Common Places and Other *Topoi* of Limits. On the Relations between Art and Philosophy in Europe around the Nineteen Sixties

by

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for my parents

Preface

> In all these respects art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past. Herein it has further lost for us its genuine truth and life, and rather is transferred into our *ideas* than asserts its former necessity, or assumes its former place, in reality. What is now aroused in us by works of art is over and above our immediate judgement; inasmuch as we subject the content and the means of representation of the work of art and the suitability or unsuitability of the two to our intellectual consideration. Therefore the *science* of art is a much more pressing need in our day than in times in which art, simply as art, was enough to furnish a full satisfaction. Art invites us to consideration of it by means of thought, not to the end of stimulating art production, but in order to ascertain scientifically what art is.[1]

Since 1820-1821 when Hegel first lectured on aesthetics in Berlin,[2] his reflections have become famously emblematic all during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries for all those who attempt to reflect on art. Even in the writings of

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[1] G. W. F. Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics. ed. Michael Inwood. Trans. Bernard Bonasquet. (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 13.

[2] See Inwood's "Introduction" in ibid. p. XIV.

one of the most radical thinkers of twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, who attempted to significantly alter the way we think about art, the spell of these words by Hegel was unavoidable. Both in his thirties lectures in "The Origin of the Work of Art," and on Nietzsche, as well as in the fifties and sixties writings which deal with art, it is not difficult to show how Heidegger always attempts an elaborate and detailed dialogue with Hegel's reflections.

And it is of course no accident that Jacques Derrida, another more recent influential thinker, named Hegel "le dernier philosophe du livre et le premier penseur de l'écriture," in 1967.[3] One need not agree with Derrida on this point, to grant him the insight that the very adjectives "last" and "first" are indeed very proper for characterizing Hegel's philosophical enterprise. For Hegel marked, as all subsequent reflection on art will show, the end of a certain thinking on art and the beginning of a different one, no matter what names one chooses to give to such end and such beginning. Thus he stood at the outset of a serious, ongoing controversy about the status, the role and the meaning of art. One need not find recourse to the artistically proliferous 19th century to prove this point for indeed one need not go thus far. The examples that confirm it are close to us, they are contemporaneous and even from everyday life.

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[3] Jacques Derrida, De la grammatologie. (Paris: Minuit 1967). My translation is "the last philosopher of the book and the first thinker of writing" p. 41.

For example, in 1997, in an article that shook the artworld of France, Jean Baudrillard was declaring that art does not seem to have a vital function any longer.[4] Baudrillard was not of course unprecedented to articulate a disenchanted and pessimistic view of art. This has become a quotidian episode in Europe in countries suffering during these times of a deep crisis of values, permeating all culture and threatening to curtail even further all material state support of the arts. Another major French thinker, Jean Clair, called for a different end, "the end of the idea of modern art" through which he also expressed a pessimistic view about the state of the arts and by which he invited to a return to more traditional, painterly forms of art.[5] Likewise, in Germany, Peter Bürger's extremely popular Theory of the Avant-Garde is a radical criticism of all art after the second world war, the so called "neo-avant-garde," in view of the prewar avant-garde's ultimate institutionalization and "failure," in

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[4] Jean Baudrillard, "La commedia dell'arte" interview by Catherine Francblin in Art Press, 216, 1997, pp. 43-48. In p. 43 Baudrillard's statement reads as follows:

> Mon point de vue est anthropologique. De ce point de vue, l'art ne semble plus avoir de fonction vitale; il est atteint par le même destin d'extinction des valeurs, par la même perte de transcendance.

My translation is:

> My point of view is anthropological. From this point of view, art does not seem to have a vital function any longer; it is struck by the same destiny of value extinction, by the same loss of transcendence.

[5] See Jean Clair, Considérations sur l'état des beaux-arts. Critique de la modernité. (Paris: Gallimard 1983), particularly p. 21.

terms of its political program.[6] And one could go on and add a number of examples from other European countries as well, to indicate the climate of pessimism and mistrust towards the European postwar artistic developments. It is not that these reflections do not have a value in themselves or do not partake often complex and promising ensembles of criticotheoretical considerations. What is however missing in these critiques is a detailed and rigorous examination of and engagement with European art history after the second world war. From this point of view they are harmful and unjust to a quite large number of postwar artists in the West, who were decisively engaged in procuring vital and forceful artistic messages through their works. What can be simply pinpointed to qualify this, is the North-American example through which all of these critiques can be proved unnecessarily general.

For a great lineage of art historians based in North America have admirably shown how there, the art after the second world war, confirms and defies the Hegelian predictions in intricate and promising ways.[7] Without entering into details one can simply indicate a few names of such art

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[6] Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde. Trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For a quite succinct statement of Bürger's thesis with regard to what he calls the "neo-avant-garde" see p. 58.

[7] Indicatively see Hal Foster's The Return of the Real. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996) and in particular his essay "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?" (pp. 1-34) contained in this volume, which is the most explicit and profound criticism of Peter Bürger's position.

historians: Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, Clement Greenberg, Rosalind Krauss and others.

But whereas these art historians proved best through their analyses that the landscape of contemporary American art is more intricate and complex than what is contained in the forementioned European critics' of art verdicts, the field of postwar European art remained, strangely and besides a few exceptions, extremely neglected. One, of course, cannot expect a handful of art historians to provide answers for all problems pending in the historiography of art history. Furthermore, it is reasonable to
expect that scholars deal with subjects of their immediate environment and tend to deal with issues that do not greatly evade the geographical region of their reach. However, the reasons behind the negligence of contemporary, postwar European art seem to be more intricate than these considerations.

For, many among the American critics and art historians, including the ones just mentioned, seem to have been entertaining a negative prejudice about the scene of postwar art in Europe. Already in 1953, Clement Greenberg, was arguing about the "superiority of American abstract painting" in comparison with the French.[8] However, regretable the terms of this comparison were, they had a startlingly profound

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[8] Clement Greenberg, "Contribution to a Symposium" in Art and Culture. Critical Essays. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 125.

influence to some of the best North American art historians.[9] And although one can understand the need of North Americans and first and foremost of Greenberg, to rid themselves of the cultural hegemony and tyranny of European art, one cannot help wondering why this need had to take the form of such a perverse reversal of tyranny. For when art historians of the caliber of Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss, and others, condemn with such fervor as we shall see in detail further, what they deem as two of the most important protagonists of the postwar European scene, namely Yves Klein and Joseph Beuys and use for their criticisms the poor indications of scholarship that, they, themselves taught us to treat with the utmost suspicion, then these condemnations become paradoxically puzzling. One could only possibly explain them by recourse to this Greenbergian, nationalistic prejudice about "the superiority" of the North American paradigm versus all others. Then the fatal and misguided critiques of postwar European art pronounced by the European critics and philosophers, such as Baudrillard, Clair and Bürger would be most welcome in USA as another confirmation of the superiority of the American exception.

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[9] See for example Serge Guilbaut's prejudiced and unfair essay "Le pouvoir de la décrépitude et la politique du désengagement dans le Paris de l'après seconde guerre mondiale" in Voir, ne pas voir, faut voir. Essais sur la perception et la non-perception des oeuvres. (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1993), pp. 52-99. See also his famous How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art. Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Certainly this dissertation does not simply wish to reinstate the European paradigm. For if art should indeed be thought in the context of its production, we have enough experience that indicates all concepts bordering to "the nation" are, to say the least, dangerous and rather inappropriate artistic contexts. Not solely because the term "nation," employed in art, awakes bad memories and fuels nationalistic feelings which at this very time in Europe are less than needed; it is moreover an absolutely obsolete context, given that the Western world has been increasingly marked by global cultural production and communication, for the last fifty years. However, by adopting precisely the example of those artists who were condemned as the emblematic European artists, Yves Klein and Joseph Bueys, this dissertation wishes to correct the negative prejudice surrounding them, by accounting of their works in a positive and productive way and further, by extension, call for more attentiveness when it comes to either interpreting Hegel or pronouncing sweeping generalizations on the contemporary state of the arts. There are also other attempts which bring Klein and Beuys together, in order to advance a productive analysis of them and confirm them together as emblematic artists, albeit in a positive way.[10] But the terms and the extent of such attempts have often been problematic in that they lack

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[10] See for example Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, M.A.J.Y. MAGIE (Duchamp, Warhol, Beuys, Klein). (Paris: E. L. A. La Différence, 1988).

comprehensiveness, scope and methodology and ultimately fail to come up to the standards that these artists set with their respective works.

