

Ontology of the "there is"

SECTIONS

Sections 1, 2

As seen at the Vitrine de Cergy,
Paris, April 2009

3

Sections 3, 4

As seen at the Lisson Gallery,
London, October 2009
and at the Musée d'Art moderne
de la ville de Paris,
Paris, June 2010

24

Sections 5, 6, 7, 8

As seen at
the Hollybush Gardens Gallery,
London, November 2009

53

Section 9

As programmed at De Vleeshal,
Middelburg, January 2011

111

METHODOLOGY

Organisation of the narrative
and structural models conjugated
in the sections

75

Fetish
and representation in modernity
and postmodernity

101

INGRESS

INTO SOME

CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

ACCORDING

TO THE BURDENS,

ACCORDING

TO THE OBJECTS,

ACCORDING

TO THE METHODS OR

QUESTIONS

Dash Snow: To die of joy

104

DIDACTIC

Academic presentation of the concept
of the differend

10

TALKS

The *Aesthetics of Differends*, an introduction
As presented in Milan,
October 2009,
in London, with Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield,
November 2009
and in Amsterdam,
March 2010

28

Use and display of the sign severed
from its end:
Jean-François Lyotard and the exhibition
As presented in Vilnius,
November 2010

121

A X I O M S

—

Giacometti's *nose*
verifies the true hole in the Real.

68

F I G U R E S

—

Fig. 1 *The Nose*
As designed, Paris, April 2010

59

Fig. 2 *The Cave*
As presented at the Musée d'Art moderne
de la ville de Paris,
Paris, June 2010

87

B U R D E N S

—

The severed finger pointing to
the transcendent.

16

The son of a whore — breaks with a genealogy,
thus founding the lack as primordial.

48



1-1

A discussion with Benjamin and a reading of both *Wittgenstein* screenplays, i.e., Terry Eagleton's original screenplay and Jarman (Derek)'s shooting script, here – that raises the issue of private and public speech.



3

The Greek head

In the pop dialectic:

recognised / hardly known
unknown


The question of the nude (a classical — and now reactionary — issue)

1-2

The aesthetics of differends

Introduction

Foreword



In this short treatise, I would like to reflect on what a postmodern aesthetics might mean. The question of the postmodern contains a series of questions poorly expressed when you consider the postmodern an historical category that would come after the modern era. The term “postmodern” was coined by Jean-François Lyotard and if I wanted to define it in a nutshell, I would say that the particularity of the postmodern lies in a writing of history freed from any concept of history. Therein lies a paradox, and it is precisely with this paradox that postmodern theory engages. Now, as I review Jean-François Lyotard’s works, I perceive a concept at work within what we refer to as the postmodern — the concept of the differend. Differend is a powerful concept that designates a case of misunderstanding that arises as two or several non-homogeneous languages are in conflict over a common issue. I believe that the differend is the concept of the postmodern, i.e., that in

Lyotard's works it enables us to understand a series of artistic events subtracted from the horizon of History. By subtraction from the horizon of history I understand any event occurring in the postmodern era (improper term), i.e., since the end of the 1970s if you go by the art history textbooks. Therefore, rather

than speaking of a postmodern artistic theory, I will deal with an aesthetics of differends, applicable from the 1980s onwards, or perhaps even before, as there have always been artists opposed to the notion of historical perspective. The aesthetics of differends is an ahistorical and therefore transhistorical theory. Although I will focus my analysis on contemporary practices, I do not exclude the possibility of making leaps into the past, to times when the differend was already at work.

1-3

ABCYHK

A and B as two consciousness-subjects

H is a world

Y is another world

C traverses two worlds

It is the result of a differend between

[A, B] and [C]

K is the extension (the mark around the H world) — here, the grease — that A, B, C traverse without knowing it
= like an unheard noise

1-4

Intermediation:
Picture of a Barnett Newman sculpture in Berlin

1-5

using the differend to write the differend (its aesthetics) appears as a necessity, but it is also an easy option (a kind of laziness)

—> revelatory? a superficial procedure (mannerism of the note a little —)

—> *clothing — belies — the body*
(*l'habillement*

— *ment* — *le corps*)¹

TRUE / false

effective



—> *ghastly*

4

Display plateau A.1 — Intermediation:
the pointer

¹— Translator's note: Literally: "clothing — lies — the body", or "clothing — belies — the body". Here, the author plays on the French word "*habillement*", which means clothing, and the verb "*ment*", to lie (i.e., to tell a lie) in the third person singular.

1-6

What is the meaning of Lacan's phrase "a question is always based on an answer"?

If this claim is true, then either our question must have an answer or our

(in the sense that this second wanting-to-say would have the value of a ~~being-worth-saying~~ due-said)? Thus: is a Lacanian wanting-to-say based on money? Money being this abstract entity which has the value of a pastry or a loaf of bread, or a car, if you have enough money for a car. If we ask: what is Lacan's saying "every question is always based on an answer" worth?, then we will not enter an exegesis but a transaction with a credit-for-saying. Is it good or bad, expensive or cheap? In short, would we want to buy it?

1-7

1-8

Intermediation: *Husserl*

1.9

Intermediation:
and the square

1-10

I am dying of thirst
I am losing the sense of
continuity

5 question is not in fact a question. What might suggest this question is not in fact a question is the hermeneutic process through which we engage with the enquiry: the "wanting-to-say". We wonder what Lacan wants to say. But can we presume Lacan wants to say something that wants to say something

I was a child
one morning
I was a child
without you I am a whole without unity
I am bored
I am poor
I would like to see you again one evening
I am losing the sense of continuity



Once again I would like to understand
the end of the story
I have not read Moravia
or a morning

another language — or an other
language)

1-12

Display plateau A.2 — Intermediation:
Manufacturing the Cyclops

Intermediation: *nude self-portrait, 1929*

1-11

While suddenly telling myself
I am now aware of the most
insistent question in
Wittgenstein's works by
reading Derek Jarman's
screenplay (and having
viewed the film and read
Terry Eagleton's screenplay)
— that of private speech —
I wonder how I might link
it to Lyotard's question of the
differend. I have the strong
impression that there
are several language games
at work within art, different
language games at different
points in history, but which
are grounded in
transhistorical questions.
If I feel an urge for private
speech, the mere, inadvertent
stating of it would make it
public, but not in
Wittgenstein's sense.
Here I want to confront what
seems to me public a priori,
with what seems private
in the materiality of the forms
I use. The differend arises
in the points of interconnection
of heterogeneous languages.

Accessibility from the autistic core

→ → → →

← core of language in differend
(without echo, or waves moving towards



2-1

Intermediation: *the crowd*

2-1.2

Introducing the point of view
The differend.

Lyotard's term.
He forged the concept in 1983.

2-2

Die Armut (poverty)

2-3

Introducing the concept
of the cut

The concept of the pure cut in
Derrida, as a reader of Kant:

"The tulip, if it is beautiful, this irreplaceable tulip of which I am speaking and which I replace in speaking but which remains irreplaceable insofar as it is beautiful, this tulip is beautiful because it is without end, complete because cut off, with a pure cut, from its end."²

The figures of the cut in the
"being-artist" from an
historical perspective:

There are three figures
of the artist-being.
An artist is always thrown,
in the sense of Dasein that
we inherited from Heidegger,
and this thrownness
(*Geworfenheit*), which, for
Heidegger characterises any
Dasein — therefore any human
being — is more or less
forgotten by man as a worldly
entity. The active man who
refuses the weight of the

question can forget his thrownness to
concentrate on pure worldliness, or what
is referred to as technical activity.
Like an *analysand*, the artist-being bears
the search with the weight of the question
— and thus the metaphysical question as
such: where am I? This is a metaphysical



7

2-1.3

The gathering
—> therefore the body becomes ONE
—> [A, B, C] here, the crowd
greet the truth-event of a world.

Display plateau A.3 — is aside

2 — Derrida, *The truth in painting*, p.94.

introduction to the question of artistness, but let us concentrate here on its historical characterisation. We have the son of a whore, the heir and the tramp. These three figures form the triangle of a potential relationship to History. That does not mean to say that every artist is either a son of a whore, an heir or a tramp, but rather that the artist embodies all of these at once, with tendencies of varying and shifting intensity towards one or another figure during his existence at work. "Existence at work" is an expression that seeks to set itself apart from the idea of activity, in the sense of something leading to a form of technology (Gestell) that forgets the question, work being regarded here as that which forces the question to be considered.

A — As for the first one, the son of a whore: this tendency expresses a cut, that of the parental relationship in the sense that by "son of a whore" we are referring to a person whose birth was not the outcome of a decision. Of course, what we are dealing with is a trope, not a concept, let alone a reality. But when trying to grasp what makes this insult so piercing, I realised that, ideally, the son of a whore is the son of a woman who conceives him with a man in the absence of any expression of will or desire. Thus, such a child, or being, or man ultimately, does not have to bear his life because he is not indebted to his genitors for a decision regarding the very possibility of his existence. His life, therefore, is accidental, if not gratuitous³,

and he does not owe anything to anyone as to his being-in-the-world, which he is free to waste, usually without saddening his parents — a radical cut then from the debt of the gift of life. The chosen sphere of the son of a whore is therefore the future.



B — The second, the heir: contrary to the former, this tendency conveys the non-cut, a continuity between the decision of the parents and the existence of the child, the being, or the man. The heir is a victim of his parents' decision regarding his being-in-the-world, he is accountable, he runs into debt. His chosen sphere is the past.

³ On a different plane of consistency—religious, for instance— this life can be entrusted to the hands of God, like any other birth.

Intermediation:
a photograph of a prior instance
(Organon, Berlin 2007)

Display A. 4 – Intermediation:
untitled

2-5

the weeps:

An upside down tree with the trunk
the right way up

—> difficult 4 surfaces sides

—> 3 sides

—> 2

2 triangles

square—> triangle

2-6

Let us introduce some elements
that Derrida (reader of Husserl)
presents towards the end of his
first philosophy book:

the figures of History linked
to the notion of the cut:

the sorrowful mother

the tramp

the heir

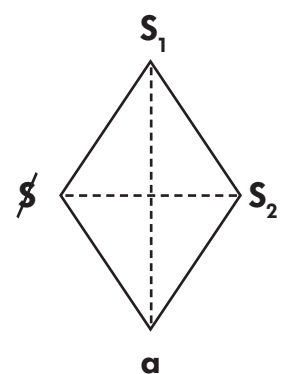
the parricide

the son of a whore

that we can combine with

Lacan's schema on the

arrangement of discursive
authorities:



(it says that on a shirt it is a
much nicer *harbitre*⁴)

2-7

Intermediation:
body (language) grouped and cut

9

2-4

4 – The author plays on the French words “habits”, clothing, and “arbitre”, referee, judge.

2-8

a lone man = an idiot
idiotes (without duplicate) attempts the thinkable in solitude.
nice to see how a madman connects with this, I mean like 2 contradictory forces the informal of movement on — the structure.
This being so, a moment is always based on a structure (an aleatory element happens at least meanwhile always an “a” along the way — the motor of its desire)

Display A. 4 — Intermediation:
the swimmer

2-9

From now on, the psychoanalyst speaks woman, and is the conceptual character of the female philosopher.

The woman does not exist as a basis for discourse, then Nietzsche plays her a while.

Until then the solitude of thought used to confine the libido in asceticism, the libido sublimated by Freud turns into strong and feminine thought.

Display A.5 — Intermediation:
the nose issue

D I D A C T I C

Academic exposition of the concept of the differend.

A —

I N T R O D U C T I O N

A₁ —
COMMON LINGUISTIC SENSE

A₂ —
A PRESENTATION OF
JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD'S WORK

A₃ —
THE DIFFEREND IN J.-F. LYOTARD'S WORK

A₄ —
PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

A₅ —
THE PROBLEM

A₆ —
STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

‘Differend’ commonly refers to a debate between two or more people about (among other things) matters of opinion and interests on which they disagree. One can say for example (in French): “They have a *differend* on this or that topic.” The word has been used since the Middle Ages, though originally it had the more precise meaning of the difference between the price

I O

requested and the price offered in a commercial transaction; Jean-François Lyotard gave it its philosophical shape in his 1983 book, simply entitled *The Differend*.¹ He notes from the start, that is, in the “Title” section of the “Reading Dossier”, that: “As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments.”² Lyotard frames the core problem of his book as that of the possibility of judgement after philosophy’s linguistic and relativistic turn.

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) is associated with poststructuralism and world famous for his theory of postmodernity. As an engaged philosopher, he places politics at the very centre of his philosophy. On a more personal level, his activist career started when he joined “Socialisme ou barbarie” in 1950; he created the radical-left organisation “Pouvoir ouvrier” in 1959 and publicly opposed the Algerian War. His first book, published in the “Que sais-je?” series in 1954, was an introduction to phenomenology, but his first important book *Discours, figure* was only published in 1971, followed by *Libidinal Economy* in 1974 and by his most famous work, the *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, in which he argued the end of *grand* and *meta*-narratives. He published the “philosophy book”³ with which we will be dealing here in 1983, *La Faculté de juger* (with contributions by Derrida and Vincent Descombes) in 1989, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* in 1991, and the superb *Confession d’Augustin* in 1998.

The Differend occupies a singular, if not pivotal, place in Lyotard’s body of work. Shortly after he coined the term ‘postmodern’, he tried to come to terms with the way language relates to reality in a relativistic and linguistic philosophical context. Indeed, the intellectual world of the

I I

1 — *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988.

2 — *Ibid.*, p. XI.

3 — This is how he refers to *The Differend* on the backcover of the French edition.

1980s was centred on poststructuralism, a notion that may be understood as the wane of universalist metaphysics and an opening onto “the thought of dispersion”, which, as Lyotard notes in his “Pretext”, “shapes our context.”⁴ Through the work-in-progress of postphenomenology, Lyotard seeks to re-establish the subject-position within the framework of a deconstructive metaphysical philosophy, a move that is not without affinities with both Derrida’s “differance” and Lacan’s “*parlêtre*.” It might be argued in retrospect that, with this book and the concept of differend, Lyotard situates himself after the heyday of phenomenology and Heideggerianism, that is, after a metaphysics that placed the subject at the centre of the constituted world, and before Badiou’s ontological logic and his affirmation that “there are truths.”

The fundamental problematic of the “differend” remains that of the question of judgement within language and therefore the need to find an idiom for deciding between heterogeneous discourses. Lyotard’s investigation draws mainly on the philosophers that shaped both the epilogue to modernity and the prologue to postmodernity — namely, Wittgenstein on the issue of reality and the Kantian step over the abyss. Lyotard, navigating between these two thinkers, devises his own concept of history. We will focus on these three issues, in an attempt to see how Lyotard conceptualises the problematic of judgement. First, our analysis will bear on the concept of reality and its relationship to the question of the referent; second, we will question Lyotard’s concept of history in so far as it relates to the notion of end; third, we will explore his reenactment of the Kantian sublime as a way of bridging the abyss between incommensurable phrases.

B —
R E A L I T Y : T H E Q U E S T I O N O F
T H E R E F E R E N T

In *The Differend*, Jean-François Lyotard inaugurates a mediatory position between phenomenology and analytic philosophy to provide the concept of the subject with a singular place within the event of the linguistic “there is”, and to make it the latter’s driving force. Indeed, if Lyotard starts by repudiating the academic position of phenomenology — arguing that “Reality is not what is “given” to this or that “subject”, it is a state of the referent (that about which one speaks)”⁵ — he also makes the analytic position fit for his own purposes by turning it into a theory of language-created worlds. This move aims at grounding a singular concept of the subject as immersed in the universes of phrases and referent-worlds, and at revealing the workings of the subject-signifier correlation. If at first Lyotard seems to abandon the phenomenological terrain, his concept of reality does not, as we just saw, refer to something given to consciousness; nor is it — Lyotard adds, for the sake of clarity — the result of an experience.⁶ Rather, the state of the referent “is the result of unanimously agreed-upon establishment procedures.”⁷ These procedures vary with the genre of discourse and the regimen of phrases used to establish the referent’s state of existence. Scientific cognitives do not follow the same procedures as prescriptive and descriptive phrases. The world given as the whole set of established referents is not homogeneous, since all establishment procedures are not themselves homogeneous. “How can it be known that the referent is the same?” Lyotard asks. It must be “locatable at the same place among common and accessible cross-references.”⁸ If this is not the case, a differend may emerge between two subjects over the

B₁ —
SPEAKING OF A STATE OF THE REFERENT

B₂ —
DISCURSIVE SPACE IS BORDERED BY TAUTOLOGY
AND CONTRADICTION

B₃ —
LANGUAGE EXISTS ONLY BY VIRTUE OF THE SUBJECT,
AND VICEVERSA

5 — Ibid., p. 4.

6 — “A subject is thus not the unity of “his” or “her” experience.”

Lyotard pursues: “It follows that reality does not result from experience” (ibid., p. 46).

7 — Ibid.

8 — Ibid., p. 38.

existence of a referent that neither of them can establish, since they do not share the same genre of discourse. Lyotard's position thus seems to be a pragmatic one; but he also refutes what he sees as Wittgenstein's overly empiricist stance, which folds the referent back into the sign and argues for a use-based relativism. The point is that reality relies on referents that have to be established, and this establishment is in turn based on procedures; when a differend about these procedures emerges, so does a malaise about the status of reality; a subject can become the victim of a wrong and as a result remain silent. Now, since reality relies on these procedures for establishing the state of the referent, we should look at how they are organised. Lyotard invites us to consider or analyse discursive space as bordered by tautology and contradiction. Through Wittgenstein's logical tables he shows that, within these limits, the combinations of signs are devoid of sense (*sinnlos*) and teach nothing because they are necessary: *if p, then p, and if q, then q* (tautology), and *p and not-p, and q and not-q* (contradiction) do not tell us anything even though they are not located outside logical space. "*It rains or it doesn't rain*" is not absurd (*unsinnig*); however, although it does not tell us much about the referent *what the weather is like*, it still belongs to "logical space", as opposed to the utterance "*a triangle rains*". Those two borders of logical space are those of a genre of discursive space and thus, of a corresponding genre of language. The subjects who share these logical rules in their phrasing can agree on a number of referents and therefore on the existence of a common world. By making public the idiomatic rules for using a certain genre of language (in this case, logical), individuals may phrase without having differends. But — as the representational field is larger than logical space — other genres of discursive space cannot be as easily organised through a regimen of rules. All genres of discursive

space, however, share the assertion of a “there is” that is the correlate of the expression of the subject of any uttered phrase. This position of the “there is” inherent in language is Lyotard’s strong point and, although he does not put it this way, it supports an ontology of the event. In an interview with Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Lyotard clearly says that the subject itself “is that which happens with that which is happening”;⁹ “this is, I think, where I depart from anthropology and phenomenology”: “understanding that there is no great subject that is the receiver of Being itself” and that “it is not happening *to* us, but we happen with the *it sometimes happens that...*”¹⁰ Thus there is a primordial correlation between being, the subject and language, in a Heideggerian perspective recast through the daily event of birth and Descartes’ invention of the cogito. The Cashinahua say that “if the child has no name, he is nothing, he cannot exist.”¹¹ Lyotard concludes that humans that remain unnamed cannot enter the space of history and myth, they cannot be narrated and thus cannot come into being or existence. Lyotard notes, with respect to Cartesianism, that “it does not result from the phrase, *I doubt*, that I am, merely that there has been a phrase.”¹² The apprehension of the subject, whether in a public or intimate space, always depends on a kind of language. The subject can take different places relative to the communicability of the referent he expresses. He will be considered a victim if he cannot prove the wrong he claims to have endured — for instance, when his language is not shared by anyone else (see, in Werner Herzog’s *Where the Green Ants Dream*, the crucial scene in which an aboriginal pleads in court, speaking in a language he is the last user of, as the only survivor of his tribe), he can only become a plaintiff if he can share the referent (the wrong) he experienced with a third party. As regards the “there is” inherent in the presentation of a world, the

9 — Christine Buci-Glucksmann, “Avec Jean-François Lyotard: à propos du *Différend*” (interview), in Claude Amey and Jean-Paul Olive (dir.), *À partir de Jean-François Lyotard*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2000, p. 26.

10 — Ibid.

11 — *The Differend*, p. 153.

12 — *ibid.*, p. 59.

**THE
SEVERED
FINGER
POINTING
TO THE
TRANSCEN—
DENT**

dilemma is that if a subject is unable to communicate his lived experience, he will be unable to prove its existence; conversely, if he can prove its existence, this experience ceases to be his own personal experience, and becomes a shared experience. Testifying to the differend is always irreducible to reality. A wrong that is personally experienced does not exist for a third party. Yet Lyotard has this enigmatic formula: "Reality is not a matter of an absolute eyewitness, but a matter of the future."¹³ We will now turn to this relationship between differend and history.

C —
H I S T O R Y :
T H E Q U E S T I O N O F I T S E N D

By stressing that reality is not a matter of an absolute eyewitness, Lyotard seeks to break with the idea of God or of transcendence which traditional metaphysics saw as able to break through the realm of pure language. According to him, no radical exteriority or no absolute alterity is able to contemplate reality as such, as an idea in an intelligible sky. On the other hand, that reality is a matter of the future means that it is to be built, and that we build it in effect through creating the existence of referents, the referents that we share in the form of consensus or differend. Lyotard therefore considers that human history as well as the thinking about history is a construct, the modern notion of which is Hegelian and relies on the idea of end. Here is how he puts this into perspective: "For thought to remain modern, doesn't it suffice that it think in terms of the end of some history? Or, is postmodernity the pastime of an old man who scrounges in the garbage-heap of finality looking for leftovers...?"¹⁴ Our time would thus have rid itself

C₁—
COMMUNITY SUSTAINS ITSELF
THROUGH NARRATIVE

C₂—
CAPITALISM IS GAINING TIME

C₃—
THE TIME OF THE NOW

¹³— Ibid., p. 53.
¹⁴— Ibid., p. 136.

of finality — this is one of the prime senses of postmodernity. Exploring three notions, we will see how Lyotard sharpens his own thought on history: a meditation on community, a reflection on capitalism, a new definition of time.

