of primordial address – ‘exposure’ – is by no means bounded by sense. It applies equally to nonsense. Thus Nancy considers that falling outside, being excluded, excluding, being rejected, or choosing to reject are all nonetheless modes of relation, or registers of ‘exposure’. Where singularities reject one another, Nancy insists, a relation of rejection holds. The relations between singularities fall where and how they may, whether sensically or nonsensically. A community of singularities is composed of such relations. But these relations don’t operate as structuralist differential value because they are not generative of the singularities that are their terms. For Nancy singularity cannot be understood as an effect of structure, not because it is prior to structure, but because it is equiprimordial with relationality as such:

...singularity does not proceed from such a detaching of clear forms or figures.... Singularity perhaps does not *proceed* from anything. It is not a work resulting from an operation. There is no process of “singularization,” and

singularity is neither extracted, nor produced, nor derived. Its birth does not take place *from out of* or as an *effect of*: On the contrary, it provides the measure according to which *birth*, as such, is neither a production nor a self-positioning, the measure according to which the infinite birth of finitude is not a process that emerges from a ground (*fond*) or from a fund (*fonds*) of some kind. The “ground” is itself, through itself and as such, *already* the finitude of singularities.<sup>93</sup>

Singularity then is irreducible. It doesn't require a cause, whether efficient or final. A singularity is an irreducible finitude. From the infinity of finite singularities we chart relations. It follows that where 'serial singularity' is pre-determined and produced by a hungry differential matrix like the contemporary art market, this is really no singularity, merely a 'bad infinity.'

But how are we think about the series in relation to singularity? If our diagnosis names the disease as serial singularity, what might be singular seriality? We have followed Sartre's account of seriality as a process of continually deferred agency: a 'logic of the they' in which I model my action on how I believe 'they' do and will behave; a kind of infinite regress of deferred responsibility. In other words, a rationality of modelling my behaviour on 'their' behaviour, real or imagined. This is not unrelated to the motif in psychoanalytic thought according to which somebody is attractive if I believe that others find him/her attractive. Now while we have embraced the power of Sartre's critique, we want to locate an alternative understanding of the series, of seriality that does not impose a 'bad infinity.' The series that predetermines singularity is of course the opposite of what's needed. But beyond that, we need some account of how the series could be compatible with

singularity at all. That's to say, it is far from self-evident that singularities could figure as members of a series, since they are surely singular and incommensurable.

The series I'm concerned with is the series of artworks. But this already suggests at least two distinct series: the series of oeuvres, and the series of works that makes up an oeuvre. To cut through the potential complexity here we can approach things normatively: the singularity we seek should be realised both at the level of the oeuvre and at that of the individual work. Already then there's a partial answer to the question about how a singularity can enter a series in that we find a relation of singularity to series already in place in the relation of the single work to the oeuvre.

In his texts of the 1960s, especially *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze is concerned with exactly this issue, although he prefers to couch it terms of repetition. And what after all is a repetition other than an extension of a series? For Deleuze there is "bare repetition", which is not unlike Hegel's "bad infinity," however much Deleuze goes out of his way to distance himself from Hegelian thinking in *Difference and Repetition*; and there is "clothed repetition," which is to be affirmed. On one level we are in the vicinity of modernist repetition here, in the spirit of Gertrude Stein's "a rose is a rose is a rose": as Deleuze says, he notes "how the repetition of the question itself develops the relation between the problem and repetition."<sup>94</sup> Thus any attentive, alert and open repetition promises to shift the circumstance of our address, the very position from which we repeat. And with each subsequent repetition the positions of address are shifted anew. But Deleuze wants to affirm something more precise than that. The kind of series his preferred repetition may constitute is harder to trace, harder to extend, harder to protend.

Ordinary repetition is prolongation, continuation or that length of time that is stretched into duration: bare repetition (it can be discontinued, but remains



fundamentally the repetition of the same). However *who* is prolonged in this manner? A singularity, as far as the vicinity of another singularity? On the contrary, what defines the extraordinary power of that clothed repetition more profound than bare repetition is the reprise of singularities by one another, the condensation of singularities into one another, as much in the same problem or Idea as between one problem and another or from one Idea to another. Repetition is this emission of singularities, always with an echo or resonance which makes each the double of the other, or each constellation the redistribution of another.<sup>95</sup>

Thus the profound repetition – the ‘clothed’ repetition – extends a series of events which is intensely paradoxical: for at each moment of development – with each gesture of re-constitutive repetition – the given or preceding singularities are re-configured, and so *a fortiori* their ‘togetherness’ – their very being as series – is re-grouped and freshly woven. Thus the next singularity contests and re-casts the prior singularities, and thereby contests and re-organises, even re-deploys the series itself. Thus at the very least we have a series, a one, which nonetheless differs from itself afresh at the point of impact of each of its constituent moments. It is a one, which is also not a one: it is a multiple. It is both unified with respect to a problematic, and polyvalent. Heidegger, staking similar territory, emphasises the difficulty of genuine repetition in the face of the resistance of the possible:

By a repetition of a fundamental problem we understand the disclosure of the primordial possibilities concealed in it. The development of these possibilities has the effect of transforming the problem and thus preserving it in its import as a problem. To preserve a problem means to free and to

safeguard its *intrinsic powers, which are the source of its essence and which make it possible as a problem*. The repetition of the possibilities of a problem, therefore, is not a simple taking up of that which is ‘in vogue’ with regard to this problem.... The possible, thus understood, in fact hinders all genuine repetition and thereby all relation to history....<sup>96</sup>

The key claim here for our purposes is that continuity of ‘genuine’ repetition depends upon discontinuity. In other words, a problem exerts its weight and sustains its currency as an issue only by being continually re-located and re-ignited. For Deleuze the event that is the repetition qua intervention does not merely re-constellate existing singularities, though it does do that; rather, the eventual act of repetition fuses and condenses singularities into new singularities. As Deleuze wrote in *The Logic of Sense*, events are to be understood “as jets of singularities.”<sup>97</sup> Thus understood, repetition is also continuation by re-commencement.

Deleuze’s account of Ideas, with a capital “I”, sounds like Plato. His Ideas sound like Platonic forms: eternal, inhuman, pre-linguistic and anti-social. He acknowledges the point himself when he describes his own movement of thought in *The Logic of Sense* as a “quasi-Platonism”. The Idea for Deleuze is not a social or linguistic notion: it is a fecund nodal point of problematics “beyond the representations of consciousness.”<sup>98</sup> It is rather a problematic or ‘problem field’ that has its reality as a virtual domain.

The virtual possesses the reality of a task to be performed or a problem to be solved: it is the problem which orientates, conditions and engenders solutions, but these do not resemble the conditions of the problem.<sup>99</sup>

This sounds fine, but what does it suggest for something as much mired in social formations as painting? For after all, there may be some plausibility in assigning an ontology of the objects of mathematics to a realm outside the historical and social, a realm of pure problem-fields. But painting? It seems unlikely.

George Kubler described a process of development of painting qua series of flat pictorial objects. But while Kubler's account<sup>100</sup> of how painting dissimulates flatness is exemplary, his notion of painting's serial continuation is ultimately too logical and pseudo-technical. As I have argued above, painting necessarily involves technics and a prosthetic immersion in the context of embodied judgment; yet painting necessarily exceeds the ambit of its technical considerations. Its 'outside' – in the guise of and by means of the ruse of the icon, or the sign, or the resemblance, or even colour itself, as will be discussed at the end of the thesis – is ever seeping in. Thus the notion – which is really Kubler's position – that painting sustains its own authentic seriality by successively occupying the logically conceivable positions of its pseudo-technical specification is not credible. The real parameters of painting are too complex and divergent for such a model.

Nonetheless, given that there have been modernist affirmations of authentic seriality qua 'genuine' repetition – isn't T S Eliot's affirmation of tradition just such a claim for creative repetition? – we need to ask what is distinct and enabling in Deleuze's account. Henry Ford's standardised production projects and extols an image of 'bare repetition.' Yet to a pedantic empirical mind it is a flawed image insofar as each ostensibly congruent chassis or crankshaft is in fact a unique formation of material with its unique microscopic fingerprint and its signature stresses and faultlines. It is exactly this thought that Deleuze expresses in his discussion of Kierkegaard where he states: "According to the law of nature, repetition is impossible."<sup>101</sup> To this empiricist-nominalist thinking, sameness is an

elusive spectre. It is graspable only with respect to determinate purposes, such as buying and selling cars, i.e. pricing them. From this nominalist perspective it is uniqueness that is unavoidable, and sameness that is, on the contrary, astonishing and in need of explanation: “If repetition is possible, it is due to miracle rather than to law.”<sup>102</sup> “In every respect, repetition is a transgression. It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality.”<sup>103</sup>

In what way can we conceive of repetition as a transgression? Or even as an act of creation? We’ve seen that for Deleuze repetition is miraculous whereas mere duration, mere extension is the norm, literally, the law. For this thinking then, it is repetition that makes the creative intervention by asserting and instituting an affective relationship between the events that make up the series. Hence the recommencement that is ‘genuine’ repetition. “(F)ar from being opposed to the emergence of the New, the proper Deleuzian paradox is that something truly New can *only* emerge through repetition. What repetition repeats is not the way the past ‘effectively was’ but the *virtuality* inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization.”<sup>104</sup> At this point we can start to grasp why we are not dealing here with anything like modernist affirmations of repetition. Getrude Stein’s poetics of repetition hinges on the intersection of the synchronic and the diachronic. What matters for us is that the modernist conceptions of repetition are fundamentally temporal and linear. The Deleuzian proposal is that, on the contrary, repetition is an encounter with the virtual which is by definition eternal, a domain of problem-forming potential rather than of moments and durations. The reason that repetition is creative is that it (re-)invents the series. Thus, as Deleuze notes, the series is strictly many series since each of its constituent acts of repetition has created its own new

version of the series. In this sense, the series differs from itself at each link in its articulation.

Alain Badiou's conception of the series is in some ways compatible with Deleuze's accounts of repetition and the 'sense-event.' Badiou, like Deleuze, is preoccupied with the problem of the new. But Badiou's version of the event, that which exceeds its causal setting and brings forth the new, stresses the creation of axioms. An axiom is of course a deliberate presumption,<sup>105</sup> not unlike a performative. An axiom is not based on evidence or research, or correspondence to a prior reality, and, again like the performative, it does not propose to represent any state of things independent of its own effects: its validity is not a matter of adequate groundings, but of what consequences it is capable of precipitating. An axiom is not a description, nor a definition. It acknowledges no past and no precursor, but occurs as a pure punctal present: "An axiom is precisely that paradoxical declaration that asserts an eternal principle because it is established 'in one point.'"<sup>106</sup> For Badiou, the event empowered by the axiom is one that releases an infinite series of resonant consequences. This he calls the truth event. The truth event's power is evidenced in its capacity to release an infinite series of echoing responses, which in one of Badiou's key phrases, are said to be 'faithful to the event.' And in a further compatibility with Deleuze, the notion of fidelity to the event proposes a difficult creative repetition, one that can re-cast the spirit, rather than the letter of the inaugural event.

Badiou is not concerned, in the first instance, to offer criteria for an event that would allow events to be demarcated from non-events. There is the suspicion that his preferred exemplary 'events' – Lenin, Mao, St Paul, Danton, Beckett – contrive a radical wish list after the fact. There is the doubt that if the devil is said

always to be in the detail, Badiou's account qua generally applicable model remains at best slippery, as in the following:

The distinction between events is always a distinction between the consequences of events because an event itself is always a perfect weakness. It is such because the being of an event is to disappear.... The event is nothing - just a sort of illumination - but the consequences of an event within a situation are always very different.<sup>107</sup>

If Badiou's theoretical undertaking offers no generalizable criteria for distinguishing an event from a pseudo-event we might well ask what its value can be. Badiou concedes that he does not and cannot supply criteria in the mode of formulas for the event. Thus he notes in his *Ethics* that the Hitler (bogus) event was "formally indistinguishable from an event - it is precisely this that led Heidegger astray."<sup>108</sup> In the useful interview seminar that appears at the end of *Infinite Thought* we get a clear sight of how Badiou proposes to account for this problem. There he says that truth is "*index sui*."<sup>109</sup> In other words truth is irreducible and therefore not a possible object of knowledge. If there were generalizable criteria for the event - which for Badiou means for its truth - then truth would be a possible object knowledge. This is what Badiou refuses. Instead he argues persuasively that it must be impossible to determine the evental force of an act or occurrence from within the setting of that act. Thus a stabilised judgment about an event is not possible at the site of the event. The event is by definition undecidable, or in his language 'supernumerary.'<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Badiou's event is liminal in that it stakes a claim that exceeds the parameters of the situation, and is beyond the scope and competence and exceeding the symbolic resources of that situation:

... the Iranian Revolution was inscribed in often archaic Islamic preaching, whereas the core of popular conviction and its symbolisation exceeded this preaching from all quarters. Nothing has better attested to the fact that an event is supernumerary, not only with respect to its site but also to the language available to it, than this discord between the opacity of the intervention and the vain transparency of representations. The upshot of this discord is that the events in question are not yet named, or rather that the work of their naming (what I call the *intervention* on the event) is not yet complete, far from it.<sup>111</sup>

Given these commitments, it is not surprising that Badiou insists on the categorical separation of knowledge and truth. Truth here is far from banal facticity, nothing like the 'what is' of the everyday and the normalised. Truth for Badiou is rare and inventive: it is what the event creates.

The immense tension that persists is that between the contingency of the creative act that proposes its chosen axiom - and thereby comes to generate the event, and thereafter, in its wake, the series through which it resounds - and the universality of the event. There is also, relatedly, the tension between the creativity of the axiomatic proposition and the bond of respect in the notion of fidelity to an event; moreover, while the former asserts its futural force, the latter is retrospective. And anyway, what are we to do about competing claims for fidelity to a given event?

The contestations of value in art - specifically in relation to the legacies of influence - are instances of these competing claims for fidelity. In the case of the Pollock event - surely *the* universal event of post-Cubist painting - are we to side with Greenberg, and agree that Louis, Noland, Frankenthaler and Olitski were the

faithful ones? Or do we look elsewhere, outside of painting proper, for candidates for fidelity, say, in the work of Eva Hesse or Carl Andre or Richard Serra or Lawrence Weiner? Pollock's work at its best has a characteristic fearlessness; yet Greenberg's successor team doesn't measure up to such intensity. So there's a curious way in which fidelity to the Pollock event mitigates against replicating Pollock's painting procedures, since after the event, they no longer require the same courage. Fidelity to the *spirit*, not the letter of this inaugural event therefore demands a degree of dissimilarity to the inaugural event. Here then we touch back on the point of the earlier Heidegger citation: that genuine repetition – the elusive continuity of the series – is so hard to attain. Indeed, it is so difficult that it becomes tempting to say that we're still awaiting a series from the Pollock event: nothing yet quite secures the necessary re-commencement. Eva Hesse's suspended string works of 1969 come closest perhaps to the fidelity we seek.

Deleuze and Badiou offer powerful accounts of what a 'genuinely repetitious' series, or as I call it, a singular seriality might be like, instead of the reductive seriality of the self-regulating and self-policing commodity market. I have said nothing about the theoretical discords between Deleuze and Badiou. These comprise major philosophical disputes too extensive for this text. To simplify massively: Deleuze's ontology is vitalist, committing itself to the power of the virtual and of pure becoming; whereas Badiou's ontology is oriented around the void. These determinations are of direct consequence for their differing views of the event. Whereas Badiou's event is said to require a decisive *subtraction* from the pre-existing status quo, and so marks itself off from the past insofar as the site of the event represents the sedimentations of the past, for Deleuze the event is always a potentiality that was implicit in the latent complexity of the situation. This is an important divergence.



We can revisit the case of Duchamp now in the light of this divergence. Should we understand the intervention of *Fountain*, or of the readymade in general, as a deconcealment of a latent complexity in art, or should we grasp it instead as an axiomatic gesture that both inaugurates a new series and negates the symbolic environment amid which it was staged? The first version is the Deleuzian, the second follows the model of Badiou. It should also be clear that these two readings correspond to the different readings of *Fountain* by de Duve and Kosuth. It is de Duve who insists that *Fountain* simply reveals what was already implicit in avant-garde practice since Manet. Thus for de Duve the readymade deconceals a force within the pre-existing complexity. For Kosuth on the contrary the readymade decisively negates and subtracts from the pre-existing state of affairs, and institutes the reign of art as concept. My disavowal of the readymade in Chapter 1 was a rejection of Duchamp's disembodied judgment. It was not a rejection of the bare claim that the readymade was an outgrowth of the history of painting in particular. So on the question of this pairing up of Deleuze/de Duve on the one side against Badiou/Kosuth on the other, I must favour the former. Indeed, in Chapter 3 I will examine how the conjunction of painting and the readymade release new possibilities. This very claim supposes that there can be some kind of meeting of the two – of painting and readymade. If the latter were a resolute and uninflected subtraction from inherited continuity, like the Badiou event, it would be hard to account for such a meeting.

If serial singularity as the 'bad infinity' of programmed difference is a means of *appearing*, a way for artworks to emerge out of murky indistinction, then by the same token, the 'genuine repetition' of singular seriality involves a risk; in practice, for an artwork, primarily a risk of disappearing. This risk of disappearance is real. Artworks do disappear. But their disappearance may indicate only that they lack

difference with respect to the current circumstance, whereas altered states will allow them to appear in their full distinction. The latent continuity of the problematic may thus overcome the terms of an artwork's disappearance. With respect to the problematic, the singularity of the artwork can compose distinctiveness as a potentiality. Thus we can adapt from both Deleuze and Badiou in claiming, for instance, that Malevich's work disappears and then reappears in the 1960s through Blinky Palermo's work. Alternatively, we can return to Duchamp himself. De Duve stresses that the reception period of the Duchampian readymade comes extraordinarily late: one can plausibly claim that *Fountain* of 1917 is properly received only around 1960. Furthermore, nearly all Duchamp's original readymades are lost – they literally disappeared. Duchamp had to authenticate replicas, often in small editions, long after the event. When we look at *Fountain*, the *Bottlerack* and in most cases *Pharmacy* (it seems there is still 'the original') in a museum today we are seeing a later replica. It is undeniable then that the readymade disappeared and returned. Serial singularity is programmed appearance. The gambit of singular seriality on the contrary is that in risking disappearance the artwork also declares a potentiality for (re-)appearance.

## Chapter 3 Gesture and Trace

### 3.1 The Indexical Mark

Returning then to the gesture as a mode of embodied judgment: it would be reasonable to expect the indexical mark, as a trace of movement in space and time, to be a privileged apparatus of embodied judgment.

Is there today anything remaining to be said about the indexical mark? Haven't we seen it all, heard it all as regards the indexical aspects of the mark in painting? About the ways the mark in painting tells a story about its past? It would seem hard to find much at all new to add to what we have come to know.