For a decisive confrontation with the work of both Klein and Beuys opens up a series of confrontations with the discipline of art history, with philosophy and many other domains; such a confrontation poses most radically the problem of the *science* of art, to which Hegel refered. Furthermore, such a confrontation is impossible without suspension of the borders among philosophy, art history but also the rest of human sciences. This does not mean to indicate that art becomes a philosophical activity, even if Hegel predicted rightly that art encourages philosophical considerations. For Klein and Beuys through their example, question the very distinction between art and philosophy. Art, in its very distinct domain, calls forth philosophical considerations which would not have been made possible otherwise. More specifically, the work of Klein and Beuys, for example in our first two chapters, allow us to question Heidegger and Derrida in a very special way, in the last two; Klein and Beuys allows a view into the writings of Heidegger and Derrida which enables us to extract from their reflections new ideas for understanding art.

There is however, an additional reason why, art does not merely become philosophy. For the very term of philosophy is put under decisive scrutiny, in the work of major

"philosophers," such as Heidegger and Derrida. The interesting thing is that this scrutiny of the philosophical vocation is being modeled after art, conceived in the broadest sense possible of the term, with which many contemporary artists, including Klein and Beuys worked. If therefore, we must find recourse to philosophy in order to understand art, the opposite is also true from the part of philosophers. Philosophers look into art in order to delimit the domain of their own thinking and domain. There is closeness, distinctness and reciprocity between philosophy and art; certainly there are a lot of common places between them. Maybe, we live in an era in which both of these designations, art and philosophy are in the limits of their semantic capacities and are therefore found to be profoundly wanting, particularly when understood as representational regimes.[11] And this is precisely what the critics who lament what they see as the sorry and unfortunate state of the arts in the West, such as Baudrillard, Clair and Bürger, have failed to consider. For many important artists and thinkers have practically demonstrated that a positive account of what these

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[11] One can only offer here as an indication of the direction of art historical studies towards a general criticism of representation, an interesting example of an analysis of Raphael which claims that Raphael builds up a vision for the viewer without dependance upon external reality but rather through projection of his mind. This tendency to critique representation is therefore not only apropos contemporary art but also appears in contemporary readings of past art. See Michael Schwartz's "Raphael's Authorship in the *Expulsion of Heliodorus*" in Art Bulletin, September 1997, vol. LXXIX, number 3, pp. 467-492.

syntagms, philosophy and art, leave unaccounted, is possible. The irreducible, regulative and reciprocal exteriority of both philosophy and art, is neither a stumbling block nor a lamentable fact, but is perhaps the best remedy for their menaced longevity.

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Chapter 1

Tales of Contingency: Color, the Void and the Imprint in Yves Klein's Artwork

> As long as one shares this world and not another one cannot remain an authentic person unless one faces one's own historical contingency and learns to live with it, to cope with it and to withstand the strong temptation to escape from it.[12]
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> Metaphysics is not a construction of concepts by which we try to make our paradoxes less noticeable but is the experience we have of these paradoxes in all situations of personal and collective history and the actions which, by assuming them, transform them into reason....The contingency of all that exists and all that has value is not a little truth for which we have somehow or other to make room in some nook or cranny of the system: it is the condition of a metaphysical view of the world.[13]

Introduction

According to the Oxford dictionary contingency is "the

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[12] Agnes Heller, A Philosophy of History in Fragments. (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), p. 8.

[13] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Metaphysical in Man" Sense and Non-Sense. Trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus & Patricia Allen Dreyfus, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 95, 96.

uncertainty of occurence."[14] Agnes Heller who understands the term in an existential manner and distinguishes between "cosmic" and "historical" contingency, claims that "contingency is the loss of innocence."[15] In any case, contingency from an existential, perceptual, cosmic, historical, metaphysical or any other point of view, marks both the experience of the individual, and the condition of the world, in modern times and tints all expression with ambivalence.

Art is of course not exempt from the uncertain fate of humanity but partakes in its own way, in this fate. Occasionally, as in the second half of the twentieth century, art becomes one of the most overt expressions of human contingency. The artists that emerged in Europe after the second world war had to cope with a desire to forget, even suppress, at all costs, cruel and shameful memories and generate, or, at times, force, a new beginning.[16] The particular social and cultural circumstances in postwar Western Europe, created a situation where the conscience of

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[14] A. S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 185.

[15] Heller, op. cit. pp. 1, 3, 4, 8, 9-35.

[16] See Serge Guilbaut's interesting, quite exact but also misguided, in our view, essay "Le pouvoir de la décrépitude et la politique du désengagement dans le Paris de l'après seconde guerre mondiale" Voir, ne pas voir, faut voir. Essais sur la perception et la non-perception des oeuvres. (Paris: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1993), pp. 52-99.

this contingency was extremely heightened. This conscience resulted in tendencies in European art which were not only tinted by ambivalence but were also looked upon with a great deal of ambivalence.

Yves Klein's art (See in fig. 1, a portrait of the artist) is one of the best examples of these artistic tendencies: despite the present broad knowledge of and interest in his artwork, despite the short span of his career[17] and despite the fact that he was almost immediately recognized as one of the seminal European artists, after the second world war, his work stands out by its ambivalence and therefore still generates considerable controversy around it.[18] The controversy around the value, meanings, status and

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[17] Klein's career was as abruptly launched as it was interrupted. It started around the year 1954, the year he published a small collection of monochromatic paintings with the title Peintures, under the name "Yves." See Sidra Stich's Yves Klein. Exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1994), pp. 42, 43. Klein died of a heart attack eight years later, on June 6, 1962, at the age of 34 and after having made a powerful impression in the international art scene.

[18] Thierry de Duve's essay, with the title "Yves Klein ou le marchand mort" Cousus de fil d'or. (Paris: Art Edition, 1990) resumes best the attitude of many contemporary scholars towards Yves Klein's work. This attitude is characterized by, on the one hand, a deep mistrust towards Klein's art as idealist and on the other, a preoccupation with his work and a need to account for it and situate it in reference to the rest of their critical interests and projects. Indicatively, one can mention several such scholars and their respective works as for example, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde" October, 37, Summer 1986, pp. 41-52, Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, "Bas matérialisme" L'informe. Exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), pp. 54, 55. See also Yve-Alain Bois's introduction to the essay of Wladyslaw Stremiński, "L'Unisme en peinture" Macula, no 1, 1976, p. 15,

qualities of Klein's artistic production exemplify the problems of artistic contingency, in the second half of the twentieth century. This having been said, the historians and critics who participate in this controversy, only rarely take artistic contingency seriously into account. For to do so, as Merleau-Ponty remarks, is to develop a metaphysical point of view, since contingency is "the condition of a metaphysical view of the world." But the positivist heritage of art history, in our century, divorces reflection and study of art from philosophy and often traps and misguides even those who most vehemently wish to refute its legacy. Thus, at times, the result is a type of art criticism which, trapped by itself in a blind formalism of which it often accuses others, cannot properly account for contemporary art.

The attempt to give an account of Klein's work that takes positive consideration of artistic contingency, in the way that this is inherent not only in his work but also in its reception, renders justice to Klein as an artist and attempts to meaningfully situate the many puzzles that still linger around him. Furthermore, this attempt is justified in view of a number of additional reasons. First, as Klein extensively influenced subsequent generations of Western artists, the

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note 4. On the other hand, contemporary artists like Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Joseph Kosuth, Louis Cane, Donald Judd and Frank Stella are more appreciative of various aspects of Klein's work, which has helped them crystallize their own ideas. For some of these artists' accounts, see "Special Feature on Yves Klein" Art Press, 67, February 1983, pp. 4-14.

evaluation of his legacy is extremely important for the history of contemporary art.[19] Then, Klein's reception in New York was not the most fortunate among artists, critics, and art historians alike, and his status as an artist in New York is perhaps more than anywhere else controversial, despite the impact that he also had there.[20] The mistrust and hostility against this "typical European artist" matched a postwar stereotype, endemic to New York, about the derivative and degenerate state of affairs in the art of the Old World in comparison with that of the USA.[21] Last, and in relation to

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[19] Klein influenced many of his contemporaries such as the "new realists" in France, the group Zero in Germany, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni and the "arte povera" artists in Italy and as diverse artists as Joseph Beuys, Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Vito Acconci, Joseph Kosuth, Dan Flavin and James Turrell in the USA. With regard to Klein's far reaching influence, see Stich, op. cit. especially pp. 7, 100, Catherine Millet, Yves Klein. (Italy: Art Press/Flammarion, 1983), especially p. 22, Joseph Kosuth, "Un jeu qui élabore ses propres règles" Art Press, op. cit. p. 8, Pierre Restany, Yves Klein. Fire at the Heart of the Void, (New York: Journal of Contemporary Art Editions, 1992), pp. 137, 139, Pierre Restany, "Who is Yves Klein?" p. 14 and Nan Rosenthal, "Assisted Levitation" especially pp. 91, 95, both in Yves Klein. A Retrospective. Institute for The Arts, Rice University, Houston, (New York: The Arts Publisher Inc, 1982).