Community sustains itself through narratives. As we saw with the Cashinahua, to be a subject and to enter history is to be narrated. The contemporary world also requires a creation of narratives: “The nation, inasmuch as it is a community, owes the essential of its consistency and authority to the traditions of names and narratives.”¹⁵ Through a reading of Kant¹⁶, Lyotard adds that political history, if deprived of a guiding thread, turns to chaos. An *Unwillen* (an indignation, a depression) takes the place of its aim. What Lyotard designates as names and narratives can be translated in more traditional terms. Here a *name* takes the place of what can be named an *event* — in history the name *Napoleon* remains in the place of the event that he provoked — whereas the term *narrative* acts as a stand-in for the more traditional idea of ideology. Lyotard notes further on that the politics of postmodernity aims to replace narratives with scenarios¹⁷, the prime finality of which is to persuade the adversary or the third party that takes the place of the judge. Scenarios have a narrower scope than narratives, their second finality is to induce and regulate behaviors. How can ideas (which may ordinarily guide our actions) be replaced by empty behaviors? An answer may be found in Lyotard’s critique of capitalism. In his view, capitalism’s main feature is that it gains time. Money is time that is stocked; therefore what capitalism sells through money is time. Capitalism sustains itself through a narrative, caricatured in the expression “time is money”, a narrative of emancipation from poverty¹⁸, that might be understood in the phrase “*we will have a better life*”, meaning “*we will be better off*” and an increase in purchasing power. To

15 — Ibid., p. 147.

16 — On Immanuel Kant’s *The Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitical Point of View* (1784) (ibid., p. 163).

17 — To specify this point, he writes: “Political deliberation properly takes place in these scenarios” (ibid., p. 149).

18 — Ibid., p. 155.

19 — Ibid., p. 73.

increase one's purchasing power is also to gain time. But what for? Does gaining time also mean gaining presentness? With reference to Augustine and Husserl, Lyotard notes that "the now is the permanent point of origin for the ecstasis of time"¹⁹, whereas for Aristotle it is the point that is not yet or no longer is. In Augustine or Husserl's view, the perceiving subject has to take charge of the now, the point of the present, and constitute the world from this point; in Aristotle, however, it is an external category in which people move like swimmers in a pool. Lyotard uses these two notions to shape his own singular position, for which time — a category of the existent like Descartes' extension — happens at the very point at which a phrase is being uttered. § 120 consists of this single phrase, "There wouldn't be any space and time independent of a phrase."²⁰ Rather, it should be said that everything happens *with* the phrase — time, the subject, history, and therefore, being. But if time and history depend on phrases, we should conclude that they must necessarily be dependent on their modes of structuration. The very heterogeneity of our history and of our current, so-called post-modern, time, must thus be so by virtue of language. By internalising itself into a transcendental subject for which the world is everything that is given (Kant, later radicalised by Husserl and phenomenology), then by insisting on linguistic dwelling as worldmaking (Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy), post-modern deconstructive philosophy (Derrida, Lacan, Lyotard) expresses the heterogeneous time of being that happens with writing (Derrida), with *parole* or speech and lapsus (Lacan), or with the "there is" of language and the referent (Lyotard). Yet this time and these language-related stakes, fully immersed in heterogeneity, entail an insurmountable abyss (differends) between the speaking subjects. A rule of judgement is needed. An idiom that will enable us to decide. In such circumstances,

can Kant's theory of the sublime, which dialecticises the irreconcilable, function as our guide?

D —
THE SUBLIME:
THE STEP OVER THE ABYSS

D₁—
KANT'S PROBLEM

D₂—
THE LOGIC AND AFFECT OF THE SUBLIME

In *The Differend*, no less than four 'Kant Notices' reveal Lyotard's interest in the *Critique of Judgement* and its central concept of the sublime. First, we will introduce the problem solved by the sublime in the Kantian construction, and second, we will try to determine what, in Lyotard, this concept is meant to unify. What is now commonly referred to as Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' is predicated on a reversal of the subject's relation to his object of knowledge. Before the *Critique of pure reason*, knowledge was based on the subject's movement towards the object. The Kantian turn consists in positing that it is the subject that, through the play of its various faculties, constitutes the object of knowledge. The pre-critical subject is materialistic in so far as it is modeled on and by the object; with Kant, it becomes transcendental and determines the object's phenomenal givenness. In this new jurisdiction, the *a priori* forms of its intuition, understanding and judgement enable the subject to grasp its objects. As Lyotard points out, "the faculties keep making representations, remonstrances, or grievances to each other, that is, to criticise each other through the confrontation of their respective objects."²¹ In this work of representation, "they thereby alternate relative to each other between the positions of addressor and addressee."²² Given the fact that a referent (noumenal, in this instance) is also at play, it seems legitimate to

²¹— Ibid., p. 64.

²²— Ibid.

argue that it is through this relationship that an idiom comes to be created. Lyotard thinks of Kant's play of the faculties as an exchange relationship *de jure* similar to a linguistic relationship (the creation of an idiom), and defined as effective to the extent that it involves a referent, an addressor and addressee. In Kant, however, this relationship is not as fluid as it should be; the faculties operate within heterogeneous registers, and communication between them proves sometimes impossible. Through a moral example, Lyotard shows how a prescriptive (which is the cause of that which it engenders)²³ is completely unrelated to a descriptive. This unrelatedness is called 'abyss'; Lyotard recognises its identity with the abyss referred to by Wittgenstein, as well as its mystical character.²⁴ Kant considers his *Critique of Judgement* as a bridge between the first two *Critiques*, and his concept of the sublime is meant to solve certain contradictions the faculties encounter. The bridge over the abyss is thus, as we just implied, a structural one, at the level of both the *Critique* and the transcendental subject. So much so that, according to Lyotard, Kant dramatises, in the Introduction to his third *Critique*, the problem to be solved as that of "finding 'passages' (*Uebergänge*) between these heterogeneous genres."²⁵ Later on Lyotard points out that it is the faculty of judgement (the faculty inherent in both the subject and the architecture of the *Critique*) that performs the unification of the heterogeneous. This faculty then presents itself as the power to pass from one faculty to another, as a bridge thrown over the incommensurable. The sublime, therefore, is a concept related to the incommensurable. Let us try and understand its logic for if, on the one hand, it presents itself as an affect, on the other, it also prevents the faculties from collapsing. In this sense, it seems to have a mechanical function in Kant's theory of the subject.

2 I

23 — Lyotard specifies (*ibid.*, p. 175): "The Kantian argument is that prescriptive phrases, far from being regulated by principles like causality, on the same order as descriptive phrases, are themselves the cause of the acts they engender."

24 — *Ibid.*, p. 128. 25 — *Ibid.*, p. 130.

In Kant's definition the sublime is primarily an affect, but also the vehicle of a representation which, however ambiguous and contradictory, is necessary for the faculties to operate when they are caught in a deadlock: "The infinity of the Idea draws to itself all the other capacities, that is, all the other faculties, and produces an *Affekt* 'of the vigorous kind,' characteristic of the sublime. As can be seen, the 'passage' does not take place, it is a 'passage' in the course of coming to pass. Its course, its movement, is a kind of agitation in place, one within the impasse of incommensurability, and above the abyss..."²⁶ When felt at its most extreme, the sublime is blind, and reason cannot use it as a representational force; it then turns into sheer *dementia*, *Wahnsinn*, a momentary exaltation of the imagination. When it is more moderate, it may conceive of itself as the contradiction-made-form, and be the pleasure of a displeasure or a joy tainted with pain, but it nonetheless presents reason with a state of the referent. In this sense its finality is non-finality, and it may induce a mixture of attraction and repulsion vis-à-vis an object — in Kant's case, the French Revolution. It directs itself to what is simultaneously feared and desired. Despite pertaining to the category of aesthetic affects, the sublime does not exactly derive from the judgement of taste; it exceeds the matter of mere personal taste, and in his fine analysis in *Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida thematised it in the register of the pure cut — as a severing of the notion of end within the object. Here as well, the essential lies in the sublime's ability to represent the irrepresentable: though the representation may be inadequate, it is always given in its paradoxical and contradictory form as the pure form of absolute heterogeneity. Kant notes that this contradictory feeling reaches its most extreme point with personal investigations on the aims of nature — the privileged object of romantic art,

which staged man's simple and profound interrogations about the world. This could be the very aesthetic basis of the sublime: a question that is too powerful, yet one that you still want to ask even though you know very well you will never be able to solve it. The affect of the sublime lodges itself in reason, replacing the calculations of the understanding. In this sense, the sublime compensates for the shortcomings of the faculties that inform reason, a synthetic form of *the heterogeneity of experience* that derives from *the heterogeneity of the faculties* of the transcendental subject.

E —
C O N C L U S I O N

In sum, Lyotard's concept of differend mediates between two powerful philosophical trends, phenomenology on the one hand, and analytic philosophy on the other. It originates both in Kant and Wittgenstein and makes it possible to understand the discrepancy of the given (its relation to the Kantian sublime) in a universe grasped as a set of phrases (its relation to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language). Since differend speaks of the heterogeneous, it is also a synthetic concept, it produces a new philosophical position that no longer pertains to phenomenology or analytic philosophy — it is a poststructuralist concept with political effectivity (the tribunal being a recurrent figure in Lyotard). Since it expresses how a subject can stop phrasing, it has directly political aims that we left aside in our analysis — most notably, Auschwitz as the extreme case of the incommensurability of representation. Two particularly insistent notions might open onto a reflection on *The Differend's* philosophical genealogy: the "there is" and the *question of procedures*. These two notions are also present in Badiou's logical

ontology: with Badiou, the “there is”, which is, for Lyotard “a mark of presentation in a phrase”²⁷ becomes a part of the logic of the appearance of a multiple in a given world; while Lyotard’s “procedures for establishing the reality of a referent” become Badiou’s “truth-procedures”. These two points of convergence remain undeveloped and need to be validated or invalidated through closer reading. Nonetheless the furtively established connection we have at this stage raises the question of an *ontology of the* “there is” in Lyotard, which may be understood as an *ontology of presentation*. We will therefore work on this ontology, first through Lacan, and then through Badiou.

27— Ibid., p. 70.

3-1

**description
of the elements involved**

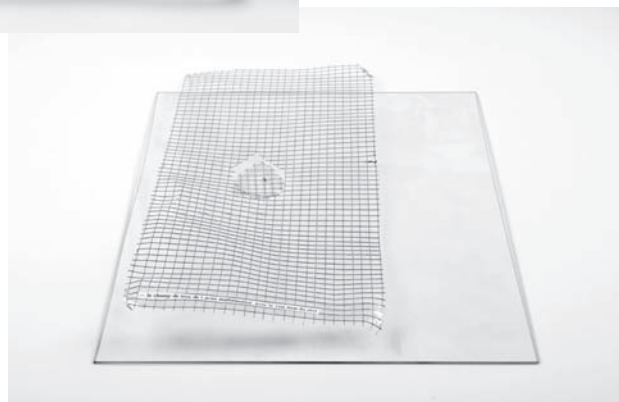
- A — the signifiers**
- B — investigation A (failed) according to the position**
- C — the field of Lacan’s hole mathematised with the true hole in the Real**
- D — the void of representation**
- E — the mechanical transcendent in plane geometry**
- F — transcendental indexation**
- G — the finger pointing skywards**
- H — the empty subject, that only expresses itself through screaming**
- I — Vattimo’s disjoined circles**
- J — the nude merging into the landscape**
- K — the restricted mirror of transcendental indexation (or manufacturing the Cyclops)**
- L — one of the two threads in Lyotard’s work**
- M — the nude spectator**
- N — the open shell**

3-2

basic rule

There is a mechanical transcendent in every system, acting as the witness transcendent.

The mechanical transcendent is given the names hole, silence and transcendental indexation here.



3-6

the field of the hole mathematised
with the true hole in the Real

3-7

Lacan's second real, once language

is established,
is the hole
in this real,
and I
would say
that this
is where
Giacometti's Nose

is located. It acts as an indicator of
this space: Lacan's concept of the hole on
which the sole question that can resist
the "there is" relies, for, although linguistic,
this question should also be understood
as an event, the event of language as such.

3-3

we raise the question
of an ontology of play

3-4

signifiers with suspended
determination

3-5

Investigation A (failed) according
to the position



3-8

An empty
representation
(a photocopy
of nothing,
therefore a more
or less black
sheet of paper)
is an habitation
as such, that is to say,
a sadness.

3-9

reorganising
two transcendents
(heavenly
and earthly).

3-10

The finger pointing skywards placed over the mechanical transcendent is a somewhat awkward explanation, or a way of stating the same thing twice, not saying what it is in itself (recall the name Yahve) but only in its structure. Ultimately, I am not sure whether the contents are present, and whether they really matter to us. The point of an analysis is mainly to describe places like empty palaces. And this is indeed what we are describing here: an empty palace, or suburb, or plain.

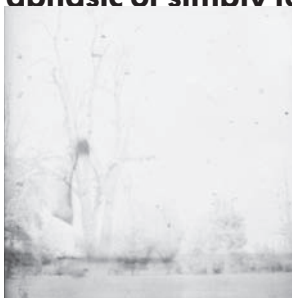
3-11

first instance

The empty subject designates the hole, the hole being placed on investigation A (failed) according to the position.

An empty subject does not exist, save by excluding itself as subject, which means the subject is not in its locus, thus usurping the hole. To conclude: speaking of an empty subject is an error, perhaps we are merely dealing with a subject that does not speak an articulate language, made aphasic or simply too full, weaving

a sinthome that can not be established; it is static then, rather than driven, or let us say it is more animal, like a lamb.

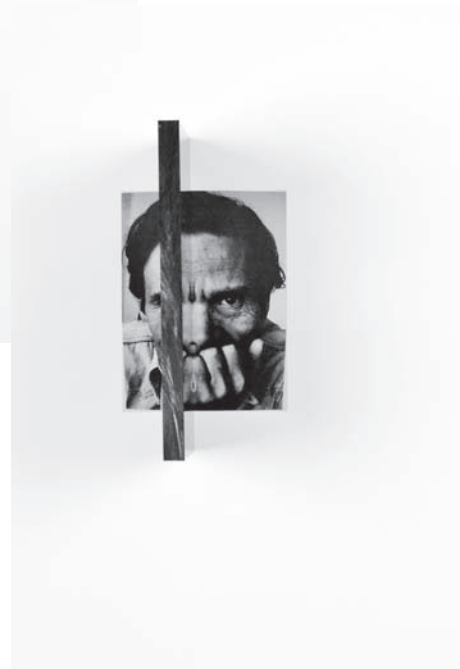
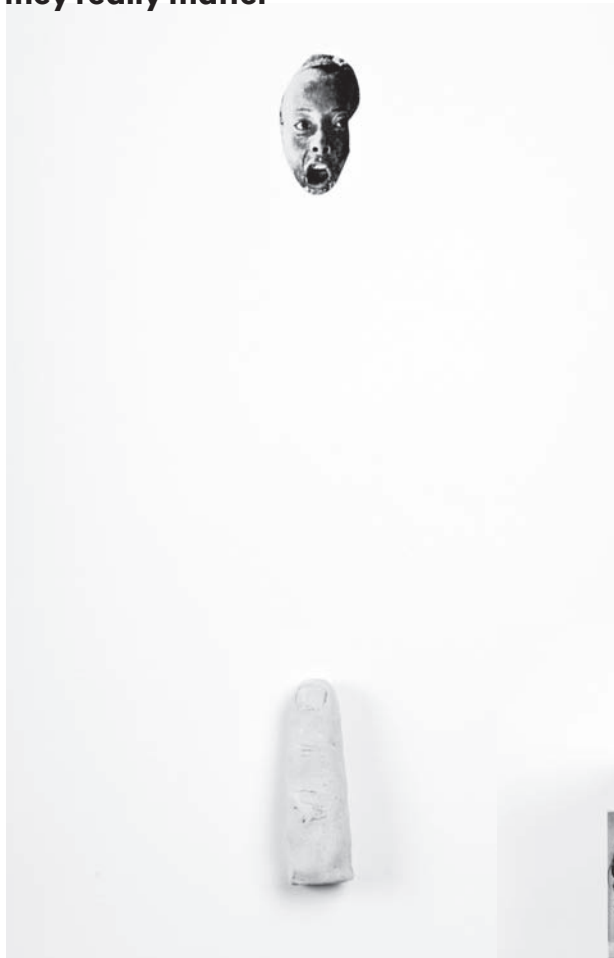


4-1

Vattimo's disjoined circles

4-2

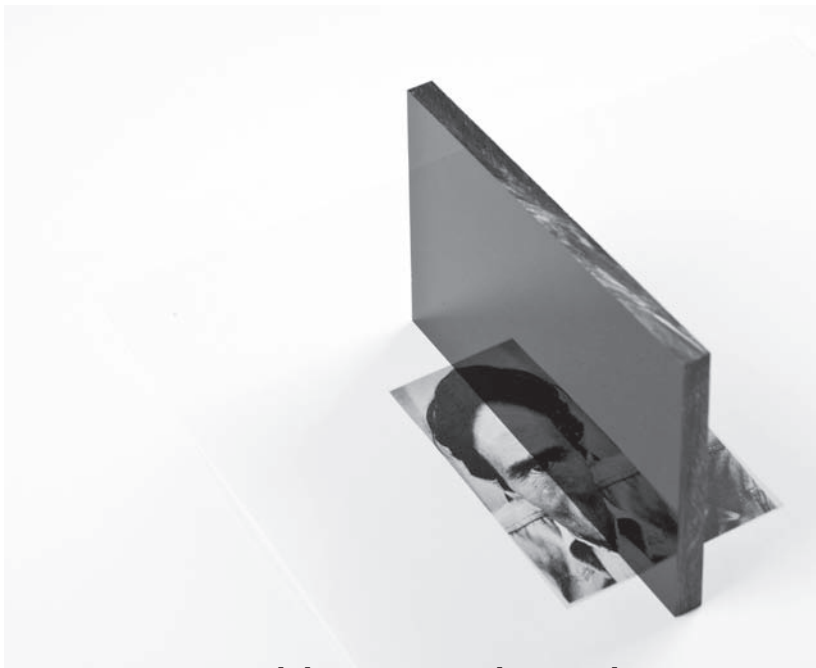
axiom
of the note plateau:
the "there is"



4-3

"there was"

In this transversal, knotted reading the "there is" indeed resembles the name Yahve — at the most, the "there is" equals Yahve's speech (*parole*) and Yahve is only speech (the word).



Lyotard does not say the word,
nor does Lacan, nor does Badiou.
Because Yahve is the only
unpronounceable word (YHWH).
They do not say the word,
and this results in:
The hole — for Lacan.
Silence — for Lyotard.
Transcendental indexation — for Badiou.



4-4

Manufacturing the Cyclops

4.5

Existentially, I could perhaps
recount an experience
axiomatised as follows:
only Giacometti's Nose resists
the "there is".

I would be very glad to share
this experience if someone
asked me to, so as to not betray
the "there is". But the axiom
holds well, only my personal

experience is lacking for the
spectator. But I do not claim all
spectators are nude.

4-6

A nude does not work with
a transcendental indexation
— here, in this case, it is only good
for manufacturing Cyclopses.
We must return to this point later
on.



4-7

Why the question
of the nose?
It should definitely
be considered
a master-signifier.

The master-signifier (in this case
Giacometti's nose) is that which, located
in the void, holds the condition of the
human being-there, and in a sense this is
indeed the case: Lacan borrows
Heidegger's concept of anxiety (and this
also includes Kierkegaard) as the main
existential experience once the
ontological difference is established
between being and the entity, the real
world and language.



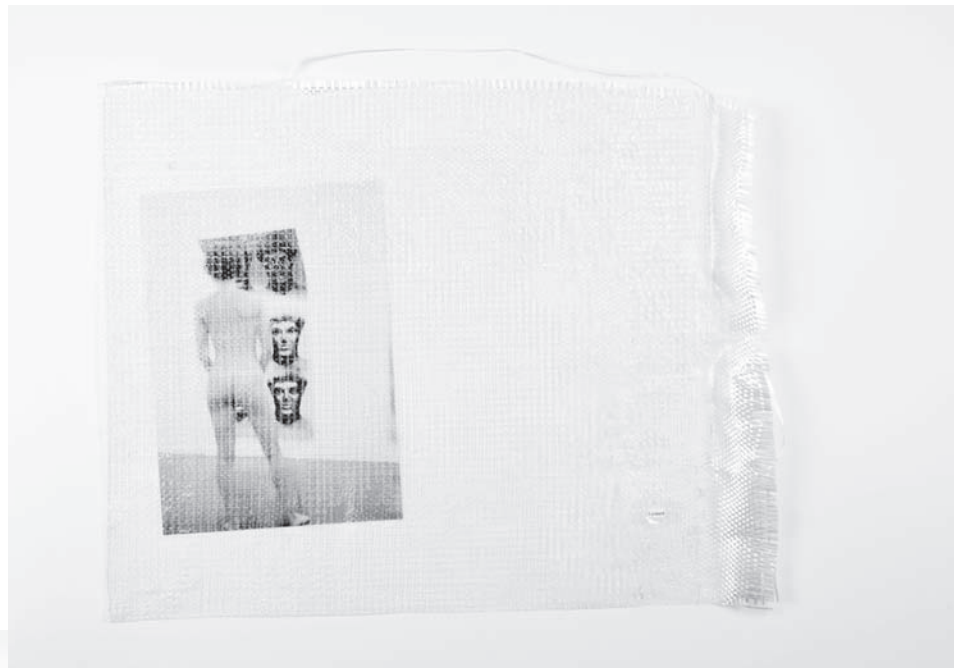
4-8

The questions have no logic here, there is only a relationship between their weight, and therefore a weave of corresponding affects.

4-9

axiom of the perfect spectator

A nude is never nude enough — a clothed subject, speaking, can be even nuder (out of shame, for instance).