Then what do we know? And in the spirit of Donald Rumsfeld, can there be things that we know, that we don't know we know? We know very well that the double code of depiction plus indexicality has been ever central to painting, whether it be the European tradition of oil painting since as long ago as the seventeenth century (or let's say since late Titian), or the Chinese tradition of brushed ink painting. In these traditions the mark that both depicts, and refers to its own making, is fundamental and has been endlessly elaborated. We can further observe that a key move in modernist painting asks the question about the necessity of depiction and then tries to answer it by locating the whole operativity of painting in an indexical mark purged of its depictive function. This is one good way to understand a painting such as *Gotham News* [Fig.13], which will be considered further below. But as seasoned postmoderns, we know also that the indexical qualities of the mark can be hammed up.<sup>112</sup> And we are well aware of a varied line of painting since Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *II*, and including Lichtenstein's *Brushstroke* paintings of the mid-sixties, which took that

knowingness as its focus and made the older idea of direct indexicality look naïve. These things we know.

Later in this chapter we will follow Derrida's account of *differance* and what he calls the trace, or the archē-trace. To grasp the mark as index is to see it as a trace. This rudimentary idea of the indexical mark is important, and is by no means irrelevant to the Derridean topic of the archē-trace. Yet in crucial respects it is quite distinct from Derrida's trace, as will become apparent. So I want to posit the givenness of the indexical mark as a necessary preliminary to the development of the chapter through the reading of Derrida. But before that happens, we need to situate the indexical gesture in terms of its broader commitments and values. In other words, given what we already understand about the indexical mark, what do we take the consequences of those understandings to be?

There are broadly affirmative and negative responses to this question. On the positive wing, there is the affirmation of the indexical mark as the mark that draws attention to its own contingency, and so to the wider contingency of the picture it helps to paint and of which it is a component. Indexicality is always a kind of 'thrownness.' It rhetoricizes the mark, like a scar, as a contingent event in the basic sense that the mark has a past, was previously absent; that the space it occupies was unmarked space and is now marked space. So the indexical mark dramatizes its invasive force as an incursion into unmarked space. In contrast to prevailing image technologies, the crucial point here is that this mark emphasizes the artifice and constructedness of the image. In that vital respect it is then very unlike the mark in the guise of the pixel that serves much of the surrounding visual culture. The mark capable of concealing the constructedness of the image is the pixel, and it is calibrated to do just that. Thus it plays a leading role in an image culture that conceives the image-making apparatus as transparent. That's to

say the image technology is conceived as passive with respect to a pre-existing visual entity, and it is understood as recording and documenting that entity. The dissonance between the indexical mark and the pixel is evidenced in the difficulty of relating indexicality to anything like photographic seeing, as will be further considered later in the chapter, in the context of the marked readymade image. But the key point here again is that the indexical mark offers a genuine critical intensity in contrast to the dominant mark within prevailing image technologies. The difficulty of refreshing and renewing that intensity is immense.

If paintings like Rauschenberg's and Lichtenstein's declare the difficulty of renewing indexicality, the negative response might be that this difficulty is not difficulty but full impossibility. However, there is a more interesting and ambivalent response on the negative side. It is suggested in these remarks by Baudrillard:

In a technical civilization of operatory abstraction, where neither machines nor domestic objects require much more than a controlling gesture... modern art in all its forms has for its primary function the salvation of the gestural moment, the intervention of the integral subject.<sup>113</sup>

From this perspective the positive attributes of the indexical mark turn sour and reappear as forms of sentimentality. In a similar vein Agamben writes: "An age that has lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them."<sup>114</sup> It's a plausible suggestion: the technicity of the lifeworld increasingly trivializes the gesture, reducing it to a point. This "controlling gesture" - flipping the switch, pressing the start button - offers no unfolding in space or time, no sequential aspect whatsoever. And it doesn't really matter what the gesture is exactly - whether

done with a thumb or an elbow or a pen – so long as it produces the required effect. It is instrumental in this narrow sense that its value is entirely dependent on operational outcome – is purely, exclusively teleological, while fully exchangeable – thumb or pen or whatever so long as it gets the job done. As pure telos, it is a gesture without a rhetorical or connotative dimension. Consequently, in Baudrillard's scenario, the artistic gesture is ushered in as symbolic compensation for the evacuation of the lived gesture. Hence the gesture in artworks is the polar opposite of the "controlling gesture", it is pure rhetoric. It is evident now, however, that painting has developed modes for prolonging and re-elaborating the indexical mark that by no means safeguard the integrated subjectivity that Baudrillard distains. As we will see, in paintings by Reed, Brown and Richter, among others, the indexical mark is being developed in new ways that by no means offer refuge for such a subject.

To the extent that every material thing in the world is an outcome some causal sequence or other, its appearance could be expected to be evidence of that causality. This is the sense in which indexicality ought to be a general condition of things. In Gell's terms: "Every artefact is a 'performance' in that it motivates the abduction of its coming-into-being in the world. Any object that one encounters in the world invites the question 'how did this thing get to be here?' " <sup>115</sup> Indexicality ought to be a general condition of artefacts. But plainly it isn't generally manifest: I look at a TV or a computer or even a roll of selotape without ascertaining much at all about how they were made. We agree to defer to the expertise of those few who can read off from the appearance of such artefacts, pay them to carry out repairs and so forth. Therefore much of the indexicality of contemporary artefacts is inscrutable except to the initiated. What that implies is that manifest indexicality in painting has to tread a fine line between

sentimentality, in a sense very close to Baudrillard's, on the one hand, and a kind of symbolic empowerment, on the other. By the latter I mean that the indexical mark in painting enables a certain demystification of artefact and artifice. Thus, when the perennial scandalized viewer of Pollock complains that anybody could make a drip painting - even a child -, the reply should be Yes, indeed, that is the scale of Pollock's accomplishment: everything is done with the bare mark. Such is the real invitation of Pollock's work: in an important sense anybody could do it. So if it's right to speak now of an age of inscrutable indexicality, painting has to be grasped in a dialectical relation to that condition: it operates between the precarious fringe of sentimentality and affirmative demystification. It declares that, on a certain level, all artifice and all technics are as crude as the drip or the smear, and that, what's more, the social fact of the inscrutability of technics is nonetheless always a theatrical conceit.

Let us look now at two paintings. *Gotham News* [Fig.13] exemplifies a particular expectation of embodied judgment where the painting *is* its own making and refers to its own making. Yet still it articulates a sense of resemblance. I say sense of resemblance because it is hard to specify what the resemblance is of. In contrast to de Kooning, I want to look also at Richter's *Inpainting-Grey*, 1972 [Fig.14]. Looking at the two it becomes obvious that the sense of resemblance in *Gotham News* depends upon the differences between the marks. Whereas, the absence of resemblance in the Richter depends upon the homogeneity of the marks. As you spend time with *Gotham News* you appreciate how fine-tuned are its internal checks and balances, and how painstakingly its network of internal differences has been composed. You realize that it took a long time. Yet it feels fast. It has the feel of an assembly of instantaneous movements. It is a white monochrome in disguise, yet it feels colourful. The white allows the wet-on-wet

coloured marks to get picked up where white and colour mingle – thus the coloured mark can be manifested as a traced movement. This would all be far more difficult, if not impossible with any hue other than white. De Kooning has to use the white as a bright but neutral medium of the index, without his positive chromatic marks getting significantly diluted as they mingle with the white. There are many such dissimulations at work here. The fuller complexity of the indexical mark is implicit in the painting. One could then interpret much subsequent painting, like the Lichtenstein *Brushstrokes*, as the rendering explicit of these dissimulations. But I don't use that word as a pejorative. These are fabulous, virtuoso dissimulations that stage the conjunction of seeming spontaneity of mark with balanced, sectored composition.

*Inpainting-Grey*, 1972 is also an image of its own making. But if *Gotham News* manages to rhetoricize its own component decisions and present them as purposeful, decisive and finely poised, *Inpainting-Grey* suggests instead aimlessness, boredom and the arbitrariness and pointlessness of stopping where it does. Indeed, this and the other three grey paintings in the same group by Richter ought to be boring. But they are not. What we find in these dense grey paintings is an attempt to open up a position within gestural abstraction which is neither affirmative in manner of the de Kooning, yet nor is it securely didactic in the way that *Factum I* and *II* must be understood as being. After painting like this, de Kooning's idiom can also be seen afresh. That's to say in demonstrating how the gesture can be constitutive of the painted image without playing the compensatory role analysed by Baudrillard, *Inpainting-Grey* re-inflects our response to *Gotham News*. Hereafter we don't concede that the latter's force is exhausted by the semiotic of expressive immediacy. The sheer complexity of the image casts doubt on the claims around immediacy. The point is rather that every mark in *Gotham*



*News* is both singular and is a component within an architectonic ensemble. Every mark is at once singular and nodal, networked. Every sector is simultaneously convex and concave. The marks are by no means accumulations of immediacies: nowhere do they lack complexity. Already in the feedback between *Inpainting-Grey* and *Gotham News* the indexical mark opens a plural field of contingency.

### 3.2 Crary's Seurat

If the discrepancy between the pixel and the gesture is emblematic of painting's relation to contemporary image technologies, then isn't it going to be necessary to say something about the pixel's forebear in painting, the dot? In this regard it is valid to address the work of Jonathan Crary. His account of the dot in Seurat in particular, and of the role of embodiment in the visual cultures of modernity in general so directly contravenes my own position that I will now spend some time responding to it.

In his book *Suspensions of Perception* Jonathan Crary provides what will surely prove to be the most fruitful account of Seurat's paintings *Parade de Cirque* and *Cirque* for at least a generation. If anyone doubts the complexity of Seurat's critical enterprise this is the text they should appraise. And we should recall that everyone from Malevich to Matisse to Picasso to Mondrian to Kandinsky to Picabia to Riley confronted Seurat's pointillism at some moment in their careers. Duchamp too admired the intervention that Seurat's dot delivered. This community of influence was and is so profound because Seurat's reduction of the gesture to the dot is one of the fundamental inaugural moments in Modernist art. Crary connects Seurat's method of marking and depicting on the one hand to his

imagery on the other. *Parade de Cirque* (1887-88) [Fig.31] is an image of a sideshow, a stage show of a kind employed along the façade of a Parisian circus as a draw. The stage shows were free, but were intended to entice their audience into paying to enter the main attraction, which was invisible from the outside to non-payers. In other words, the stage show is advertising. Seurat's painting is a painting of advertising. Crary argues convincingly that *Parade de Cirque* is a bleak but accurate anticipation of the subordination of the aesthetic to the commodity by the development in modernity of new modes of (in)attention, especially through photography and film. For Crary, visual (in)attention develops in modernity into a kind of distracted contemplation in which the presence of the visualized realm is always withheld or deferred. In *Parade*, according to Crary, Seurat both anticipates the usurpation of the visual-aesthetic by advertising and the commodity-as-spectacle, and – and this is crucial – allegorises that process qua withholding and deferring of presence in his own pointillist mode of depiction: thus Seurat himself withholds the presences of his figures from the viewer, for whom they disperse into gaseous clouds of evaporating colour particles as one draws near to the picture surface. But for Crary the pointillist technique does not only allegorise the deferral of presence of commodified aesthesis. It also symbolizes the process whereby the advertisement draws together an audience which it simultaneously fragments and disperses: it is a crowd but a non-group and un-collective. Crary's argument is that the crowd-as-audience is the gathered yet dispersed un-collective much as the figure in a pointillist painting is a spurious cluster of dots with indistinct boundaries and without organic linkage between the individual atoms that compose it.

Seurat discloses ways in which individuals, in their status and capacities as observers, can be assembled into new pseudo-solidarities, whether as crowds or audiences, even while maintaining their effective isolation. The painting reiterates on the level of content what it produces through its technical system: the work is a solicitation of attention. The sideshow, with its musicians and performers, is a device of *attraction*, meant to focus the attention of the urban strollers and to persuade them to buy a ticket for access to the ‘main’ attraction in the tent in front of them. But it is an attraction that will forever be withheld from them, from us, for this is a painting fundamentally designed around the cancellation and suspension of what it promises to reveal. The spectator of this painting, both as individual and as part of a collective subjectivity, is inescapably in its perpetual play of attraction and absence.<sup>116</sup>

There is nothing here I wish to reject. I find the argument persuasive, and Seurat’s painting comes to light as an exemplary critical engagement with the commodity. But there’s more.

Let us place the brilliant analyses of Seurat in the broader context of Crary’s critical-historical project. Consider Crary’s argument in the earlier book *Techniques of the Observer*, which connects in important respects to his discussion of Seurat. In the first book the historical argument is that a number of overlapping practices and discourses in the nineteenth century – in particular photography, the prehistory of cinema in the cinematograph and the Zoëtropes et cetera, together with physiological research into the nervous system – brought about a gradual and accelerating autonomization of vision, in both theory and practice, as the precondition for what will be the full-blown technologies of

spectacular consumption in the twentieth century. For Crary the autonomization of vision means ultimately a disembodied vision; an abstraction of optical experience from its intertwining with the other senses, touch especially, and from the lived intensities and extensities of embodiment in general. “The prehistory of the spectacle and the ‘pure perception’ of modernism” he writes, “are lodged in the newly discovered territory of a fully embodied viewer but *the eventual triumph of both depends on the denial of the body, its pulsings and phantasms, as the ground of vision.*”<sup>117</sup> In a theoretical montage of Debord and Foucault, Crary develops the claim that the abstracted optical subject is - in modernity - the subject prepared for new informational and behavioural disciplines in order to become the compliant consumer of the commodity as spectacle.

It’s a powerful narrative, but is it correct? And do we judge its validity in purely empirical, historical terms?<sup>118</sup> I raise these problems because clearly Crary’s position does two things of great consequence in relation to my position: first, it gives a powerful and focused account of modernist painting’s relation to the commodity in the guise of modernity’s new spectacular technologies and optical sciences; but second, and more globally, it challenges the entire force of the argument about bodily making, since in Crary’s history it is the very possibility of a fully bodily making of a visual artwork that is eliminated in modernity’s drive toward an autonomized opticality.<sup>119</sup>

Seurat is located in this scheme as a historical figure in contradiction. He is both the harbinger of the new autonomous vision, its prophet, yet by the same token, he is cast in the role of Weber’s ‘vanishing intermediary’: that is to say he simultaneously beckons the new opticality, represses within his art its full consequences, and clings to those modes of poised, resolved pictoriality that will vanish when the new autonomized vision reaches its maturation. But we need to

think about Seurat's means, the dot. The dot is absolutely crucial to the development of modernist painting. It is no less an icon of modernism than the grid. And just like the grid in Rosalind Krauss' celebrated essay,<sup>120</sup> the dot likewise promises simultaneously to be immanence – a pure punctum of colour without extension, a pure quiddity – and transcendence – an informational node in a differential network of co-ordinates. In short, the dot is the great unsung hero, or rather anti-hero of modern (including postmodern) painting. The dot is always thought of as a neutralized mark; a mark purged of expressive or anthropocentric values. It is mechanical, automatic, corresponding to no bodily movement, robotic, geometric and axiomatic; hence it is the anti-gesture par excellence. In this respect it chimes with Crary's notion of autonomized vision as a disembodied opticality, an experience of and through eyes without bodies.

By way of response, let's consider Seurat's drawing styles. The dot, after all, is compatible with any drawing style whatsoever, as Lichtenstein deftly showed in his mock eclectic pictorial tour of Modern Art. You can draw like Ingres or like Soutine, and still use dots. What is puzzling with Seurat, towards the end of his short life, is the movement to caricature as the ethic for his drawing. Why does an artist so respectful of the academic version of classicism abandon that kind of drawing?<sup>121</sup> On the evidence of the paintings the move to caricature coincides with a shift in imagery and a shift in technique. The change in imagery is the choice of entertainment spectacles, rather than his previous images of Sunday strollers and riverside promenaders. The change in technique is the intensification of the dot – it is, so to speak, the dogmatisation of the dot. Whereas in earlier works like the *Bathers at Asniere* the dot is still an offer, a proposal for future research, and so, occupying only limited passages of the painting, in the later works like the final picture of Seurat's wife at her dressing table, the dot is total, a

fully instituted programme, and therefore occupying and homogenizing the entire picture surface. In the early works the dot is in its Leninist phase, as it were, whereas in *Parade* and *Cirque* we arrive at its Stalinist phase of claustrophobic foreclosure. Here also, as with the portrait of the artist's wife, the drawing style is a type of ornamented caricature. Certainly the deployment of caricatural drawing has to do with the subjects, placing them as demotic, not classical, modern, and implicitly as already within the realm of the pictorial, the realm of received images. But I feel that is not enough. For it is when the dot takes over, when it totalizes and homogenizes the image that Seurat embraces caricature.

I think there is something here that Crary misses altogether. The recurrence of caricature in conjunction with the dot is a constant in art: we get it in Seurat, Lichtenstein, Pollock (in certain of the so-called Black paintings such as *Number 7, 1951* and *Number 27, 1951*), Picabia, Polke and in Ofili. There are two broad lines of development for the dot in twentieth century painting: one is the all-over organization of dots by the grid (as in Bridget Riley, Larry Poons, Damien Hirst); the other is, as we've seen, the dot's encounter with caricature, cartooning and doodling. (There's no denying that there is also plenty of hybridizing the two, as in Polke.) The conjunction of the dot and the grid is inevitable, hence it is nobody's mystery. But again, why the constant and continuing conjunction of the dot and caricature? And why did Seurat, the arch-classicist, set it up in the first place, right there at the inception of the dot in its full rigor?

This is not a question Crary acknowledges, and for good reason. Because the answer has to be that caricature returns a kind of pseudo-gesture to the fanatically disembodied matrix of dots. For what is cartooning and the caricature except a kind of embryonic gestural drawing of rhythmic movement and staccato abbreviation, of lurid exaggeration and autopoietic rhetorical energy? Cartooning

is gestural drawing writ small. The pencil wielded from the knuckle as hub (Disney) instead of the brush wielded from the shoulder as hub (de Kooning). Isn't the issue here that caricature resuscitates the gesture as doodle at precisely the moment where the dot neutralizes the gesture? In other words, caricature must be understood here as the gestural compensation for the neutralizing force of the dot qua pure punctuality. It is as if, right at the onset of the dogmatic phase of pointillism, Seurat had built a self-destruct button into the apparatus. For already in *Cirque* the totalising, homogenizing dot, - the icon of disembodied vision, of the eye without a body - is wedded to its Other, the bodily mark.

### **3.3 Deferral of Presence in Derrida**

Rosalind Krauss introduces the relation between the indexical mark and the Derridean discourse of the trace with this passage:

The graffitist makes a mark. Like all marks it has the character of a sign.... With the graffito, the expressive mark has a substance made up of the physical residue left by the marker's incursion: the smear of graphite, the stain of ink, the welt thrown up by the penknife's slash. But the form of the mark - at this level of 'expression' - is itself peculiar; for it inhabits the realm of the clue, the trace, the index. Which is to say the operations of form are those of marking an event - by forming it in terms of its remains, or its precipitate - and in so marking it, of cutting the event off from the temporality of its making.

The graffitist goes up to a wall. He makes a mark. We would say he makes it to register his presence, to intervene in the space of another in order in order to strike against it with his declaration, "I am here." But we would be wrong to say this. Insofar as his declaration is a mark, it is inevitably structured by the moment *after* its making that even now infects the time of its making, the future moment that makes of its making nothing else than a past, a past that reads "I was here," "Kilroy was here." Thus even at the time that the marker strikes, he strikes in a tense that is over; entering the scene as a criminal, he understands that the mark he makes can only take the form of a clue. He delivers his mark over to a future that will be carried on without his presence, and in so doing his mark cuts his presence away from himself, dividing it from within into a before and an after.