[20] In an interview taken by Rosalind Krauss, for the French journal Art Press Robert Morris reports how Yves Klein influenced the generation of New York artists that followed his own. Morris reports: "But I also got a lot from Yves Klein (I wasn't the only one, where did Johns's *Skin* drawings come from?). He showed how to use the body as a tool to make a trace, an indexial sign. Klein: art as combat, art as degradation..." See "Robert Morris. Around the Mind/Body Problem" Art Press 193, Juillet-Août 1994, p. 31.

[21] With regard to Klein's reception in the USA, not good in New York but rather favorable in California see Stich, op. cit. p. 232 and Hannah Weitemeier, Yves Klein, 1928-1962, International Klein Blue. Trad. francaise Wolf Fruhtrunk,

the previous point, the work of Yves Klein poses epistemological problems for the discipline of art history conceived in a strict, narrow and positivist sense and as a consequence, risks not to be understood or appreciated by anyone who is reluctant to adopt an epistemologically broad point of view.[22] The pivotal interest that this artist presents today is that he marked a time after which several artists increasingly commenced to borrow systematically from and find recourse to theoretical practices and ideas that were, until that time, considered neither belonging to their artwork domain, nor part of their authority.[23]

(Köln: Taschen 1995), pp. 77, 78. For the cultural nationalism in the USA after the second world war, centered around the movement of abstract expressionism and the decisive role in this of Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg and Thomas Hess see "Yves Klein. Un artiste radicale dans un monde contradictoire" interview of Pierre Restany by Catherine Millet, Art Press, op. cit. especially p. 4. The idea that we do not share for many reasons, which claims that the capital of western art after the second world war, moved from Paris to New York, is best depicted in Serge Guilbaut's book How New York Stole the Idea of Avant-Garde. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1983). With regard to the American critics' nationalist tone and negative reception of postwar European art see Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting" Art and Culture. Critical Essays. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 208-229 and p. 229 in particular.

[22] See Rosenthal, op. cit. p. 97.

[23] I refer to minimal, *arte-povera* and conceptual artists that that were also the pioneers of such tendencies and dramatically altered the attitudes of the subsequent generations towards art. Hal Foster refers to the importance of "theory" for many of the artists belonging to the movements mentioned before. See his "The Crux of Minimalism" The Return of the Real. (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 35-69.

In what follows, I propose a phenomenological reading of the major corpus of Klein's work from a point of view that borders between art history and philosophy. In relating the artistic experiments of Klein to the philosophical ideas of Gaston Bachelard, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others which marked him or his time, I wish to account for the logic of these experiments, not in order to resolve their paradoxes but to better grasp and appreciate them. My main focus will be Klein's highly intuitive, lifelong interests in color, the void and the imprint,[24] interests which will eventually provide the link I establish between his work and phenomenology. In view of these among Klein's preoccupations, the rest of his investigations concerning nature, art, individuality, the flesh and the body will also be examined.[25] I would like to reconfirm Klein as an emblematic European artist and use his example to reiterate that a critical understanding and appreciation of contemporary artwork, increasingly requires interdisciplinary approaches,

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[24] These interests in marginal elements and practices in the history of painting such as the color, the void and the imprint are in fact inseparable from the broader context of their time. Within this historical context, conceptions and ideas of artistic space were systematically explored by diverse artists in Europe such as Jesus Raphael Soto, Yaagov Adam, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, the new realists in France and the group Zero in Germany. See Weitemeier, op. cit. p. 40.

[25] Perhaps Klein's most seriously professed interest and quest was to go beyond the problematic of art, as the title of his unpublished book Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art characteristically indicates. See Stich, op. cit. pp. 85, 159.

similar to those which, in the past, founded the discipline of art history.[26]

I. Color and the Space of Pictorial Sensibility in Yves Klein's Monochrome Paintings

The fundamental mistrust of color in painting has a long history that dates since Plato and has been voiced by modern figures as diverse as Immanuel Kant and Ad Reinhardt.[27] Already since mid-fifties, Klein conducted his first artistic experiments by wholeheartedly embracing color. As he said later in his life about his first artistic activities, he "just wanted to show color" since he was convinced that pure

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[26] See Georges Didi-Huberman's article "Imaginum pictura...in totum exoleuit. Début de l'histoire de l'art et fin de l'époque de l'image" Critique, Mars 1996, 586, (Paris: Minuit 1996), pp. 138-150. In this essay, Didi-Huberman develops the close relation between art history and philosophy at the very constitution of the art historian's domain of expertise. See page 148, in particular.

[27] Art history and philosophy are full of examples which illustrate this fundamental mistrust of color, a mistrust which has been conditioning painting for many centuries. Indicatively, see "The Analytic of the Beautiful" in Immanuel Kant's classic Critique of Judgement. Trans. J. H. Bernard, (New York and London: Hafner Press, 1951) par. 1, pp. 61, 62. Kant conceives of color as a secondary matter in comparison with delineation and composition. Color belongs to the "charm" of the picture, enlivens sensation and excites the representation but does not "constitute the proper object of the pure judgement of taste." The famous American artist Ad Reinhardt is quoted as saying: "There is something wrong, irresponsible and mindless about color, something impossible to control. Control and rationality are part of any morality." cited by Lucy R. Lippard, "The Silent Art" Art in America 55, no 1, (January-February 1967), p. 62. See also Agnes Heller's discussion of color in philosophy in her recent book An Ethics of Personality. (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 141.

color represented something in itself,[28] in fact, one of the most important factors contributing to the aura of painting. This intention became manifest in summer 1956, when he started making his monochromatic pictures with one single protagonist, the color blue[29] (fig. 2). These pictures were homogeneous, as Klein used to this effect, fine brushes and chemical products found after a number of laborious experiments.[30] Klein's painted canvases appeared not only devoid of any marks of artistic or other human intervention,[31] but were also

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[28] See Weitemeier, op. cit. p. 8. also Stich, op. cit. p. 46, and Millet, op. cit. p. 28. Reductive tendencies in painting that isolated and intensified certain composite elements of it predominated among several artists around that time. See, for example, Robert Rauschenberg's flat white paintings (1953) and his assertion about them that "he only wanted to make a painting" or Piero Manzoni's achromes, but also the works by Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman, and the entire generation of postpainterly abstraction in USA, including Robert Ryman, Brice Marden and others.

[29] Klein is famous for his blue monochromes although even after having consciously limited himself to exploring the blue color, he still occasionally pursued his research of other colors. Restany writes about his monochromatic triad: blue, gold and pink. See Pierre Restany, Yves Klein. Fire at the Heart of the Void. op. cit. p. 9. Whatever remarks are being forwarded on monochromy of course apply more or less to all the monochrome experiments of Klein, although many of these experiments deserve a separate examination. The blue monochromes, however, merit a special consideration as they were given a special status, by the artist and his audiences alike, standing somehow for the entire monochromatic research of Klein.

[30] These experiments of Klein with the product "Rhodopas" and his assistance from the Parisian chemist Edouard Adam, are reported by Weitemeier, op. cit. pp. 15, 19.

[31] Painting's tendencies in Paris of Klein's times were dominated by tachisme and abstract lyricisme that celebrated a kind of abstraction which emphasized the personal gesture and investment of the artist in his work and registered the

colored in a very profound, radiant, luminous and extremely saturated sky-blue that the artist trademarked as his invention and named it IKB (International Klein Blue). The color on the canvas seemed at least as unadulterated as when it was in powder form; at times Klein even displayed the color in powder form on the ground, underneath his paintings in order to confirm this impression of color purity[32] (fig. 3). In sharp contrast with the practices of his contemporary tachist and abstract lyricist painters in Paris, Klein consciously sought to minimize the signs of authorial intervention in his pictures.[33] On several occasions, Klein expressed his disapproval of the expressionist attitudes espoused by the painters of his time, notably by Georges Mathieu, who "empty themselves on their canvases." (fig. 4)[34]

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trace of his/her inner world against the cold and dry prewar abstract painting of constructivism, Mondrian and others. See Stich, op. cit. pp. 30, 69, 190.

[32] See Stich, op. cit. p. 92.

[33] Contrary to Lucy Lippard's and Dore Ashton's judgements, Klein was not a gesture or spectacle artist in the same way that his contemporary Georges Mathieu was. From one point of view, ritual and spectacle have a role in his works and particularly in their public presentation but signs of authorial agency on the material aspects of the works he produced were consistently eliminated throughout his career. See Lippard's "Silent Art" in Art in America, 55, no 1, Jan-Febr. 1967, pp. 58-63, p. 61 in particular, and Ashton's "Art as Spectacle" in Arts Magazine, vol. 41, no 5, March 1967, pp. 44-46.

[34] These are Klein's words, cited by Rosenthal, op. cit. pp. 93, 94. Klein vehemently refused to associate his art with an expression of inner self but rather systematically sought to detach himself from his work. See also his statement about "the hypertrophy of self," cited by Millet, op. cit. p. 38.