THE AESTHETICS OF DIFFERENDS, AN INTRODUCTION

Milan



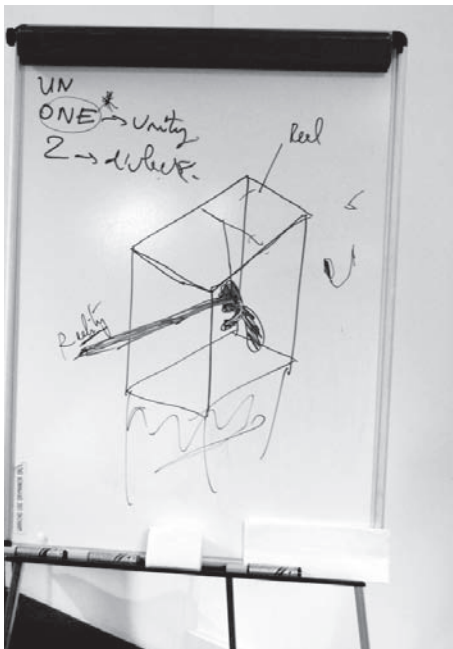
MILAN, OCT. 2009 —
INSTITUT CULTUREL SUISSE

London

Q1: I just have a question for Benoît. You said before that you see theory as your medium — I don't know if I read that right — how would you articulate the difference between doing philosophy and doing art in relationship to theory being your medium, and for philosophers, theory being their medium in a sense?

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield: Yes, good question

BM: ... Because I said theory is the medium, and so it should just be theory and not... is that what you mean?



LONDON, NOV. 2009 —
CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS COLLEGE OF ART
& DESIGN

Q1: Yes, I guess...
He was reading
a speech and...

BM: What is a
medium for you,
for example?
What is your
definition of a
medium in art?

Q1: It's a kind
of vehicle... a
way to manifest
ideas or con-
cepts ... A way
of making them
manifest...

phy... ? How do you understand your
relationship to it... as an artist
as opposed to a philosopher? If
we're drawing that distinction.
I'm just curious...

BM: I just want to say that was
in an interview, and it was an
attempt to say something quite
clear about something that is not
that clear, and it is part of
the game with an interview to say
things to provoke something — I
don't pretend to tell the truth
about my work when I'm doing an
interview but I just want to pro-
voke the reader in fact; and so I
thought it was interesting to use
theory as a medium, like painting
for example, just to say that it
is a habitation of certain rules
and a kind of history too, and I
don't know...

BM: Does a medium have rules in
general?

Q1: I guess there are restraints,
a medium is restrained by certain
plastic...

BM: Ah, so there are only lim-
its... All mediums have history,
for example, for me, painting is
a medium and there is a history of
this medium, so there are rules in
fact and doing a new painting, a
Barnett Newman zip for instance,
is like finding a new rule, a new
possibility of doing a painting
and so for me, a medium has rules.
Is that definition OK for you?

Q1: Yes, I understand.

BM: ... Or just limits? What do you
think?

Q2: But when you started today
you said it's an artwork, you
insisted to us, you said twice:
"it's an artwork".

BM: Yes, but it's an artwork that
plays with the rules of the the-
ory medium, in a certain way, and
I agree with you, when I read
theory... I feel that I am seeing
the objects... It's like this work:
(VISUAL) ... I don't know if it is
theory... I think it is aesthetics,
you know in a way I don't think it
is either theory or art — because
there is this difference between
theory and artworks — but there
is something that we don't really
speak about, which is aesthetics
— and what is the field of aes-
thetics? Perhaps I'm doing aes-
thetics in a way, more than art or
philosophy, and this aesthetics
can also be based on visual ele-
ments and concepts. And when I
read a text — sometimes I want my

texts to be read the same way an image can be read – in fact with the text, it is its analytical part, you see the text as an image, you see it without seeing the signified, the referent of the text, you just see how the words are all placed together to create affects, and the affect is the pure domain of aesthetics.

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield: "affect", is that? Not "effect"... ?

BM: Yes, "affect", since Baumgarten in fact, with *Aesthetica*. And so in fact what I want to produce is linked more to the affect, and when I read theory I really read the affects in dispute, in conflict in the book, more than the logic of it in fact. Because I think what you read in some philosophy, I read it like "watching" art history, I read it like different affects in a logical model... Yes, it's a construction "with logic", but what is really the object with each philosopher are the affects that he is really dealing with. But I think the way he resolves these affects has something to do with logic and so I'm more interested in, and have an art vision of, theory. In fact, I think that is my reading of theory.

JLD: But you have just appealed to this pure realm of affect. You said: "pure affect". But what is this "pure affect". How can affect exist purely, outside of any... ?

BM: Purely? No, I never said that, I said there are affects, I did not say there are ideal affects...

JLD: So when we're in aesthetics

we're in the pure realm of affect... ?

BM: No, what I said is that aesthetics is the domain of the affect – it is the pure domain of affect, but it is the domain that is pure, not the affects, I said it is the specific domain of affects.

JLD: Do you mean: in which there is only affect?

BM: I mean when someone... For example, Kant, when he is doing his critical investigation, he uses the aesthetic part, in *Critique of Judgement* (which is about aesthetics), and he says in the introduction that it is to make a bridge between two things that cannot be resolved, and the question of that is the finality without end – and the finality without end can be resolved by the affect of the art things. So, in my opinion, if you see a logical system, by Kant for instance, you can have a logic, phenomenology, and you have aesthetics which is something which deals with affect and the unrepresentable as you say, and there is a mechanic status of the aesthetics in this construction, but for me, if I want to be more clear, I can say that I think I am doing aesthetics, in a way, and so I am using theory as a medium, but I also use sculpture and...

Q2: Yes, that was just a question... to act as a foil...

BM: Is that OK?

Q2: Yes, fine. That's satisfactory...

(laughs from audience)

Q3: In fact, this discussion brings me back to my question, when you said that Kosuth used text for justifying his work, can't we just look at or read his texts as work?

JLD: You mean these theoretical texts, can we read them as work? Yes ...

Q3: When you use the verb "to justify" then it creates the hierarchy of one over the other.

JLD: Yes, well I think that's what happens in Kosuth, there is funnily enough a kind of hierarchisation, because he's calling it "Art after philosophy" – so philosophy has done something to art, and art will never be the same again... Reading them as works...? Yes, a big criticism made of Kosuth's writings, his theoretical writings, was that they were bad philosophy, they were attacked for being bad philosophy, but that in a way is itself a kind of bad philosophy: to attack these kinds of texts on that basis, because you're just reading them as philosophy. If you did read them as simply, purely philosophy, if you came across these and you didn't know Kosuth was an artist, and you just read them as a philosopher might read them, then you might criticise them, philosophically – for what they say philosophically – but that would still be itself bad philosophy. You have to do something else, you have to read them as a kind of work. Well, what I'm interested in is this: to what extent can you read them as works? as we might read an artwork as a work, given that Lyotard says the same gesture is going on in

both kinds of work? So where do you stop? How do you stop going as far as saying that these are artworks? You know, you move away from reading them as simply philosophy, you move towards them as something like work... well how do you know when to stop?... without making them artworks and losing all the kind of theory and philosophy that they might be presenting as well?

Q3: Can we read some of Benoît's work as philosophy?

JLD: Yes, it's a good question. Because Benoît said a couple of things that a philosopher can't say. For instance, Benoît said, when he pointed to that piece of Perspex – he said "it's an object, but I want it to become a concept", so in Aesthetics of differends no.9 or no.10 it might be a concept, but right now it's an object. Well, if only I could just say that, you know "it's an object", and that's enough, I present it as an artwork. An artist can say "this is an object", he insists "this is an object", and then the next time you see it – exactly the same piece of Perspex, exactly the same, with a different arrangement on that same plinth, with maybe the same objects but differently arranged – well, "now it's a concept!". Well, that's something a philosopher can't do. He can't make that kind of claim: "Well, in this text it's an object, and in this text it's a concept" – well how do I know, if I'm reading it, whether it's an object or a concept? So you can't do that in philosophy – and I'm not saying that you shouldn't be doing this Benoît, by any means – it's just

that how do you know how to read these things? And how does the work itself know how to be read? So how can an artist answer this question: "To what extent can it be read as philosophy?" It's the question of course, that is the question we're asking. It's not a question that can be answered, I mean definitively – you can just talk about this work, about this example or that example...

Last night I was responding to a paper given by a philosopher at the London School of Economics, and it was the second of two papers under the rubric of "Rethinking Marxism", the first paper was last week, on revolution, and the second, last night, was on art. So, art after revolution, "Philosophy of Art" it was called, under the rubric of "Rethinking Marxism", and this philosopher, this Oxford philosopher, said that contemporary art has no social or political critique. None. Because all contemporary art is "theorised" – it can't be understood outside of grasping theory – and the theory you'd have to understand in order to grasp the art is "irrational". So Lyotard would be a good example of this for her, you know, you have to understand people like Lyotard, in which case you can't understand the artwork because this is irrational theory and philosophy that's going on here. So, this "pact" – it sounded like a "pact" that art was in, with theory – meant that it gave up any possibility of critique. But the point to be retrieved from that, for me this dogmatic and overly general and in the end ridiculous argument, the point to be retrieved from it is that there's no art that isn't theorised – and this goes

back to your question about medium, or media, you know, the different media... Is there such a thing as a pure medium, in other words, a medium which isn't already theorised? So is there such a thing now as being able to work – say within an institution, an art school – is there a possibility of doing art which is not theorised? Well I would say it's not possible, so to that extent she's right, this philosopher: artists and philosophers and the public, moreover, for her, have to have a grasp of theory if they're to understand art. That, I concede. But it's not a theory/practice distinction as I've tried to show, it's not as if there's theory over there on the one side and practice over here on the other. If there's no art which is not already theorised, then it's all in one place. But whether that means the philosophy can occupy a place of its own, which isn't in some way aesthetic, that's another question.

Q4: But did she define that ideal moment when it wasn't laced to theory?

JLD: Yes, I asked her to give an example of art which... I mean, she thinks that... if art is theorised in this way which is irrational, or the kind of theory it appeals to is not understandable accord-



JONATHAN LAHEY DRONSFIELD,
LONDON, NOV. 2009 —
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ing to conventional ways of understanding, then it leaves itself open to manipulation, and what it's being manipulated by – and this is where her Marxist bit comes in – it's being manipulated by vested interests, capital, it's being governed by the market. That is what art is being governed by, before anything else it's being governed by the market. And I put it to her that the same thing could be said about universities and therefore philosophy, you can't do philosophy outside of the academy, outside of the university, universities are no less subject to the market than is art, but that's another argument. Yes, so art leaves itself open to manipulation and I asked if she could give an example of work that isn't being manipulated in this way, or an example of non-theorised art, before this kind of "bad period" of contemporary art, and she said "Brecht!". (laughs from audience) "The life of Galileo", she said, "the play" – but she's appealing there to perhaps the first artist to have theorised their work to the nth degree!... you know, who wrote theories of their art... and maybe you can't understand the art without understanding these theories that Brecht wrote, theories of the alienation effect and that kind of thing. So, for her, an unmediated work would be work of the sort that Brecht was making. Why? For similar reasons that Benoît just gave in relation to your question about media: because it's historical, and it acknowledges its historicity in its construction and this would be what would make it resistant to theorisation, so I think you're touching on some-

thing similar there, because to answer that guy's question about medium, you didn't say "ah, because it's theorised", but "because it's historical and it's got roots", so that is what she's giving us as what enables art to be resistant to its manipulation by outside forces, if it wants to appeal to a certain kind of theory. But it's funny that she should give Brecht as an example of unmediated art because Brecht was all about mediation! it's a term that's even in his theories.

Q4: But why could she not see that theory could turn into practice, or...

JLD: Well, I think there's an answer implicit in what she's saying and that is because philosophy is able to decide these things, and if philosophy became practice, then only a certain kind of philosophy can become practice, for her, and that would be the suspicious kinds of philosophy, because they're illogical. Those kinds can become practice, that's OK, as long as they're not "philosophy", that's the main thing, so long as they don't impinge on the realm and the authority of "philosophy"!

Funnily enough I was also speaking over the weekend at the so-called "Art Festival" at Hay, Hay-on-Wye, a three-day art festival, it was about ephemerality, ephemeral art, and I argued that there's no such thing as "ephemeral art", but at the same time all art is ephemeral. But the main point of discussion ended up being the influence of the market on art, it was like a grand conspiracy theory, for three days, one three-day long

setting-out of a conspiracy theory—that what you’re doing, what we’re doing in art institutions is just a bit further down but no less subject to market forces than the kind of work that’s being made at the top end of the market. So all these art critics and journalists were arguing this.

Anne Tallentire: Well unfortunately, it’s time to...

JLD: Yes, that’s a terrible note to end with...

(laughs from audience)

AT: Well I don’t quite know what to say after that other than that

this does go some way to refute that...

JLD: Oh I completely agree, I couldn’t agree more, I think this is a crazy argument, I think what’s going on in places like this, and the kind of work that Benoît is doing, utterly refutes this notion and all these kinds of claims.

AT: So this is a little interstice in the... ?

JLD: Can I just say I don’t think this is the “interstice”, I think it’s the main business of art, I think pretty much all contemporary art is of this kind.

Amsterdam

Good evening,

I am currently working on an “aesthetics of differends” and am here to explain what that means.

Introduction

Firstly, I will introduce my main thesis on the meaning of aesthetics and the position of the artist as a specific kind of aesthetician. I then intend to pursue with a discussion on the concept of the differend introduced by Lyotard, and end my presentation by arguing the importance of an aesthetics of differends for understanding the contemporary moment we call, to put it succinctly, postmodern.

Once that has been done — that is, once I have given my personal definition of the term “aesthetics”, followed by a definition of Lyotard’s concept of the “differend”, and posited the importance of a potential “aesthetics of differends” for art today, I will move on to defining the artwork in terms of a conflict between two approaches: the analytical and synthetic. This will lead us to the crucial elements in the process of creating a body of works, and we will consider the risks of analytical art on the one hand, and those of synthetic art on the other.

Located somewhere between these two approaches, we will consider the specific position of my work *Aesthetics of differends*, which is both analytical and synthetic, both a system of concepts and a visual arrangement of affects. And this will help us view my aesthetics of differends as a tool, a tool for taking care of the main issues in the art field.

For the time being, I will attend to the three main issues, which are as follows:

- First: the severed finger pointing to the transcendent
- Second: Giacometti's *Nose* verifying the true hole in the Real
- Third: the son of a whore breaks with a genealogy, thus founding the lack as primordial

I will introduce all of the above issues yet I will mainly be attempting to deal with the second one with the first principles of my aesthetics of differends, which should not be regarded as an object of investigation but more as a way of managing issues.

the word "aesthetics"

the weight / the burden

My first task will be to introduce a key concept in aesthetics: the question of weight. Does that mean anything to you, put like that? The weight of something is expressed in kilogrammes; for example, the weight of a human body is around 70 kilogrammes. Weight, or, interchangeably, "the burden", is the key concept in my particular understanding of the term "aesthetics".

My thesis is based on an analysis of classical writings, and especially on Immanuel Kant's third *Critique*, in which he provides a specific definition of the field of aesthetics with the sublime – the feeling of the sublime being presented as an affect that exceeds the idea of measure. In this way, aesthetics can be defined, according to Immanuel Kant, as this feeling, this affect of being exposed to an *event-beyond-measure*. This event is the *passing-by*, the *passing-through* a transcendental field, in the sense that a transcendent is, precisely, immeasurable.

The "in-between
of the conceptual object"

In this way, my thesis is that a transcendent is not an object, as in an object that can be perceived – it is, rather, a field, a field a subject can *pass-by*. And, through this *passing-by*, the subject – that perceives, whose act is perception – sheds some of the weight that founds it, the weight acquired through trouble, by being faced with all

the metaphysical questions that are precisely questions without answers, because these questions are the formalism of what I call the "already unsolved". But they still carry the weight of the question, a weight that cannot be left on the ground. Aesthetics takes care of this weight that surrounds the subject with the affect of the "already unsolved" – that which, precisely, is beyond measure, to enable, through the encounter with a transcendental field, the "leaving-the-weight-on-the-ground".

In sum, I understand aesthetics as a field of perception that enables the transfer of weight (that derives from a metaphysical level of questioning) onto sites other than the heart of the subject. In other terms, "aesthetics" should be understood as a mechanism of fluids whereby the weight circulates between several people and is mediated by objects and experiences.

The object *Manufacturing the Cyclops*
becoming a concept

The second point I would like to develop further is (what I call) the "in-between of the conceptual" *object* which, in the aesthetics I am working on – that is, in my working aesthetics – will very quickly come to express the fact that an object can take the place or function of a concept (*I* means a concept in its fullest sense).

For example, this is the case with this piece of Perspex entitled *Manufacturing the Cyclops*. In my aesthetics of differends it is a sculptural object but it will become a conceptual object in the next stages of my enquiry.



AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

The "in-between of the conceptual object" must therefore be understood as a becoming as such: the concept becomes an object and vice versa. The relationship of becoming is made possible as these are concepts and objects that provide the subject with the opportunity to "leave the weight on the ground" – these concepts and objects face the pure void of the "already unsolved", yet, as their perceptions are made possible by an affect that exceeds the idea of measure in itself, language contains no inherent criteria for judging their qualities. These objects and concepts are on the void, and can be perceived through a body (a network) of affects that are not measurable *in letters*, or that are, rather, non-signifying, in the linguistic sense.

In this way, the term "aesthetics" in the expression "aesthetics of differends" is a transfer of weight between human subjects mediated by a becoming of concepts and objects (the concepts becoming objects, the objects becoming concepts).

I will end this introduction by discussing the meaning of the term "differend" in the expression "aesthetics of differends".

the concept of "differend"

≠ conflict

This word, which is not the word "different" with a "t", but "differend" with a "d", could ordinarily be translated as "conflict" in English. However, as the concept – developed by Jean-François Lyotard in his 1983 essay – has gained strength, so has a rendering of the term as "conflict" lost its accuracy. His essay, entitled *Le Différend* in French, has not been translated with an English term but is simply rendered as *The Differend* – so it is like a new word, and a novel concept, both wider-ranging and more precise than the typical translations, "conflict" or "disagreement".

So if a differend is not just a conflict or a disagreement, what is it exactly?

on judgement

For Lyotard, a differend is a linguistic concept linked to the problem of judgement. He states: "As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for a lack of rule of judgement applicable to both arguments". In fact, Lyotard framed the core problem of his book as that of the possibility of judgement after philosophy's linguistic and relativistic turn.

Our concern, via this book and Lyotard's concept, is grounded in the fact that after his "Report on Knowledge" in the 1970's, where he introduced his main thesis – postmodernity as an era stripped of meta-narratives – Lyotard worked on a concept that attempts to give a shape to a problem of judgement in our time, a concept with the same problematic structure as the concept Kant was working on two centuries earlier. In his book Lyotard reenacts the Kantian notion of the sublime as a way of bridging the abyss between incommensurable phrases.

Because if there is a lack of judgement between at least two parties or two phrases – because these phrases are heterogeneous, even if they attend to the same object – the critical measure is broken. In this case, we just retain

affects and weight, and aesthetics (as a tool) points toward this hole in language to draw a distinction, even if it is not a judgement.

postmodernity

So this explains my current interest in the concept of the differend, I would venture the possibility of an aesthetics for our postmodern times, based on the idea that art is a vast stage where multiple voices emerge via objects, experiences, written texts, screens, etc.,... And, rather than attempting to judge the objects (the core issues) of these voices (and if I use the term "voice" here rather than "human expression", I do so in order to deal with the idea of the "face" brought to us by Agamben and Levinas) we should interpret them with a structure without structure – which, for me, is hermeneutics – and interpret them with non-positive, although linguistic, concepts such as the void and weight.

I mean that the issue of contemporary art, the art that artists are producing today, should be apprehended via new concepts that may appear through a reading that would be *in conflict* with them, that is to say, via the concepts of the aesthetics of differends I am in the process of developing.

Before defining the term "artwork", I will first present the three main issues it raises and will address one of these, because the "aesthetics of differends" is a body of questions that carries answers. It is just that the answers – and their weight – come before the questions.

In sum, the weight of the question *is* the answer and it comes first, although this may not be evident. Only afterwards does the question appear, through the answer, a question that ends the process of transfer of the fluid of the weight of the answer.

I should confess, therefore, that the *Aesthetics of differends* functions exactly like an artwork.

The artwork

2 approaches:

- the analytical
- the synthetic

My task now is to try and define what an artwork is. In *The birth of tragedy* published in 1872, Nietzsche defined two notions to characterise Romantic art, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These two notions are not concepts but rather two tendencies in conflict with one another within all artworks and all creators. According to Peter Sloterdijk, the Dionysian and the Apollonian form a dialectic, they are

contrasting, but Nietzsche does not mean one to be valued more than the other. A work of art is in this sense a compound of this dialectic. I would wager that this dialectic that Nietzsche inherits from Greek philosophy is particularly valuable for defining Romantic art – that is to say, the kind art Nietzsche was beholding, the art of his time.

The idea of defining the artwork through a new dialectic came to me quite some time ago. Now, when I look at the art of our time, that can succinctly be described as “postconceptual”, the two tendencies are the analytical and the synthetic, and they can define the way art is made in the postmodern moment. But with this approach the risks are twofold:

Analytical art is defined by the work made by an artist obsessed by a question or an object, whatever the object or question may be. It could be the theory of perception for Falke Pisano, archeology as methodology for Marianna Castillo Deball, the relationship to time for the curator Raimundas Malasauskas, or even skateboarding and eighteenth-century astronomers for Raphaël Zarka. I call these “objects of obsession”, and the artist’s work can be understood as a plunge into these objects, which is not without risk – the risk of being misunderstood – and the deeper the plunge, the deeper the misunderstanding.

Therein lies the risk of analytical art and, in a word, its specificity. Well that is one way of making post-conceptual art. However, “postconceptual art” has become the generic term for contemporary art.