When Derrida would come to analyse this condition - the pure form of the imprint - to which he would give the name arche-trace, he would invent the name *differance* to account for the temporal disjunction internally fissuring this event. . . . For if to make a mark is already to leave one's mark, it is already to allow the outside of an event to invade its inside; it cannot be conceived without 'the non-presence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present.'<sup>122</sup>

This connection between the indexical mark in painting and the Derridean *trace* is my focus in this section. Krauss's remarks are a useful point of departure but do little more than introduce the relation and delimit it to the question of temporality, or more precisely, to the notion of an interminable fold of fluctuation between the present moment of mark-making and the futurity of the address that the mark will accomplish qua sign, which will, in turn, cast it as a past event, as an



absence. Certainly the figure of the graffitist is a fruitful model for the artist in general, for marking in general, since the graffitist is indeed rhetoricizing and territorializing<sup>123</sup> his/her presence for an addressee who is necessarily absent and futural. The importance of temporality in this discussion is clear, and Krauss is right to stress it, but in what follows I attempt to broaden the argument, such that temporal folding will emerge as just one register of the trace, one among several guises of the trace.

What is specific to Derrida's notion of the trace? As always with Derrida – and the disciples who still dominate the secondary literature would declare, of necessity, given Derrida's (non)-position – arguments such as there are, are not cumulative, do not get assembled up through compositions of elements; such arguments as there are, are constituted in streams of negatives, of critiques, of readings of texts, of asides and parentheses. The demanding reader has to do his/her own accumulation and construction. We have a number of materials, both 'positive' and 'negative', for an argument. We need to consider and relate the motifs of: the originary supplement; the critique of presence; *différance*, or 'the inside is the outside', the failure of a delimited structure to hold at bay its exteriority. We need to gain some familiarity with the interweavings of these motifs.

What is the 'originary supplement'? *Of Grammatology* is about writing. The book traces an overarching continuity in Western thought that denigrates writing in favour of speech. The prejudice has motivations and consequences that are at once epistemological, ontological and ethical. Hence the book takes the site of writing, or more exactly the site of the writing/speech dichotomy, as a stage for an all-encompassing critique of Western metaphysics. *Of Grammatology* is an obsessive researching into the histories of the speech/ writing distinction as a

philosophical trope. The question of the supplement arises at the centre of the speech/ writing discussion since, by one account, writing is a supplementation of speech. Writing, it is said, is a supplement to the presence of the speaker as speech itself is a supplement to thought. *Of Grammatology* works at undoing this received wisdom not by inverting it, though on a sloganising level it sometimes sounds so. ‘Writing’ in Derrida’s text comes to stand in for signifying in general. In a sense, the book works away at rendering this plausible, compelling the reader to allow that signifying in general could be thought as a writing. To return to received understandings: a supplement is by definition posterior, an afterword, a subsidiary, of subordinate status, “an auxillary aide-memoire to the living memory,”<sup>124</sup> an exteriority to a presence, a structure established in the absence of the event, of the thing, an effect in an aftermath. Originary supplement is then a logical *faux pas*. It is true that the institution of writing in its historical growth and development, infects, reconfigures and frames speech and the habits of speakers. Saussure says as much. Derrida re-affirms the point, - “Representation mingles with what it represents, to the point where one speaks as one writes...”<sup>125</sup> - but the claim for the originarity of the supplement goes further, goes to the root.

There is the case of the demarcation of an origin, where the origin must be celebrated and communicated as origin. Derrida talks of “the supplement of origin: which supplements the failing origin and which is yet not derived; this supplement is, as one says of a spare part, of the original make (or a document, establishing the origin.)”<sup>126</sup> This remark conjures up the image and myth of the Founding Fathers and the originary gesture of an institution as in the Declaration of Independence of the USA, an example considered elsewhere by Derrida: a document, establishing the origin. The temporal and ontological paradox of the Declaration of Independence – and therefore its legal paradox – lies in its

assertion that the signatories and the ‘Americans’ they identify with are already free and independent: the Declaration in effect states that ‘we are now independent because we declare that we were already independent.’ The paradox is that ‘our already having been independent’ is actualised and effected only by means of a retrospective assertion. And obviously it is both true and untrue: the ‘Americans’ were *de jure* and *de facto* citizens of Crown colonies prior to the Declaration. The paradox of the manifest destiny dogma is analogous to that of the Declaration. But my point is not to contest legitimacy, ethical or ontological. The point is rather that the originary gesture is by its nature mythic and paradoxical in this sense. However, the issue for us is more precisely that the originarity of the gesture, of the event, is inaugurated belatedly through the retroactive supplement which nonetheless casts itself as initiation and semination. In this sense the origin is characterised as such posthumously.

An analogous structure is discernible in the presentation of a contemporary artwork for sale in the marketplace: Martin Creed’s *The Lights Going On and Off*, 2000 [?], in two versions (one specifying 30 second intervals, the other 10 seconds), each version in an edition of three, £10,000 each (at the time), and the buyer receives a description with instructions and a signed statement of authenticity and edition number. As with the Declaration of Independence, the supplement takes the rhetorical stance of bearing witness to what already is: *The Lights Going On and Off* already exists, it declares, and this is it, and you, dear collector, now own it. The affinity with the Declaration is closer still in that the certificate of authenticity stakes precise legal claims with respect to copyright and intellectual property rights. Hence the certification claims to bear witness to the pre-existence of a determinate legal entity, yet this determination is assured only by such *ex post facto* witness. We can now envisage the kind of claim made by the

scandal of the originary supplement. But are we merely being asked to address the application of a signifying structure to a thing or event? Well, yes except for the ‘merely,’ since it is the signifying structure that secures the determination of the event.

Now I want to follow the motif of ‘the inside is the outside’, or ‘differance’. It’s useful to read this book alongside Derrida’s contemporaneous 1967 essay *Differance*. Differance is more often than not presented by Derrida and his disciples couched in a string of denials: it is, we are told incessantly, not a concept, not a method, not a programme, not dialectic, not an absence and not a presence and therefore not a force if force entails presence, not even an operation.<sup>127</sup> It is not even an undertaking of a subject – not something done – insofar as differance differs and defers, that is, it is a movement that is in no need of an external origin of its movement: it moves; it is not put through its paces. So this stream of denials has its place but soon grows tiresome. A better approach to understanding what is at issue is to follow a localised argument that then is seen to fold out into a total horizon. The following deceptively simple argument appears in differing wordings and contexts in the *Grammatology* and the *Differance* essay. In the section of the *Grammatology* called ‘The Inside (Is) the Outside’ Derrida’s close reading of Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* raises problems concerning the classical distinctions between the sensible and the intelligible, and by extension, the matter/form or *hyle/morphe* distinction. Derrida follows through an antinomy or paradox. The argument runs as follows. The sensible particular, whether a sound or coloured shape or whatever, seems to be a given entity. But how does that entity, that particular, come to be characterised, qualified and quantified? Its qualities and quantities are characterised with respect other possible attributes, perhaps including future, past and counter-factual attributes. Hence the

determination of the particular, including indeed its delimitation as a particular, is operative only when the thing can be gathered up into a relational structure, a relational space with respect to other present, absent or possible particulars. Hence the sensible particular, the sound or shape, is characterised and circumscribed only a differential structure. As Derrida insists, the differences that flow from that relational structure – the difference between this sound and that sound – cannot itself be sensible, audible in this instance. The difference between two sounds is precisely what is not audible just as the difference between two colours is not visible. Ordinary language would suggest otherwise: “Can’t you see the difference?” While there is the strong probability that seeing and hearing must be a matter of the cognitive construction of relations between sensible elements such that “seeing the difference” gains theoretical legitimacy, nonetheless, I think it is sufficient for Derrida’s argument to demonstrate that hearing a sound is of a different order cognitively, phenomenologically, ontologically – to ‘hearing,’ recognising the difference between two sounds. Hearing – the sensible in general – thus takes place in the movement in a relational space, in a movement between the particular and the network, between the present and the absent, between the intelligible and the sensible. “The difference between two phonemes, which enables them to exist and to operate, is inaudible. The inaudible opens the two present phonemes to hearing, as they present themselves.”<sup>128</sup> Thus we have arrived at the much vaunted Derridean deconstruction, or movement of *differance*, in which a category – viz. the sensible – is found to shelter and nurture at its core its supposed opposite, the intelligible: ‘the inside is the outside.’ Or perhaps we should say here that what ought to have been the outside turns out to be the inside. I will now cite a lengthy passage where we observe Derrida moving quickly

from the above deconstruction of the category of the sensible to broad remarks about the trace and *differance*, the two terms being near synonyms for him:

the phonic element, the term, the plenitude that is called sensible, would not appear as such without this difference or opposition which gives them *form*. Such is the most evident significance of the appeal to difference as the reduction of phonic substance. Here the appearing and functioning of difference presupposes an originary synthesis not preceded by any absolute simplicity. Such would be the originary trace. Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the *pure* movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is differance*. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls signs, concept or operation, motor or sensory. This difference is therefore not more sensible than intelligible and it permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order – a phonic or graphic text for example – or between two orders of expression....

Differance is therefore the formation of form.<sup>129</sup>

Here in the figure of the ‘originary trace’ we are given a taste of how the argument around the originary supplement folds into the account of differance. The above

“originary synthesis not preceded by any absolute simplicity” is indeed the work of the originary supplement.

Differance with an ‘a’ then, is what allows signification to emerge. It is what makes articulation possible. Signification is always articulation. So it becomes clearer why Derrida might propose writing to stand for signification in general. Derrida says “The space of writing is not an originally *intelligible* space. It begins however to *become* so from the origin, that is to say from the moment when writing, like all the work of signs, produces repetition and therefore ideality in that space.”<sup>130</sup> We then have a constellation of related concepts, namely, spacing, articulation, repetition and ideality. These require some unpacking. The sign in general must be exchangeable, therefore its being iterable means that it is necessarily repeatable, capable of re-iteration in differing exchanges and contexts. As the ‘first’ inscription/mark/sign, so to speak, beckons the series that will constitute its repetition, so the future marks cast their shadow back onto the moment of the inscription of the ‘first’ mark. As Derrida puts it, “repetition always already divides the point of departure of the first time.”<sup>131</sup> And with this, we are firmly back with the inscription of Krauss’s graffitist. The sign qua sign cannot occur only once just as the dollar bill qua unit of value must be always available for further circulation. As the song has it, “I recall the actor’s advice / Nothing happens til it happens twice.” Iteration, iterability, repetition usher in a temporal sequence that is in principle infinite. This alone introduces an aspect of ideality. The unity of the sign in the plurality of its repetitious appearances is, or requires an ideality. But the inconceivability of the sign that appears only once is not only a matter of its iterability; it is also a question of establishing the sign in its spacing, as a determinate articulation. And as the latter citation from Derrida

indicates, the establishment of that domain, that dimensionality for spacing, cannot be accomplished in a sign that is not re-iterated.

I have considered the arguments for the originary supplement and for ‘the inside (is) the outside.’ It should be apparent how the two motifs are interwoven, how they support and require each other. Thus, the originary supplement can be portrayed as an application of ‘the inside (is) the outside.’ Both can stand as versions of the complex origin of the entity, of any and all entities. The argument for the originary supplement is itself a critique of presence, where the latter is understood as the noncomplex originary plenitude. In the case of the Declaration of Independence, it was found that there was no originary presence sufficient to the task of marking an inauguration. This is not to suggest that there *could have been*, or that formerly present moment (of emancipation, of the condition of being always already emancipated) was short on intensity. The point was rather that the originary moment, or condition needed to be *marked as originary*, and that this marking as originary was necessarily retrospective. So the question of the originary supplement has already given us a familiarity with the structure of the critique of presence.

It is valuable to compare the above with the essay *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, in which we find another rendition of the critique of presence read from and through Freud. In Derrida’s reading, the condition of the Freudian psyche as both virginal and always already marked by memory is equivalent to the archē-trace, or the originary supplement. Freud has to find an enunciation of a structure in which the psychic apparatus can contain, at once, “ an unlimited receptive capacity and a retention of permanent traces”<sup>132</sup>



And a “psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of ‘memory’ ”. The crux of such an explanation, what makes such an apparatus almost unimaginable, is the necessity of accounting simultaneously...for the permanence of the trace and the virginity of the receiving substance, for the engraving of furrows and for the perennially intact bareness of the perceptive surface....<sup>133</sup>

Derrida continues:

That the present in general is not primal but, rather, reconstituted, that it is not the absolute, wholly living form which constitutes the experience, that there is no purity of the living present – such is the theme, formidable for metaphysics, which Freud, in a conceptual scheme unequal to the thing itself, would have us pursue.<sup>134</sup>

On this reading, the Freudian account is one that denies the presence of the immediate impression on the psychic apparatus, both because the impression is always, already structured through memory and as affect; and because it is not available - not capable of being assimilated or ‘owned’ - until filtered through meaning, in its most elementary sense. “In Freudian terms, every experience or excitation reaches us only after having suffered the transfiguration of secondary elaboration.”<sup>135</sup> Compare Derrida again: “The metaphor of pathbreaking [Freud’s *Bahnung*]... is always in communication with the theme of the *supplementary delay* and with the reconstitution of meaning through deferral ... after the subterranean toil of an impression. The impression has left behind a laborious trace which has

never been *perceived*, whose meaning has never been lived in the present, i.e., has never been lived consciously.”<sup>136</sup>

### 3.4 Presence in Newman

Newman is hardly an obvious choice for this discussion. Hardly contemporary, you might say. I hope to demonstrate that Newman, more precisely than his own contemporaries, rehearses the conditions of the contemporary gesture as I have outlined them. Newman foresees and rehearses one kind of response to the problem of developing the gesture beyond the terms of presence/absence or past/present, by fashioning his own kind of mark that is, at the same stroke, deadpan and spontaneous, yet also framed and framing, through its deployment of symmetry. What’s more, Newman’s work links in several interesting ways with the Derridean motifs we have just considered. Given the above motifs of the originary supplement, ‘the inside is the outside’, and the critique of presence, one can follow structural seams in Newman’s oeuvre that are closely and relevantly analogous.

Newman already in his works of the 1940s was exercised with the theme of origination. Newman deploys a thematic of the performativity of artistic creation – concretised as mark-making – to enact a response to the quasi-theological, cosmological, metaphysical and anthropogenetic versions of the question of origination. In this discussion I am not at all interested in the sublime in Newman. I am very much interested in how the theme of origination, as articulated in Newman’s paintings, complicates the distinction between presence and absence. To originate, for Newman, is to appear. The mark is what appears.

We will need to study in detail the how of its appearance. But before that, we should say that there is already a double structure, of sorts, in the preoccupation with origination. For it was, for the Newman of the 40s, a matter of nothing less than the origination of painting *tout court* in a situation where the medium was felt to have died:

I had to start from scratch as if painting didn't exist, which is a special way of saying that painting was dead. I felt that there was nothing in painting that was a source that I could use, and at the same time I felt that the whole situation was such that we had to examine the whole process.<sup>137</sup>

So there was the need to originate painting as if its traditions counted for nothing. Or such was the feeling. But for Newman that necessity became itself the subject of the paintings. The paintings then also had to be images of origination. This is what I called the double structure: painting as a "whole process" had to be re-invented "from scratch", and in the marks of re-invention it was to construct an image of origination. Newman's early titles make the issue fairly explicit: *Genesis - The Break* 1946; *Genetic Moment*, 1947; *Onement*, 1948; *End of Silence*, 1949.

Newman, I have said, manifests the performativity of artistic creation. We have seen that performativity is a structure in which product and production are fused and cannot be satisfactorily separated. As we noted in chapter 1, in its initial theoretical formulation in the tabulation of speech acts by J.L.Austin, the exemplary performative speech act is the promise, in which speech names itself as the production of an act and so institutes itself as an outcome by describing itself as the production of that outcome. Thus in the promise we cannot distinguish between the production and its outcome, or product: with the "I promise..."

speech both characterizes its own undertaking, somewhat like a live commentary, and at the same instant, marks and commemorates an inauguration within a determinate institution. Clearly we have a complex temporal determination here. It should be clear that this performative set-up is equivalent to the aporetic structure of the Declaration of Independence discussed above with reference to Derrida's originary supplement. It should also be apparent that this performative structure is equivalent to the case of Krauss' graffitist: Newman seeks both to originate painting as such, and to make each individual painting a monument to origination. And of course, Newman cannot originate painting only once and quit: he has to originate it over and over, ushering in here the Derridean notion of repetition as iterability.

Speaking to Thomas Hess about a sacred native Indian site in Ohio, Newman said: "Looking at the site you feel, Here I am, *here*... and out beyond there there is chaos, nature, rivers, landscapes... but here you get a sense of your own presence... I became involved with the idea of making the viewer present: the idea that 'Man is present'." <sup>138</sup> Of course there is a note here that is unfortunate for us: Newman's verbal statements are thus frequently couched in terms of an ahistorical pan-humanism as in the above. So I will try to be precise about what I value in Newman and its relevance for and deployment in the argument.

I accept that in some sense the paintings do succeed with respect to Newman's avowed aim, namely, to produce in the viewer a heightened awareness of his/her own presence. But just how is that accomplished and at what cost? I think we can follow the opening up of a sequential and ontological difficulty in Newman with respect to this intended effect of intensified presence. The paintings prompt, symbolise, celebrate and theatricalise the experience of

presence. But how? If the scenario of standing at the Ohio Indian site as the awed beholder of primordial earthworks amid a grand sweep of landscape – if this is the preferred analogy for the experience of the viewer before a Newman painting, then the conundrum is the following: in the analogy is the painting equivalent to the prehistoric earthworks only, or is it instead equivalent to the entire scene such that a Newman painting stands for the entire visual field of the beholder at the Ohio site? It sounds pedantic, but the point matters. In other words, are these paintings virtual chromatic spaces that the viewer enters imaginatively and traverses, as one does a Friedrich landscape, or as Diderot wrote of imaginatively wandering into Vernet's pictures in the celebrated Salon texts; or are the paintings resistant to relational structure and virtual, illusionistic space and, rather than establishing a recessive volume or interiority, they are concerned with drawing our attention to that space exterior to the painting that is inhabited by and proportionate to our bodies as we look? So we have two distinct possibilities: that the paintings intensify the experience of presence through their interiority, that is by the viewer's imaginative identification with their virtual spaces; or that the paintings establish the issue of presence by insistently drawing the viewer's attention to his/her own presence as a physical unit of scale in the exterior surroundings of the painting.

Newman was evidently aware of this conundrum, as we see in the interview done shortly before his death, with Emilio de Antonio:

I was concerned constantly in doing a painting that would move in its totality as you see it. You look at it and you see it. And if you don't, there's nothing to walk into. It's not a window leading you into a situation where you walk

through some interior or exterior world from which you then come to a conclusion. The beginning and the end are there at once. ....