For Klein, the unadulterated, pure color which he entertained in his views was translated in his canvases with a blue color, marked by profundity, radiance, luminosity and extreme saturation. If the dimensions of color are the hue, the luminosity and the saturation,[35] Klein's "pure color" pushed these dimensions to their limits. This is also the reason why, even today, the aged surface of the monochrome painting maintains, in part, its original hypnotic effects on the eye of the beholder. For the blue ultramarine that Klein used is characterized by its radiant opacity.[36] This opacity combined with the painting's homogeneity make the spectator's gaze unsure about where to focus. Furthermore, the spectator does not even have a clear perception of the painting's surface as this is obfuscated and disincarnate, revealing no texture.[37] As a consequence, luminous and radiant color, thrusts forward and produces the illusion of being separate from the canvas, the illusion of depth. For the spectator knows that what is seen, is in fact a painting which has a material surface, no matter how obfuscated and disincarnate

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[35] See Rolf G. Kuehni, Color: Essence and Logic. (New York: Van Nostrad Reinhold Company, 1983), pp. 38, 39.

[36] See Jonathan Stephenson, The Materials and Techniques of Painting. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1989), pp. 22, 23.

[37] See the collective study Colour. Ed. Helen Varley, (London: Marshall Editions Limited, 1980), p. 41, for the analysis of cases when colored surfaces appear disincarnate and formless.

this might seem to the eye. And yet, the thrusting color, not only causes this surface to seem closer than it really is but also translates the impression of undefineability to the impression of "color thickness," of a deep blue field extending not only in front but also behind the painted surface. This is why the beholder has often the temptation to try to feel, with the finger, the canvas in order to confirm the limit, the distance between his/her body and the painting's material support. In sum, despite their apparent simplicity, the monochrome paintings are characterized by a materiality, largely undefined. Klein worked to enhance this effect of material indefinability by employing several other secondary measures. Aware that the effect of material indefinability increased when one looked at his paintings from a certain distance, he had the corners and edges of his monochromes rounded, in order to blur as much as possible clearly demarcated corners and lines and further obfuscate the perception of the canvas' limits. For the same purpose he hung his paintings 20 cm away from the wall, to intensify the impression of a floating, immaterial color, emmanating from his pictures.

Promoting with these strategies the undefined materiality of his painting, Klein rendered explicit the contrast between the flat surface and the illusion of depth, produced by this very same surface. This contrast has also been enacted by perspectival painting and can be said to have repeatedly

characterized classical representational painting at least since the Renaissance.[38] Despite the fact that Klein produced monochrome paintings in an abstract, non-representational manner, he simulated the effects of representational painting. In the midst of monochromatic abstraction, he introduced effects typical of classical representation, namely the illusion of depth and its concomitant opticality, as if there was perspective in his works. Likewise, the temporality of Klein's monochromatic paintings is also conflictual: as abstract and self-referential proposals his paintings may be perceived at the time of an instance but when it comes to their hypnotic color, inviting a contemplative gaze, these same paintings lead to daydreaming and are contemplated in the time of duration.[39]

Thus Klein generated color as an autonomous value, divorced from its materiality, defining painting by color alone. Klein was a great partisan of color and on several occasions he presented his views on the war between line and

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[38] See Erwin Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form. Trans. Christopher S. Wood, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), particularly pp. 40, 41, 71, 72.

[39] Catherine Millet writes about the non temporality of Klein's monochromes but it rather seems more pertinent to talk about two different temporalities in conflict: that of the instance and that of duration which have also characterized classical representational painting. See Millet, op. cit. p. 29.

color, a war as ancient as painting.[40] He had a great admiration for Delacroix, the grand master and renowned advocate of color, in the 19th century French artworld and attempted to take to the limits some of his ideas on color. For it was Delacroix who had exalted the indefinable, immaterial and invisible elements of all great painting.[41] However, not solely Delacroix but also the entire romantic school, in the arts of 19th century, had exalted color, principally thanks to its connection with the faculty of imagination.[42] In a text, among the most classical in the philosophy of art, the Critique of Judgement by Immanuel Kant, the latter also considers how imagination and understanding

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[40] Klein spoke of two rivalring historical genealogies around the primacy of color or that of line. According to him the advocates of line were Ingres, Courbet, the cubists, the dadaists, the neoplasticists, the unists and the suprematists around Malevitch. Among the advocates of color were Delacroix, the impressionists, the pointillists, the fauvists, the surrealists and the abstract lyricists. See Stich, op. cit. p. 76. Several episodes in this war between line and color are constantly found from Plato, Plutarch and Aristotle up through twentieth century. For a good commentary on such episodes, see George P. Mras' essay "Delacroix's Art Theory" Readings in Art History. Ed. Harold Spencer, 3rd ed. vol. II, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), pp. 300-303.

[41] Eugène Delacroix, Ecrits sur l'art. (Paris: Librairie Séguier, 1988), pp. 55, 60. It is possible to deduce these theoretical positions of Delacroix from what the latter wrote on the importance of expression rather than trait regularity in portraiture, on the necessity to trust the instict rather than calculation in order to learn design and on the impossibility of teaching design apart from the instict of which design is the proper outcome.

[42] Mras reports how even before romantism Dupuy du Grez had noted the effect of color on imagination. See Mras, op. cit. p. 302.

play in harmony in front of an artistic work that is judged as beautiful.[43] Yet, in front of a monochrome painting by Klein there is hardly anything to understand as there is no design and no trace of the artist's intervention. Despite this lack of understanding and thanks to it, the monochrome painting has a strong effect on the imagination due to the vigorous presence of color. As the IKB color is sensual and radiant, it has a seductive effect and fuels the imagination of the spectators.

Thus, it is by no accident that the blue monochrome paintings by Klein were in part associated by most of their critics with the natural extensions of the sea and the sky.[44] In front of such abstract paintings, which become close to representational ones, with regard to some of their effects, one is naturally tempted to attach to their perception a story or a narrative and to associate them with nature. In fact, all colors had always had their specific connections with social codes, sexes, natural and other phenomena by social and historical convention. As much as these connections of colors

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[43] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement. Trans. J. H. Bernard, (New York: Haffner Press, 1951), p. 52.

[44] Indicatively, see Weitemeier, op. cit. p. 58. These hypotheses appear for the most part among critics who are favorably disposed towards Klein's work. Klein himself joined his critics in forwarding several hypotheses in order to explain why the blue color had become so important in his work. His critics cited Giotto's frescos in the St Francis basilica, about which Klein talked a lot, Matisse who reached the apogee of his influence in France during the fifties, Gaston Bachelard's ideas on blue that Klein had read and admired, etc.

with their social significations may be instrumental for our understanding of paintings from a psychological point of view, they remain quite limited when it comes to elucidating the choice and the specificity of the artistic medium from a historical point of view.

Klein brings color to the limits of its dimensions in the same way as he takes painting to its limits. Among the intentions that Klein never neglected stating to all those interested in his work was to go beyond art.[45] Indeed, Klein's monochrome paintings can be surely considered to be in the limits of painting since the personal work of the artist and the signs of his intervention are reduced to a minimum and there is neither subject/content, nor form to observe. Yet, on the other hand, the employment of a canvas, the invented color which is then applied through brushes and the sensuous effects of this color, make these works intimately related to painting and to its history. Consequently, Klein's work oscillates between painting and a practice that simulates some effects of painting, those in particular that excite the faculty of imagination.

Klein saw color as the major effect of painting, the motor element generating all its impact; painting must evoke and solicit in each spectator her/his proper "pictorial

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[45] See Stich, op. cit. p. 159.

sensibility" through color.[46] And yet, according to Klein's writings, pictorial sensibility is not associated with the gaze, exists beyond the human being and yet "belongs to her/his sphere."[47] Convinced that pictorial sensibility is all that painting amounts to and all that painting is worth for, Klein sought the minimal and principal conditions to achieve it. In fact, the way that Klein described pictorial sensibility was not new or unprecedented but matched what Walter Benjamin defined as "aura."[48] The author of the essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" associated aura with *mémoire involontaire*, involuntary memory, to which Baudelaire refers and which consists of an imprint of an impression, lost with regard to its exact dimensions and its temporal aspects but still and always alive in one's interior self.[49] The effect of aura is so powerful that once one comes to contact with an object invested with its enchanting power-the painting

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[46] For the important role of the term "pictorial sensibility" in Klein's work see Stich, op. cit. pp. 76, 211, 218 and Weitemeier, op. cit. pp. 31, 52, 55. The term appears in Klein's writings with the title "The Chelsea Manifesto" reproduced in the exhibition catalogue Yves Klein. Sponge Reliefs. Intr. Robert Pincus-Witten, (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 1989), pp. 19, 20.

[47] See Klein's "The Chelsea Manifesto" ibid.

[48] See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 155-200, and in particular pp. 183-191.