The other tendency, the synthetic one, is not a plunge into an object but a way of connecting different objects, made possible by finding questions able to create links between these objects.

Here is an example: Tino Seghal’s work can be understood as a synthesis naming the links between different objects which in this case are the names of various analytical artists.

Thus, Tino Seghal’s synthesis is firstly accomplished through a huge synthesis of names:

–Jeff Koons for the relationship between money, power and society

–Xavier Le Roy for the choreographic aspect

–Yves Klein for the dematerialisation

39 –Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman for the relationship to the body in exhibitions

Then, Tino Seghal’s other synthesis deals with the relationship between the time of the object and the time of the event: through repetition, the time of the event becomes the time of the object, enabling the institutional objectivity of dematerialised work.

So that is a brief presentation of how a synthesis can function in postconceptual - art, and I would advance that Tino Seghal is indeed a very brilliant synthetic artist.

But in my own terms, in my aesthetics of differends, I could just as equally say that Seghal is an analytical artist, and that the object of his obsession is the screen (like Liam Gillick in fact). Seghal is obsessed with the screen and wants to break it. But the critic (in the present case, myself) has to be creative to describe Seghal's work as analytical art. The main idea that should be developed features in the piece *Instead of allowing some things to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other things*, well-discussed by Dorothea von Hantelmann in her *How to do things with art*, that is: the artists' use of their bodies in their projects, that become videos in gallery exhibitions.

As Von Hantelmann explains: "In contrast, Seghal introduces the choreographed body as choreographed body -not as a video image- to the context of visual art". So from my perspective, Tino Seghal thus breaks the screen of representation, generating a situation the observer must participate in.

This counter-example clearly demonstrates that there are both analytical and synthetic artists, but that the boundary between them is not clear, and, furthermore, both analytical and synthetic procedures are involved in the work of any artist. But these are obviously just two tendencies among many for defining an artistic practice today, at least that is the hypothesis grounding my aesthetics of differends.

Thanks to this introduction, you should now have a clearer idea of how I understand:

- "aesthetics": as a mechanism of fluids in which weight circulates between perceivers, and a series of objects become concepts and vice versa.
- the *differend*: more than a conflict, it is a lack of judgement in postmodernity, and an extremely important feature of postconceptual art.

Now that we have a better understanding of the artwork as a tension between analytic and synthetic tendencies, we can try to get to the crux of the main issues at stake in the aesthetics of differends, which constitute the first part of my aesthetics as an ontology of the "there is", and are as follows:

- First: the severed finger pointing to the transcendent
- Second: Giacometti's *Nose* verifying the true hole in the Real
- Third: the son of a whore breaks with a genealogy, thus founding the lack as primordial

I will just try to give you some idea of the weight of these burdens before entering further into the second issue, in the sense that we will be dealing directly with the aesthetics of differends.

**the three main issues
of the aesthetics of differends
(ontology of the "there is")**

— First

The severed finger pointing to the transcendent is based on a synthetic relationship we can establish between the famous *John the Baptist* painting by Leonardo da Vinci and the new concept of transcendental indexation developed in Alain Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*.

To put it simply, there is a smile on John the Baptist's lips. Answering a question by pointing his finger skywards, he refers to the transcendent. But something along the lines of a positive doubt is at work in this indexation, something that, for the spectator, is linked to an "already unsolved" item. And Badiou's book, when discussing transcendental indexation—a scale of measurement for the elements that appear in a world—gives exactly the same impression, the same sensation of weight transfer. There is an invisible smile in the book and this is the first point the aesthetics of differends should investigate. I have already worked on this with a sculpture and with several fragmented texts, but never through a presentation such as the one I am giving now, a form that needs to be clear, and I hope it will be...



AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

— Third

In the third field, the genealogy without beginning, we should deal with a concept of history and try to link it to a contemporary representation of Narcissus, and we should investigate and link the question of existence as a non-choice — and particularly for the son of a whore — to the question of debt and the relationship to the artists that came before as inheritors. But none of this is very clear for the time being.

— Second

Let us play closer attention to the second field of weight,

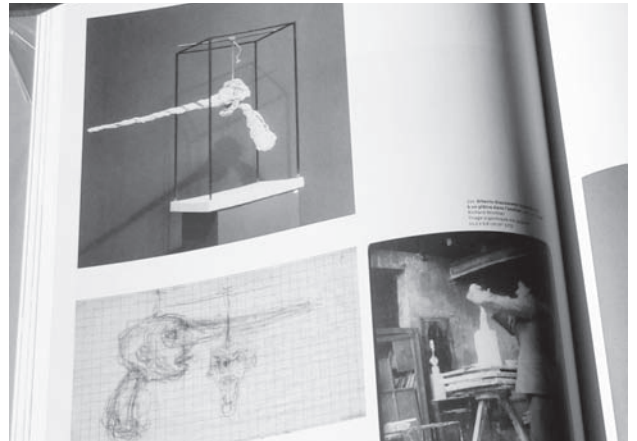
which can also be called a "burden". This burden can be phrased as follows:

Only Giacometti's
Nose resists the "there is"

And it is axiomatised in the sentence:

"Giacometti's Nose
verifying the true hole in the Real".

I should first of all state that the question of the "there is" is the main concern of the opening sections of the *Aesthetics of differends* and probably the first three burdens each focus on a specific "there is", linked to three thinkers: Lacan, Lyotard and Badiou, and I intend to deal with the "there is" in the works of all three thinkers. Investigating the "there is" in these three philosophies will specify an ontology of presentation which will make up the first part of the *Aesthetics of differends*.



AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

I provide this detail so as to state that, through *The Nose*, (that some of you must have seen as a phallus, the law of the father) we will deal with Lacan's very specific form of "there is".

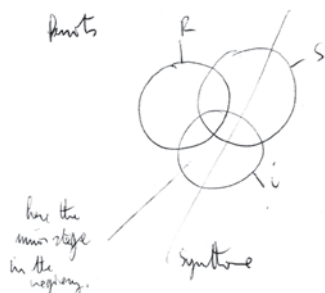
There will thus be two stages: Firstly, I will explain the main concepts of my axiom and of my question in a Lacanian context of thought. Secondly, I will go on to demonstrate that *The Nose* verifies the true hole in the Real.

Giacometti's Nose verifies the true hole in the Real

Lacan's concepts

Lacan's philosophy is a shifting one, he is Freudian in the 1930s and invents the "mirror stage" — he is truly Freudian! But his reading of Freud is particularly inventive, ultimately giving shape to a set of new concepts to approach human psychology. For the purposes of our investigation, we will focus on his R.S.I schema, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, that establishes a new order replacing the Freudian ego / id / super ego, and which is different from the "I". In the 1960's, Lacan discussed the R.S.I schema by referring to Borromean knots, and later, when analysing

the place of the function ego/id/superego which is different
in the 60's to what Lacan talks about the RSI with the recourse to
points



and later when he only
wrote of Joyce he invented.
than work is the "synthome"
can be represented by a line
synthome is a holding of res

AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

Symbolic, and there is the sintome, created by the subject,
and referred to as reality.

And this Real (the second one) is the site of the
subject's "there is": it can be understood as a scription
for a third term—the concept of the "third term" is a person
outside of the structure, but who is not the other — con-
cerning the viability of the subject as a whole.

For Lacan the subject is immersed in the world with the Im-
aginary, the Symbolic and the Real, and when it produces
something (its sinthome), it produces the "there is" as
established. This is quite different then from Freud's sub-
ject, who is linked more to Husserl's phenomenology, in a
certain Cartesian genealogy, as a subject who perceives the
world from a specific standpoint. With Lacan, the subject
is weaved into the world and creates reality by tying knots.

The relationship between the Real and reality must there-
fore be explained. As Lacan states: "the Real is the impos-
sible", it cannot be symbolised, it is unspeakable, and so
reality should be understood as a determined but indeed
vain effort to symbolise the Real.

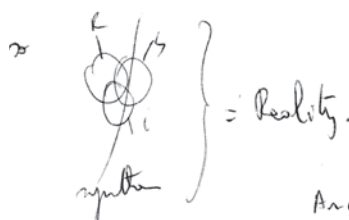
In spatial terms, the Real is what the subject seeks
to say. It is always a share of what is outside of him, even if
he can tie knots with it, the process is without end. And so
reality is a subject struggling
with the Real and establishing it
within the category of the "there
is" with the two other orders (the
Imaginary and the Symbolic). The
"there is" is a mode of represen-
tation addressed to a third term,
and not to the other or to the
Other (the Great one).

But there are many holes
in the R.S.I schema. In "The
Sinthome", Jacques Lacan ex-
plains for example that, there

the work of Joyce, he invented
a fourth term, the "sinthome",
that can be represented by a line.
The sinthome is a relationship
constructed between the three
circles, and Lacan explains that
this relationship forms the Real
in itself.

Therein lies the first paradox:
there is the Real, which is con-
nected to the Imaginary and the

Symbolic, and there is the sintome, created by the subject,
and referred to as reality.



And this Real (the second one)
"there is" of the subject, it can be used
to the third. (the work of the third is a person who is
but who is not the other
of the viability of the subject as a whole -

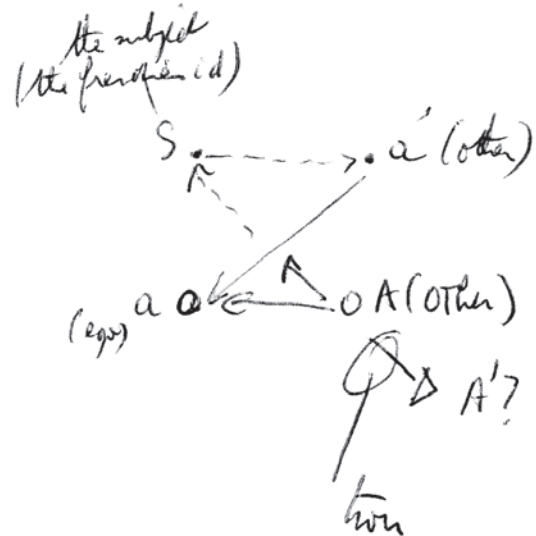
AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

are holes all over the symbolic order, in other words: the symbolic order is awaiting meaning, it is an empty space. But that is not the true hole, the true hole is that there is no other of the other.

In this schema, we can note that the true void is a constitutive part of the subject's reality. Whereas the hole of the "there is no other of the other" is the motif Hölderlin identifies as the "silence of the gods".

I believe the Christians called God "YAWHE", a series of letters that cannot be expressed, a name that cannot be pronounced. The term therefore resists representation and the "there is" logic.

Thus, the true hole is located within the R.S.I schema, inside reality, and thus inside the subject's construction. But because it is a hole, it is precisely the share of that which is lacking inside the subject, an absolute outside from the inside itself. A share that resists the "there is" of the Real.



AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

Giacometti's Nose verifies
the true hole in the Real

And when I saw Giacometti's Nose, I immediately identified this sculpture with a problem of representation, with the "there is" logic, and the ontology of representation.

The Nose
Man's head on stem

In his book, simply entitled *The Nose*, Jean Clair says something about the face that is of considerable importance for Giacometti. He states (my translation) that: "The face is precisely that which cannot be measured, that which makes the human a non-thing, a non-object, without limits, a *no-thing*" (here, he uses the English term), "meaning that the existence of the other, face to face, is not in the "there is" order, nor is it in the "that" order — neutral, anonymous, measurable — but in the order of the "he is someone", a "you", who questions, who defies me, stops me, surprises me, suspends my attention." Jean Clair's words corroborate my impression, and he also uses the "there is" notion — the "il y a" in French or "es gibt" in German.

At the beginning of his book, Jean Clair writes that to interpret *The Nose* and *Man's head on stem* we must

take into account an experience Giacometti had in 1921 but which he only recounted years later, in the text "The Dream, The Sphinx and the Death of T" (published in *Labyrinthe*, 1946). It deals with the hotel-room death experience of his spiritual father. Giacometti explains in this text that this experience went on to determine his artistic career.

Interestingly, Jean Clair describes this man as Alberto Giacometti's "ideal father", and we glean that what Giacometti discovered through this lived experience is precisely that there is no other of the other, no permanency, that this man — who Giacometti positions in the locus of the Law of the father — died, just like any insect.

The burden that Giacometti discovered here is that there is no Great Other (his ideal father), radically established by the fact of the hole in the Real.

By applying the theory of the Borromean knot to Giacometti's sculpture, we can advance that the head, screaming or smiling, is located within a cage. The space defined by this cage surrounds the head, it is the reality of the subject formed by a network of knots and the nose points to something outside this specific space, something the subject can touch or point to with its long nose but cannot see with its eyes or hear with its ears. Something that is outside the space defined around the head, and something that is also outside the space defined by the plinth. And I call that "a point that the subject cannot finish writing", which is the true hole in the Real.

Q1: Hello.

BM: Hello.

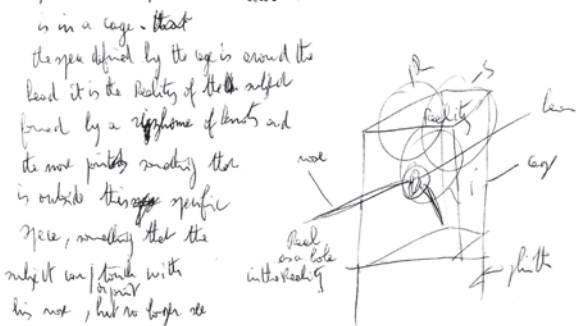
Q1: I was wondering if you could speak about the tension between the synthetic and the analytical in your own practice.

B: ...In my practice? Yes, OK. Well I think that a work is a mixture

told in a text "Le père, le Sphinx et la mort de T" in 1946, ~~he told~~ ^{that} it is the experience of the death of ~~his father~~ ^{his father} in the hotel room. Giacometti tells in the text that it is the experience that decided his artistic career.

It is interesting to note that Jean Clair says this man was the "ideal father" of Alberto Giacometti, and we can ~~infer~~ ^{infer} from this indicated that what Giacometti discovered through this lived experience is that there is no other of the other, no permanency, that the man Giacometti places at the place of the father, the father but, died like any insect. The burden Giacometti found here is that there is no ~~big other~~ ^{big other} (god) for the other (his ideal father) radically states by the fact of the hole in the Real.

by applying this theory of the Borromean knot to the Giacometti sculpture we can ~~see~~ ^{infer} that the head with a long nose is in a cage. ~~that~~ ^{the} space defined by the cage is around the head it is the reality of the subject formed by a ~~network~~ ^{network} of knots and the nose points to something that is outside this specific space, something that the subject can touch or point to with its long nose but cannot see with its eyes or hear with its ears.



AMSTERDAM, MARCH 2010 —
POWER POINT PRESENTATION AT THE
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMIE

of synthetic and analytical, for postconceptual art, but we are not always dealing with conceptual art, we can do whatever we are into — Romantic paintings and things like that, but I think postconceptual art is a framing for a lot of contemporary practices. So... in my work it's really a mixture of sometimes something which is analytical and something

which is synthetic, so when I'm obsessed by questions I go deeper and deeper into these questions by reading and by other things, and so I am analytical in that way, but when I want to link it to another object, I am synthetic. For example, *The Nose* by Giacometti: I am obsessed by this piece so I read things about it, and I am also obsessed by Lacan and the theory of holes, and in these two ways I am analytical, but when I try to link the two, I am synthetic. So I think this work, *Aesthetics of differends*, is for me analytical and synthetic, it's a mixture of both, and also it is a mixture of theory and practices. And so it's a synthesis... I think what I like about this work is that it's really a synthesis of sculpture and theory, so that is where the synthesis is. And so there are many layers of analytical aesthetics and synthetic aesthetics, for the formality, for the main concept...

Q1: And do you think it's a new idea that doesn't apply to Romantic painting for instance?

BM: What do you say... ? What do you think?

Q1: What do I think?

BM: Yes.

(laughs from audience)

Q1: Ah. I haven't thought about it, or read about it, so I couldn't say... No, it's just something that came to mind and I wanted to talk about it.

BM: Sure. I like to say that Nietzsche was looking at Roman-

tic paintings, and we are dealing more with minimalism now and these kinds of things, and so the "Apollonian and Dionysian" is really good for Romantic painting... I think we can have two Romantic painters that are analytical and synthetic but it's not two tendencies that are really "framing" for these kinds of things... We can say, when Géricault painted *the Raft of the Medusa*, for example, he went to a place where he could study how to paint a hand and so, in this way, we can see an analytical approach... and likewise when Leonardo da Vinci wants to know what is inside a body, in a way—but it's not the main thing.

Ilse van Rijn: Any questions?

Q1: Just a very short question. You said something about the risk of the analytical part, that you could maybe drown in the object—or that's how I received it, and I was wondering where you would see the risk of the synthetic approach.

BM: OK. For me the risk of the analytical approach is incomprehension, or misunderstanding, because if you are obsessed by something you are going to develop a specific language for that and no-one will understand you.

Q1: Exactly.

(laughs from audience)

BM: So that's the risk of the analytical thing. Now the risk of the synthetic is another risk, it is not a positive risk like that, it is a negative risk in the sense that when you make a synthesis, the risk of your synthesis is that

it's not a good one, so the risk of the synthesis is a repetition of other artists' works. For example, I said that Tino Seghal did a synthesis of a great many names in art history, but he did a good synthesis. However, the risk of the synthesis is just the vacuum of a simple repetition of your predecessors.

Q1: So maybe it relies on the kind of synthesis you make, or one makes, to get the new spark... ? The synthetic approach reminds me of collage, or also surrealism a bit...

BM: Yes. I understand you because what we can also say is that Tino Seghal is really a synthesis within the art context, but you can do a synthesis with "some" art and "some" mathematics – with something that is outside of art, and so it's another kind of synthesis, and as you say, it's like surrealism, like collage, it is taking something from the real – or from reality I should say – and placing it within art, and doing things like that...

Q1: So again, the distance also matters...

BM: For what?

Q1: ... For the synthesis,...

BM: Sure. The greater the distance, the more beautiful the synthesis!

Q1: Yes, I think that too.

Q2: Last year I went to a lecture, and there was someone who at the end of his talk approached the making of art, or even described

the making of art as something that we could look at a "visual rhetorics", so rhetoric but in a visual way. So he posed that could be how we make art nowadays, that we know that whatever visual stuff we make will be thrown into an arena where people will look at it and maybe then it's very important that those two things in the dialectic, the synthetic and the analytical, are both so equally balanced that we have a successful artwork because we can relate to it on those two levels, because the analytical approach and the synthetic approach are both two human things that are combined in our way of thinking, and we need both to relate to something. So could you relate to that approach of the making of art as a visual rhetoric?

BM: Do you mean: do I have another idea about the making of art?

Q2: Well, could you relate to that, or do you think this is some completely wrong idea of how we look at making art, or what art is, could art be "visual rhetorics"?

BM: Can art be "visual" or... "metaphoric"?

Q2: Can art be visual "rhetorics"? *Rhetorica*. As in... ?

BM: Ha, it's a metaphor! It's because your language is too good for me!

(laughs from audience)

IvR: "rhétorique"! "rhétorique"!

BM: Yes. So what is the question exactly?

Burden

THE SON OF A WHORE — BREAKS WITH A GENIE CRY

GENEALOGY, THUS FUNDING THE LACK AS PRIMORDIAL

(laughs from audience)

Q2: Could art be visual and “*rhétorique*”?

IvR: “*rhetorica*”!

BM: So rhetoric and visual? So what do you think?

(laughs from audience)

Q2: I think yes. I think this was a sort of an eye-opener for me because I think of this rhetorics – “*rhetorica*” – as the making of art in such a way that it would help me to put all those things in it: the analytical approach, the synthetic approach...

BM: Do you have an example?

Q2: Well, if you make a sculpture it deals with space, it deals with some emotional things people get out of it and some physical things people get out of it, and if you put all of those elements in it that touch on the human body, or the human mind, then you have something that people can relate to. But if one of those things lack, for instance physicality or texture, and the other one is overbalanced, then you’re just looking at something that you don’t know what to do with, and so you can’t approach it.

BM: Yes...

(laughs from audience)

BM: ... Yes... I agree... I don’t know what to say...

(laughs from audience)

IvR: Shall I throw something in

then? Now you’re giving your lecture, Benoît, on these themes, on these topics, and you’re explaining what your ideas are – and we talked about it before you started, and you said “yeah, well, let’s call it a lecture, but I’m not sure whether we should call it that, maybe we can come up with another term”, do you see other forms in which you can perhaps visualise *this idea* in an exhibition context?

BM: Sure. I can show you if you want.

IvR: Yes please... that would be wonderful.

(VISUALS)

BM: So that was the first part of my *Aesthetics of differends*.

IvR: I see a lot of text as well – so the onlooker becomes a reader in your exhibition?

BM: You can choose.

IvR: You can choose – but do you understand if you do not read the text?

BM: Yes,... as we said, you see the materiality of the objects and... I think that in my work a text can function as an image, sometimes... so you can just “watch” a word, you don’t have to read it.

IvR: And going back to this issue of analytic and synthetic artists, do we as onlookers need those tools to read your works as well?

BM: For that, I really don’t know, because I’m in the work, I’m do-

ing the work and so I really don't know about the reception of the work. I'm trying to do what I am doing and so I don't know, I'm not outside, I can't say... I mean, I think it's important to read – the written text is part of the work, but you know the duration of the work is not defined either, so you don't know, you have to choose how much time you spend looking at a painting. Perhaps, for example, a painter could say "the duration of my painting is two hours, and if you don't see my painting over a two-hour period then you don't see my painting but something else". I can say the same with my work: if you don't read the text you miss something, if you read it you have something but... that's the question of perception...

IvR: And talking about the synthetic approach, you say you can make a good synthesis, or a bad synthesis – how do you choose your material in order to make a good synthesis, do you say "well, this theoretician, I don't appreciate his thought or the way he formulated it, so let's leave it out", or... How do you come to your choices?

BM: It really depends. For one spectator, a synthesis can be good, and not for another.

IvR: But for you as a maker?