I think, in a sense, my painting removes the observer. At the same time I'm not too happy about those writers who always talk about some of my large paintings as environmental, in which the observer becomes part of the painting. I like to think of the person becoming part of the painting in terms of meaning, because in the end I feel that most of my paintings are hostile to the existing environment.<sup>139</sup>

There is a direct awareness of the conundrum. Newman is, as he usually was in interview, fairly frank and ingenuous. But where do his comments leave us? – No to traditional interiority, but No also to pure exteriority, as in “I'm not too happy about those writers who always talk about some of my large paintings as environmental.” Then the final sentence which seems to me a cop-out. For me, the most generous reading of it would be that Newman fears and opposes succumbing to the environment in all senses. That is why he must be “hostile” to exteriority. Yet “hostile” is in its way sly: after all, to be hostile to x is to engage x in a relation of rejection; it is at once to relate and to contest relation. But what is more striking in the passage is Newman's reasoning in rejecting interiority: traditional interiority is suspect because it establishes a sequential, even a narrative temporality. In his work “You look at it and you see it. And if you don't, there's nothing to walk into.” It sounds deceptively easy, but let's unravel it slowly. “You look at it and you see it”: the painting gives itself up to the viewer at a glance, all at once, withholding nothing from that initial instant. However, if you don't play ball, if you refuse the temporality of the instant, of the totality given in the momentary glance, then the painting won't play ball with you, it will refuse your

demand for a sequential temporality: “if you don’t (look at it and see it), there’s nothing to walk into.” To follow the converse: if there *were* something to walk into, then in an important sense, the painting would have withheld its substance from the viewer in that first instant of visual encounter. Newman’s refuses this possibility because it destroys the unity of the appearance qua totality that does not unfold successively in time; and moreover, because the very project of intensifying presence for the viewer is bound to the idea of removing the viewer from narrative or sequential time, which would imply a logic of anticipation (of a conclusion to come) and therefore, in Derridean terms, a deferral of presence.

I don’t believe there is a satisfactory answer to the conundrum. Perhaps it is precisely Newman’s achievement to hold these contradictory demands in some kind of embrace. There is no reconciliation conceivable. But Newman’s oeuvre is as elegant an illusion of reconciliation as one could hope to attain.

In the years of success Newman was fastidious, with his multiple studios, each apparently hosting a single painting on the go for as long as it took. And Newman understood, as a classically repetitive modernist painter, that he had to decide the terms of his repetitiousness not so much with rigor as with immense tact. That is, I take it, the reason why there are so few paintings – less than 120 completed for the entire period of the public oeuvre, which spans 1944 – 1970.<sup>140</sup> In a Retrospective show like the one recently at the Tate, the differences between the paintings are surprisingly dramatic and surprisingly hard to assimilate. Newman is a highly original colourist. But his decisive originality lies in his wrestling with the conundrum I have described as the dilemma of interiority versus exteriority. The ultra thin, wide-as-a-stripe paintings of the early 50s serve as high-water mark for the assertion of exteriority. These awkward pieces initiate what will become minimalism, and find its apotheosis in the work of Donald

Judd, himself a 'close reader' of Newman.<sup>141</sup> Judd's wall-mounted works I understand as what is left *of* or *after* painting when it becomes sheer exteriority. Newman's expansive colourzone paintings like *Uriel* [Fig.15/16] stake out the nearest approximation, within the oeuvre, to landscape-type interiorised virtual space. There is no satisfactory synthesis between the two tendencies, but I suspect that Newman's insistent verticality lends itself - better than do any of its alternatives - to the concealment of the extreme disunity under construction. Newman tried horizontal divisions, and then straightaway dropped them. The difficulty is that horizontality just gets easily ensnared and transmitted as diagrammatic landscape, no matter how rigorous its attempt to eschew illusionism. Therefore in Newman's terms, horizontal divisions are always liable to offer something you can "walk into."

So there is no synthesis and there cannot be. *Uriel* is a great try. Another, very different kind of attempt is made using colour density, as in the *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* series, most of which are too easy and too didactic. *Who's Afraid #4* [Fig.17] is the best of the series, but even it cannot shuffle its own spatial pack of cards right in front of your eyes as *Uriel* does so deftly. Newman's oeuvre is *in contradiction*, to an extreme degree, however it masks the fact.

I have stated above that Newman prefigures the contemporary condition of the gesture. Newman worked out his own gesture that was deadpan and banal, yet intensely dramatized through its compositional centredness and its ultra-stark figure/ground set-up. The viewer is compelled to acknowledge a very particular conjunction: that the gesture eschews technical control at a certain point, dramatizing its own contingencies and chaotic momentum; yet, in the same instant, it is manifestly pre-plotted, channelled through a dedicated centre line, pre-framed by the parallel vertical sides of the canvas, and pre-scripted to unite



and totalise the painting through its very centrality. All of this is apparent in the seminal, small (27 x 16 inch), 1948 *Onement I*. The gesture is chaotic and contingent – just a ragged line of cadmium red paint slapped on with a flat knife – without a neat or straight edge, not uniformly opaque, a bit translucent in places where the darker warm brown of the ground shows through. While the gesture is aleatory in these respects, it is also tightly controlled: it follows precisely a centre line marked by a strip of masking tape, and its path does not deviate from this pre-delineated centre channel. I want to emphasize the double structure of the contingent-aleatory inscribed into and through the pre-mapped and pre-assigned. This offers a significant analogue for the Derridean motifs of the originary trace and the critique of presence.

Newman's gesture, insofar as it is both spontaneous and unconstrained yet predetermined and pre-packaged, serves as a kind of prototype for the contemporary gesture as it appears subsequently in the overdetermined reflexivity of gestural painting at the hands of Lichtenstein, Richter, David Reed and Fabien Marcaccio, among others. In this respect, Newman's gesture is distinct from those of his contemporaries like Pollock, de Kooning and Kline.

Can one relate the Derridean motifs back through Newman to gain insight into the dilemma I have described concerning interiority and exteriority? Could one understand Newman paintings as pictorial renditions of 'the inside (is) the outside'? In other words, is the solution to my much trumpeted conundrum simply to respond that Newman's paintings are a pictorial *deconstruction* of the dualism of interior/exterior? I think not. Look at those painfully odd sculptures Newman did in the 60s, with the sanguine banality of their figure/ground set-up. No dilemma here, no complexity at all, no fraught, self-questioning presence here. I feel that the sculptures operate as commentary, captioning, for the paintings.

That's why I find the sculptures laughable but admire their frankness. Newman makes a mistake that may be common in aging and wealthy artists: of presuming to transfer the essence of his art from one medium and re-distil in another. For the Newman fan there is a jolting shock of de-mystification or disenchantment upon first encountering the obelisk sculptures. It is tempting to say that the sculptures render the subject-matter of the paintings trite. But I think it is more faithful to say that the problem is that the sculptures make one look at the paintings as just subject-matter, as themes stabilised and codified rather than discrete acts of thinking.

But these sculptures are exceptional for Newman. Mostly he is a good enough artist to let the work do his thinking. In that sense, some of his paintings do do deconstructive work in a ruthless, immanent logic. *Differance* moves its moves, but is not put through its paces. " 'Differance' is neither simply active nor simply passive, ...it announces or rather recalls something like the middle voice, ...it speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which cannot be thought of either as a passion or as an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient...." <sup>142</sup> The paintings dissimulate the easel painting tradition by their insistence on exteriority and symmetry. But they equally refuse the resolution of the literal surface that would be pure opacity and pure exteriority: Newman's paintings always retain a role for an illusionistic transparency of colour.

Why should it be Newman above other artists who should follow my account of Derrida? The equivalences are I hope apparent. And the force and relevance of those equivalences for my broader narrative are, I claim, evident from the fact Newman is the first painter to work out a *modus operandi* for the contemporary condition of the gesture: a condition in which the gesture has to exhibit, in same

movement, manifest origination and spontaneity on the one hand and manifest belatedness, pre-determination and anterior circumscription on the other. But I need to clarify. Newman is not presented here as a 'deconstructionist' artist, if such a thing were even conceivable. (Some modernist artists have, after all, been described with some plausibility as 'existentialist' artists.) So I am not claiming Newman for deconstruction. But assuredly nor am I applying a deconstructivist reading to Newman's work, as one might with any 'text', in the broad sense. A deconstructive reading would, I suppose, aim to unmask the unspoken, subterranean aporias latent in the work. My account of what I take to be the central tension in the work has stressed all along that it is anything but unspoken, that it is indeed trumpeted by the paintings and discussed openly and identified directly by Newman himself. It is hardly a candidate for unmasking. My interest in Derrida is, in this way, not at all an enthusiasm for deconstructive readings of artworks; it is a concern with how the Derridean motifs modify an ontology of the mark.

Let's end with the Ohio Indian archaeological site and the motif of presence. I offer two admittedly lurid metaphors for the Newman works I especially admire, like *Uriel*, *Adam* and *Gate*. One metaphor – one pictorial analogue – is Friedrich's *A Monk at the Seashore* [oil on canvas, 1808-9, Berlin-Charlottenburg, Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten]. In this metaphor, the monk in the Friedrich, as the only vertical form in the painting, is equivalent – pictorially, dramatically, ontologically – to the thin black vertical band in *Uriel*,<sup>145</sup> and vice versa. In the second metaphor, the colour bands in the Newman are equivalent to the coloured line markings on a city street – yellow parking lines along the gutter, or the white lane divisions. The street markings organize objects in real space. They do not work by establishing any kind of virtual, optical space. There is no colour space brought

into operation by these coloured markings: they only delimit and divide an environmental space. In this second metaphor, the Newman viewer is organized in exterior space like a car that is trying to park on or off the double yellow. Yes, the metaphors are trashy, but they make a point. With Newman's paintings we can't ever settle matters between the monk within the seascape and the car outside the parking lines: between presence through pictorial interiority or presence through literal exteriority. As I have argued already, this non-settlement cannot be claimed as a territory of deconstruction. Newman's non-settlement is, nonetheless, one of those forms of generosity and dispersion that allow painting to be done, again.

### **3.5 A Contemporary Gesture**

In spite of everything, perhaps *because of* everything we distrust about it, the gesture or the mark is still what makes painting. It is what makes painting a fascination and what fascinates painting. What allows work to be done by painting, both banally and critically. The gesture is what makes painting as such possible. I have been at pains, throughout the entire text, to distance painting from the execution of ideas. In one sense, though, I concede, a simplifying one, this is to remove painting from Conceptual Art. But it is also to remove painting from designing. And it is not just that things go wrong during the making and one is forced to accommodate mistakes, though that happens. Think of Hitchcock with his shooting script sown up, his crew on salary, which in his view made improvisation on set unthinkable, bored by the toil of executing his minutely planned films. "For me a film is ninety-nine per cent finished with the screenplay. Sometimes, I'd

prefer not to have to shoot it.”<sup>144</sup> Painting – thankfully, sadly - is never like that even when it pretends it is. Haven’t many painters operated with something close to Hitchcock’s screenplay? – it will be objected. Renaissance frescos with their pre-mapped cartoons, Jeff Koons today with precise image scripts for his teams of painters, and so on. My position is not at all an insistence on improvisation or some kind of theoretically labyrinthine post-Derridean spontaneity. It is rather that the mark itself is the thought, the thinking is active in the marking, and not prior or exterior to it. That is not to say that the mark is necessarily and narrowly identified as the product of a body, or of an individual body: it may or may not be. It certainly doesn’t have to be. There’s no logic that requires me to say that the mark cannot be the mark of a team. The positive claim will be that where painting forces the mark to trail in the wake of thought – as in design – and as in what I earlier labelled dumb instrumentality – in such cases the outcome will fall short of the potentiality of painting and will not avail itself of painting as a movement of thought.

Now, having said all that, it is obvious that all paintings are planned. At least in part, if only to delimit their technical field of contingency. It may sound innocent to say so, but after all, painting is difficult. Paint is always more or less out of our control, more or less meaningless, worthless, smelly coloured poison. Getting it to do any pictorial work at all is forever a matter of capitulating to the lack of control while at the same time applying a torque, twisting the mode of capitulation such that the paint’s properties come to converge on some pictorial affect. I want to stress both terms: *pictorial affect*. It is an affect that is pictorial. And it is where the pictorial as such is affective. The motif of capitulation must be not confused with the image of the abandonment of the pictorial as such, as in the tedious Lucio Fontana, for example. So I am not for a moment championing that

kind of (post-) painting that stages this desolation of the pictorial as tender abjection. That is sentimentality. The pictorial never went away. The pictorial indeed is the form of responsibility through which painting has a voice.

Given that pictorial affect is technically restrictive – which is a certain way of saying it offers resistance - clearly all paintings are rehearsed in some sense. Because painting requires a technical immersion on the part of the artist, there is with every technical encounter a protention forward into future technical contexts. The gesture is in this sense always already rehearsed. The contemporary gesture, as I have argued, places itself outside a simple logic of presence and absence. But now I want to consider specific examples of the gesture in current painting. I do not wish to limit discussion to abstraction, but still it is useful to look at two abstract painters: David Reed and Fabien Marcaccio. Though superficially similar with their carefully rehearsed and calibrated marks, Reed and Marcaccio's paintings, as I will now argue, have very different effects in ways that are important to the discussion.

What is it that distinguishes David Reed's painting from Fabien Marcaccio's? More specifically, what distinguishes them with respect to the context I have called the condition of the contemporary gesture, since both in their different ways approach the gesture in these terms? In Marcaccio's energetic but unrewarding paintings, gestures are largely freed from the ground: they frequently run beyond the perimeters of the canvas support, lift off into surrounding space, occasionally link one canvas to another panel. So we have what I earlier called a semantic heterogeneity: here in Marcaccio there is a massive insistence on the semantic gulf between figure and ground. Like Reed's gestures they are manifestly brush-made and combine the roles of depicting the gesture and embodying, *being* the gesture. In this sense both Reed and Marcaccio imply the common influence

of the Lichtenstein brushmark paintings of circa 1964, but in them this influence is sublimated.

Marcaccio's brushmarks are not evidently products of a bodily movement at all. The paintings seem to be concerned primarily with setting up loud contrasts between brush-dragged and dripped paint and their dry canvas support. Marcaccio's paintings are clever but turgid. I hope their failure can throw some light on Reed's accomplishment in particular, and the contemporary condition of the gesture in general. In Marcaccio's *Paint Zone #11*, 1994-95, [Fig.18] we find elements formed into twists and curves without any evidence or sense of movement or flow. The surfaces look dry and icily plastic. The gestures move and flow only as signs; as paint stuff and as indices they are static, immobile, have never been in motion. This conjunction as we know is the painting's subject and its method, its claim to criticality. I will return to this point.

David Reed's paintings [Fig.19] deploy a series of exacting technical procedures to produce brushmarks and swirling knife smears that are evidently spontaneous, 'first order' gestures, yet which appear also to be images *of* gestures. This is largely because Reed's gestures are extremely flat, making the indexical qualities of the marks look simulated, and because the cropping of background elements, and of profiled areas that often mark off echoing halos around the gestural marks that repeat their perimeter shapes, - all of which makes it really impossible for the viewer to ascertain the technical sequence for making the painting. That starts to matter for the viewer, because the figure/ground relationships are so much a fraught focus in the paintings - and the paintings' effects are so closely bound to the fine-tuned figure/ground antagonisms - that often the viewer tries to settle a particular case by working out the actual mark-making sequence. With Reed's precise sanding and masking method, ground is as

often as not, applied after figure. So figure/ground becomes an interminable, indeed aporetic issue for Reed's viewer.

Reed's gestures are generated by rhythmic movements of the arms. They provide the dramatic focus of his compositions. They are what the paintings compel the viewer's eye to dwell on. The blank areas, margins, bands and croppings in the paintings are the voids that permit the gestures to designate themselves as plenitudes, as activated zones. They set up the gestural areas as equivalent to figures in classical painting, by which I mean painting like Poussin, for instance, in which figures are organized into choreographed groups, and the group as a whole stamps out a gestalt in the design of the painting. In Reed's heightened contrast between the agitated paint of the gesture and the 'passive', uninflected paint of the ground, between the fluidity and transparency of the gesture and the opacity and non-indexicality of the ground, we find again an insistence on a semantic discontinuity between gesture and ground.

In his book *Manet's Modernism* Michael Fried outlines two decisive aspects of the ontology of painting; two unassailable - in Fried's word, "primordial" - conditions of painting which, as he argues, have critical consequences for the practice of painting in all its concerns, whether of subject matter, register, paint handling, specific surface or whatever.<sup>145</sup> The two are: that the painting as a material artefact is static and endures in time; and that the painting seen, is grasped in its entirety by the eye, in a flash, in an instant. These are ontological constants within painting. They are "*limit* modes of the representation of temporality, each of which is based on a distinct property of easel painting."<sup>146</sup> As Fried shows, painting has evolved in immanent, unconscious ways, modes, registers and genres that state and exploit these ontological features. The aspect of stasis and duration in time is manifested and exploited by the still life genre, and



then re-inflected by the genre of still life flower painting, where the flower is precisely what, though static, does not endure. The still life genre, Fried argues, is powerfully affective precisely because it trades on this structural analogue between the ontology of the painting qua stasis in duration and those same qualities in the constituent objects of the still life image. The still life genre is in this way structurally privileged for painting. But still-life does not monopolize this feature of painting; one can follow a lineage wherein the trope of enduring constancy and stillness is absorbed into (geometric) abstraction, as in Mondrian, Newman, the early Marden, and so on. Now to the second aspect: that a painting is glimpsed and grasped in a flash. What genre of painting exploits this ontological constant? Well, genre could be a term to mislead us here. But I think it is clear that certain registers of painting – Pollock and de Kooning come to mind right away – *Ruth's Zowie*, *The Deep* are convincing cases – are very much directed at usurping and rhetoricizing the encounter in which the gaze feels itself in its duration to have occurred long after the explosive instantaneousness of the glimpse, where the gaze feels like the afterglow of the glimpse. De Kooning's late 50s paintings, with their wide flat brush trails and their simplified compositional scaffolds, as in *Parc Rosenberg*, *Ruth's Zowie*, *Montauk Highway* and *Palisade*; such paintings especially play on the instant of the glimpse by suggesting, as they do, that they were painted in an instant. Indeed, since these painting compel the viewer to believe that their structured appearance emerged solely through their being painted, they further conspire to give us the feeling of the paintings glimpsing themselves, grasping their own apparitional structure in an instant.

Reed's paintings, with their luxuriating expanses of gestural folds, bespeak a version of this painting register, one that derives primarily from Pollock. But the rhetoric of the glimpse, of the instantaneous, that the gestures and brushmarks

with their accelerated, washy fluidity encourage and sustain, is interrupted. Reed's use of the stretched, horizontally elongated format itself disrupts the instantaneous by making it unlikely that the painting can be taken in the scope of one glance; instead, the eyes are made aware that they must roll laterally, or the head must turn on the neck. Reed's chromatic bands, as they cut through and under the translucent gestural areas also disrupt the sense of the instantaneous glimpse. For they suggest a mediation and a filtering and channelling of this temporality of the glimpse. Reed's paintings exploit the register we have discussed, but they tend to place that register in brackets.