[49] Ibid.

naturally included-it is impossible to become disenchanted.[50] According to Benjamin, the decisive trait of painted images, in contrast to the photographic ones, is in the aura, which they maintain, if they are capable of returning the spectator's gaze, of never exhausting themselves in this gaze. The perception of aura presupposes the perception of the painting's ability to return our gaze. The painting returns our gaze when it is capable of maintaining the distance between itself and us, that is to say, when we can never annihilate this distance and grasp the painting once and for all.[51] The issue of distance is also being discussed as the distinguishing feature of aura in another essay by Benjamin, perhaps his most famous "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." There, Benjamin associates aura with the authority and the authenticity of all works of art and examins the phenomenon of aura's decline, during the industrial age, manifest in precisely the loss of distance.[52] Klein's paintings with their conflictual temporalities, with their seductive solicitation of the spectator's gaze difficult to avoid or exhaust, impose this distance between them and

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[50] Ibid. p. 187.

[51] Ibid. p. 188.

[52] See Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" op. cit. pp. 220, 221.

their beholder and are typical paintings of Benjamin's aura.[53] As a matter of fact, the aura of Klein's paintings is analogous to the aura that the most traditional and most representational paintings possess. Hence, once more the paradox in Klein's monochrome paintings. On the one hand, the monochrome paintings adopt the formal strategies of abstract monochromatic art, as these were explored and defined by figures like Alexander Rodschencko or the Polish unists.[54] Strictly formally speaking, the application of a single color on the canvas, in Klein's monochromes, functions by introducing a schism in painting, among the several painterly

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[53] However, one cannot fail to remark here, as my reader Dr. Michael Schwartz did, a certain irony in Klein's industrial and extremely elaborate, from a technical point of view, retrieval of aura in the age of its decline. Klein's chemically processed color, homogeneously painted surface through the application of sophisticated brushes and moreover, his copyrighted color, perhaps indicate his disagreement with Benjamin's pessimist view of the incompatibility of aura with technological advancement and industrialization.

[54] In fact if one sees the monochromatic production of Klein in association with the rest of his painterly experiments, during the early phase of his career, when his main production were monochromes, the impression of the formal preoccupations that mark his interests, becomes even more pronounced. These formal preoccupations seem to concern the exploration of the arbitrary relation between color and canvas and come extremely close to the explorations of abstract formalist artists. For example, Klein's booklet entitled Yves: Peintures which he published at the very beginning of his career in 1954, contained images of homogeneous monochromatic paintings of different colors with a different city name underneath each color. Another example is his exhibition at the Gallery Apolinaire in Milan where Klein exhibited several identical monochromatic paintings while assigning to them all different prices. See Restany, Yves Klein. Fire at the Heart of the Void. op. cit. p. 13. See also Stich, op. cit. pp. 42, 84.

elements. Color ceases to be a supplementary element and becomes a quality which attempts to define by itself the entire surface of the painting. However, in principle, a quality as color, can never define a space as such and inevitably functions, despite all its aspirations, as an additive element. Thus, the color becomes conspicuous as independent from the canvas' space and the relation between color and surface becomes arbitrary. In this manner, monochrome painting renders explicit a condition that has governed painting for centuries now, namely that the different elements of painting are related one to the other in a conventional and ultimately arbitrary manner. The priority of design or line over color or vice-versa is neither logical nor necessary. One can make painting by privileging the one or the other. Consequently, painting is, in its several elements, arbitrary in the same way as Ferdinand de Saussure showed the linguistic sign to be an arbitrary entity, not having any logical or natural relation between signifier and signified.[55] On the other hand, the aura in Klein's paintings, associated as it is with the process of pictorial sensibility, inspires reverie and excites imagination, as if the spectator was in front of a classical painting of a natural landscape. The phenomenon of the aura was considered with regard to its effects on the individual, by Gaston

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[55] See Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de linguistique générale. (Paris: Payot, 1972), p. 100.

Bachelard. Bachelard, among whose most fervent admirors was Klein himself, does not directly employ the term "aura" but rather writes on the effect to human imagination of "intimate space," a space "of no dimension."[56] With the notion of intimate space, Bachelard wanted to examine the most personal surroundings of individuals, the very type of surroundings which, for the most part, remain unexamined and unthematized and therefore concern mostly the unconscious. Arguing about "the immanence of the imaginary in the real" and "the continous trajectory from the real to the imaginary," Bachelard finally suggests that all "reality is a power of dream and the dream is a reality."[57] Imagination is considered as autonomous being, as "being itself."[58] Bachelard gives a number of examples where imagination accomplishes its trajectory departing from gazing natural elements surrounding us, such as fire, earth, air and water.[59] The images of these elements constitute intimate auratic spaces that mobilize our imaginary powers, our

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[56] Gaston Bachelard, L'air et les songes.Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement. (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1943), pp. 5, 15, 16. With the space "of no dimension," Bachelard wants to exclude a geometrical interpretation of the space he refers to. This, however, does not mean to indicate that the geometrical space cannot be an intimate space. What Bachelard is very attentive to make clear is that, in principle, and for the definition of intimate space, geometry is not needed.

[57] Ibid. pp. 10, 21.

[58] Ibid. pp. 128, 140.

[59] Ibid. p. 13.

reveries. Despite the fact that intimate space refers predominantly to the image of natural elements, its effect is not exclusively reserved to nature. Bachelard also analysed the cultural space of the house as an intimate space.[60] In brief, Bachelard considers the power of imagination to generate the reality of individual being in the cases where this being is immersed in intimate space. Even if the idealist conclusions of Bachelard must be generally accepted with a certain degree of precaution, this philosopher remains among the rare ones who attempted to thematize the role of intimate space and its aura, on the formation of reality and in particular, of individuality. Intimate space is certainly extremely difficult to decipher, delimit or thematize due to its extremely personal character, psychic investment and unconscious underpinnings. Yet it is important to take under consideration its role and import as it gives a hint of the formative effects that aura has on human individuality.

In recapitulation, the phenomenon of aura is associated with intimate space, initiates imagination and functions as a principle of individualization. Under the light of aura, Klein's monochromatic paintings acquire a distinct place in the history of art. When Klein's critics, like Benjamin Buchloh or Thierry de Duve pinpoint the formal proximity between Klein and some protagonists of monochromatic painting

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[60] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space. Trans. Maria Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

before second world war, as Kasimir Malevitch, Alexander Rodschencko and the Polish unists and accuse Klein of having copied their works,[61] they, first and foremost, neglect a contextual, historical reading of art which does not follow the absolute rule of "unique form," or "the modernist myth of originality," as Krauss would have put it[62] and which they, themselves, have taught us to oppose. Furthermore, they neglect the special employment of color and its auratic effects in the paintings of Klein. As Denys Riout and Yve-Alain Bois have remarked[63] and Malevitch himself has written,[64] values that related to and often evoked the immaterial and the indefinable were indeed among the prewar,

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[61] See de Duve, op. cit. p. 59, Buchloh, op. cit. pp. 44, 47, 48, 51.

[62] Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde" The Originality of Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 151-171.

[63] See Denys Riout, La peinture monochrome. Histoire et archéologie d'un genre. (Nîmes: Editions Jacqueline Chambon, 1996), pp. 39-65 and in particular pp. 39, 45 as well as Yve-Alain Bois' introduction for the French translation of a text by Wladyslaw Strzemiński, "L'unisme en peinture" Macula, no 1, 1976, pp. 14-27, and in particular p. 15, note (4).

[64] Kasimir Malevitch, La lumière et la couleur. Trad. Jean Claude Marcadé et Sylviane Siger, (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, S. A., 1993), pp. 39-47. The first essay in this collection entitled "To the Innovators of the Entire World" (*Aux Novateurs du monde entier*) contains a critique of representation in the theory of contemporary creation which in certain respects resembles Klein's ideas. The closeness between suprematism and Klein's positions is better demonstrated in Jean-Claude Marcadé's essay "What is Suprematism?" (*Qu'est-ce que le suprématisme?*) which serves as an introduction to this collection of writings by Malevitch.

abstract avant-garde's tasks. However, not only the utilization of color but also the entire production of painting served in the prewar, abstract avant-garde's case different aims than in Klein's, to state quite elliptically such an important issue. For as Jean-Claude Marcadé suggests, monochrome painting before the second world war, broke art's relation to nature.[65] Furthermore, as Buchloh adds to Marcadé's account, this same monochrome painting before the second world war, put art simultaneously in service of the pure materiality of color and of the new and emmerging social collectivities, the societies of future.[66] Klein, following Bachelard and conformingly to the tradition that Matisse inaugurated,[67] denied the distinction between nature and art and put his paintings in the service of the individual's pictorial sensibility, in the service of the individual's "health"[68] as he himself once declared.

Likewise, Klein's position is also different from the North-American tendencies of abstract, monochrome painting,

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[65] Ibid. pp. 9, 11, 12. Nature in the classical sense is denied as an imago, reports Marcadé.

[66] Buchloh, op. cit. p. 44.