51 BM: As a maker, it has to resist representation, I think it is the criterion of the good synthesis if it resists representation, the "there is", so if it is near a hole in the Real.

IvR: But still, you choose the

visual arts context to present your work.

BM: Yes.

IvR: So, why?

BM: I studied philosophy and art, and I think my synthesis is aesthetics, and so my object, if I am obsessed by an object, is aesthetics, it's not really sculpture or paintings or art, it's not philosophy, but when I read philosophy I am "watching" affects, it's like watching a movie and seeing affects fighting each other, and so I read philosophy as an artist and I read art as a theoretician, so in fact I'm really working on an aesthetics, on a aesthetic level, but an aesthetics made by an artist. So I am really working in the field of art.

Q3: Can you go three images back?

BM: Three? OK.

(VISUALS)

BM: "la pauvreté"

Q3: We have to look at it!

IvR: So you still need visuals then?

Q3: No, I mean I do not agree that you put the emphasis on the visual aspect of the word. I think it's language, so you put it there on purpose, it's for reading – of course it's a visual, a visual entity, but it's there for reading.

BM: Yes, but in general we have the feeling that when we read something we understand this thing,

but for example, with that: "*Die Armut*", "*la pauvreté*", "*poverty*", you can read that, but you don't know what it is. We always have the feeling, and I think that this is linked to the English language, that language is a mechanism to transfer information—but it is not, that is computer language, it's a technology – but when you read a word, you don't *get it*, and it's exactly the same when you are looking at an object: you are watching this object but you don't get it... You don't see all the facets of the objects, you just see one aspect. So, it was the main purpose of the cubists, to give you all the different perspectives of an object, but you just see *one* object. When you are reading a text, you don't get the text. I don't know, even when you are reading the letter your lover gave to you, you are reading a "love letter", but do you have the materiality, the reality of the love? I don't think so. So there is no difference between "text" and visual things, I think it is really the same thing. It's not about information. It's about fighting with affects, with perception, and things like that.

IvR: Are there any more questions?

B: OK. Thank you.

IvR: Not really? Then thank you very much, and thank you, Benoît Maire, for a wonderful talk.

(Applause)



**Index finger pointing to the transcendent,
or the severed finger.**

**We must start by stating that the severed
finger in question is that of St John the
Baptist pointing skywards in the famous**

**he understands his gesture the same way
Badiou understands his. Clearly,
we are drawing a comparison here.
The comparison contains 4 terms:
Leonardo da Vinci and his painting
St John the Baptist, and Alain Badiou and
his book *Logics of Worlds*. It deals
with the index finger. The central point
in *Logics of Worlds* is
transcendental indexation;
the central point in *St John the
Baptist* is the index pointing
to the heavens. Leonardo
couples his Baptist's gesture
with a sideways smile, and
like all smiles in Leonardo's
work, we never really know
how to interpret it, and herein
I see a playful engagement
with the viewer on an object
of knowledge: I show you
what I know you do not know
— this is my hypothesis, and
I have the same impression
with Alain Badiou's
transcendental indexation.**

**The object of aesthetics:
the weight of appearance
rather than its logic.**

**A few poorly written and
badly thought-out notes, that
could perhaps help to reflect
on something other than what
they attempt to reflect on, let's
take a chance, let's try our
luck, you never know...**

**— A transcendent is relative
to a subject (a transcendent
and not *the* transcendent).**

**— A transcendent is a journey through
a region where you feel a weight
and can shed part of this weight.
— This weight is metaphysical
in the sense that it is experienced as the
sensation of a non-response to a
question that does not call for an answer.
Because metaphysical questions are**



**53 Leonardo da Vinci painting, and reiterate
that the index finger pointing to
the transcendent is the grasp-eluding
gesture Alain Badiou performs in *Logics
of Worlds*, a gesture he himself no doubt
understands, but which I, as spectator,
do not. So this is our first hypothesis: John
the Baptist also understands his gesture,**

questions that, by not having any inherent answers, weigh on the subject in a constant manner. This constitutes the domain of aesthetics.

— The shedding of the weight of such questions characterises the transcendent.

— In sum, the transcendent is inherent to all philosophy as a thought on life that accepts the negative.

— Consequently, a purely positive philosophy can do without the transcendent, and therefore, logically, of its aesthetic sphere, as if it were one of its mechanical parts.

Objects:

— the allegory of the pointing finger

— an illuminated tree

— a localised entity of a tree

— notes concerning the logical definition of transcendental indexation

— the beginning of the tape

Aesthetics of differends

World \longleftrightarrow multiple

Transcendental indexation

= the measure of the relationship of intensity of appearance between

2 elements of a multiple

= the mode of appearance of the multiple

= a function that relates a transcendental degree to a pair of elements of the multiple.

this degree: it measures the identity of the 2 elements in their world of appearance

Let (a and b) be a pair of a multiple A
 $\text{id}(a,b) = p$, where p is an element of T

T = the transcendental T in the world in question

= T is necessarily connected to a judgement by a subject determining the appearance of elements of a world, it is necessarily a personal phenomenological judgement, otherwise it is the outbreak of war



Let us reiterate that in *The Aesthetics of Differends*, the text should be read the same way an image might be (and this is especially true in section 5, meaning: "this is especially visible

in section 5"), where the text is like colour placed on paper. The text is in a concrete relationship, its signifiers are valued more for their affective weight and the other images they occasion than for delivering information, which would be the information *at the point*, on *the cutting edge* ("at the point" means

sometimes believe this myself, when I force myself to be old, but I only need to become simple once more ("simple" means "single" here, non-duplicated by the play of effective words) to know perfectly well that the purpose of language is to throw rubbish ahead.

6-0

**Mathematics
do not think in solitude.**

Logics of Worlds is situated here, at the point where philosophy finds itself at an impasse, the point where its logical aspect maintains it in a positive register. In such a way that if we draw on what we reviewed in section 5, this philosophy can do without (in the sense of consentment) a subject (an ego-cogito) that would perform the action of thinking it — first point; and it stands as a mathematical truth. But still, logical and positive philosophy employs a finger pointing to the transcendent. This establishes a paradox, and another way of referring to it would be to speak of the severed finger. But let us presume this paradox can be dispelled, this raised finger that is (and I am reminded of schoolchildren, made to raise their finger in



55 directed towards the end) of technology — therefore that of an exchange between linguistic automatons¹. There are people, no doubt "older" people, who believe that the purpose of language is exchange, and I even

the air before answering a question...) by saying that Badiou's transcendent is a quantifier of existence, and is not linked to a journey whose outcome would be the shedding of weight (for this is how, earlier, in a somewhat simple and foolish manner, we described the role of the mechanical transcendent). Here, such

¹ — this terminology is Lyotard's in "Report on Knowledge"

mechanics is only bound to the determination of the degree of existence of the atoms of a multiple in a given world.

6-1

the *harbitre*² as
a referent

Gianni- Gregory Fornet: «Words, clothes, clothing belies the body³»

In «The Sinthome», Jaques Lacan investigates the Joyce case, whose writings provide a novel and, for him, primary way (before the letter) of connecting his R.S.I schema, his Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, by filling the hole — not with a symptom but a sinthome, which is similar to a symptom but without its passive aspect. The sinthome here is a construction that binds the fabric, creating a knot as a way through psychosis — in other words, as a way of overcoming it. The *harbitre**, the garment donned by every rhetor and judge in a postmodern mechanics of judgement, builds up like a dynamic in which the passage from one signifier to another is enabled by the divided subject, by the necessity of “objet a”, (what speech is lacking in such or such situation, or what the principle lacks in any situations, what has taken the place of the transcendent for a subject, what is located in the void, and which is “at the point” (therefore the end) — the tip of the nose — and the nose is a major signifier, located in the void. I will be the *harbitre* of my own nose, which I refer to as a major signifier.

6-2

The nude merging into
the landscape

The lesson Paul Nougé teaches us is that women are a landscape, but not just any landscape. Secondly, woman is simultaneously the possibility of the landscape, therefore her questioning is the condition of possibility of the landscape, and its contemplation... As its condition of possibility, she is the transcendent of the landscape. But not just any landscape: a landscape where objects are weighty.

6-3

A dream

We could imagine these two halves as in section 5, one “illuminated” and one “entity of light” but here, it is more a case of a repetition that complements itself, because with the two systoles, if we consider the representation of a heart, it is not a case of being illuminated (by a camera, the camera being that which signifies that an object is illuminated, even though it is not the act of illumination, but its indication) while the other reproduces. No, we are dealing with a combination, although one is the counterpart of the other, and therefore is taken as a model. No longer having a model would be a victory for the aesthetics of differends, its point (its end, once again) as signifier of the result of the total dispersion of the discursive singularities on plateaus related to similar questions, although the similarity is impossible to determine. This, therefore, is the point of the aesthetics of differends, not the indeterminable origin, nor the classic postmodern dispersion, but the impossible recognition of similarity, the children of whores and beasts.

2— Translator's note: the author plays with the French words “habits”, clothing, and “arbitre”, referee, judge.

3— Translator's note: the author's phrase l'habillement-ment-le corps literally means “clothing-lies-the body”, or “clothing-belies-the body”. Here, the author plays on the French word “habillement”, which means clothing, and the word “ment”, to lie (i.e., to tell a lie) in the third person singular.

7

The observing nude:
Are you reading in the cave?

Me reading the past:
Yes, but I need a light.

The observing nude:
Would you like
to see into the future?

Me reading the past:
If the analytic is precise I can predict
the future — like an angel —
according to a certain repetition,
you, the nude,
will be coming back frequently,
I will be disappearing.
But this book is written, therefore
it can always be read.

The observing nude:
Like Gould?

Me reading the past:
Yes, like Gould.

The observing nude:
Well that is wonderful.

Me reading the past:
It wasn't pointless.

The observing nude:
But he was unaware of that!

8

57 The two protagonists of the dialogue are
figurative in section 7.
Here, in section 8, the point is recollection:
to make their dialogue continue
to carry on, continue to come,
here, and on the side, and beside them.

Me reading the past:
I would like to rip my face off.

The observing nude:
With an absent face
I will still recognise you.

Me reading the past:
Why?

The observing nude:
Behind your face lies the cave,
and this cave resembles you.

Me reading the past:
It's pointless!
I want to conceal everything I say!

The observing nude:
I see everything you conceal when I enter
into your ripped-off face,
you place everything in this cave,
which lies behind your image.

Me reading the past:
there is only one valid thing.

The observing nude:
nudity?

Me reading the past:
Shame. I don't like signifying,
but I can't help it.

The observing nude:
You hide yourself behind your formalism,
but you have to want violence,
nudity is the condition of the spectacle.
And you know, nudity has no end.

Me reading the past:
That's classic, you have to open up
beauty and it is ceaseless.

The observing nude:
I am open, look at me from afar.

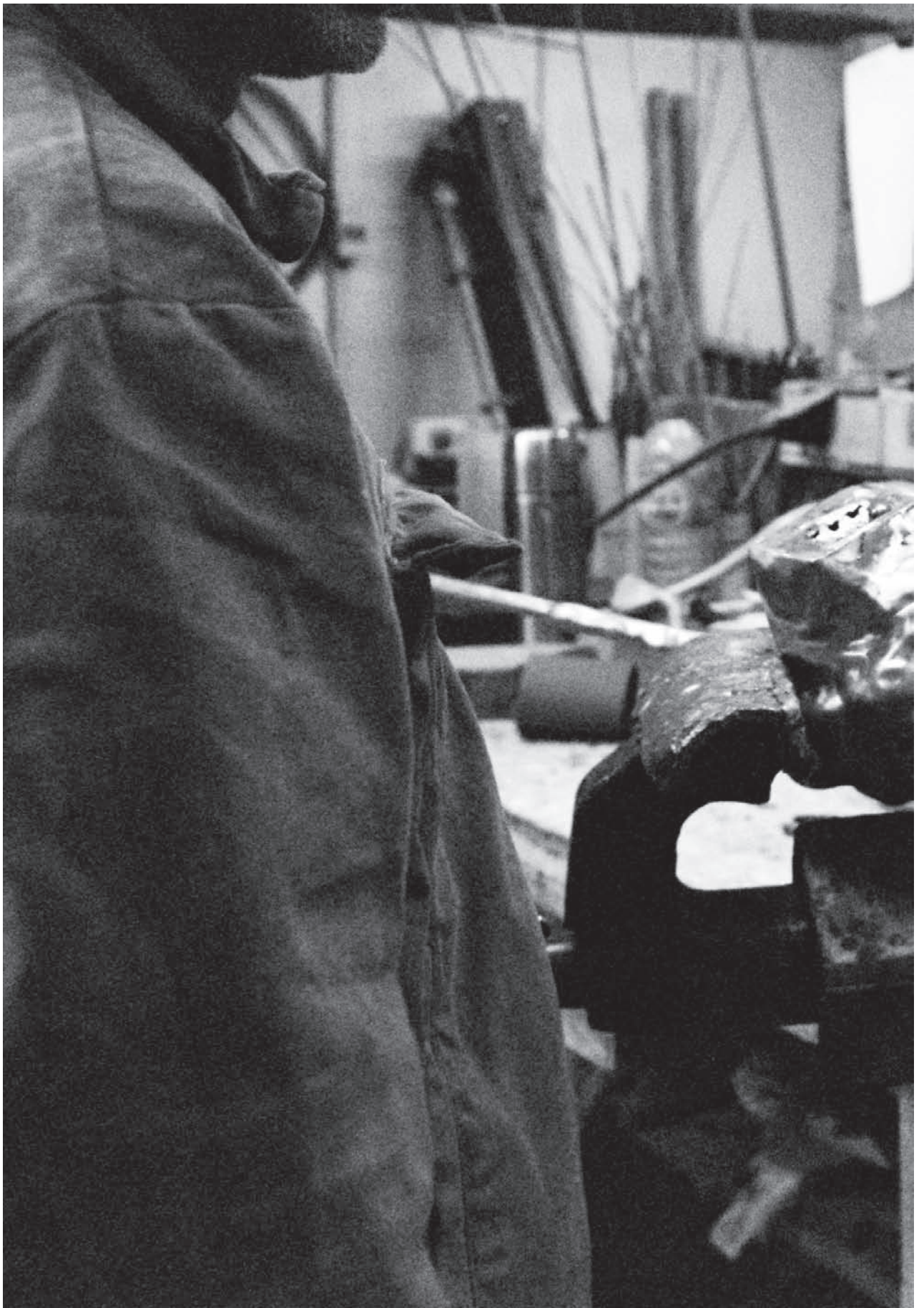


Fig.1 THE NOSE





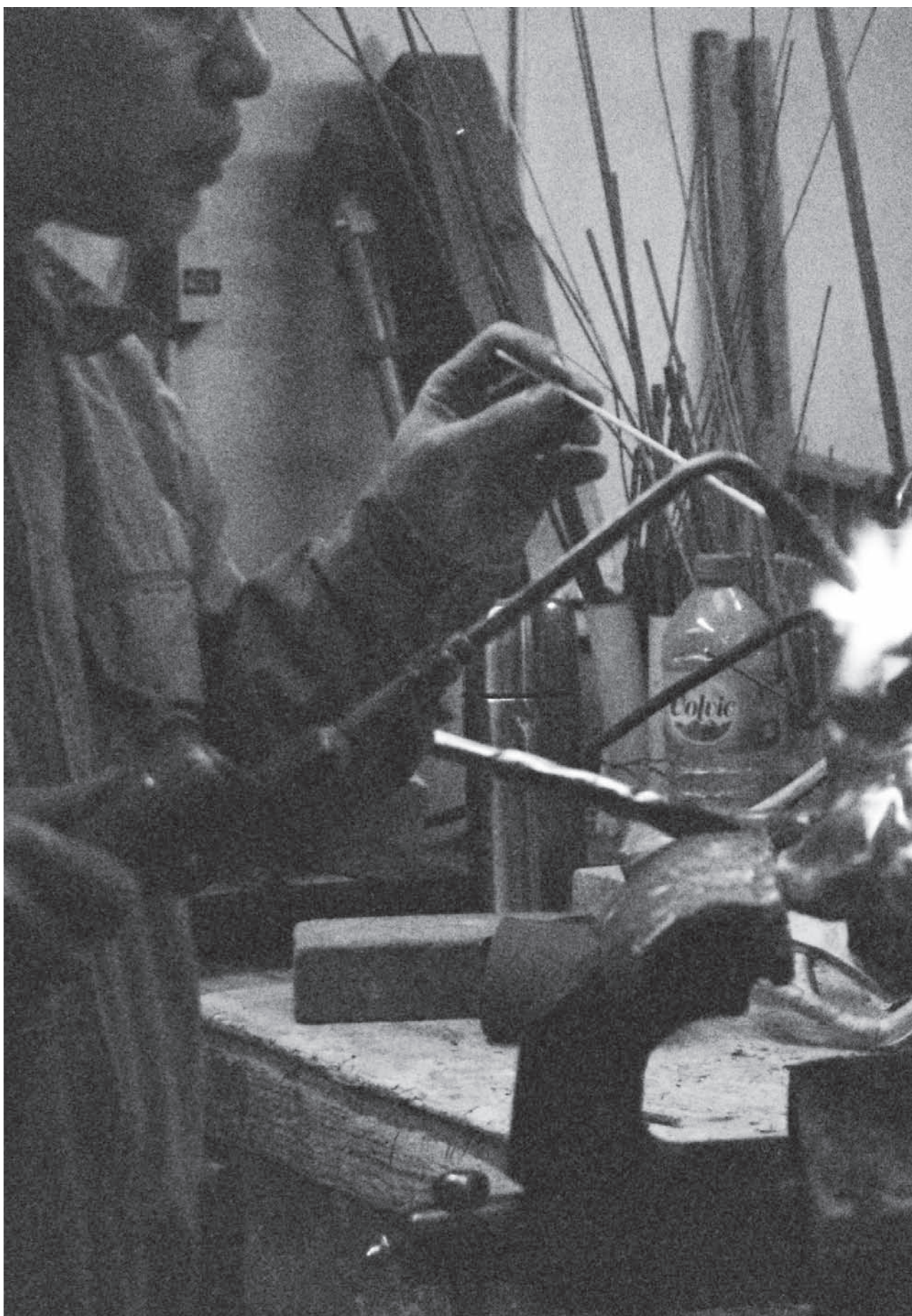












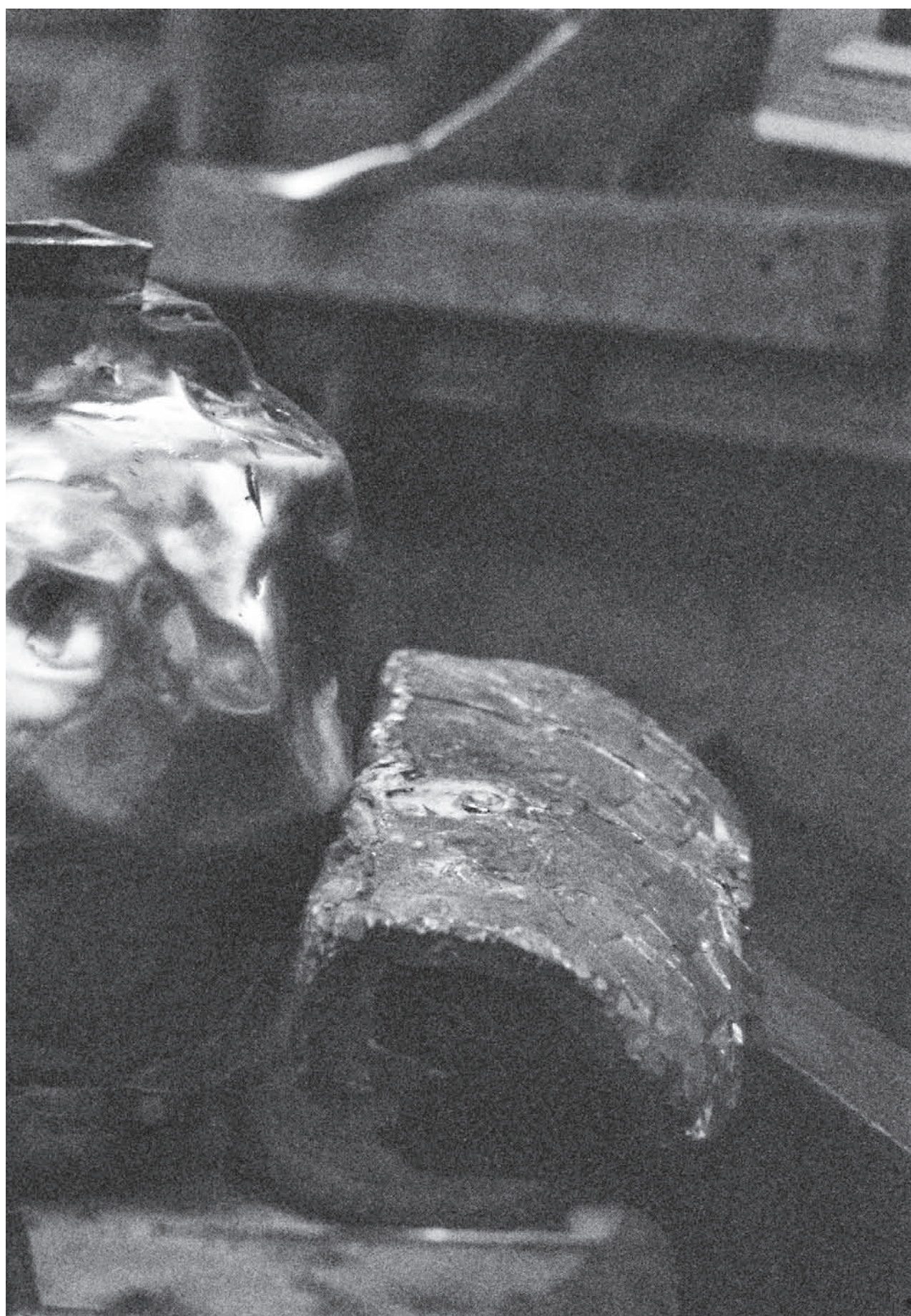


Axiom

GIACCOMETTI 'S NOSE VERIFYING

THE TRUE HOLE IN THE REAL



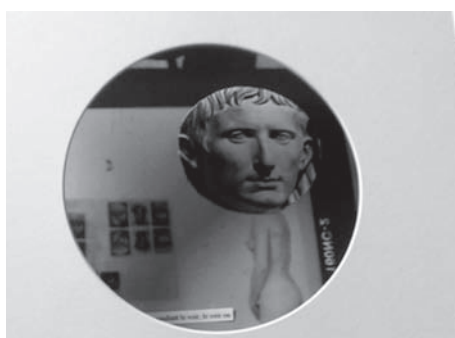
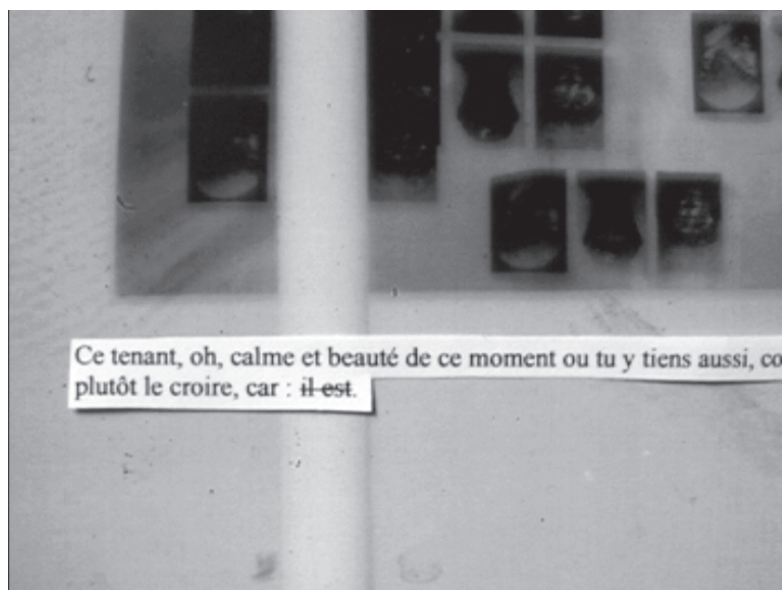