Marcaccio's paintings, qua paintings *of* brushmarks in the deconstructive manner, confront a difficulty. The problem for this type of self-critical painting is this: how do you get the critical work *into the paint?* – how do you use the paint to re-present the painted gesture - without crippling it, and therefore losing the register whose energy comes from its fluidity and its structural analogue with the ontology of the glimpse? Marcaccio's brushmarks are fully paralysed, they look dry, ossified, like petrified traces of organic life. And of course one can say, yes, but that is their critical charge, they must be ossified to do their critical work, to deconstruct the fluid flowing brushmark. This response has its logic, but it won't do. The gestural deconstruction strategy holds the considerable danger of forsaking, without recovering any affective remainder, the power of the rhetoric of the instantaneous glimpse. Marcaccio pays this price apparently with equanimity.

My refusal of Marcaccio's painting is argued along two trajectories. One is a dissatisfaction with its performance as gestural painting. The other is a distrust of its performance as deconstruction. Let me re-visit the two complaints more slowly. The argument about the gestural performance employs Fried's analysis of

the limit conditions of the temporality of painting. The argument does not assume that Fried's two limit conditions constitute *values* – for they clearly do not. So I do not claim that in approaching one of the limit conditions and manifesting it, a painting gains value. However, the limit conditions inevitably come to have evaluative consequences *in particular circumstances*. And as always with painting, one is arguing from the encounter with the particularity of individual paintings. There have been all manner of paintings in which the gestures have been slowed down, clotted, half paralysed. Think of Jasper Johns in the Number and Alphabet paintings with their slow-flowing, molten encaustic paint. Think of Simon Linke's *Artforum* paintings of the 1980s. These paintings indicate that the paralysed gesture works rather well when it collides with the written sign. This is not about the technical difficulty of getting the gesture to render lettering and signage, and of preventing it from becoming merely gestural writing, as in Cy Twombly, or indeed graffiti. It appears, rather, that the paralysis of the gesture relates affectively to the indissoluble antagonism between gesture and writing, where writing identifies the mark as pure ideality while the gesture returns the mark to difference within repetition. Thus the inevitable movement, in the mark, between the sensible and the intelligible – as in the Derridean motif of 'the inside is the outside' - re-asserts itself here. The gesture that reproduces gestures is, however, playing a very different role to the gesture that conjures writing. Simon Linke's own 'paintings of gestures' in the early 90s were short-lived and inconsequential. In this sub, sub-genre of contemporary painting, the viewer is lured by the promise of the sheer instantaneous, in the manner that Fried's limit condition outlines. But as one scrutinizes the marks close up, the promise is withdrawn. We could pay lip service to irony, to manipulation and planned disappointment of audience expectation, all of which are familiar artistic strategies. But these interpretative moves would only

re-affirm the problem of rupture in the temporality of the gesture in Marcaccio, and postpone its treatment.

It is this point that the spectre of deconstruction makes an entrance. The rationale for gestural paralysis in Marcaccio – a rationale that will name Marcaccio’s tactic as irony - will say that the ruptured temporality of the gesture is the vehicle of Marcaccio’s deconstruction. The reply to the argument from Fried will then be that it is precisely by disappointing and violating the Fried ‘limit condition’ that Marcaccio’s paintings do critical work. But this kind of rationale raises again the issue of deconstruction – which we have understood as the movement of *differance* – as an intentional stratagem. Let’s recall Derrida’s insistence that *differance* “cannot be thought of... as an action of a subject upon an object.”

So the complaint against Marcaccio is that his critique is too overt, too premeditated. But the question is again better clarified by a comparison with David Reed. With Marcaccio’s work there is the strong sense that the paralysed gesture can only possess a deconstructive logic. There is no other conceptual register – phenomenological, existential, whatever - that can apply. The inescapable conclusion is that Marcaccio’s gesture stems exclusively from a didactic motivation. There can be no other motivation for doing this to the gesture. In Reed the contrast is immense: there a sense of free flow, of balanced effusion, both at the literal level of the fluidity and transparency of the gesture, and at the metaphorical level. There is no suggestion, as there undeniably is with Marcaccio, that the marks have been coerced into their structures purely for the sake of an ultra-legible and declarative deconstruction. But this is exactly the expectation of deconstruction that was earlier found to be suspect. For Marcaccio does nothing but return the gesture to a stabilized, noncomplex meaning.

So where are we? What has changed in all this? How has the argument re-cast the real, practical stakes for painting? I have used readings of Derrida to re-orientate the account of gestural painting. One kind of impatience with Derrida or ‘deconstruction’ as an academic ideology is expressed here, under the sign of ‘post-structuralism’:

How can one not recognise, in the passionate zeal with which the post-structuralist insists that every text, his own included, is caught up in a fundamental ambiguity and flooded with the ‘dissemination’ of the intertextual process, the signs of an obstinate *denial*; a barely hidden acknowledgement of the fact that one is speaking from a safe position, a position not menaced by the decentred textual process? ... The problem with deconstruction is not that it renounces a strict theoretical formulation and yields to a flabby poeticism. On the contrary, it is that it is too ‘theoretical’ (in the sense of a theory which excludes the truth-dimension; that is, *which does not affect the place from which we speak*).<sup>147</sup>

That is a fair statement of a dissatisfaction one frequently feels upon reading the literature of deconstruction. Whether it should be levelled against Derrida’s texts, those of the disciples, or both, is questionable. Derrida speaks of the deconstructive reading leaving a track in the text,<sup>148</sup> which can hardly imply that either the text or the reader come away from their encounter unscathed. So one wants to defend Derrida’s texts from the flak, up to a point. On the other hand, Derrida’s constant reluctance to clarify his position through cumulative argument – a reluctance itself, of course, presented as ‘on principle’ – is forever an open invitation to flabby disciples.

But the cited complaint helps focus the discussion of Marcaccio. It suggests that in several ways Marcaccio matches up to this reviled *affectless deconstruction*. In my treatment of Newman there was a hesitation around the homology with *differance* and the 'originary trace.' My doubt was about the fine line between a deconstructive reading and the claim that the work in question does (and sets out to do) deconstructive work. On Derrida's principles, of course, all works, all 'texts', are susceptible of a deconstructive reading since all 'texts' are marked by *differance*. There is a delicate theoretical problem here. After all, if all 'texts' – however dumb - are marked in advance by *differance* then how does it benefit an author to deploy the ('non') concept of *differance*? The answer must be that *differance differs*. It is not a uniform quantity. Therefore the track left in the text, to repeat Derrida's image, will always be particular and local. There is a further important point here. We might think of the painting as the text and the viewer/critic/commentator as the reader whose viewing/writing leave its tracks. But there is also the strong sense that the painting itself interprets other paintings. So a Marcaccio painting is indeed a (mis)reading of de Kooning-type painting, just as a Newman functions, in part, as a (mis)reading of Mondrian. This is much more precise and more focused in its motivation than generalised intertextuality. Here the painting has itself taken the role of the deconstructive reader. But - and here is the trouble with Marcaccio - that deconstructive role should not be the whole *telos* of the painting. If it is then the mark becomes newly instrumentalised, is assigned its explicit role and meaning, and therefore does not differ from itself at its core. In Derrida's terms, this is not *differance*.

What of the complaint about post-structuralism and deconstruction? – that it does not affect the position from which we speak? The consequence of the argument that has been followed, and its borrowings from Derrida's constellation

of ideas around the *originary trace*, is that painting's address - the position from which we speak in(to) painting - is profoundly affected by this thinking. An entire logic of post-modern style - in which artworks or architecture cloak themselves in pre-established codes while claiming a power of domination of those codes through irony - that logic is undone by this argument. Why? Because that logic has to treat the mark as a given, pre-stabilised meaning in order to then climb - that's the idea anyway - to the high ground of the meta-language, from which it casts down spells of irony; which in turn are supposed to de-stabilise *all* the pictorial codes. The ruse of the meta-language is another way of denying the possibility that marking is already a movement of thought and a theatre of complexity. Because in seeking the critical refuge of the meta-language, one is presuming that meaning is capable of being opened up, renewed, re-made, only through juxtaposition, as where one register of marks is confronted with an alien code. The assumption is that meaning is not contestable at the level of the mark. Thus the mark is assumed to be a known quantity. In this way the postmodern trope of ironic distance in painting is premised on an originary simplicity for the mark. It is therefore another way of coercing the mark into an instrumental role, another flight from the complexity of the gesture. To render the *trace* as a telos is at once to reify it and to mythologise it.

The central claim has been that the gesture, surviving by re-casting itself, has emerged as a double structure, allowing for a certain autonomy, spontaneity and the chaotic and aleatory, on the one hand, and pre-planning, anterior delimiting and channelling on the other. As the prototype for such a gesture was set out by Newman, I claim, there is seen to be an irresistible homology between Newman and Derrida, or more generally, between the gesture and the Derridean themes I have followed. The homology is quite precise in its implication. It compels us to

recognise that instrumentalising painting practices return the mark to a noncomplex origin, in a suppression of originary complexity. The genuine gesture, then, becomes, from a certain vantage point, heady with reflexivity. Perhaps too heady. Nonetheless, what we thought would turn out to be a maddening burden of reflexivity might, on the contrary, eventuate in an intensely compacted visual thrift, as with Monique Prieto, or Myron Stout. It may equally eventuate in exuberant and noisy gaming with the banal, the ephemeral and the pictoriality of the commodity-icon, as in Pop Art's legacy. So it is impossible to legislate for the gesture: to say in advance what kind of pictorial work it can or cannot, should or should not do. The gesture, I claim, has to articulate the *trace* in Derrida's sense. The gesture as *fun* is never incompatible with this trace. The gesture at its most potent feels non-coerced. That is why we must conclude from the argument that the gesture must rethink and renew constantly its modes of inscribing the *trace*, but that it cannot take the *trace* for its subject.

### 3.6 Gesture and Violation

Origination and presence were the themes that preoccupied Barnett Newman. We saw how Newman thought that painting had to address them in the absence of tradition, as if in the state of a *tabula rasa*. But what if one views the historical circumstance at any point as one of thrownness? What if the *tabula rasa* is unattainable because there is always something relevantly already there? This was an important aspect of the initial account of the prosthesis read through the work of Bernard Stiegler: that the implement is the given that both transmits a past and pretends a futurity. But the sense that there can be no *tabula rasa* is also central to



Duchamp's intervention with the readymade. As Duchamp commented, one can think even of oneself as a biological readymade. With these divergences in mind, I want now to consider a different kind of gesture, different both to Newman's conception of the mark and to the type of mark one finds in Reed.

In the context of a response to Derrida, let's note that Derrida's own writing practice is very substantially a reading practice. Derrida's method is entirely unlike, for instance, Badiou's. The latter proposes to declare and construct a philosophical system. Derrida, on the contrary, with no interest in exhibiting systematicity, composes his own texts as close readings of received texts, or, of readymade texts. Thus, it is no travesty to say that Derrida's texts themselves are near to being marked readymades. Duchamp's readymades are almost never unmarked: they too are marked readymades.

The subject of this section will be the case of the readymade as a picture which is then newly marked in ways that contradict the original picture. I want to consider a structure of violation into which the gesture has frequently cast itself. The model is prefigured in Duchamp's *Pharmacy* of 1914 [Fig.20] in which two dots of colour (originally red and yellow, over time decaying to red and green) are added to a commercial print of a landscape. Here image-making is equated with the readymade; painting is equated with abstracted chromatic decision-making. Implicitly image-making here also is kitsch. Around 1960 Asger Jorn considered making the equation with kitsch explicit. In a group of paintings including *Hirschbrunft im Wilden Kaiser* [Fig.21], *Lockung* and *Abendständchen* [Fig.22] (all 1960) Jorn applied a very few marks over a kitsch landscape. The readymade landscape painting he used looked a competent Sunday painter product, guided by dependable rules of thumb. It was both impersonal and conventionally lyrical, hand-painted and signed. It's remarkable to me that Jorn did not estimate these

superb 'overpaintings' as a threat to the rest of his oeuvre. Jorn's 'normal' paintings are a turgid mix of Northern Expressionism, tachist marking, traditional genres and anti-art posturing. The paintings are too conventional in a variety of ways, but they also fall between competing conventions in a manner that is disabling. To some commentators this condition of foreclosure has its own quality, even stakes out its own realism. Thus T.J. Clark: "An Asger Jorn can be garish, florid, tasteless, forced, cute, flatulent, overemphatic: it can never be vulgar. It just cannot prevent itself from a tampering and framing of its desperate effects which pulls them back into the realm of painting, ironizes them, declares them done in the full knowledge of their emptiness."<sup>149</sup> For Clark then Jorn embodies a real problem for European painting in the 50s: that however *informel*, however aleatory the marking, the result is always framed by taste, or in Clark's parlance, refinement. This sounds tendentious but the evidence supports the claim: think of the good manners of the supposedly radical European painting of the time: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein. The trouble with Clark's praise is that it too easily sets up a self-fulfilling expectation: that Jorn conceives painting as endgame and then acts out the scripted scenario with generous burlesque. This is of course not uninteresting, not least because it rehearses certain discourses of 1980s painting. But it hardly implies that Jorn is comparable to the best work of his contemporaries, by which I mean American painting of the 50s. Frequently Jorn's titles – which convey an epic arrogance of the kind typical of Beuys' titles – are more fun than the works themselves. The incontestable evidence of the 'normal' Jorn paintings is that Jorn did not think openly about the technics of painting, by which I mean in contrast to the kind of open technical thinking evident in, say, Pollock or Robert Rauschenberg or even Max Ernst. There's the strong feeling that Jorn didn't really look at his own marks or his own paintings except with a jaundiced

eye. Everything about them indicates bombast, habituation and dogma. In a word, pre-judgment.

All of which suggests an artist unworthy of attention. But that is the point about the overpaintings of 1960. They show, on the contrary, an artistic intelligence of wit and agility. The issue of the normal paintings in relation to the overpaintings here is one of addition versus not exactly subtraction, but perhaps cancellation, or negation. Several alternative renditions offer themselves: integration versus difference; construction versus dereliction; norm versus transgression; assertion versus denial; health versus pathogen; weaving versus tearing. For Jorn the problem with normal painting, and what in the end made it impossible, was the additive and constructive nature of its marking. Later in this section I will connect these constructive aspects of marking with the notion of the 'thetic' employed by Kristeva. How are we to conceive the closure that additive marking appears to have instituted for Jorn? Why did it institute closure? I'll offer only extrapolation from the paintings. There's a basic commonality between Duchamp's *Pharmacy* and Jorn's overpaintings of 1960: in both there are the two equations:

{readymade = image = background = kitsch}

and

{painting = violation of the image = pseudo-foreground / picture plane = free play}.

To put it this way suggests that *Pharmacy*'s declaration of pictorial possibilities was one that fundamentally did not contradict contemporaneous abstract painting practices within the high modernism of Malevich and Mondrian. In *Pharmacy*, as in Malevich's Suprematism or Mondrian's post-Cubist works, *painting* is set against image-making, against optically establishing a recessive space, and is identified instead with marking the surface of the picture plane. Hence it is misleading to present Duchamp here, or in general, as the resistance activist waging a guerrilla campaign against modernist painting. *Pharmacy* appears on the contrary to chime pleasantly with the Greenberg of *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*.

The above equations distil themselves down to the pairing:

{painting = figure}

{readymade = ground}.

Both *Pharmacy* and Jorn's overpaintings appear to endorse such a valuation. Jorn's problem with his 'normal' painting can then be understood as the extreme difficulty of attaining any satisfactory alternative to this reduced pairing of equations.

The first obvious alternative is {painting = figure and ground}. This corresponds to traditional painting, most nineteenth and much twentieth century painting. Jorn cannot adopt this mode because, one suspects, he like everyone in his generation has been convinced by the pictorial deconstruction of "figure and ground" at the hands of cubism implicitly and Mondrian explicitly. So Mondrian offers the second obvious alternative. Mondrian is really the first painter to achieve a resolved pictorial deconstruction of the figure/ground distinction. The cubists in the end were committed to depiction of the human figure and had

therefore to reassert the figure/ground distinction without which the human figure was not reliably communicable. In Mondrian the constituent rectangles of the painting are apparently of equal import; and are no more figure than ground; we can see them all as figure or all as ground; but what we cannot do is view them hierarchically, with some as figure and others as ground.<sup>150</sup> The Mondrian option corresponds to the equation:

$$\{ \text{painting} = \text{not [figure/ground]} \}.$$

Even if it sounds overly Hegelian, this formulation has the advantage of describing the Mondrian option as the securing of a historical continuity through a self-conscious negation of traditional practice: negation of tradition is what guarantees its qualified transmission. We can see this same equation in the Pollock of *Alchemy*, 1947, the Ellsworth Kelly of *Painting for a White Wall*, 1952 and so on.

To review: we have three schemas corresponding to three sets of paintings:

{ painting = figure and ground }	[ tradition, Old Masters]
{ painting = [not] figure/ ground}	[ Mondrian and after ]
{painting = figure} + {readymade = ground}	[ <i>Pharmacy</i> and Jorn in 1960 ]

This last pair of equations corresponds only to a tiny minority of Jorn's output, namely his overpaintings of 1960. I claim that the fatal difficulty in Jorn's 'normal' work, which makes up the vast majority of his output, amounts to his failure to attain any practical alternative to this last pairing of equations. Put crudely, his

inability to adopt the first equation – the traditional one – lay with being a good modernist, up to a point. More interestingly, Jorn tried and endlessly failed in practice to realize the second equation – the Mondrian-and-after one. There seem to have been two insurmountable problems. First, a refusal to discard decisively and unambiguously the human figure, or in general the image-making and communicating function of painting. As discussed above, with the case of the cubists, the insistence on communicable human figures does not reconcile itself with the equation {painting = not [figure/ground]}. Second, the ‘Mondrian equation’ is best satisfied by painting that articulates values of addition, accumulation, construction, integration (for examples of parts into wholes) and relative homogeneity. It’s hard to string those words together without suggesting affirmation. I would argue that such values are equally evident in the relevant Pollock work I cited in this category, namely *Alchemy*. Now obviously Duchamp in 1914 and Jorn in 1960 wish anything except identifying painting as credible affirmation. But for the latter it’s not just a matter of a cowed post-war German art context in which an effete painterly abstraction of the Wilhelm Ney variety is glorying in institutional approval. The issue goes much deeper than that. I believe that Jorn required a gesture that was manifestly vengeful, did work of overt violence and unambiguous negation. To that extent I’m in sympathy with Clark’s account. Where I differ from Clark concerns the capacity of the normal paintings to do the requisite work of negation. Rauschenberg once spoke of the logic of asking de Kooning for a drawing to erase:<sup>151</sup> he had already erased his own drawings, but found that “too 50 / 50.”<sup>152</sup> He wanted 100% subtraction, 100% negation, call it what you will. Jorn’s logic - whether he grasped it or not is irrelevant: it is grasped by the work - parallels this. Only in the overpaintings was he able to get 100% negation from the gesture. The normal paintings remain

50/50, occasionally 60/40. But Asger Jorn went on doing his normal paintings. If we ask why – why in the face of the intensity of the overpaintings did he need to prolong the rehearsed agonies of the normal paintings? – we might reflect on this from Kafka’s diary: “The negative having been in all probability greatly strengthened by the ‘struggle’, a decision between insanity and security is imminent.”<sup>153</sup> For security read the normal paintings.