[67] See Yve-Alain Bois' essay "Matisse and Arche-Drawing" Painting as Model. (Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 3-63. Bois analyzes Matisse according to an originary structure that he calls "arche-drawing". In the context of this structure it is no longer possible to separate design from color. See pp. 59, 60 in particular.

[68] Dennis Picard, "Metaphysiciens du Vide: Chirico, Klein" Connaissance des Arts, no 373, Mars 1983, p. 81.

as these were explored by Ad Reinhardt, Barnet Newmann, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Ryman and others.[69] For the most part, filtered through the incisive criticism of Clement Greenberg, such tendencies explored the media of painting in the manner of a "non subversive [artistic] self criticism."[70] In general, these American tendencies also distanced themselves from classical representation and from nature and found their theoretical justification in self-referentiality and in the formalist exploration of the absolute flatness of the canvas.[71] Thus, Klein is far from these American tendencies as he opposed the distinction between art and nature and as he adopted the stances of abstract art without dispensing with all strategies of classical representation.

II. The Void Which Is Not Empty in Yves Klein's Installations and Performances

Yves Klein is an artist who never considered his work complete. On the contrary, he considered his artworks as stages in a personal itinerary, as traces of an ongoing

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[69] See Stich, op. cit. p. 70.

[70] Clement Greenberg's words cited by Bois in his introduction of Strzemiński's text, op. cit. p. 15. Greenberg analyzed the relation between art and nature in "On the Role of Nature in Modernist Painting" op. cit. pp. 171-174.

[71] See Riout, op. cit. p. 62, where he suggests the proximity between the positions of Greenberg and Strzemiński. See also Lippard, op. cit. p. 61 where the author mentions the predominantly formal orientation of American monochrome painting.

research and thus called his monochrome paintings "the ashes of my art."[72] Moreover, he proclaimed himself as his greatest work of art, always in need of further execution and completion.[73] His association of art with life did not however bespeak a conception of art as self expression but rather an expanded notion of art, transcending the boundaries of its purported domaine. This is clear from the fact that all during his career, Klein consistently sought detachment from rather than involvement with his works; instead of presenting himself or his life as a work of art he consistently endeavored to explore the artistic potential of different media, among which he also included his own self. Thus, the combination of Klein's previously mentioned statements provide the frame to understand performance and installation, two practices which Klein adopted with the explicit view to expand the boundaries

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[72] The full statement dates from 1957 and is as follows: "My monochrome paintings are not my definite works but the preparation for my works. They are the left-overs from the creative process, the ashes." See Yves Klein, 1928-1962, Selected Writings, J&J ed. (London: The Tate Gallery, 1974), p. 35. For another similar statement of the artist see also Weitemeier, op. cit. p. 81.

[73] "Un peintre doit peindre un chef-d'oeuvre unique: lui-même, constamment...et devenir ainsi une sorte de pile atomique, une sorte de générateur à rayonnement constant qui imprègne l'atmosphère de toute sa présence picturale fixée dans l'espace après son passage. Ca c'est la peinture, la vraie au 20e siècle."(A painter has to paint one single masterpiece: himself, constantly... and thus become some sort of nuclear reactor, some sort of generator with constant radiation which impregnates the atmosphere with his entire pictorial presence fixated in space after his passage. This is what painting is, the true painting in 20th century.) Extracts from Klein's book with the title Mon Livre, cited by Weitemeier, Trans. by the writer, op. cit. p. 7.

of art. Given the time of Klein's experiments with installation and performance, in Paris of the late fifties, before such practices became common and established forms of artistic production, one may say that he was indeed, one of the artists of those times, that succeeded in expanding art beyond what was until then known.

But, as with his monochromes, so with his installations and performances, Klein also experimented reaching painting's limits, always against the very idea of an artwork crystallized for eternity in a form. Installation and performance art, gave him a better opportunity to pursue these limits than the monochrome paintings, since they are time and space specific, have a limited duration and audience and need documentation in order to subsist. They are therefore, in themselves, the most provisional, incomplete, immaterial, and indefinable media to produce a work of art.[74]

One of Klein's first installations in 1958, consisted in displaying as an artwork the empty rooms of Iris Clert's Parisian gallery. He sent invitations for the opening of the exhibition which he entitled The Void and a few days before repainted the gallery white and emptied it of most furniture and other objects. The gallery's front and entrance was painted blue, the doorway was covered with blue drapery and

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[74] For a brief commentary on installation and performance which started being extensively employed as artistic practices from the end of 1960's see Robert Atkins, Petit Lexique de l'Art Contemporain. Trad. Jeanne Buniort, (Paris: Abbeville 1994), pp. 78, 79 and 101-104.

two Republican Guards, in full uniform, were placed outside the doorway to allow ten persons to enter the room at a time (fig. 5, 6, 7). A blue cocktail was served to the audience and Klein and his gallerist, Iris Clert, had made arrangements to have the obelisk at Paris' *Place de la Concorde* illuminated, with blue spotlights, the night of the opening, a plan which however was cancelled the last moment by Parisian authorities.[75]

Whereas the blue painted entrance suggested a kind of continuation with the monochrome works, the logic of this work extends further the principles introduced by the monochrome paintings. As in them, albeit here more conspicuously, the viewer's imagination is addressed in order to make up for the appearing absence of content. For judging from the pompous ritual and the supplementary happenings organized around the opening of the exhibition, the viewer would expect to see some elaborate artistic treatment of or reflection on the void. On the contrary, because of the pomp outside the gallery, the appearing absence of content inside, besides of course the whitened, albeit empty room, is made even more manifest. The viewer is therefore exposed to a shock, to the impression of witnessing a bad joke or a deep irony, of the type "anything goes," a position that the dada movement at the beginning of

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[75] Klein left a few objects in the gallery because he could not move everything. He however painted them white and generally created "...a setting that appeared too deliberately naked or shocking..." as Stich reports. See op. cit. pp. 132-139.

the century and Marcel Duchamp in particular, took and exploited.[76] However, Klein's dada-like gesture takes place in the artistic context of the fifties during which the movements of tachisme, art informel and abstract expressionism reigned in Europe and in USA, respectively. These movements emphasized the gesture of the artist, incarnating her/his heroic genius and virility and expressing her/his utmost creativity, often in quite a pompous and grandiose setting[77] (fig. 8). As mentioned previously, Klein had explicitly professed his aversion towards these forms of art in which artists narcissistically indulge in exalting their own creative faculties. Thus, the empty gallery rooms in their pompous entrance setting, stand as a form of self-irony and derisive criticism to these forms of spectacular artistic selfhood and authorship.

This however is not intended to suggest that the void exhibition merely stands as a reaction against the predominant artistic currents of Klein's times. More importantly, it also carries positive meanings and significant considerations with regard to the role of the artist in creation, the artwork and its sensory perception and finally the artwork as a created

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[76] See Thierry de Duve, "Fais n'importe quoi" Au nom de l'art. Pour une archéologie de la modernité. (Paris: Minuit 1989), pp. 112, 113.

[77] See for example Georges Mathieu's public painting performances in big theaters or Hans Namuth's film on Jackson Pollock's drip paintings that presented Pollock as a dramatic and heroicized artistic genius, in Stich, op. cit. pp. 188, 189.

thing. In this void exhibition, as in the monochromes, the artist is given the most modest role possible. His/her celebrated hand, touch, craft and skill recede completely into the background. The artist rather merges with the audience in the sense that no sign of his craftsman's abilities or capacities are depicted in his work. Rather than creating an object, the artist simply appropriates the view of something given. The artwork, even if it is carefully planned as an idea by the artist, is not crafted. It is still a thing, a place that always existed but was never given artistic consideration before and Klein's proposal is precisely to pay to it, the attention we reserve to crafted artworks. Again, here, as in the monochromes, Klein's work is materially confounded and indefinable. Artistic creation is being replaced by a combination of a kind of rediscovery of the world and a theatrical depiction of aspects of it within a certain frame.[78] If in the monochromes the spectator's visual field becomes a battlefield between the impressions of surface and depth, here, the realm of visuality becomes altogether less important, as there is nothing new, unknown or unfamiliar proposed to the sight of the viewer. Rather, the gallery space, familiar to all in the artworld of Paris, is proposed for consideration, as an artwork entitled The Void. The audience is asked to consider the frame of artistic

[78] The similarity with dada and particularly with Marcel Duchamp's definition of readymade is evident here again. See de Duve, op. cit. pp. 112, 113.

presentation, the gallery space, as an artistic work equal to painted objects.

What Klein seems to suggest is that for something to be an artwork, no dependence upon materiality is required. In other words, the artwork need not be a material thing. It suffices if it is simply a thing, if we can assume that the broadest sense that could be given to this term does not exclusively depend on materiality. But the artwork need not be materially formed to represent some other thing, either. It does not need to be a solely representational object.