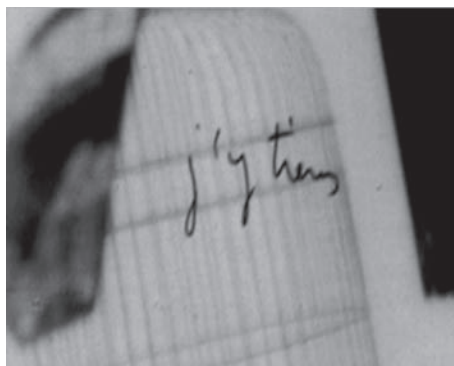




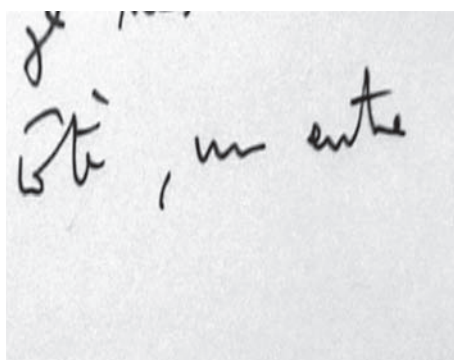
organisation of the narrative and structural models conjugated in the sections



I hold it
Or
I hold on to it: I



But you
— an I put in an other place, on the side, another I —
does not see this holding.



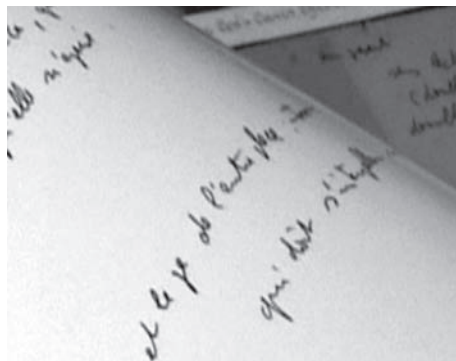
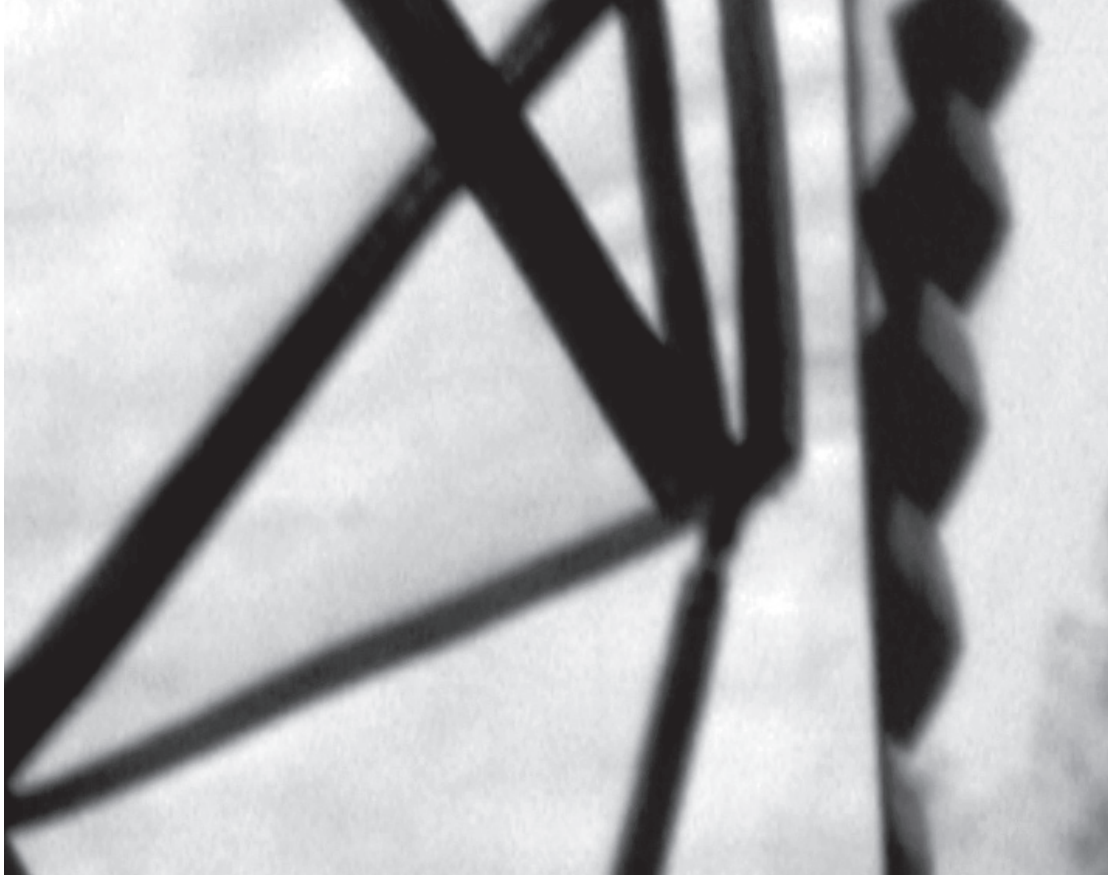
This holding, oh, the calm and beauty
of this moment you also hold on to, as if wishing to see it,
to see it or rather to believe it, for: ~~it is~~.



he can speak



he can the present, he can speak the he in the present,
by presenting the he to himself (himself as other):
a modern axiom.



It happens, it happens that I believe in he, happens ha!
Presents he to me, reading me in the present,
my erasure.



Everything finds itself behind, in an other nudity
(that the page does not hide) and the I of the other place,
~~you~~ that must interpellate itself, does not believe it,
it does not hold onto it: leaving me alone,
on an other ground, in the distance. In fact: in a language
in dispute, in unmarked conflict.



In the case we will be dealing with, or deal with
at the start, there is always this lack of place, that reading
maintains more than it relieves.



peut le prése
iome moder

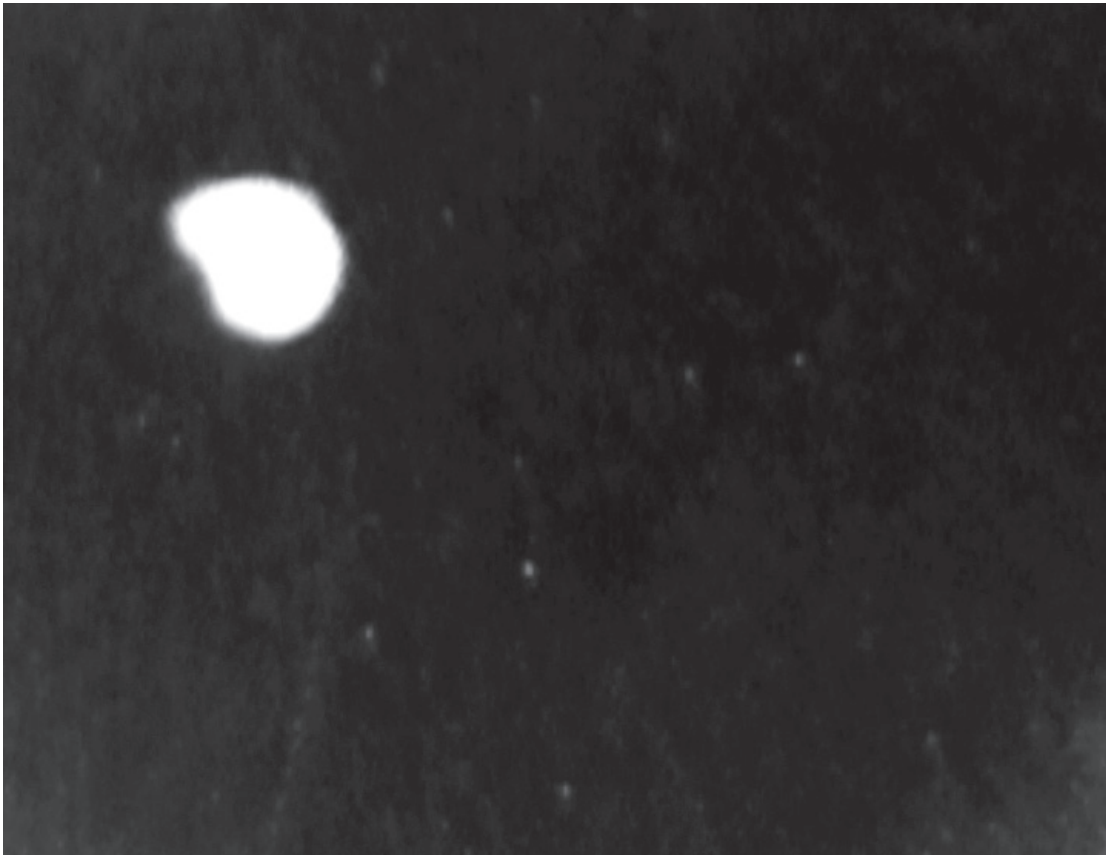
The initial narrative model starts with the I with the condition of an initial lack of place (inexistence wanting to be filled).

The structures can be conjugated in accordance with the narrative models and they determine points which are fragmentations.

A fragmentation is a series of affective segments activated by the exposure of a subject (I) to existential space and these multiple burdens.



A narrative model is a fashion
(therefore a function of the era) of the generic
presentation (“generic” in the postmodern case,
as a combination of modes of presentation) of burdens
— even if already known in other fashions.



Burdens.
That is enough now.

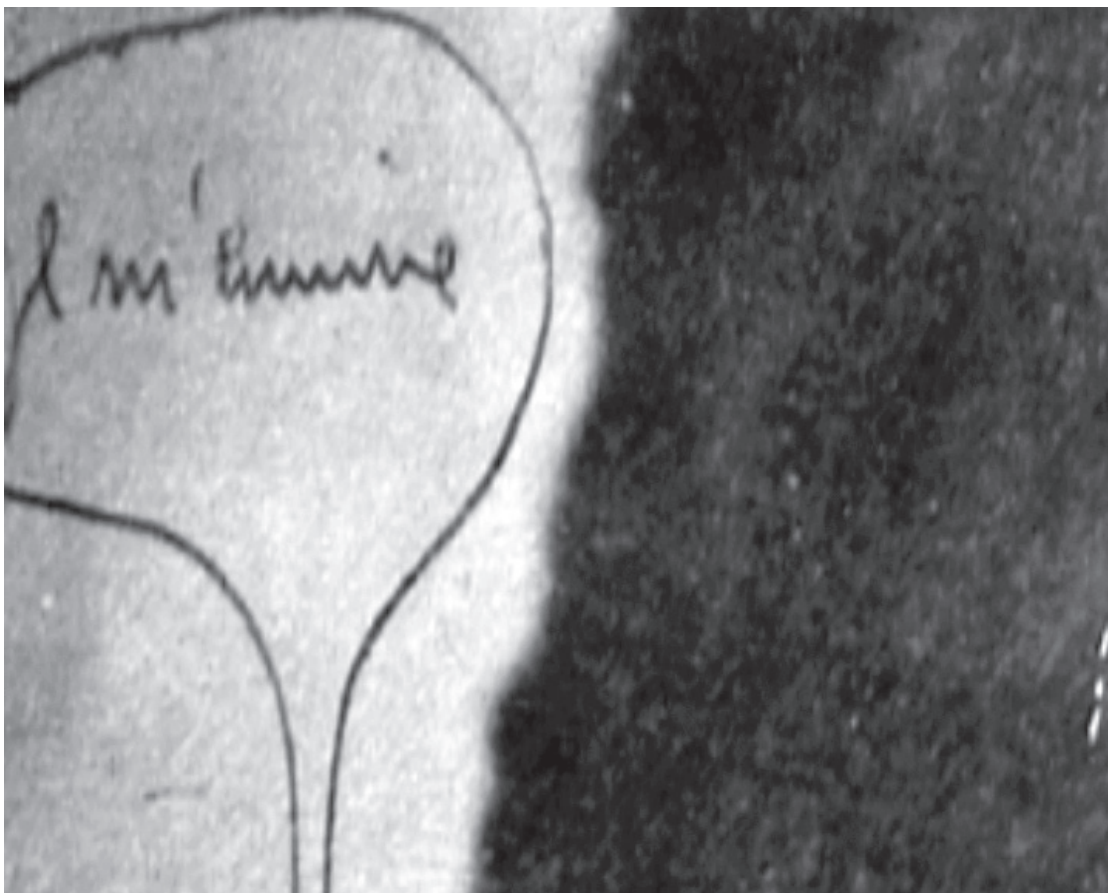
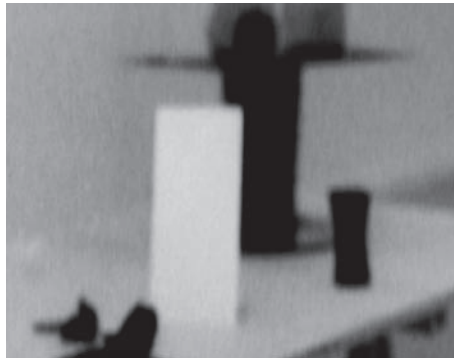
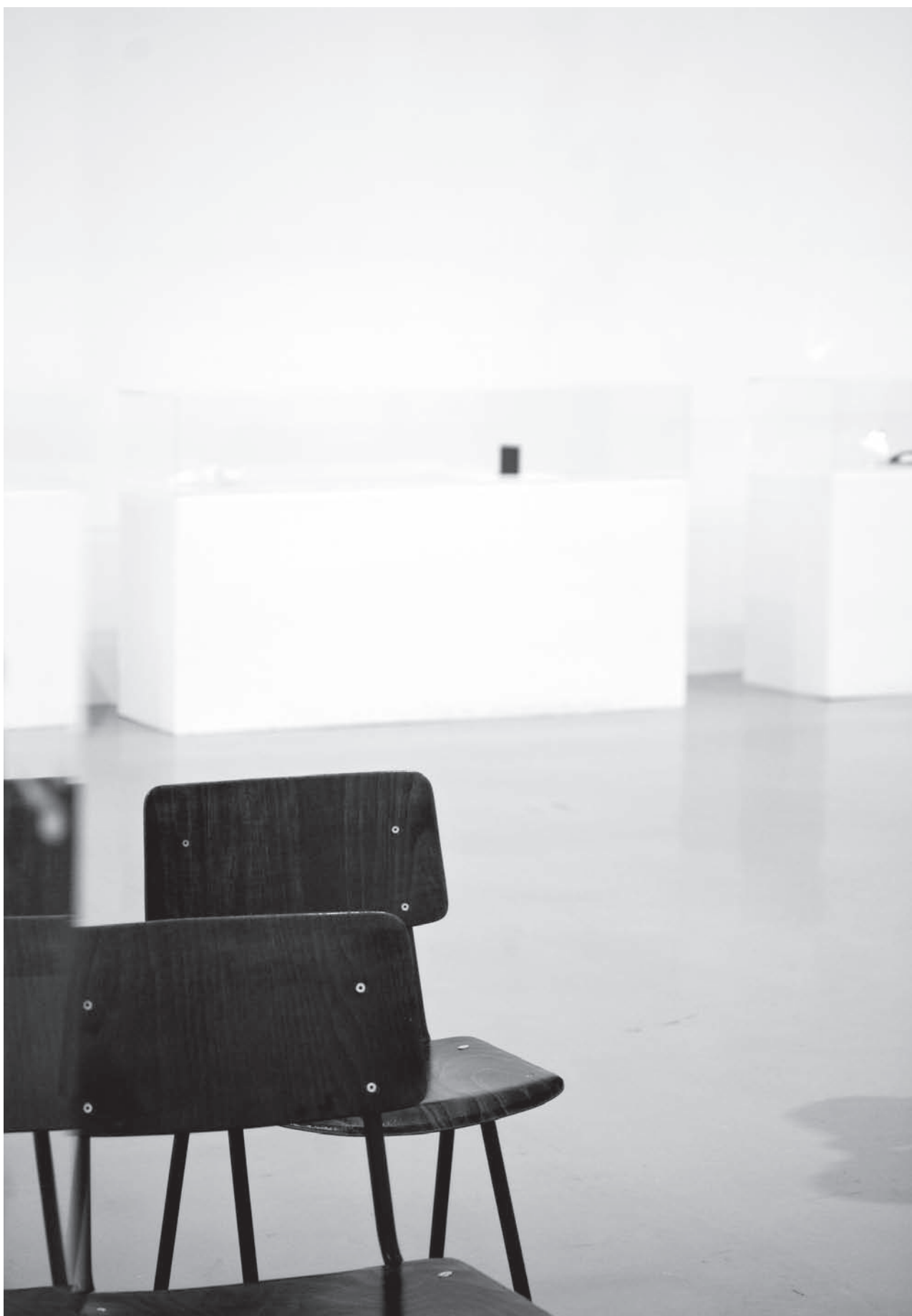


Fig.2 THE CAVE





























M E T H O D O L O G Y

Fetish and representation in modernity and postmodernity

What characterises a modern work is the way it establishes, within the movement of the fetishisation of its object, a set of rules, a way of legislating, that breaks with the ordinarily accepted vocabulary. This is what characterises revolution, and a modern work develops through the prism of a revolution produced by its formal birth. A modern work is thus made up of two things, the material *restance* of the object, the fetish, and all the legislating laws and statements accompanying the object. In such a way that a modern work has a double impact on the history of forms, being at once the object and its *regulae*.

One way of defining the postmodern gesture would be to advance that the idea of revolution, and of the *regulae* accompanying the production of the object, is henceforth obsolete, and that the history of forms should therefore no longer be informed in this way. A postmodern work, the object I describe as residual, although a valid basis for an experience of the gaze, is nevertheless still divided, as if double-faceted. On the one hand it is what it is, and on the other it re-presents itself, it represents what it is. The object is at once the object and its own representation. In

postmodernity, an art that does not represent itself has no chance of expanding in the sphere of the visible; from criticism to the institution, it has no way of coming into existence. In sum, a postmodern art, an art in dispute (differends), contains its own representation. In this way, it is not a case of the artist saying A, the point, rather, is to show “saying A”, to represent the act of saying A, by establishing this possibility — in two ways: either by showing A or by showing oneself saying A.

Thus any work in dispute (differends) comes with a series of statements that support the fetishisation of the object but which do not have any general principles, that is to say, principles seeking a logic or mechanics defining art as such, which would be modernity, from Greenberg for painting to Kosuth for conceptual art, where an artistic proposition is equivalent to a definition of art. No, in a context with differends, so in postmodernity, statements are autistic in a sense, or, to put it simply, statements do not refer to an ideal outside that would align the fetish-object by linking it to a set of ideas — an outside legislating in the name of art, that would be shaped by the artist — here, the

statements represent the object with a view to inscribing it in a history of a present materiality of forms, in the now, and what is at stake is distinguishing it from the other productions. What is sought is not the alignment of the object with the rule but the exclusion of the object from the rule it establishes. The becoming of contemporary art is pure exclusion, it can be represented ideally, and it is through the prism of this eidetic case that I propose this analysis as a way of introducing a few exemplary works.

I N G R E S S

THROUGH THE PRISM OF BURDEN 2:
THE SON OF A WHORE — BREAKS WITH A GENEALOGY,
THUS FOUNDING THE LACK AS PRIMORDIAL.

Dash Snow: *To die of joy*

Dash Snow is no stranger to the twofold movement that characterises the creation process of a postmodern work, the becoming-fetish of the material *restance* and the self-representational conceptual duplication. All of his photos, collages, graffiti, and sculptural arrangements assert the material residue that can be fetishised by a far-reaching and far-ranging play of statements — like the argument that his polaroids are “*the only memory of his nights*” — thus romanticising the artist and inviting a reading of his work (henceforth) through the prism of his life story. It seems unavoidable, as the two dimensions of the work — its materiality and its self-representation which are dialecticised around his person, *Dash Snow*, he like

an other — make this modern, Romantic axiom passed down by Rimbaud (the otherness of the subject in its relationship to itself, or the “I am an Other” as the poet says) the substance of his work: the question of the ego at the start of the twenty-first century, supported by his body, by his *psyche* as much as his *flesh*. Experiencing *I* as an other is a crucial element in Snow’s work, for the artist breaks with his genealogy and lives under the weight of the second burden. The primordial lack and the notion of the cut play out on multiple levels, articulating around an equation mainly driven by *blind jouissance*.