*Pharmacy*, I have argued, does not contradict the painting practices of high Modernist abstraction or even Greenberg’s early account of “advanced painting”. It confirms the view that painting is not image-making or recessive space-making; that it is chromatic decision-making and marking without depiction. It consigns image-making and space-making to the readymade, for which read kitsch. Of course the entire Duchampian oeuvre shows the readymade in a variety of lights and does mark out a dissident position relative to a notional account of modernism that privileges, let’s say, ‘optical’ painting. But there is too much deference in the dissident/outsider account. Where Duchamp traverses the stage of painting in his post-cubist output, the results affirm the most basic understandings of modernist painting concerning the conditions that constrain painting.

By 1960 things have changed. Superficially there is no great gulf between *Pharmacy* and *Hirschbrunnft im Wilden Kaiser*. In each the marking imposed onto the readymade image occupies a small percentage of the picture area, reinforcing the viewer’s experience of the readymade as ground to the figure of the invasive gesture. In each, the readymade is a landscape image; thus both a standard painting genre and a promise of recessive space, as well as inevitably a fantasized and consoling other to culture. In each, the gesture violates the integrity of the landscape both as genre and as spatial order. The gesture is what dis-integrates the

image. Well, kind of. In the Duchamp the gesture is so incidental that the viewer could miss it. The disrespect done to the image is, shall we say, procedural rather than sensory, a breach of etiquette no doubt, but one uttered in a whisper. In *Hirschbrunft im Wilden Kaiser* the gestures are loud and in bloom. What is hard to say is whether they make up an image. You can almost make out a new Hirsch (deer) among the smears and drips that mess up the left third of the readymade. *Abendständchen* feels less febrile, less urgent, more played for laughs. It is also a much more complex assertion. And as often, comedy turns out to be serious business. The gestures are applied with a knife and they make up parts for two faces - eyes, mouth. They are altogether more contained and controlled than the gestures in *Hirschbrunft*, and they need to be, as we shall see. Another yellow knife marking conjures up a bird in a depiction that is as skill-free as possible. The readymade image is again a landscape – a river scene.

In *Abendständchen* all the added gestures go to form images, or more precisely, parts for images: eyes, mouths. The depictions are skill-free yet disciplined. There are no added marks that fail to depict: all merrily embrace an image-making vocation. In this crucial respect we are already a far cry from *Pharmacy's* oblique collusion with the consensus of Modernist abstraction. For *Abenständchen*, painting is and must be image-making, and fools itself if it pretends otherwise. (A sample Jom title of 1965: 'In The Beginning Was The Picture' [*Am Anfang war das Bild*].) It is made no less clear that the image-making impulse is inescapably infantile. However, the resonance peculiar to this painting lies in compelling the viewer's awareness of a beckoning infinite regress as imagery is grafted onto imagery potentially without cease. Of course we could have heard this said about the use of layered line drawings over backgrounds that is familiar in Picabia, and later in Polke and Salle. But why do I want to insist that the stakes



are greatly raised in *Abendständchen*, and of a different order? In part because the Jorn picture doesn't rely on line. Line drawings, especially where the line is an outline of uniform weight, pace and breadth, as it is canonically in Leger and Lichtenstein, abstract from and flatten things by homogenizing them. When line drawings are overlaid onto background images in Picabia, Salle, Polke and Schnabel too, the dissonance between overlay and ground is - optically and cognitively - very secure. That's to say the viewer is never made to feel unsure of the distinction between overlay and ground. Whereas in *Abendständchen* (roughly translates as 'Little Serenade'): though an optical distinction between ground and overlay (readymade and painted gesture) is trumpeted by chromatic means (the muddy modulations of the readymade's hues contrasted with the saturated colours added over), it is much less secure cognitively. To the lower right of the canvas Jorn places eyes and a mouth across a zone of readymade that pictures rocks and a cascading river. Again, we know what is readymade and what added marking, that much is unambiguous. We are obliged to see a face. There's no choice about this. We do see a face. Is there a face there? Well, we do see a face. In other words, we are unable to see only eyes and mouth. We see a face that is a river and rocks. Should we find the edges of the face? The jawline, the crown of the head? There are no discontinuities in the painting that could indicate the edge of the face. We could designate the entire readymade backdrop as the flesh of the face, but it is very difficult to *see* that designation, to enact the designation by seeing it. We could, alternatively, designate the entire backdrop as a masking screen: like those picture boards containing holes into which you place your face to be photographed within some absurd illusionistic tableau. In this picture the holes would correspond to eyes and mouths rather than complete faces. This designation is a little easier than the last, but doesn't work either: the moronic

yellow bird towards the top right spoils it by being slightly too translucent to sustain the apparition of a collaged cut into a backdrop. We are obliged to see this bird as dumb smearing over and across a backdrop, not a shape incised into and through a screen. Further, there is a strong network of chromatic equivalences established among the added markings. This necessitates seeing them as sharing a common layer-status: it's impossible to see some as cuts into the ground and other as smears across it. They have somehow to be grasped on equal terms.

*Abendständchen* thematizes the viewer's expectations of painting much as Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and *Rear Window* allegorise the desires and identifications of the film audience. The comparison doesn't carry far because in Jörn's painting those expectations cannot and will not be satisfied. The tone is not contemptuous of those expectations: the painting's premise is the hunch that they contain more possibilities than the art that denies them in the name of transcending or sublating them. For the latter read the Mondrian paradigm. Jörn has understood the force of the pictorial regime that I have gathered under the name of Mondrian. He has experienced its fruition and ruination. Painting's older compact with the viewer – the one that agreed upon the image-making goal and its being embedded in cognitively resolvable figure/ground relationships – is the repressed that *Abendständchen* re-visits upon modernist painting as unfinished business. The wonder of this painting is precisely in its knife-edge determination of local figure/ground events. Jörn both holds figure at bay – eyes and mouth with no face to bind them – and simultaneously beckons it by implicating landscape features and their profiles as the contours for overlaid figures.

As I've argued, overlaying in *Abendständchen* produces cognitive instability of an altogether greater intensity and precariousness than that of the overlaid linear depictions in Picabia, Polke, Salle et al. But it must also be stressed that the Jörn

image is not a matter of a contest between gestalts in the manner of Wittgenstein's duck/rabbit figure. The double-aspect figure, for which the duck/rabbit provides the paradigm, is a frequent concern of twentieth century painting. In Dali's paintings of 1938-39 it is a recurring device, e.g. *The Image Disappears*, 1938 [Fig.23]. Notice first that the painting, as in Arcimbaldo's vegetable heads, depends for its effect on the traditional pre-modernist continuous paint surface and could not accommodate marks that disrupt that continuity. Such a painting then cannot contain the gesture understood as a paint mark that manifestly separates its information value from its utterance value. And notice second that the viewer's experience here is one of closure: of being shunted from one gestalt to another and back again in a closed loop of visual duopoly. Moreover, this is closure in the sense that the binary contest is comfortably secured: nothing is radically destabilized and the binarity offers its own complacent assurances. Jorn's overpaintings never resolve themselves into such duopoly. It is never a case of either/or. In the Jorn works the overmarkings act like performers on the stage supplied by the readymade image. In so doing, they inscribe, soil and pollute that stage. There is an emphatically *transitive* relation here for which the equilibrium of the double-aspect figure offers no equivalent.

Obviously the overpaintings of 1960 offer no solutions. They hold great clarity, are not confused. Yet they are failures and they know it. That makes them poignant and lends them an ease that is absent from the normal paintings. The trope of painting declaring the impossibility of painting is a cliché of interpretation. Commentators once said it about Pollock although he realized an entire new field of potential for the discourse and technicity of painting. It's hard now to regard Pollock's oeuvre as anything but an opening forth into possibility. Jorn's overpaintings are, however, the real McCoy, or as near any could be to

painting that manifests its own impossibility: it celebrates the pictorial expectations sneered at and spurned by modernism, but it too fails them. The whole Jorn oeuvre participates in the manifestation insofar as the normal paintings are unrelentingly and doggedly inane.

Perhaps the test for endgame art is influence, or its absence. Jorn's work has had no influence but there is an inheritance. The 1960 overpaintings provide de facto prototypes for a variety of more recent works. Throughout Richter's work, from the 1965 quartet of Baker family portraits (*Herr Baker, Frau Baker etc.*) [Fig.27] to the oversmeared photo-paintings of landscapes and skulls in the 1990s, we find the recurrent device of loose marking overlaid upon an integrated, stable, self-sufficient image for the purpose of dis-integrating it. Consider also Morley's *Racetrack*, 1970 [Fig.26]; Polke's *Profil*, 1968 [Fig.24]; Kippenberger's *Kaputtes Kind*, 1985 [Fig.25]. Among these instances it is Richter who has the most difficulty with the overlaid marks, because he has found no logic for organizing them beyond the fact that they de-stabilize and dis-integrate the underlying resolution. Richter often hints at a decorative logic for the overlaid marking: it's made explicit in the Baker family paintings in which the overmarking also readily depicts decorative snowfall. But here decorative is nearly synonymous with the gridding up of the picture plane: often Richter's overmarking imposes a barely disguised scaffold for a grid, as in his *Venice*, 1986 [Fig.29]. Elsewhere games of symmetry with the surface geometry of the underpainting are played out by the overmarking, as in *Baumgruppe*, 1987 [Fig.28]. These Richter works are both unsatisfying and keenly self-critical in a rather worthy, programmatic way. They thematize perfection disturbed: a need to challenge the polished finality of the photo-paintings. And it should be stressed that such overpaintings are directly parallel to the Jorn cases despite the fact that Richter, Morley and Kippenberger in

the instances cited, overmark their *own* marks. Nevertheless, I claim that the twin equations of painting with figure and readymade with ground still apply, since, in the wake of Pop generally, and in particular, Lichtenstein's work from *Look Mickey!*, 1961, onward, it became possible for painting to absorb the image as readymade and to absorb the readymade as image. It didn't matter then whether it was handpainted, screenprinted or whatever; the point is that after Pop the image could be both intimate, idiosyncratic marking and simultaneously sheer readymade. Hence the strong equivalence between Duchamp's *Pharmacy*, Jorn's 1960 overpaintings and the cited works of Richter, Kippenberger et cetera.

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, in a section titled 'Negativity: Rejection', Julia Kristeva considers the ontology of negation. Given that the mark we have considered in this section attempts to violate – to negate – a readymade image, the issue of the ontology of negation is central here. Kristeva's argument, drawing substantially on Hegel and Frege, is that signification finally cannot be negation since it is always and inescapably a matter of positing something. It is always "thetic", always produces a thesis even where it adopts the guise of anti-thesis. Following Frege, Kristeva argues that the placing of "not" before a word is itself only an extension of predication: "as part of the predicate, 'not' is part of judgment – which we call the thetic – and is merely a variant of the *positive predicate*".<sup>154</sup> Negation then is a momentary apparition in language; yet qua judgment, qua predication, it is a positing. Therefore signification cannot contain negation: signification is an ontology of the thetic.

Kristeva's move at this point is not to banish negation but to find its force elsewhere than in signification. Negation, or "negativity,"<sup>155</sup> she then argues, is not produced in signification but is better understood as a *condition for* signification: "We must *leave the verbal function* and move toward what produces it,

so as to understand the process of rejection that pulsates through the drives in a body that is caught within the network of nature and society.”<sup>156</sup> In the psycho-physiological development of the child on the eve of language acquisition proper Kristeva sees “a basic biological operation of scission, separation, and division: at the same time it joins the always already splitting body to family structure and to the continuum of nature *in a relation of rejection*.”<sup>157</sup> She continues:

Within this specific space, which is corporeal and biological but already social since it is a link with others, there operates a nonsymbolized negativity that is neither arrested within the terms of judgment, nor predicated as negation in judgment. This negativity – this expenditure – posits an object as separate from the body proper and, at the very moment of separation, fixes it in place as *absent*, as a *sign*. In this way, rejection establishes the object as real and, at the same time, as signifiable....<sup>158</sup>

It is in this sense that negativity is a condition of signification. And it is in this sense that Kristeva argues that this negativity which is *originary* with respect to signification cannot be represented.

Ready-made verbalization (language) can register rejection only as a series of differences, thus fixing it in place, and losing sight of its dynamic process. True negativity is a dialectical notion specific to the signifying process, on the crossroads between the biological and social order on the one hand, and the *thetic* and signifying phase of the social order on the other.<sup>159</sup>

The identification of negativity with rejection is highly appropriate for Asger Jorn's painting. I don't wish to *apply* Kristeva's theoretical position here. Nor to offer it as an abstracted equivalence for Jorn's painting practice. I claim that the gesture in recent painting inaugurates a structure of violation. I identify violation with negation. Citing examples from Jorn, Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Richter and others, I have traced the resistance of painting to sustaining practices of negation. Duchamp's brilliant insight in *Pharmacy* was to have understood so well that negation could be accomplished in painting henceforth only if authorship were substantially relinquished, in his case via the readymade. The evident difficulties of Jorn, Rauschenberg and Richter in sustaining negation amount to a reluctant succumbing to the thetic aspect of painting and drawing as additive, cumulative marking, even when, as in Rauschenberg's initial erasures, they are nominally subtractive. As already narrated, all three of these discover in their different ways that negation is sustainable only in relation to the readymade. Hence painting, always thetic, sustains negation only by entering into contact with its other, the readymade.

There is however an alternative register of negation, and a different way of engaging with the pictorial readymade, which is altogether more subtle. While the examples chosen in this section typically soil or stain a received picture, in the work of Glenn Brown the bravura impasto paintings of Frank Auerbach are repainted as immaculate flat illusionistic portraits. Now after some fifteen years work in this vein, Brown has convincingly extended his practice well beyond the framework of quotation and appropriation. Thus what started as cool reproductions of Auerbach have now become something much stranger and more elusive, pitched at a mode between active and passive, between image creation proper and citation of a readymade. **[Fig.30]** In finding that strange middle voice

between active and passive, Brown, more than any other contemporary painter has raised the stakes for the gesture in a manner that is fully commensurate with the reading of Derrida.



## Coda: The Chromatic Mark

Ad Reinhardt liked to say the end is always a beginning. Bearing in mind that sense of a process - in this case, the overarching argument of the text - looping back upon itself, I want to finish by thinking about colour. Via colour we can reach back, through the discussions of the trace, to the starting point of the thesis: the question about making; the impact of the Duchampian readymade and the situation Duchamp himself referred to by the pun "l'impossibilité de fer:" the impossibility of iron/making.

The response to Derrida in the third chapter indicated precise consequences for painting. In particular, painting that determines the mark as noncomplex, or as straightforwardly instrumental, or even reliably quotable - as in so much of postmodern painting - is found by the argument of this chapter to be inadequate. Painting can proceed now only through an encounter with the nonsimple origination of the mark. But there is something important still to say. We need to think about colour. In particular, the mark in its relation to colour. This may seem rudimentary: the mark, we might think, can be black ink on white paper, as are these letters, or it can be coloured, and placed upon colours, or beside them. What more needs saying? In this section I claim that for the mark, on the contrary, colour is never just an alternative, or addition, or supplement to tone. Plenty therefore remains to be said. Saying it will indicate some important limits to the critique of presence as we have adapted it for the painted mark. It will also propel us back to the confrontation of painting with the readymade, though from another direction. But before we reach those terrains we need to establish the milieu of a colour discourse for contemporary painting.

Painting has long been capable of isolating and distilling its colour effects. But it is only with modernist painting that colour is consciously and programmatically separated first from tone, meaning the relative values of light and dark, and subsequently from symbolism, and from matter. This separation makes possible the treatment of colour as colour, distinct from colour as symbol, or colour as coloured stuff, or as tone. It was one of the substantial achievements of modernism to make colour in itself a viable mode, and object of address in painting. Yet having accomplished the separation of colour as colour, the theoretical as well as practical consequences were far from straightforward.

Within modernist colour pedagogy there was, at the time of the high modernism of the 1920s and 30s, a divergence between the systematic and hierarchical approach, exemplified by Johannes Itten, and an empirical, nominalist approach as in the method of Itten's sometime Bauhaus colleague, Josef Albers. We see equivalences to these positions in modernist painting. Thus we find the systematic, hierarchical, quasi-Platonic approach to colour in Mondrian, Johns and arguably Kelly. Whereas an empiricist, nominalist bias is evident in Newman, Albers himself, and later in Marden and Palermo.

Contemporary colour discourse, however, seems to have arrived at a consensus that is anti-systematic, non-hierarchical and relativistic. For recent texts like Bachelor's *Chromophobia*, and Gage's *Colour and Culture*, the decisive, if tacit, precedent is Wittgenstein. Decisive because the insistence on language as a conditioner of chromatic experience, and with it the stress upon the relativities of colour vocabularies, are applications of Wittgenstein's concept of language games. Wittgenstein himself thought intently about colour. His reflections were published posthumously as *Remarks on Colour*. These compressed remarks are a sequence of

thought experiments and phenomenological case studies which work at undoing all expectations of systematicity for colour.

In a characteristic investigation Wittgenstein considers transparency of colour. If colours can be transparent – if, for instance, one can have coloured transparent glass – then presumably all colours can be transparent. The glass could be any colour. But he then notes that, no, it could not be white. One can't have transparent white. White is opaque. At this point, as Wittgenstein acknowledges, some will say that white, however, is not a colour. Thus we learn in physics that white is not a colour, but all the colours added up. But this repost confuses the physics of colour with its phenomenology. When we look at a tricolor flag we do see three colours: we see red, white and blue as having an equal chromatic status. Adopting this mode of investigation, one can easily locate further lapses of systematicity in colour. For instance, and most obviously, certain colours – red, blue, green – can embrace a range of hues from light to dark, whereas yellow can only be light. There is no dark yellow.

Colour emphatically does not conform to a system. And that radical absence of system is crucial. But it is vital not to let that truth be dissolved into the language games account of colour, as if one sought to grasp colour in the terms of Lyotard's 'crisis of legitimation,' or its scriptural equivalent, the Tower of Babel. In other words, we must respect the lapses of system as singularities, and not expect to account for them as the effects of language games. We must not, for example, argue that the difference between yellow and other colours is a consequence of the distribution of colour names. Instead, we have to admit that this difference constitutes a positive difference and as such a singularity beyond the effects of language. The peculiar spatiality of colour relationships likewise presents further singularities beyond cultural knowledge and habit. It is, for

instance, no matter of convention that determines that a blue recedes relative to a red. Nor is it something that one learns inductively from an accumulation of experience. It may certainly be a matter of culture that determines that such sensory effects are worth attending to in the first place, but that's a different issue altogether. The crucial point here is that the effects of colour themselves are to an important degree irrespective of culture. Is this to argue that colour is nature? No, because we continue to make new colours, like the relatively recent day-glo colours. Ultramarine was an innovation of the nineteenth century. Colours are also technological constructs. Let's consider colour not as nature but instead as a domain of singularities. Since colour is a domain of singularities it is never a network of equivalences, nor merely a grid of differential values. As a domain of singularities colour is also a virtual infinity. Hence in making day-glo colour we actualise a virtual singularity.