It is at the beginning of the nineteen fifties in Germany, that Martin Heidegger undertakes the same endeavor as Klein, namely to phenomenologically reconsider the thing. His objective is to propose a new, broader than hitherto, way of understanding the thing. New, however, does not mean original or appearing for the first time. On the contrary, the striking novelty and originality of Heidegger's considerations around the thing, lies in the fact that they are retrievals of the most ancient and primordial meanings delimiting this term. It is precisely because these meanings have fallen into oblivion that all things are in danger nowadays. New technologies having at the forefront the atomic and nuclear arms threaten the very existence of all things as they threaten all life on earth. Dependent upon an equally ancient understanding of things, going back to Kant, Aristotle and Plato, these new technologies reduce things to their purported properties:

material objecthood, susceptibility to representation, form, presence, outward appearance and independence.[79] These aspects of all things may be valid and correct but can never by themselves, adequately define them. Heidegger gives the example of the jug, an example that has been repeatedly employed in the history of philosophy by Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and others. Through this example he suggests that besides aspects or properties such as material objecthood, susceptibility to representation, form, presence and the like mentioned before, one must also consider the void that the jug contains or shapes, in order to understand the jug as a thing. The void's consideration is not however simply one more aspect of the thing among all others. As much as the void becomes essential for all things, it resists, at the same time, all understanding that seeks to reduce it to an aspect or a simple property.

> The jug is a thing as a vessel-it can hold something.(...)The jug's thingness resides in its being *qua* vessel. We become aware of the vessel's holding nature when we fill the jug.(...) The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel. (...) The jug's void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.[80]

The importance of the void as "empty space," as the "nothing

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[79] See Martin Heidegger's lecture "The Thing" pronounced in 1950 and published in 1951 in Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

[80] Ibid. pp. 168, 169.

of the jug," and as the "void that holds" is radical here. The void becomes determined in a way equivalent to the absence which "is not nothing"[81] or to Being which, according to Heidegger, "is never the merely precisely actual..."[82]

Heidegger gives a priority to the invisible and intangible aspects of the thing, precisely because they are the aspects that science, being inherently representational and thereby restricted to the visible, has never dared to confront. Science, trapped as it is in exactitude, often misses truth.

The consequences of this Heideggerian point of view are at least double. First, things cannot be considered separately from "the region" or the world to which they belong and thus can never be solely objects.[83] Second, in order to safeguard things in a world that menaces them with nuclear or any other

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[81] The fascination with the "not nothing" is something that Heidegger shares with many of his contemporaries. Some ten years later than Heidegger's lecture, Maurice Merleau-Ponty was writing about "...a certain absence, a negativity which is not nothing..."("...une certaine absence, une négativité qui n'est pas rien...") as the ideas' "carnal texture" ("texture charnelle"). See "L'entrelacs-le chiasme" Le visible et l'invisible. Texte ét. par Claude Léfort, (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), translations are the writer's, pp. 197, 198. Likewise, Jacques Lacan in 1964 refered to his idea of the "not nothing" in order to conclude his famous lecture "Tyché and Automaton" in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 64. Through this term, "not nothing," Lacan characterized in a psychoanalytic manner, the content of man's relation to the world, or knowledge.

[82] See Heidegger, his Epilogue, "A Letter to a Young Student," op. cit. p. 184.

[83] Ibid. p. 181.

extinction, thinking has to confront the world, go back to it, in the phenomenological sense. This, however, cannot be simply done by a "mere shift of attitude" but requires correcting representational thinking and taking responsibility against the world and our memory.[84]

Like Heidegger, Klein was engaged in a similar endeavor to partially divorce the artwork from its representational status, not in order to make it devoid of any meaning, as some have argued,[85] but in order to restitute to the artwork its crux, more specifically its aura, which representational artistic practice had suppressed. This crux, art's aura as we have analyzed before, Klein named pictorial sensibility. Several of Klein's critics have correctly identified in his work a revival of a dada or Duchampian gesture[86] but to the extent that they saw this as a mere revival and failed to identify the strategy and the different ends to which this revival was put to work, they have missed the crux of Klein's work. For, if the dadaist gestures or Duchamp's paradoxes at the beginning of the twentieth century, generally aimed to upset the traditional art viewer's expectations in order to

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[84] Ibid.

[85] See Jean Clair's verdict in his Considérations sur l'état des Beaux-Arts, Critique de la Modernité. (Paris: Gallimard 1983), p. 19, that Yves Klein's artworks and in particular the monochromes, lack any aesthetic dimension and thus deserve neither our attention, nor our effort of comprehension.

[86] See De Duve, Cousus de fil d'or. op. cit. p. 59 and Lucy Lippard, op. cit. p. 61.

disenchant and transcend art, Klein was engaged in exactly the opposite procedure.[87] Hence, on the one hand, his artworks employ the shock-effect in order to assist the viewer surmount the merely representational level, his prejudices and expectations about what she/he is going to see. On the other hand, Klein's task is to make explicit the invisible pictorial sensibility operative in every artwork. Pictorial sensibility is the condition upon which the artwork bases its birth, existence, effect and reception. The artist is the one who frees pictorial sensibility by settling it in a form. The result of freeing pictorial sensibility produces the artistic form. In no way did Klein attempt to transcend and disenchant art as dada and Duchamp did. As his void exhibition should indeed be associated with Marcel Duchamp's happily paradoxical 1919 *Bottle of 50 cc of Paris Air* (Fig. 9), the void exhibition differed by attempting to explore new artistic forms in order to restitute to art its pictorial sensibility, aura and power of enchantment. For all pictorial sensibility, aura and power of enchantment, art's traits for a long time before the twentieth century, were seriously compromised during this century's prewar avant-garde conceptual

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[87] Klein is reported saying "Having rejected nothingness I discovered the void." See Yves Klein, "The Chelsea Manifesto" op. cit. p. 19. It is also noteworthy that at least some of the audience during the opening night, saw Klein's installation as extremely telling and meaningful rather than meaningless. Albert Camus was reported writing on the comment book of the exhibition the following phrase: "Avec le vide les pleins pouvoirs" (With the void, full empowerment), reported and trans. by Stich, op. cit. p. 140.

experiments.

Hence, the void stands for all the immaterial aspects of visual art, all that is being brought forth without necessarily becoming visible. Attempting to break from the exclusive dependence upon material media, Klein placed the emphasis in his void installation, in this "bringing forth," which can be said to characterize art since its very inception. Klein showed that apart from all art-historical or aesthetic definitions about what art might be, there is also this "bringing forth" which ought to be taken under consideration, in front of every artefact, even of the most nominal nature, as his own installation. Thus, besides being a material craft, art, is here revealed to be a "bringing forth," a manner of disclosure. Heidegger again was that thinker that at the beginning of nineteen fifties, attempted to make the same shift of emphasis as Klein, by adopting an extremely broad conception of art under the auspices of *poiesis*, while defining the latter, via Plato, as a "bringing forth," as a *hervorbringen*.[88] But defined this way, artistic creation is not the sole privilege of the artist but rather belongs to all people alike. This is also the reason why Klein

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[88] See Martin Heidegger's several definitions of *poiesis* in "The Question Concerning Technology" Basic Writings. David Farrell Krell ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 293, 294, 302, 306, 311, 315, 316. The one definition we place emphasis here is on p. 293. Heidegger's conception of *poiesis* is of course not limited to the art of verse but is on the contrary so broad as to include fine arts under its scope. See p. 315, in particular.

refers less to art than to pictorial sensibility.

Besides the exhibition The Void, Klein experimented in other ways with this idea of a certain nothingness which always had in one or another way, a predominant place among his preoccupations, in order to explore and reveal the immaterial aspects of art.

In a work that should be considered together with Duchamp's Tzchank Check (1919), Klein created the Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility (1959-1962) where he proposed to sell invisible and indefinite local regions, supposedly impregnated with pictorial sensibility, for pieces of gold, part of which he subsequently arranged to ritualistically throw to the Seine river of Paris (fig. 10, 11). Klein used the remaining gold for his monogold canvases. Upon completion of the gold payment, the client received a receipt printed by Klein's gallery to look like a bank note, with IKB insignia and the gallery's stamp, which he needed to eventually burn if he "really" wanted to "acquire" the "work."[89] The proximity with Duchamp's positions is clear: like in Duchamp, the gesture of the artist and the idea that underlies it, become the determinate features of the artwork. The nominalist aspect in both Klein's and Duchamp's works renders conspicuous the system of values and the institutions that each time decide what is qualified to be art and what not. But, by putting the emphasis on pictorial sensibility, on ritual and on sacrifice

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[89] See Millet, op. cit. p. 48.

through the destruction of all elements of the transaction,[90] Klein aims at re-enacting and reinforcing the psychic investment that the spectator bears with the artwork, which in this case is nothing but a part of the world itself. Thus, Klein's specific work is much in contrast to Duchamp's Tzchank Check with which the latter seems not interested in positively redirecting the aporias and paradoxes of the viewer's encounter with his art.