Dash Snow’s “Untitled”, 2007, is a counter-piece to Gustave Courbet’s *The Origin of the World*. A male body is cut by the frame of the photograph in such a way that his genitalia are displayed at the centre of the composition. His abandoned, listless body is just like that of the female subject of Courbet’s painting, and the framing is identical. Only two objects have been added, as if glued to the space of the work: a picture of Saddam Hussein affixed to the subject’s genitalia, and a skull, probably made out of plastic, placed between his open legs. It is a snapshot, a quick shot taken with flash, which visibly marks the subject’s skin tone and the other colours in the image. The analysis of this vanitas could inform the equation presented in the introduction, but we first need to state a hypothesis: unlike typical representations of male sexual enjoyment (*jouissance*), this listless body appears to be affected by a pleasure, the effect of a drug. The point here is not to say whether or not this body, at the time of the photographic shot, was under the influence of any kind of opiate, but rather that the piece’s arrangement might suggest as much, and as a consequence make this notion a signifier¹. In this way, we might state that the enjoyment or *jouissance* of the listless body connects with two notions:

Saddam Hussein, an authority figure personifying the negative of America, and a Bataillian becoming of jouissance, death as such — a death-skull that appears to be almost smiling in the photo. On page 76 of *Encore*, Lacan notes that “One can also situate oneself on the side of the not-whole. There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it. Despite — I won’t say their phallus — despite what encumbers them that goes by that name, they get the idea or sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond. These are the ones we call mystics ... It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it”². Lacan thus posits in the case of the mystic a dissociation between the fact of *experiencing* and *knowing* a jouissance. As regards the creation of a jouissance, affect and intellect are, at a certain point, cut, disconnected, leaving a site for non-knowledge that intervenes in a positive fashion. The mystic is he who believes to the point of being able to ‘see God’s face’ by abandoning the question of knowledge in this site. This makes belief a singular power, a counter-force of reason, which, pushed to its limit, can put *theos* in the place of *logos* in the mind of a European. The power of the imaginary, in the context of a mystic’s life, is coupled with jouissance, and the blindness of reason gives up its locus to “the step/not beyond” (*pas au-delà*): mystical jouissance, female jouissance made to stand in the place of God (the jouissance of the *not-whole* in the p.76 quotation). A blind jouissance gets its enjoyment from not knowing what it enjoys, it is a jouissance of non-knowledge, it presents itself as the ruins of its transitory objects, the opposite of a grasp, it is a release. According to *Les Inrocks*³ some of Dash Snow’s works show images that bear the mark of a form of authority, images of police officers for instance, covered with traces of

1 — We recall that in the *TBT* triptych heroin use and its paraphernalia are associated with toilets and death, which clearly suggests death operates as a signifier on multiple interpretative levels in Snow’s work.

2 — Jacques Lacan, *On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge, 1972-1973. Encore: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, W.W. Norton and Company, 1998, p.76.

3 — Abbreviation of *Les Inrockuptibles*, a French cultural magazine.

ejaculation. Here, mysticism is tied to pollution and jouissance-without-knowledge *onto* authority is a recurrent motif in his work. Phallic jouissance is represented as blind, it does not see what it attains, it is bounded by authority and non-knowledge. This blind jouissance thus bounded by authority and non-knowledge pertains to lack, and this primordially so. If we follow Lacan, we “designate Phi as the phallus insofar as {we} indicate that it is the signifier that has no signified, the one that is based, in the case of man, on phallic jouissance. What is the latter if not the following, which the importance of masturbation in our practice highlights sufficiently — the jouissance of the idiot”⁴. We can deduce that the idiot — who in philosophy is always he who seeks to understand by himself, by his own means — uses his own experience to weave a jouissance whose signifiers are lacking. A *jouissance without signifiers* is the name of the primordial lack placed on the level of the process of signification. What can happen then? There are several possibilities including *asexuated jouissance and the barring of the Name-of-the-Father* which would be the label on the folder where we put these photos.

The enjoyments can potentially be inversed: a man can seek female jouissance and vice versa. Medhi Belaj Kacem says just this in an interview: “When a woman attains jouissance, then we can say she is wholly phallus...”⁵. Perhaps we should read Lacan’s aphorism “*there is no sexual relationship*”, in the sense that there is no ultimate signifier of jouissance, neither on one side nor the other, nor by the fulfillment of one through the other. In this way, a reading of Dash Snow’s work as an exploration of *blind jouissance*, that does not know what it grasps, and that is experienced without knowledge, draws a line between various sexual jouissances (present in his work and represen-

4 — Jacques Lacan, *Ibid*, p.81.

5 — Medhi Belaj Kacem, *De la Pornologie*, Tecknikart, August 2003, p.59, 61.

ted by a series of statements — that always accompany the coming-into-being of the postmodern work) going from the well-printed black and white photograph of an ejaculatory act onto a woman's back to the "facial cumshot" ripped out of a porn magazine, from the negative of the *origin of the world* to the image of transgression in the traces left on the authority figures. These possibilities, these antagonisms as affectual representations tied to jouissance, are weighed down, as if stabilised by the potential of drugs, an asexuated jouissance that plunges bodies into an abandon where death looms on the horizon. A horizon society retrospectively codes as a signifier relative to the work of certain artists, something we can rightfully condemn. Death should not become a signifier, even if it appears as an excess of jouissance produced by the excess of the dose, a lethal surplus-enjoyment. The grid for reading the work of artists who die young by suicide or from overdose — and the two always merge into one another, like the encounter of the same volition, more or less asserted and represented — links up with that of a circle of ultimately Romantic artists, as if the Romanticism was experienced through this mark, a negative volition, flipping will towards its nirvana, its total absence, its self-destruction. If we can construct a Romantic reading of Dash Snow's work, I would venture that we should not do so through the prism of this tragedy, because with the passing of a subject a whole world collapses and therefore the meaning constructed through interiority is reduced to nothingness, which precludes us from making death a signifier (... "but the work is not tied to its author, it is entirely an opening onto the outside" the historian might argue, but we will have to turn or return to the question of art's address later; for now, let us *leave the question on the doorstep*). Two main concepts characterising Romantic art, the cut and excess, are indeed

present in Dash Snow's work, and intoxication, a recurrent motif, the intoxication that enables one to forget (and which the photographs, that testify to the nocturnal events, attempt to counter) is on trial with artistic practice, like a Heideggerian dialectic in which life as a forgetting of being (which is technical life) is problematised through the question of Romantic life, the primordial wound, that of the weight of the "already unsolved" that we approached in the first talk. After that, everything is a case of weight transfer, and the condition of weight transfer is lack, and spinning the metaphor of the mechanics of fluids a little further, could we envisage a visible transfer of fluid in a saturated machine? Lack is the object of *jouissance*, and aesthetics one of its main practices.

Or, or... , if we take the properly Romantic interpretive angle based on the concept of the sublime, which would lead us to posit *Dash Snow as tulip*, by revisiting therefore Jacques Derrida's *Truth in painting*, we might read Snow's work as a self-portrait of the artist as this kind of flower (genitalia). For Derrida: "... this tulip is beautiful because it is without end, complete because cut off, with a pure cut, from its end"⁶. In the Kantian lexicon, the beauty of the tulip is not adherent, it would be if it were attached to its concept, but cut, it becomes independent, and it is its singularity that makes it beautiful. As Derrida says, it is beautiful "*once*", in itself, therefore without ideality. The bourgeois finality of self-representation, the continuity of the family loot, the bourgeois finality, the object of Pasolini's theorem, is cut here. Snow's art, through its manifest presentation of pollution is a revolution, an idea on revolution, an idealising cut of the very movement of art that reaches its independence. In the wild a tulip corresponds to its concept, once cut its beauty is no longer adherent (attached to

6 — Jacques Derrida, *The truth in painting*, Chicago and New York: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p.94.

its concept in Kant's perspective), it has a free kind of beauty, without end, manifestly singular, independent and doomed to wilt⁷. The condition of its early demise appears as a condition of its free beauty. What is important for the signifier to make a mark on work stained by the untimely death of its author is that the edging of the work be cutting. Its finality is *without* end, and it is precisely this "*without*" of without-the-end that signifies beauty in a Romantic paradigm. The work is complete because incomplete, and therein lies the paradox of Romantic free beauty⁸. So can death be understood as signification? It is necessarily so in the sense that its cut gives meaning to the "without" of the finality *without* end, however, a possible post-Romantic ethics should exclude it. A post-Romantic and phenomenological ethics could omit death as a signifier, and at this point I am not absolutely sure what that might lead to, but perhaps we might, through the prism of this intuition, identify a free beauty, pure because without-end, severed from its cut: without the last signifier — a work cutting itself off from itself. Dash Snow, through the dual movement of his work, the way of the fetish and that of the statement, proposes a synthetic reunification to form a body, a postmodern proposition, an eidetic Romanticism, a work containing the conditions of an heroic existentialism, re-appearing as idea (postconceptual and in dispute).

I I O

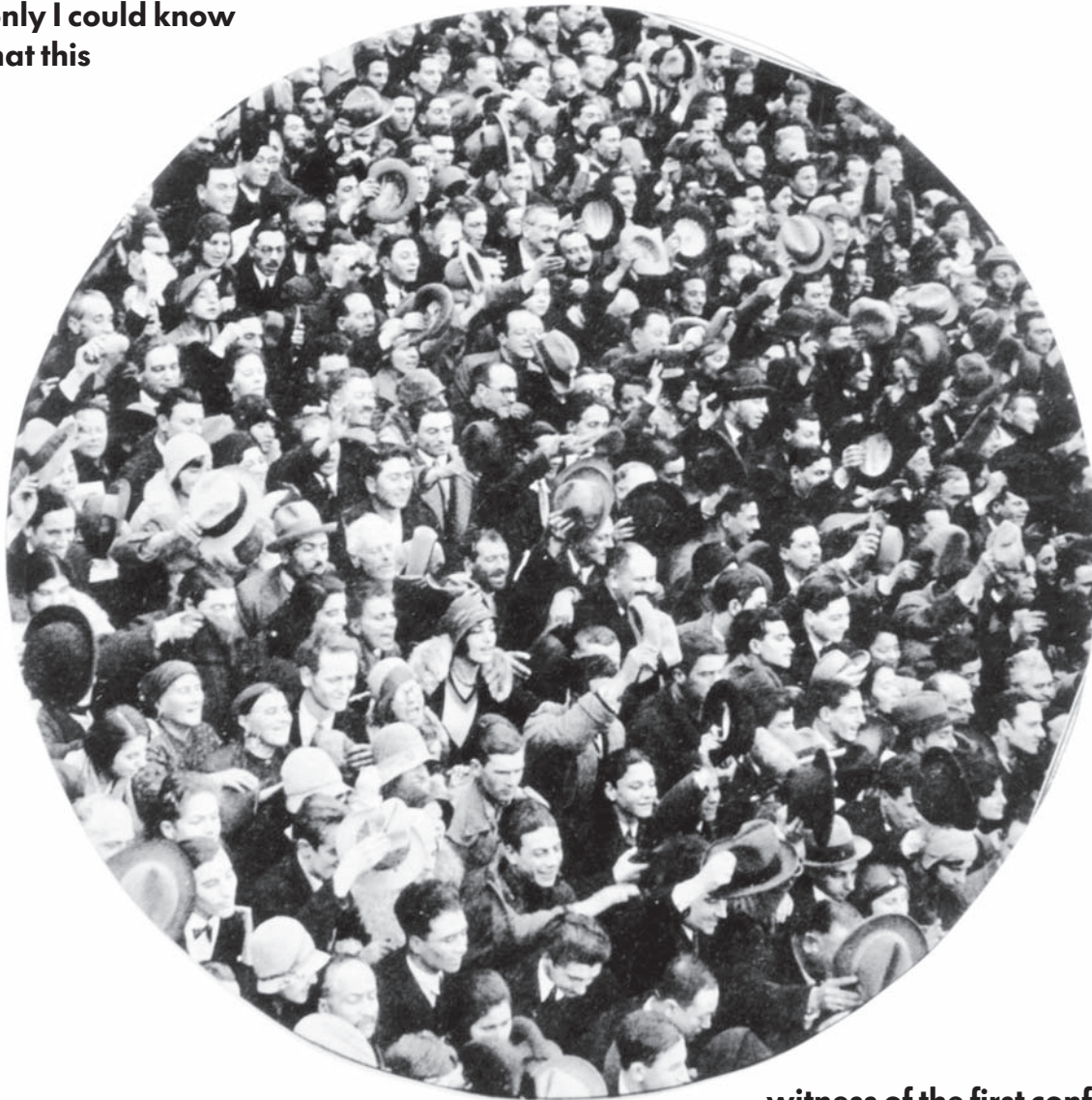
7 — On "La façon de faner des tulipes", see Etienne Chambaud's two-part piece *The Cut, Part I*, glass, wild tulip, 90 x 90 x 100 cm, 2009; and *The Cut, Part II, Enough Incomplete Thoughts on the Complete Cut to fill up a Pocket*, Notes on a lecture, suit-jacket, hook 70 x 20 x 5 cm, 2009.

8 — "The tulip is beautiful only on the edge of this cut without adherence. But in order for the cut to appear — and it can still do so only by its edging — the interrupted finality must show itself, both as finality and as interruption — as edging", Jacques Derrida, *Ibid.*, p. 88

Ah! (exclamation)

And

Ah! (sigh, a sigh of recollection),
if only I could know
what this



, witness of the first conflict
was thinking at that point. And mainly
if it were a body, *single* or *multiple*,
if it formed a transcendental subject or
an atomical multiplicity, then I would
be able to state, and know, the subject of
the first conflict.

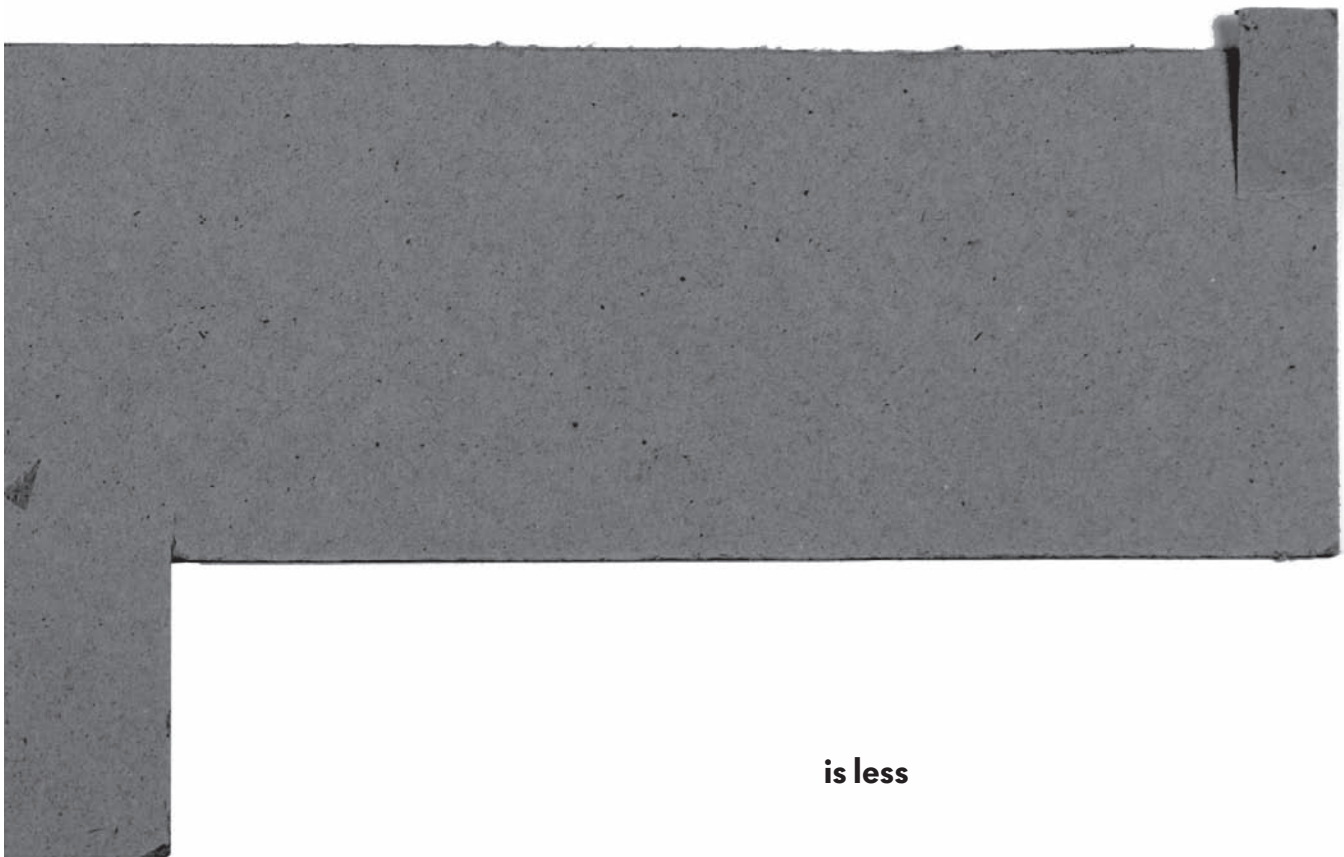
A conflict which is also the first love,
the love between seeing and saying,
its first clash (or differend) — the most
memorable and also the most
unutterable, for the author indeed states
that you cannot say what you see
— he states it in the kind of phrase that
presents the unpresentable.
It belongs to him.

**This (what is underscored by us)
is a scandal: skandalon, a stumbling
block, an obstacle that makes
you trip over. This here scandal, is what
he has since constructed
at the**

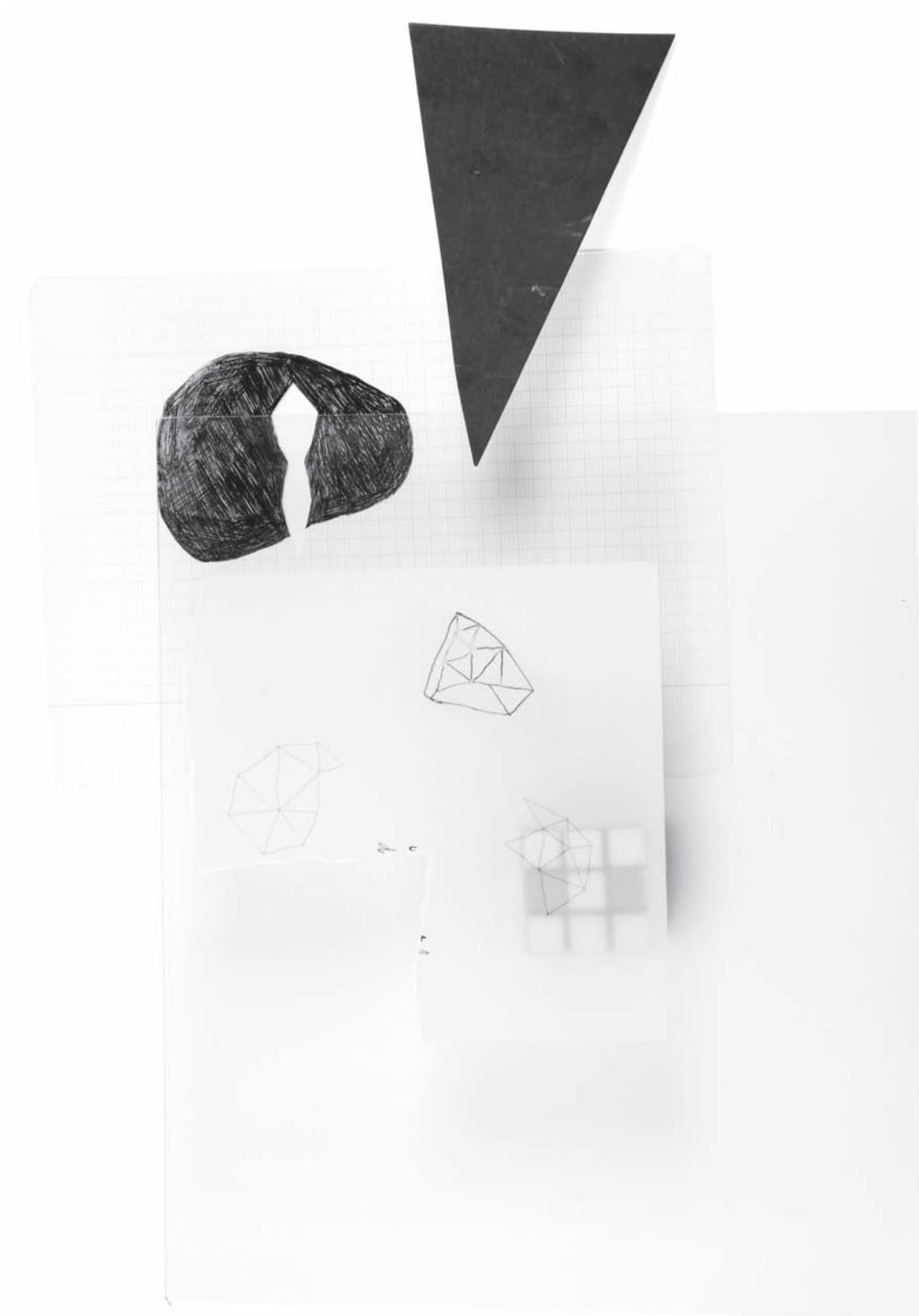


in such a way that his



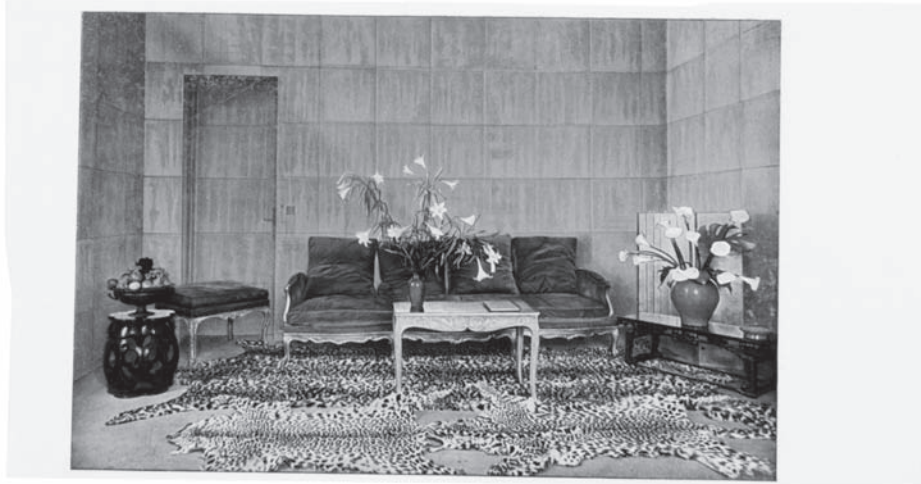


is less



and establishes his practice like a general aesthetics where what you read in the negative (because there is in the author's work a leitmotiv: the idea that truth exceeds discourse) indeed resembles the mask (with dug-out eyes) and the black, sharp point of its concept.