If colour is a virtual infinity it can be expected to be ever in conflict with its repertoire of names. Colour is infinite. The juxtaposition of one colour to another is a singular relation between two singularities, each of which occurs within an infinite continuum. I indicated earlier that the examination of colour would produce a certain severance from the Derridean critique of presence that has shaped my understanding of the mark. While colour is disclosed within differential relations it nonetheless retains the positive force of the singularity. Another way of approaching this is through the notion of iterability. We have seen how, for Derrida, the signifying gesture, such as the performative, must posit an ideal such that its repetitions are recognisable as such. This structure of (potential) repetition is termed iterability. Signification is dependent on iterability. I have argued, both implicitly and explicitly, in chapters 2 and 3 that the mark in painting is always lured onto the threshold of signification, either qua signature, or

qua pictorial device. However, I claim that colour does not require iterability to be affective. In an important sense colour is affective irrespective of iteration, of signification. The chromatic intensity is not dependent on iteration whose force initiates the repetitious sequence. At this point, then, we make contact once more with thetic negativity. As we noted, Kristeva introduces thetic negativity as a mode of negation that is prior to signification. If the chromatic mark does not fall within the ambit of a logic of inscription, and of signification, as I claim, then it has a strong affinity with thetic negativity. What then does it negate? In the remainder of this section I will argue that it negates the mark itself, thetically. As we now consider further the tension between colour as colour and colour as coloured stuff – i.e. as pigment – we will be forced to loop back to Duchamp and the readymade. In so doing, we will elaborate on the consequences of colour as a thetic negation of the mark.

We have noted that modernist painting made a conscious attempt to isolate colour in itself. Given the advent of colour as colour, the theoretical accommodation to the non-systematic truth of colour qua domain of singularity, as in Wittgenstein, gathers force. But as was noted above, the practical consequences of the separation of colour as colour in painting are far from straightforward. Whereas one might suppose that colour could be treated in film, or in stained glass windows, in isolation from coloured matter, as pure chromatic apparition, it still remains unlikely that painting, understood as the art of applying pigments, can decisively separate colour from coloured stuff. This tension in painting between colour as colour, meaning colour as chromatic apparition, and colour as coloured stuff, as pigment, as paint – this tension now asserts at the heart of the discussion.

The issue is touched on in Walter Benjamin's fragment titled *A Child's View of Colour*. In it Benjamin argues for an autonomous affective domain of chromatic encounter. For the child, he writes, colour is not

a layer of something superimposed on matter, as it is for adults.... Where colour provides the contours, objects are not reduced to things but are constituted by an order consisting of an infinite range of nuances. Colour is single, not as a lifeless thing and a rigid individuality but as a winged creature that flits from one form to the next.<sup>160</sup>

'A layer of something superimposed on matter' is, undeniably, a pretty good definition of paint. Or at least, it is a definition of paint that has been made into painting, unlike Duchamp's readymade tube of pigment. The child, Benjamin suggests, has a truer grasp of colour than the adult, whose sense has grown reified and habituated. The logic must be that only in the reified optic of the adult is coloured matter confused with colour itself, as perhaps with gold. The child, on the contrary, sees colour for the apparition – the “winged creature” – that it truly is. Colour as colour here is never coloured matter. Consider sky blue as the emblem: sky is blue, and not blue air.

The tension between colour as colour, and colour as matter, has long been negotiated by painters. It was already central in Duchamp's understanding of the tube of paint as a readymade. According to his insight, modernist painting dreamt it was devoted to colour when really it was devoted to paint. But one can equally defend modernist painting from this charge by the reverse logic. Hasn't modernist painting in fact so often understood that it needed to bracket off colour from pigment in order to re-think the mark? After all, isn't it obvious that strategies of

exclusively tonal, or achromatic painting have often been adopted precisely in order to positively investigate the mark in isolation from chromatic qualities? In other words, colour has frequently been banished in order to affirm the mark, as in early, so-called 'analytic' Cubism, or even in the Richter *Inpainting-Grey* cited above. I argued that *Gotham News* too is really an achromatic white monochrome in disguise. If the logic of radically investigating the painted mark pushes towards the achromatic image, then by the same token, the logic of radically investigating colour pushes towards the spectre of the unmarked space, as in the monochrome or the colour field. And it is probably only Newman who plausibly attempts the impossible simultaneity of the two kinds of investigation. It is indeed his respect for these two divergent logics – the logic of the mark, and the logic of colour as colour – that drives Newman's painting at its best. Rarely, as in the achromatic *Stations of the Cross* series, does Newman forego the dual logic of mark and of colour. Arguably Newman's worst group of paintings, these are weak precisely because the destabilising dialogue between mark and colour is briefly banished, and a false and facile perfection offers itself up.

The key is that colour is not a mark, and not *of the mark*. Whereas the entire discussion has been about the mark, and our reading of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* has been on the basis that it considers what one can call the mark. Yet here I claim that colour is not marking. The mark may summon colour - it may be the bearer of colour - but in so doing it initiates a further substance beyond itself: it supplements and over-reaches itself.

At this stage we seem to linger at the threshold of another discourse, a discourse at some remove from the whole scope of the text thus far. For the argument seems to direct us away from the terms of the foregoing discussions. But what becomes apparent now is that the modes by which colour is *sui generis*

were already a latent issue in the starting point of the thesis. For we began with the question of making in the face of the historical fact of Duchamp's readymade. With that in mind, let's re-state the central claims of the current section. By the reasoning of this section, applying a colour is not marking. Or, at the least, it is not co-terminus with marking. Applying colour is and is not marking. Then how should we understand it? It should not surprise us to find Duchamp already focusing on exactly this question. Via the following remarks we reach back to the very beginning of this entire text, and the initial question about *making*. Whereas I answered the question by developing the idea of an embodied judgment, Duchamp insists on identifying making as a mental act: precisely a *disembodied judgment*. What is remarkable for the current discussion is that for Duchamp the exemplary case of making is the colour decision:

Now what is making? Making something is choosing a tube of blue, a tube of red, putting some of it on the palette, and always choosing the quality of the blue, the quality of the red, and always choosing the place to put it on the canvas. It's always choosing.... Choice is the main thing, even in normal painting.<sup>161</sup>

It should be clear on what basis I oppose these claims about making. In Chapter 1 we saw how the Cruyff turn was created through bodily movement, as well as, following on Massumi's intervention, a subjective evacuation on the part of the player. The turn was done, accomplished, *made*, but on no account can it be said to have been chosen. It was never a matter of choice. And certainly not in Duchamp's sense of choosing from among readymades; in other words, a scenario in which choice is always choice from among what is already there.



Duchamp is blind to the powers of *making* because he adheres ultimately to a kind of Cartesian ringfencing of *res cogitans*. Doesn't his notion of choice resemble the cogito itself? The Cartesian cogito like the Duchampian choice, or nomination, is a disembodied judgment. It is the work of a *res cogitans* that cannot account for its liason with a *res extensa*. For Duchamp, things, artefacts *have been made*: making is what has happened, what was done in the past. Making qua ongoing fabrication is denied. His making has no present and no future. Or more exactly, the only making that can occupy the present is choosing. Making qua fabrication then is in the past, and takes the present form of an inheritance, a description that for Duchamp is both metaphorical and literal:

Even if you mix two vermilions together, it's still a mixing of two readymades. So man can never expect to start from scratch; he must start from readymade things like even his own mother and father.<sup>162</sup>

My point is that for Duchamp the made thing – which, in a Cartesian phrasing, is a *res extensa* - comes from the past, while the mind moves in the present and into the future. He is thus Cartesian to the extent that he cannot account for the mind's wovenness into contexts of things, of materials. And, again, as in Massumi's depiction of the footballer, there is an important sense in which the subjective mind has to be evacuated, forgotten, rendered liminal, in order for the player to engage adequately with his/her wovenness into a context of movements. Genuine making then requires a certain suspension of self-possessed 'mindfulness,' which is the polar opposite of Duchamp's punctal choice.

So, unreservedly, I take my distance from Duchamp's misconception of making. But what of his conception of colour? Why is it that, having posited

choice as the synonym, indeed the paradigm for making, Duchamp then stages the colour decision as the exemplary case of choice? Why colour decisions in particular rather than other kinds of decision?

In the chromatic mark there is an originary severance in which colour is discontinuous with mark. The young Duchamp was an admirer of Seurat. It is not by chance that both have figured in the journey of this text. Later, in his painted readymade *Pharmacy* [Fig.20], the ghost of pointillism persists. *Pharmacy* is a received image marked with two coloured dots. Duchamp's colour discourse is then true to his practice, and vice versa. Colouring in *Pharmacy* is indeed choosing – a *pictorial nominalism* – and little else, though there is significantly something else. There remains the minimal difference between choosing the tube of colour and applying a dot of it. At around the same time as *Pharmacy*, Kandinsky was writing his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, which was followed by the distinctly workmanlike and far from spiritual treatise of modernist painting, *Point and Line to Plane*. If we take *Pharmacy* as the exemplary contact of colour with the readymade, where colour is conveyed through the point, then we can equally regard Morley's *Racetrack* [Fig.26] as doing the same through line. *Racetrack* is the exemplary contact of colour with the readymade where colour is conveyed by line. Taken together, *Pharmacy* and *Racetrack* give us point and line to readymade. The position I want to arrive at will be that, while Duchamp crucially misconceives making, he nevertheless grasps something vital and irreducible in his exemplification of choice by the chromatic decision.

Back to the *Racetrack*. While colour is added to the readymade image in *Pharmacy* as two points, it appears in *Racetrack* as two lines. We see from this why Duchamp had to restrict himself to the point. For in *Racetrack* the lines are imperfect, modestly indexical, drip a little, and where their diagonals meet one

runs under the other, disallowing strict planar flatness and instead invoking pictoriality. As we saw in the previous section, *Pharmacy* on the contrary identified the pictorial with the readymade image qua kitsch, and in an unexpected and sly Greenbergian logic, identified painting as a marking that violates the readymade by asserting planar flatness. As regards colour, the issue here is that Duchamp restricts the mark to a point in order that it exhibit neither duration through its indexicality, nor pictorial relation with other invasive marks. In other words the point, or dot, serves a mythic function in *Pharmacy*: it attempts to preserve the illusion of making as a disembodied and atemporal judgment. Thus it is the dot of colour that best serves Duchamp's needs. The dot of colour – devoid of extension in space or time – is the emblem of the punctum of judgment, itself also a point without temporal or spatial extension.

Although Morley's painting has strong affinities with Duchamp – it is a marked readymade and, what's more, its title is a didactic pun – it however goes against his ideology of chromatic choice. Still I said that Duchamp touched on something vital in his identification of making with chromatic choice, as opposed to chromatic marking. Morley initially painted the Durban *Racetrack* as a unified 'photorealist' painting, though by 1970 his own brand of photo-painting had already become extremely loose. He added the two red lines some time after completing the 'readymade' image, upon reading of events in apartheid South Africa. So there's a strong sense in which the punctal chromatic choice does indeed describe Morley's response to an image he'd already finished. He needed to negate the image succinctly and unambiguously and he did so through choosing a colour. His red has several roles. It is a saturated colour, so it stands for colour as colour, as opposed to the tonal structure of the readymade image. It is also the red of the examiner's pen that places an 'X' where it marks a 'wrong.' And it is

blood, hence it pulses and drips. *Racetrack* is without doubt Morley's best work, probably his only great painting. Its immense ambition is to weave the didactic through the pure gesture. Colour as colour in the overpainting contradicts colour as tone in the readymade. Yet here this operates simultaneously as an investigation of the condition of the gesture with respect to the readymade, on the one hand, and a negation of the image of leisured stability under apartheid, on the other. The achievement is this simultaneity and, more than that, an interlocking of the two issues such that each is somehow implicated in the other.

Now we can revisit the notion of thetic negativity adapted from Kristeva in the last section. Recall that the key to this notion is that negation is not secured at the level of signification. First let's regard *Racetrack* as putting the readymade image in the role of signification. So signification = depiction = readymade. Then it is the gesture, by exceeding the terms of depiction and signification, that attains to negativity. There is, however, another way of understanding thetic negativity here. Morley, as we've noted, was already doing pretty loose photo-paintings by 1970. Certainly he had wandered some way from the path of perfected photo-realism that he claimed for himself five years earlier with his paintings of cruise ships. Viewed up close, the marks in the 'underpainting' of *Racetrack* are startlingly open, mobile, autonomous. In other words, we don't require the overpainted diagonals to introduce the autonomous mark here because it is already there in the (re-)construction of the readymade image. Since the mark is already given, we can instead understand the diagonals as a chromatic negation of the mark. *Racetrack* then can be seen as a chromatic version of thetic negativity.

By now we are close to grasping in what degree Duchamp was right about the chromatic mark but wrong about *making* in general. Many of the preceding remarks on chromatic aspects of paintings imply some agreement with

Duchamp's insistence on chromatic choice. For example, we saw how shrewdly de Kooning constrained the chromatic potentialities in *Gotham News*. We saw too why red was chosen by Morley in *Racetrack*, and that it was a decision separated from and coming after the rest of the making. So chromatic marks have to be *chosen*. To an extent then Duchamp was right about colour. He intuited that in the chromatic mark colour exceeds the scope of the mark. In this section I have argued exactly that.

We could say, almost without irony, that *Pharmacy* is a work of late pointillism. With *Pharmacy* Duchamp was keeping his hands clean. So clean that they wouldn't even be noticed. We saw that in the Leroi-Gourhan/Stiegler account of anthropogenesis there is a dependence of thought on the prosthesis. At certain stages the limbs themselves play the role of the prosthesis. In *Pharmacy* Duchamp attempts a mark that dissimulates its prosthetic dependence. As I have argued, Duchamp's prejudices resemble strongly those of Descartes, and it would hard to find a thinker less able than him to accommodate a notion of prosthetic priority. By specifying the mark as perfunctory and without extension, Duchamp tries to sustain a prosthetic posteriority. Let's note that *Pharmacy's* attempt to dissimulate the mark through the point does two things: on the one hand, it traces the estrangement of colour from the mark, and we too have remarked on that estrangement; on the other hand, it declares itself evidence for a disembodied judgment. But it is flawed evidence. As I claim, its failure is attested to by the more indicative *Racetrack*. Granted the complex provisos that were noted, *Racetrack* stands emphatically for embodied judgment, though it is an embodied judgment within which colour negates the mark. Nonetheless, if you had to prolong the fantasy of painting based on disembodied judgement, *Pharmacy* is where you'd go again to persuade yourself.



## Notes

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### Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Thierry de Duve *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1993, p.290.

<sup>2</sup> Other works that preceded *Fountain* can be described as readymades: the *Bottlerack*, 1914 and *Pharmacy*, 1914. Nevertheless, by positioning *Fountain* so specifically in relation to an exhibition jury, Duchamp prefigured, even if he didn't fully inaugurate a new discourse of art. On this I broadly agree with de Duve that the intervention of *Fountain* is decisive.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Smithson accused Duchamp of harbouring exactly this prejudice. See his 1973 interview with Moira Roth:

What I am saying is that Duchamp offers a sanctification for alienated objects, so you get a generation of manufactured goods. It is a complete denial of the work process and it is very mechanical too.... Duchamp is trying to transcend production itself in the Readymades when he takes an object out of the manufacturing process and then isolates it. He has a certain contempt for the work process and here I think he is sort of playing the aristocrat.

Robert Smithson *The Collected Writings*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1996, p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> Unlike the German *Kraft* meaning power.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. M. Eldred, London, Verso, 1988, p. 454.

<sup>6</sup> See Weiner's interview with Benjamin Buchloh, where he (Weiner) states: "But you had to do something with materials. For me it was my approach to dialectical materialism: it was things you had control over in terms of their production, therefore you would have a sense of their value outside of their monetary value. My work is not Duchampian or anti-Duchampian." In *Lawrence Weiner*, London, Phaidon, 1998, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> See *Some Notes on Activity and Performance in Vito Acconci*, London, Phaidon, 2002, pp. 88-92.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion of Morris's text *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making* later in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Crow *Unwritten Histories of Conceptual Art: Against Visual Culture* in Crow *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1996, p.214: "(Conceptual Art's) arrival ...recovered key tenets of the early academies, which, for better or worse, established fine art as a learned, self-conscious activity in Western culture. One of those tenets was a mistrust of optical experience as providing an adequate basis for art: the more a painting relied on purely visual sensation, the lower its cognitive value was assumed to be."

<sup>10</sup> De Duve *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> For a history of the origins of the fully public (as opposed to narrowly aristocratic) display of artwork with the advent of the Salon see Thomas Crow's *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth Century Paris*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985, introduction and chapter 1.

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Kosuth *Art After Philosophy* in Gerd de Vries (ed.), *On Art: Artists Writings on the Changed Notion of Art After 1965*, Schaumberg, Du Mont International, 1973, p. 146.

<sup>13</sup> See *Abstract Art Refuses* or almost any of the statements in *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> It's important to notice that Kosuth responds to Reinhardt the writer, not Reinhardt the painter, as de Duve himself acknowledges: "Kosuth, in fact, took his own 'definition' of art as tautology ... from Reinhardt's writings and attitude more than from his paintings." (*Kant After Duchamp* p.246) Kosuth's position could not make sense of Reinhardt's painting practice.

<sup>15</sup> Kosuth *Art After Philosophy* p. 148.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p.148.

<sup>17</sup> The so-called Judd dictum is cited by Kosuth: "But in the philosophic *tabula rasa* of art, 'if someone calls it art,' as Don Judd has said, 'it's art.'" (*Ibid.* p. 142).

<sup>18</sup> It is generally overlooked by the advocates of the Judd dictum - or its cognates such 'art is what happens in the art context' - that if it were true it would also require that things nobody calls art cannot be art, or that what happens outside the art context is not art. By this rationale graffiti, as something outside the art context, is not art, but it can become art if it enters that context. This logic alone should alert us to the deep conservatism of the dictum.

I develop some aspects of this issue, more particularly around the question of the 'art context' taking the form of an architectural context, - which itself is obliged to anticipate the kinds of disclosures that will be presented within its confines as art - and certain paradoxes that follow from that, in my essay *René Daniëls: With Respect to Disrespect in Afterall 10*, October 2004, pp. 47-53.

<sup>19</sup> In J. L. Austin *Philosophical Papers*, edited by J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 233 - 252.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida *Signature, Context, Event in Limited Inc*, trans. by S. Weber and J. Mehlman, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1988, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Though not by Deleuze and Guattari: "Anybody can shout, 'I declare a general mobilization,' but in the absence of an effectuated variable giving that person the right to make such a statement it is an act of puerility or insanity, not an act of enunciation." *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London, The Athlone Press, 1988, p. 82.

<sup>22</sup> Slavoj Žižek *The Plague of Fantasies*, London, Verso, 1997, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida *Signature, Context, Event* pp. 15-19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Osborne *Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy* in Newman & Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, London, Reaktion Books, 1992, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> In Kosuth's doctrine 'stylistic conceptual art' (like Thatcher's 'wet') was the term for the party of compromise and backsliding, as opposed to 'theoretical conceptual art' (Thatcher's 'dry'), which stood for the party of resolute virtue.

<sup>27</sup> See Žižek's remarks on Deleuze's notion of the expansion of the concept, in *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 184.

<sup>28</sup> In this connection, it is fitting to find that the first treatise on painting in the Renaissance was written not by an artist but by an architect, viz. *On Painting* by Alberti.



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- <sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1968, from p. 193.
- <sup>30</sup> Rudolf Arnheim *A Plea for Visual Thinking in New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1986, p. 139.
- <sup>31</sup> Michael Baxandall *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 86-108.
- <sup>32</sup> Niklas Luhmann *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 24.
- <sup>33</sup> Duchamp nominated the Woolworth Building as a readymade. (Robert Smithson remarked: “He was a spiritualist of Woolworth, you might say.”) The *unmarked* readymade is however the exception in Duchamp’s oeuvre.
- <sup>34</sup> Here I adapt the concept of an ‘apparatus’ from Jean-François Lyotard’s essay *On A Figure of Discourse*. By implication apparatus for Lyotard embraces, all at once, technics, technique, the discursive legacies that inform them and the discursive expectations that surround them. *On A Figure of Discourse*, trans. Mark S. Roberts, in Lyotard, *Toward the Postmodern*, ed. Robert Harvey and Mark S. Roberts, New York, Humanity Books, 1999.
- <sup>35</sup> Richard Williams, *The Guardian* 11/10/2004, Sport section p.2.
- <sup>36</sup> Brian Massumi *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002, p.75.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74.
- <sup>38</sup> The repeated failure of Dutch national teams to win major competitions despite their extreme talent is presumably related to the excessive creativity of their players. This touches on the question of the tension within any group or team between individual creativity and collective cohesion. I develop these issues below in the ‘Group and Gang’ section of chapter 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Arsenal versus Newcastle, 2001. The Newcastle defender placed momentarily between Bergkamp and the ball was Dabizas.
- <sup>40</sup> Luhmann *Art as a Social System* p. 24.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Morris *Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated* in Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge, Mass. & London, The MIT Press, 1995, p. 73.
- <sup>42</sup> Clement Greenberg quoted in de Duve *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 271.
- <sup>43</sup> Charles Harrison *Abstract Expressionism* in Nikos Stangos (ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1981, p.179.
- <sup>44</sup> Bernard Stiegler *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 157.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 145.
- <sup>46</sup> See chapter 3.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153.
- <sup>48</sup> André Leroi-Gourhan *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1993, p. 229.

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<sup>49</sup> Stiegler *Technics and Time 1* , p.152.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 141.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp. 205-206.

<sup>52</sup> Giorgio Agamben *Notes on Gesture* in Agamben *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Auster interviewed on BBC Radio 4 *Front Row* 31/5/2004.

<sup>54</sup> Stiegler *Technics and Time 1* , p.152.

## Notes to Chapter 2

<sup>55</sup> See Gregory Bateson *Steps To An Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Volume 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith, London, Verso, 1991, pp. 263-264.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 266; final emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> Dave Hickey *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, Los Angeles, Art issues. Press, 1997 pp. 108-109.

<sup>59</sup> Gospel According to Matthew, chapter 22, verses 15-22, King James Bible. Alternative versions in Mark 12: 13-17 and Luke 20: 20-26.

<sup>60</sup> Art & Language quoted by William Wood in *Still You Ask for More: Demand, Display and 'The New Art'* in Michael Newman and Jon Bird (eds.), *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, London, Reaktion Books, 1999, p. 83.

<sup>61</sup> In Siegfried Kracauer *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, edited by translated by Thomas Y. Levin, Cambridge, Mass and London, Harvard University Press, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2000 ; see Sections 4.1 *Virtualities* and 4.3 *The Multitude against Empire*.

<sup>63</sup> The internet has allowed certain kinds of micro-spectacle to emerge as global information events. This has happened recently with the moronic but symbolically fertile sport of extreme ironing. What could be more contemptuous of the sublimity of the mountain than the gesture of climbing it only to iron one's socks upon reaching the summit? How appropriate then that the Germans, as the veritable midwives of the modern sublime, should be the dominant exponents of extreme ironing. My point is that this indicates that *rather than allowing existing communities to communicate, the internet instead produces new communities whose very being and purpose is to communicate*. And of course, this is by no means a neutral determination of the human. Hailing the emancipatory power of the virtual, and of contemporary communication technologies, Hardt and Negri nevertheless overlook the coercive momentum operating in this domain: "When human power appears immediately as an autonomous cooperating collective force, capitalist prehistory comes to an end. In other words, capitalist prehistory comes to an end when social and subjective cooperation is no longer a product but a presupposition, when naked life is raised up to

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the dignity of productive power, or really when it appears as the wealth of virtuality.” (*Empire*, p.366.) Perhaps they were thinking – fondly - about extreme ironing.

See [www.extremeironing.com](http://www.extremeironing.com) or [www.ananova.com/news/story/news.quirkies](http://www.ananova.com/news/story/news.quirkies) June 2004:

“Competitors are preparing to gather for the first ever direct competition Extreme Ironing World Championships. Events at the Munich championships include ironing while standing on a mountainside and ironing in water. Organiser Kai Zosseder says competitors will also iron in woods. Previously entrants didn’t gather in one place. The two-day event will coincide with the city’s Oktoberfest. It has already attracted over 60 competitors. Reigning world champion Briton Phil Shaw invented the sport. People who compete are called ironists.” At this point, of course, it requires an effort of will to avoid the inevitable pun.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Fred Orton *Figuring Jasper Johns*, London, Reaktion Books, 1994.

<sup>65</sup> Slavoj Žižek *The Plague of Fantasies*, London and New York, Verso, 1997, p. 101.

<sup>66</sup> Steinbach’s remark appears in a group interview with contemporaries including Halley, Bickerton and Koons, in *NY ART NOW: The Saatchi Collection*, London, Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1988, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, Toronto and New York, MacGraw-Hill, 1966, p. 123 and p. 126 .

<sup>68</sup> Diagonals of course were deeply problematic for Mondrian, so much so that he perceived diagonal lines as a doctrinal threat; notoriously, during the involvement in the *de Stijl* group he fell out with Van Doesburg over the latter’s introduction of explicit diagonals into his painting.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Suk-Young Chwe *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination and Common Knowledge*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 61 – 62.

<sup>70</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Section 187, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 114.

<sup>71</sup> Hegel *Phenomenology* Section 190, trans J.B. Baillie, London, Allen and Unwin, 1931, p. 235.

<sup>72</sup> Such as that of Pierre Bourdieu in his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. R. Nice, London, Routledge, 1986.

<sup>73</sup> *Phenomenology* Section 196: Miller translation p. 118.

<sup>74</sup> *Phenomenology* Section 179: Miller translation p. 111.

<sup>75</sup> *Phenomenology* Section 190: Miller translation p. 115, “Master” substituted for Miller’s “lord.”

<sup>76</sup> *Phenomenology* Section 181: Baillie translation p. 231.

<sup>77</sup> *Phenomenology* Section 184: Miller translation p. 112.

<sup>78</sup> It is curious then to note that Derrida’s reading of Hegel in his *Glas* hinges on the concept of the family. “Derrida’s claim will be that ‘the *Aufhebung*, the economic law of the absolute reappropriation of the absolute loss, is a family concept’, and furthermore, that philosophy itself ‘is properly familial’. By this Derrida appears to be claiming that the movement of speculative dialectics always results in reappropriation, ‘...the guarding of the proper’, bringing back all phenomena within the circle of the proper, of property, the propriety, of one’s own – love, home, family, community, cognition. It is precisely the circumference of this circle that Derrida seeks to deconstruct.” Simon Critchley ‘A Commentary Upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*’ in Stuart Barnett (ed.), *Hegel After Derrida*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998, pp. 205 – 206.

<sup>79</sup> Hegel *Phenomenology*, Baillie translation, p. 230.

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<sup>80</sup> For a useful discussion of the Master/ Servant scenario, and especially why it cannot be reduced either to an ontological or a historical model, or, in the terms of the essay cited, why it is neither exclusively a psychological nor a social model, see George Armstrong Kelly's 'Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage' '. Kelly's main critical target is Kojève's reading of the Master/ Servant dialectic as a proto-Marxian narrative of emergent class consciousness. George Armstrong Kelly 'Notes on Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage' ' in Alasdair MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Notre Dame and London, University of Notre Dame Press, 1976.

<sup>81</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin *Selected Verse*, edited by Michael Hamburger, London and Dover, Anvil Editions, 1986, p. 16, my translation.

<sup>82</sup> Adapting the model of an irreducible discrepancy between enunciation and enunciated from Roland Barthes' essay *To Write: A Transitive Verb* in Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1987.

<sup>83</sup> The key passage comes in the *Phenomenology* Section 196:  
"...the being-for-self is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right. The shape [of the thing he fashions] does not become something other than himself through being made external to him; for it is precisely this shape that is his pure being-for-self, which in this externality is seen by him to be the truth. Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own." Miller translation, pp. 118-119.

<sup>84</sup> It's important to concede that of course artworks are in fact used to generate distinction. The argument against the position I am calling sociological functionalism, and associating with Bourdieu, is not based on the denial of that empirical fact. The reply to Bourdieu is: Yes, artworks are used to generate distinction, so what? - This instrumentalization of the artwork does not engage at all with the operations of the artwork as such. And it is easy to show that distinction is generated irrespective of the operativity of the artwork. For instance, ownership of a highly prized artwork bestows distinction regardless of whether the owner looks at it, or has ever looked at it.

<sup>85</sup> Žižek *The Plague of Fantasies*, p. 93.

<sup>86</sup> Donald Judd *Specific Objects* in James Meyer (ed.), *Minimalism: Themes and Movements*, London, Phaidon, 2000, p. 209.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* p. 210.

<sup>90</sup> Brian Massumi *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 88.

<sup>91</sup> Massumi *Navigating Movements* in *Hope*, edited by Mary Zournazi, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 224.

<sup>92</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy *Literary Communism* in Nancy *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. 75.

<sup>93</sup> Nancy *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 27.

<sup>94</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 201.

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<sup>95</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> Heidegger, quoted in Deleuze *Difference and Repetition* p. 201.

<sup>97</sup> Deleuze *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, London, The Athlone Press, 1990, p. 53.

<sup>98</sup> Deleuze *Difference and Repetition* p. 208.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>100</sup> See George Kubler *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1962.

<sup>101</sup> Deleuze *Difference and Repetition* p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Slavoj Žižek *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, London and New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> See Peter Hallward *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, London and Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2003, p.268.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>107</sup> Alain Badiou *Infinite Thought*, trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens, London and New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 187.

<sup>108</sup> Badiou *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London, Verso, 2001, p. 65.

<sup>109</sup> “Truth is an *index sui*. Truth is the proof of itself. There is no external guarantee. So the genericity of the procedure of truth is effective in the process itself. For very different thinkers – Heidegger, Lacan, Spinoza, myself – there is the conviction that truth has no guarantee, and for other analytical philosophers it is necessary for truth to have guarantees in thought and judgement. It is the principal split today.” Badiou interviewed in *Infinite Thought* pp. 173-174.

<sup>110</sup> The term appears to derive from the work of Jacques Rancière.

<sup>111</sup> Badiou *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999, p. 85.

### Notes to Chapter 3

<sup>112</sup> As Lichtenstein put it: “And of course I’m not sure that Kline didn’t do this too [i.e. simulate the spontaneity of the brushstroke] in his own way. They look like brushstrokes but they’re not one brushstroke.... They are certainly reworked when you look at them, not spontaneous brushstrokes. I think this is true of all of them really, that they were symbolising brushstrokes, they were symbolising that art is art, but at the same time they were drawing a picture of a brushstroke.” Roy Lichtenstein, 1965 interview, in David Sylvester *Interviews with American Artists*, London, Chatto and Windus, 2001, p.230.

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<sup>113</sup> Jean Baudrillard *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. C. Levin, St Louis, Telos, 1981, p. 108.

<sup>114</sup> Agamben *Notes on Gesture*, p. 53.

<sup>115</sup> Alfred Gell *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 67.

<sup>116</sup> Jonathan Crary *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1999, pp. 187-188.

<sup>117</sup> Crary *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, MIT, 1990, p. 136. [Final emphasis added]

<sup>118</sup> For a sceptical examination of Crary's *historical* account of the interweavings of nineteenth century optics, psychological researches and painting, see chapter 6 of Michael Fried's *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth Century Berlin*, New Haven and London, Yale, 2002. Fried argues convincingly that Crary's narrative masks all those instances of psychological investigation in the nineteenth century that go against the grain of his thesis.

<sup>119</sup> It is instructive to read Pamela M. Lee's article *Bridget Riley's Eye/Body Problem* in *October* 98, Fall 2001, pp. 27-46, in this connection. Lee examines Bridget Riley's tribulations at the hands of American textile manufacturers in the 1960s. Riley was drawn into legal battles to prevent her Op patterns being turned into fabrics for clothing. For Lee the textile makers, by using the patterns for clothing, were simply returning Riley's disembodied opticality to the body. They were forcing the patterns back into contact with the body that Riley sought to exclude. What is interesting for us is that this intriguing case study could be read either in conformity with Crary's narrative, or, as I would suggest, it could be seen as a pointer to the parallel and equivalent limitations of Crary's analysis and Riley's painting practice.

<sup>120</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss *Grids* in Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1986.

<sup>121</sup> On classical drawing versus caricature:

For some readers the distinction between classical, academic drawing and caricature may be far from self-evident. There have been many artists who have been lovers of both, whose assimilation of the supposedly classical manner has often taken the form of something close to caricature – think of Picasso's neo classicism, or Guston's youthful pseudo-classical style. Such cases attest to the prevalence of pastiche classicisms which are themselves a kind of caricature. So let me offer a definitional distinction that can support my discussion. Classical, academic drawing minimises the idiosyncracies of mark that accrue from the movements of the draftsman's hand or body, and instead rationalises all aspects of the marks as realistic equivalents for aspects of the model, or depicted object. It tends to stress tonality and modelling and to understate the graphic impact of linear elements. In classical, academic drawing, line is generally derived from tone in the guise of the border or periphery. Caricature and 'cartooning', by contrast, stress the rhythmic, graphic qualities of drawing and they thrive on displaying that these aspects of the mark are *not* grounded in equivalent visual aspects of figures or objects depicted but are consequences of the movements of a bodily making.

Now given my working definition, Seurat is already an awkward case in so far as the dot is a 'self-positing' anti-realist, arguably even anti-depictive tactic. But my definition applies to Seurat through the topic of line: in the earlier pointillist works, line behaves like classical line both because it emerges as a tonal periphery and because its rhythms, though admittedly decorative, do not imply rhythms of bodily making. In the last works, especially *Cirque*, line operates emphatically through the rhetoric of caricature, in my sense.

<sup>122</sup> Rosalind Krauss *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The MIT Press, 1994, pp. 259-260.

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<sup>123</sup> See Baudrillard's account of the graffitist in his *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Grant, London, Sage, 1993.

<sup>124</sup> Derrida *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 37.

<sup>125</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 313.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Irene E. Harvey's strenuous list of denials in her *Derrida and the Economy of Difference*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 23.

<sup>128</sup> Derrida *Differance in Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1979, p. 133.

<sup>129</sup> Derrida *Of Grammatology* pp. 62-63.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 289.

<sup>131</sup> Derrida *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, in Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 213.

<sup>132</sup> Freud quoted in Derrida *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, p. 204.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 200.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>135</sup> M. C. Dillon *The Metaphysics of Presence: Critique of a Critique* in Gary B. Madison (ed.), *Working Through Derrida*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1993, p. 197.

<sup>136</sup> Derrida *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, p. 214.

<sup>137</sup> Newman, interview with Emilio de Antonio, 1970, in Barnett Newman *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, p. 303.

<sup>138</sup> Newman quoted in Lyotard *Newman: The Instant* in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 86.

<sup>139</sup> Newman *Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 306 – 307.

<sup>140</sup> See the chart of Newman's entire and extremely concise output in Brenda Richardson *Barnett Newman: The Complete Drawings, 1944-1969*, Baltimore, The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1979, p.17.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Judd's article *Barnett Newman* in *Donald Judd: Selected Works 1960-1991*, Saitama, Museum of Modern Art Saitama, 1999.

<sup>142</sup> Derrida *Differance*, p. 137.

<sup>143</sup> I have simplified matters for ease of exposition. Strictly one should say that this equivalence depends on a parallel semantic heterogeneity in the two paintings. The effect of *A Monk at the Seashore* depends absolutely upon the *isolation* of the figure of the monk, where figure is animate-human and ground is inanimate-inhuman. This radical contrast of figure and ground in Friedrich is at once formal – the figure is the only vertically orientated element in the picture - and semantic. This is what I call its semantic heterogeneity. The equivalence claim then requires us to find some parallel semantic heterogeneity in the Newman, which in the decisive separation of the narrow triple band (black/pale blue/raw umber) from the broad colourzones, I claim we do find. If this is

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right, then strictly one could still choose exactly which of the triple band plays the part of the metaphorical monk, or whether it is all three as a unity.

<sup>144</sup> Alfred Hitchcock interviewed in François Truffaut *Hitchcock*, London, Paladin, 1986, p. 508.

<sup>145</sup> Michael Fried *Manet's Modernism: or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 290-291.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* p. 291.

<sup>147</sup> Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London and New York, Verso, 1989, p. 155. Final emphasis added.

<sup>148</sup> See *Of Grammatology* p. 61.

<sup>149</sup> T. J. Clark *Farewell to An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1999, p.390.

<sup>150</sup> I admit I'm overlooking the persistently hierarchical aspect in Mondrian, namely the strong pictorial distinction between line and area, which indeed affords opportunities for the figure/ground distinction to rise again as from the dead, presumably against Mondrian's intentions. Nonetheless I think the strategic point here remains valid: that Mondrian provides the outstanding precedent for a painting practice which resolves to deconstruct the figure/ground distinction. See Mondrian: unfinished work with lines of coloured tape, *New York City II*, 1942-44, charcoal, oil and coloured paper tapes on canvas, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

<sup>151</sup> Robert Rauschenberg *Erased de Kooning*, 1953.

<sup>152</sup> Rauschenberg interviewed in Emilio de Antonio's film *Painters Painting*, 1971.

<sup>153</sup> Kafka *Diaries*, February 2, 1922.

<sup>154</sup> Julia Kristeva *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 121.

<sup>155</sup> Throughout her discussion Kristeva operates a strict distinction between negation and negativity, which is not germane to my narrative.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* p. 122.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 123. Final emphasis added.

<sup>158</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 123-124.

#### Notes to Coda: The Chromatic Mark

<sup>160</sup> Walter Benjamin *Selected Writings, Volume 1*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, Cambridge, Mass. and London, The Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 50.

<sup>161</sup> Marcel Duchamp in a radio interview with Georges Charbonnier, 1961, quoted in de Duve *Kant After Duchamp*, pp. 161-162, translated by de Duve.

<sup>162</sup> Duchamp interview with Katherine Kuh, 1962, quoted in de Duve *Kant After Duchamp*, p. 162.





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