I would wager that there is not too much



to doubt it.

Now if the author goes from the question of the figural to that of the phrase, it is because he gives two




of the "there is" as such, going from a modern register (Romantic aesthetics) to a postmodern register (conceptual aesthetics) .

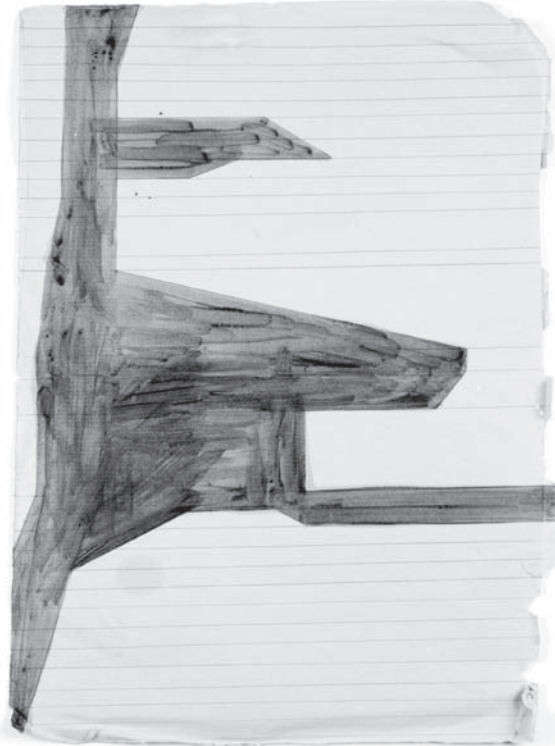
His "there is" in fact



Taureau aux trois cornes. Besançon, musée des Beaux-Arts. Photo Giraudon.



goes from the feeling of the excess of the idea of measure in representation (therefore the figural), to what is disputed (*être différend*) caused by the heterogeneity (the event-phrase) of saying. Conceptual art is



insofar as it is of a linguistic nature. Lyotard thus poses the question of the Kantian a priori, the possibility of critical judgement in the postmodern and conceptual register, by going from the figural to the "it happens" of the phrase, which are two "there is/are" of different representational natures, but which share the same ontological nature, a certain givenness to be measured here through the prism of this



But I would wager that awkwardly in



I cannot say it too much, because I struggle to speak in step with this limit, with its step/not-beyond I say, signaling the spirituality of the too-much-to-say like he

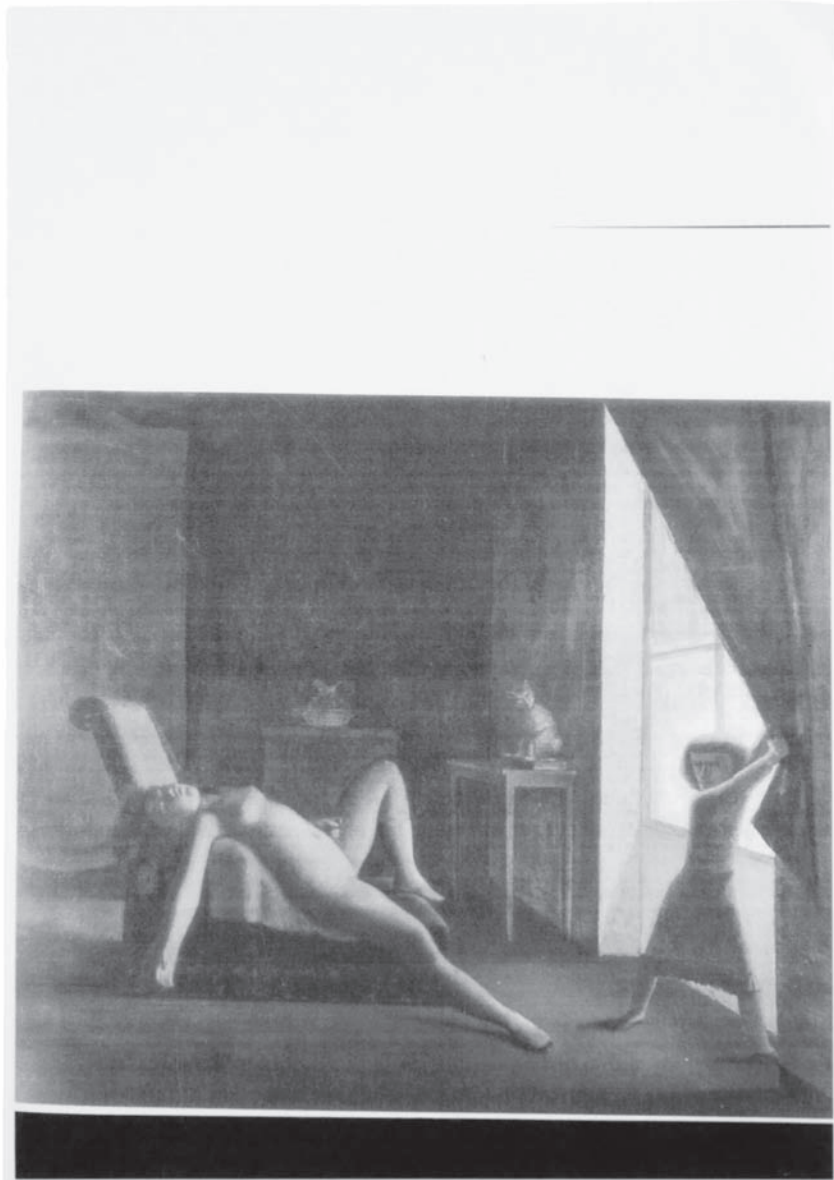


to reveal the tragedy of it.

And also, as the author demonstrates in his report on postmodern knowledge, ultimately a language



is that of machines, they have no birth,
they are not severed

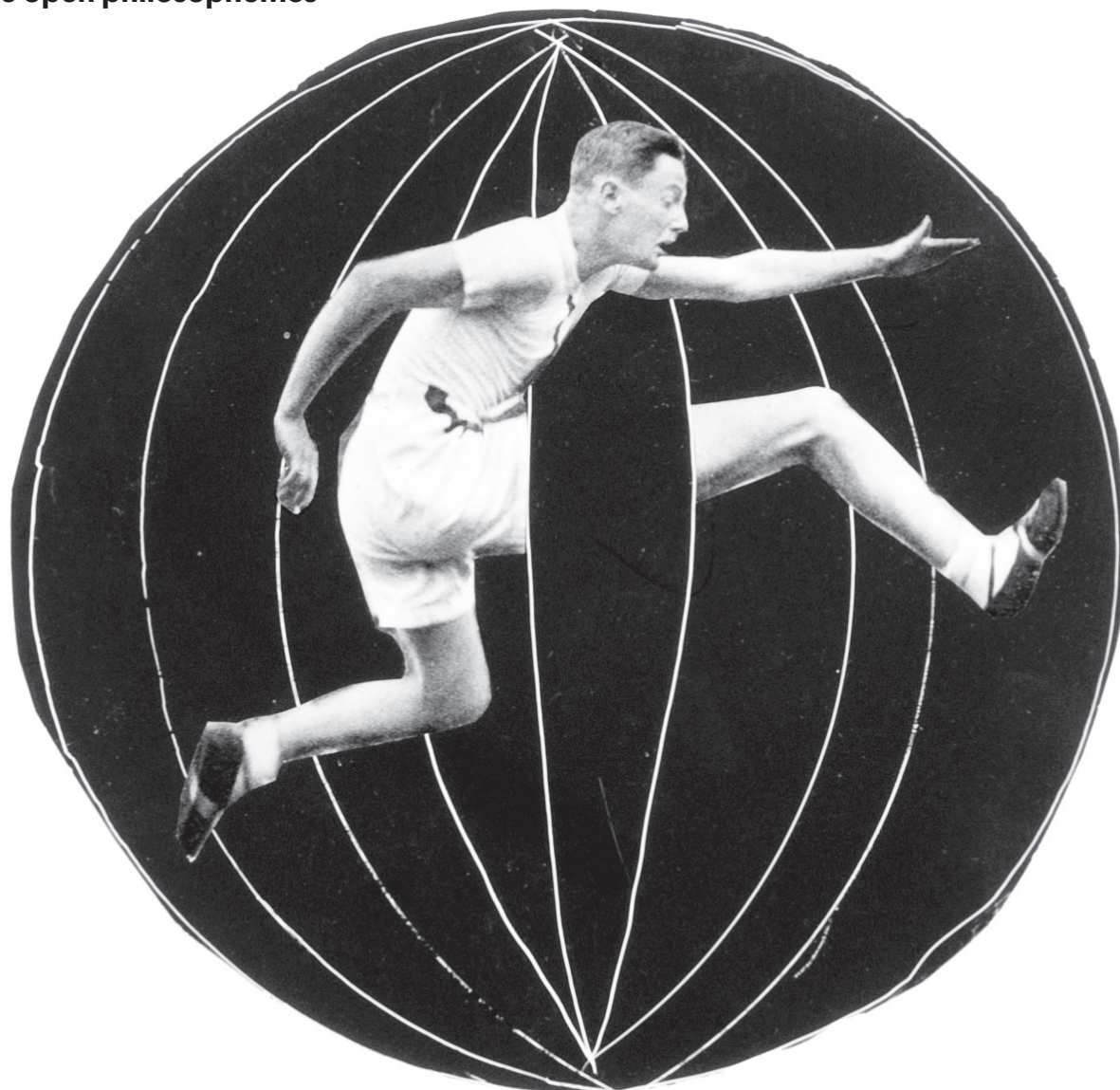


from their origin, which does not
authorise them to articulate a *phonè*,
it is therefore possible to describe
the philosophy that retracts
from anti-philosophy as a technology



, what continues
to be at stake, then, is the conviviality
(to quote Ivan Illich) of positive philosophy.

Hence, we behold a new dialectic within philosophy itself: grounding itself on the matheme, positive philosophy excludes the open philosophemes



of "anti-philosophers".

Use and display of the sign severed from its end:
Jean-François Lyotard and the exhibition

121

Vilnius

Hello,

I would like to propose a five-stage presentation of Jean-François' thought as an "exhibition philosophy" and by that I mean a philosophy that works like a visual arts exhibition.

Introducing Jean-François Lyotard
via the question:
How can I say what I see?

Jean-François Lyotard (born 1924, died 1998) is a French philosopher known for his close association with poststructuralism and his major contribution to thinking the postmodern. I am currently revisiting his thought through my *Aesthetics of differends*, an aesthetics based on his concept of the differend—a term that takes on the status of concept in his 1983 book *Le Differend*. I think the theory of the postmodern, summarily conceived as the end of grand or meta-narratives, can be specified and fine-tuned through the study of differends. I would wager that the main theory of postmodernism, at least as an aesthetic category, is truly at work in *The Differend*, and this is therefore the angle from which I have engaged with Lyotard's work.

The strong differend, the aesthetic differend, the differend that we are concerned with, and which will act as a starting point for our claim, can be summed up as the differend between seeing and saying. And the first conceptual point, a way of dealing with a primordial differend, can play out through the question "How can I say what I see?".

This question is embedded in Lyotard's interest in the discourse of the witness, the witness being the one who has seen and who must phrase. But there is an irreducible double here, that of the seeing to the saying, and the saying to the seeing. We have here two regimes of presence of the sign, two different philosophies that must be reconciled, that of Wittgenstein with that of Levinas to put it succinctly. Lyotard, located between the two positions, registers both the turn of the materialism of language games and that of the transcendence of the face, asserting a singular ethics, that of the testimony to the differend. Because testifying to the differend is first and foremost about finding the form that might reconcile two heterogeneous sets and in a sense can be understood as a re-enactment of Kant's gesture "bridging the abyss" between the two critiques. It is about asserting the space of contradiction and bearing witness to it, bringing it to light, and it is both the opening and the exhibiting, the exhibiting of the open as such.

122

Bearing witness to the differend between saying and seeing is thus resolved through "exhibition". Beyond the fact that Jean-François Lyotard did conceive an actual exhibition (see "Les Immatériaux"), his thought as such can be viewed as an exhibition, a display of motifs, a classification of apparatuses, the hanging of arguments in an open space. This philosophical exhibition as such, in which

the space between the arguments and their juxtaposition, or collage, denotes the intention of the curator, allows the affect of truth – that would be tied to the discourse of the victim of a wrong – to exceed both for the saying and the seeing. Such a discourse would form the exhibition's conceptual core.

Study of the sign severed from its end

The sign severed from its end is a way of stating "a work" in a semantic, linguistic space. A philosopher who deals with signs severed from their end can indeed be likened to an exhibition curator who hangs up artworks. This concept of the *sign* could be linked to Derrida's reading of the finality without end in Kant's aesthetics. Derrida exposes the driving paradox of Kant's philosophy in which aesthetics as the critique of the faculty of judgement bridges the abyss between the critique of pure reason and the critique of practical reason. The task of aesthetics is to reconcile the concept of nature (pure reason) with that of freedom (practical reason) by philosophically creating the concept of the sublime (somewhat borrowed from Burke), from which Lyotard draws the notion of paradoxical mechanics that we can synthetically describe as an affect experienced by a subject that fails to present to itself the unrepresentable. In this sense, the effect of the sublime could be a kind of terror and it pertains to the realm of nature, whereas the beautiful tends to deliver satisfaction more, and pertains to the realm of art. The sublime can qualify a finite object (it can be its predicate) in which the "without-end" is present. A definition of the artwork, as a sign severed from its end, as the correlate of an intention that accepts the opening of being and does not reduce itself to the technical expression of an enframed entity, relies on a way of arranging the other signs of this state that is akin to the exhibition mode.

When Badiou draws a distinction between philosophers and anti-philosophers on the basis of their relationship to truth, we could just as well distinguish two movements within philosophy, two kinds of philosopher: those with positive signs, pregnant with meaning, and those with signs that remain within the structure of the phrases and texts left hanging in the air, signs that do not exhaust their *Bedeutung* (their signifying intention) by simultaneously saying a thing and its opening. Thus, we might ask whether the philosophy of philosophers, as a system, is not in fact a tool, and in this way a technology, an enframed technology, that has nothing of the sublime, and whose presentation modality is the dialectic. And in juxtaposition to this, anti-philosophy, as exceeded philosophy,

conscious of the excess it carries, modalises its presentation on the display mode, on collage, that is. We should then note that the terms "collage" and "copula" (which is the name given to the operator "is" in the logical predication of the type "S is P") share the same root, *copula*, as in union, accolade, copulation. Collage can thus turn out to be an operator of being as such, its *associative touch*.

In this way, collage is the modality in Lyotard's philosophical works (which all have variable strategies) that constantly seeks to list, classify and arrange signifiers in order to surround a hole, a void, a lacking origin which is the condition of possibility of human thought, or of "human reality" you might say, if you are partial to Jean-Paul Sartre's translation of *Dasein*.

The differend and exhibition

Fully conscious of the use of the sign severed from its end as set out above, Lyotard goes from the primary concept (on which the secondary concepts connect as in a constellation) of the figural to the concepts of phrase-event or affect-phrase. The point is always to give shape to what occurs and to its materiality. The figural is the manner (the movement) in which an image thinks, whereas the affect-phrase enables you to glean how a text renders feeling. Both cases construct the same kind of relationship to infancy, as *infantia*, a concept that reveals the primordial lack of self-consciousness as positive. Indeed, during infancy, a kind of life before life, there is no self-consciousness, no *imago* of self, no self-representation, and the adult cannot recall this state, nor even the state of his thoughts tied to this time. As described in his *Postmodern Ethics*, for Lyotard this stage of life marks an "unforgettable forgotten", and provides a way of opposing technology to the human. Elisabeth de Fontenay reminds us that in *The Misery of Philosophy*, page 126 (of the French edition), Lyotard suggests that it is "machines (that) should be pitied, for not having had an infancy, for not being born; they have no lack, therefore no history". Giorgio Agamben revisits this relationship to history through infancy, thus linking childhood, experience and language to history. Agamben's animal meets Lyotard's machine. On page 52 (of the english edition) of *Infancy and History*, Agamben states: "Imagine a man born already equipped with language, a man who already possessed speech. For such a man without infancy, language would not be a pre-existing thing to be appropriated, and for him there would be neither any break between language and speech nor any historicity of language. But such a man would thereby at once be united with his nature; his nature would always pre-exist, and no-where in it would he find

any discontinuity, any difference through which any kind of history could be produced. Like the animal, whom Marx describes as 'immediately at one with its life activity', he would merge with it and would never be able to see it as an object distinct from himself"¹. In order to speak the philosopher experiences the cut; he is himself severed from his end and he also knows he is severed from his origin. This double cut is the condition for presenting his song, which is both a praise and a lament.

Lyotard's song, articulated around the figural in the 1970s and the affect-phrase in the 1990s, suggests – after having also produced a theory of the postmodern and the end of meta-narratives – that he conceived these two points of articulation as being those linked to two aesthetic paradigms: Romanticism and conceptualism.

Lyotard, as a reader of Kant in the Romantic paradigm

Jean-François Lyotard revisits the question of the subject, in his own era, and in a particular philosophical context (one characterised by the importance of phenomenology and the philosophy of language, and by the decline of transcendental philosophy: a marked poststructuralist context). This leads him to claim that the role of philosophy is to phrase and chain according to a rule that must be established through the process of phrasing.

The concept of the sublime in Kant is not linked to art but to nature, but when you look at Caspar David Friedrich's paintings representing a human being, alone within the immensity of nature, you can see a representation of the very idea of the sublime, in such a way that art seized this notion, where a lack of judgement, its inability to present, therefore a certain negativity, is turned into a positivity on the level of aesthetic feeling. Thus, the sublime, a concept that expresses the feeling of the *without-end*, of the cut, of the presentation of the unrepresentable, was ultimately the crucial concept of Romanticism. I advance that Romanticism is the main paradigm of the modern period and conceptualism the main paradigm of the postmodern. Both can be grasped through the same aesthetic, that of the antinomy of Kantian judgement. I would pursue, then, by saying that Lyotard enables us to specify these two paradigms by going from the figural to the event-phrase in his work, located at the intersection of the two. The modalities of modern expressions, containing at their centre the

1– Agamben, G. *Infancy and History. Essays on the destruction of experience.* London and New York: Verso Books, 1993.

linguistic premisses of postmodernity, remain subsumable through the question of the figural, whether or not the art is figurative. Because the figural, as a way of thinking the image, does not only conceive the recognisable of the figure but also grasps its monstrous, unfigurable share, as embodied by Goya's *Saturn*, for instance.

**Lyotard, as a reader of Kant
in the postmodern paradigm**

Following the fall of the third eye, which, coming from above, had some authority over historical events, and following this conception of history as moving towards a goal, a *telos*, a direction subjectable to judgement, we can detect a crisis: "the end of ideology, of unifying narratives", and the question of judgement returns, in a novel way. Because within artistic modernity a narrative, via the succession of manifestos authorising the contradictory multiplication of statements, seems to homogenise these different ideological currents by stringing them like beads, one after the other, on the thread of history. Whereas with postmodernity all the artistic languages proliferate simultaneously, in a synchronic fashion, like a shapeless *mêlée*, thus presenting another problem for judgement. Heterogeneity reigns supreme and the chaining of differends appears to be the operation most likely to render this omniscience of formal and discursive disjuncture intelligible. The postmodern paradigm, leaving the figural aside, looses the sensational character of the image that enables us to point to the sublime, and written language becomes the main paradigm of a regime subsumable by the generic term *conceptual*.

But with conceptualism the sublime is still present, although in another form, no longer that of the figural but of the affect-phrase. If this can be said to be absolutely visible in Lawrence Weiner's or Joseph Kosuth's now classical studies, as they form the essence of this paradigm, it remains present for any creation and even one containing pure image – painting, photography, video or performance – because the paratext of the work (and even, and I insist, for those that present themselves as images) is absolutely determining for its reception.

The disjuncture between the productions is also inherent in the "work" entity as unity, because it is at once itself and its own eidetic and linguistic description, divided between fetish and eidetic self-representation.

C O L O P H O N

Benoît Maire,
Aesthetics of differends,
printed paper in a box,
2008-...

This English edition is limited to 25 copies,
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Aurélien Mole and Benoît Maire

Sections 5 and 6:
Andy Keate

Fig. 1 *The Nose*:
Marie Corbin

Methodology:
screen captures of the video:
*organisation of the narrative and structural models
conjugated in the sections*, 12'30, DV, 2010.

Fig. 2 *The Cave*:
Julien Hourcade

Section 9:
Hugo Anglade and Benoît Maire

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