In a different work which had the character of a performance, *The Leap into the Void* (1960) (Fig. 12), Klein attempted to exploit the void in order to restore faith in art's promise of the impossible. The Leap into the Void was conducted in front of a small group of people and consisted of Klein's repeated attempts to have himself photographed in the air after jumping from the second floor of his art dealer's Parisian suburb residence.[91] Klein had secured his landing on a firefighter rescue net that his friends held underneath Colette Allendy's second floor. The artist's professed intention was to fly and levitate and he planned to use the photograph as evidence of his accomplishment. The performance at Colette Allendy's residence would subsequently be a reference for several body artists like Chris Burden, Vito Acconci and others. As Juan José Lahuerta has brilliantly

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[90] For a detailed description of all the ritualistic and sacrificial aspects involved in this work see Stich, op. cit. pp. 155, 156.

[91] See Stich, op. cit. pp. 217-221.

argued in his analysis of the event, this performance is telling for the nature of artistic truth and in particular for the nature of photographic truth.[92] Klein's photograph, capturing the artist the very moment he is on the air, reveals how photography isolates the instant of reality, cannot depict the duration and consequently misguides its viewers about the real. Lahuerta points out ancient, medieval and more recent religious paintings of Christ on the cross, always giving a dramatic depiction of the inescapable destiny of all humans, their continual and irrevocable pull by earth's gravity until, the final pull, representing their death. Klein's photograph on the other hand, showed himself jumping from the balcony and assuming in the air a position like Christ's with his arms wide open but contrary to Christ with his head tilted towards the sky. This desperate last effort to resist falling, manifests art's promise to defeat gravity and death. The idea that the artistic promise for eternity, a promise of the impossible, ought to materialize, at least in its first stages, in the experience of levitation fascinated not only Klein but also artists as different as Vladimir Tatlin and Leonardo da Vintzi. Klein retouched and altered the photographic document of his "flight into space" and some time later even admitted it in public, although this retouching had

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[92] See Juan José Lahuerta, "C'est le peintre!" in 3%U Revista d'Arquitectura Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona, número 2, Gener 1994, special issue on Yves Klein, pp. 125-129.

already been obvious by the fact that the photograph had circulated in two manifestly different copies (Fig. 13). But not only this retouching but also the entire event shows precisely the element of manipulation of reality which is always at work behind the seemingly most innocent, honest, naturalistic and strictly representational of all visual arts, photography. Through the manipulation of reality, art manages to promise what no other human activity can, namely the impossible.

In all of these installations and performances concerning the void, Klein attempted to prove that the void is not empty matter and is not about nothing. Klein employed the void in a way that shifted the emphasis from the material, visible and representable to the immaterial, invisible and non-representable aspects of art. These immaterial, invisible and non-representable aspects, Klein contained in the term, pictorial sensibility, the crux as well as the promise of all art.

III. The Community of Flesh and Yves Klein's *Anthropometry* Paintings

Klein once used color to experiment with a kind of painting reduced to its purported inessential elements and a second time, the void, to emphasize painting's immaterial, invisible and non representable aspects. In the *Anthropometry* paintings, during the last phase of his brief career, Klein

enhanced his experimentations by exploring the theatrical, ritual and performing aspects of painting as well as painting's relation to the body and the world.

The first *Anthropometry* painting dates from 1958,[93] but Klein started systematically producing and presenting this kind of work only in the 1960's. *Anthropometry* paintings were usually produced in public and consisted of nude, most often female models applying to their bodies blue paint and imprinting themselves once or several times on floor or wall mounted white canvases (Fig. 14, 15, 16). The imprints of the models left and dried on the canvas, constituted then the *Anthropometry* paintings (Fig. 17). The most famous among these works as well as the best documented, were the series produced during an official performance in front of an artworld audience of approximately a hundred persons, at the *Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain* in Paris, March 9, 1960. The entire event was simply supervised by Klein who wore a black-tie costume and was accompanied by a small orchestra that performed his single pitch *Monotone Symphony*.[94]

Given that among the central preoccupations of Klein was to paint a canvas, the final task here was, again, like in the monochromes, to create paintings in spite of the fact that this task was pursued in the most unconventional manner.

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[93] At Robert Godet's residence in Paris during a private party on June 5. See Stich, op. cit. pp. 171, 172.

[94] See Stich, op. cit. pp. 171-191.

However, until the final task, the process of painting became part of the artwork and thus acquired no less an importance than the end result of it. The public attended the execution of a painting taking place at a certain duration, in a certain public place. Thus, painting became a theatrical event, a time and space specific performance and the canvas became the "witness," carrying the traces of this event on its surface, in exactly the same way as the spectator carried the traces of the event in her/his memory. Therefore, the canvas ceased to be the privileged place of the act of painting. The testimony of the artistic event it offered, became equal to the spectator's. The art of painting became the act of painting and exceeded its representation on the canvas: under the intensity of Klein's monotone symphony, augmenting for the viewer the dramatic effect of the event, painting became a performance which united several media together like theater, dance and music.[95]

Not only the art and act of painting exceeded their canvas's representation but they also exceeded by far their author, since Klein only supervised the event without interfering manually or in any other physical way. Except for the artist's physical presence at the event, Klein did not interfere otherwise. Dressed like his spectators, in a formal

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[95] Uniting several media together would soon become a very important tendency in the nineteen sixties. See Dick Higgins, "Intermedia" The Something Else Newsletter. Vol. 1, number 1, February 1966.

evening costume, his only difference with them was the more conspicuous place he occupied in the center of the event's unfolding. His implication in the event, apart from the fact that he conceived and designed it, remained minimal.[96]

Klein also used blue paint in the *Anthropometry* series, as in the majority of the rest of his work. Now, his brushes became the models themselves.[97] As Catherine Millet reports, the female model in the history of modern portraiture and art, frequently offered the pretext for several attacks on figurative painting.[98] From Pablo Picasso's notorious, happily distorted portraits of his several companions and wifes until Marcel Duchamp's moustached Mona Lisa, Willem de Kooning's monstrous lady portraits or Jean Dubuffet's caricatures, the actual traits of female models on the canvas of their representation have been suffering a constant "aggression."

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[96] Klein took great pride in the fact of his non-intervention during the *Anthropometry* paintings. See his statements in Yves Klein, 1928-1962, Selected Writings. op. cit. p. 55. However, there are certain testimonies that in some *Anthropometry* paintings, particularly in those that he executed in private apartments, in front of a limited audience, Klein intervened more actively by applying by himself, the paint on the body of the model.

[97] Catherine Millet in her excellent analysis of Klein's work remarks how the *Anthropometry* paintings install a series of substitutions where nobody has the place he used to have in the past. The spectator occupies the place of the model and the model the place of the painter. One could continue in the same vain and say that the painter occupies the place of the spectator, etc. See Millet, op. cit. p. 70.

[98] Ibid. pp. 74, 75

Klein would change the role which seems to have been traditionally held by the female model in modern art. On the one hand, in his *Anthropometries* it is the female models themselves, who produce the imprint of the paint spread on their bodies, on the canvas, thus giving the initial impression of occupying the role of the "aggressor" against the canvas, the artist's everlasting privileged domaine of action. On the other hand, it is via the models' imprint again that the fundamental conditions of artistic representation are violated. The essential prohibitions regarding the use of the imprint are among the ancient conditions of painting. The imprint is considered to go against the painter's very profession and skill[99] because it is a technique of copying rather than mimiquing the original form, depicted in painting. With its "excessive realism" and "direct passage from one material to the other," the imprint destroys the ideals of classic theory of art as it goes systematically against all its parameters, namely against "idea, design, invention,

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[99] See Georges Didi-Huberman, "Figée à son insu dans un moule magique...Anachronisme du moulage, histoire de la sculpture, archéologie de la modernité" Les cahiers du musée national d'art moderne 54, Hiver 1995, (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1995), pp. 81-113. Didi-Huberman is well known about his research on the imprint and has written extensively on its paradoxical role and use in art history. This essay which gives a good synopsis of the essential aspects of his approach to the imprint, reports how the imprint has a multifarious and paradoxical relation to death. See his most extensive work on the imprint, which is also a catalogue for the exhibition he organized at Center Pompidou of Paris, France. Its title is L'empreinte. Exh. cat. (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1997).

imitation, distance, opticality and mediation."[100] And yet artists have always been using or appropriating the imprint one way or another, in their paintings, despite the essential prohibition associated with it.[101]

In the *Anthropometry* paintings the imprints of the female bodies are often unrecognizable due to consecutive imprints applied by the same model, one on top of the other, on the same canvas. In these cases, the *Anthropometry* paintings appear as abstract configurations of brushstrokes. In most cases however, the single application of the body on the canvas creates an imprint which naturally depicts the body areas which are most voluminous and pronounced: the models' trunk, thighs and breast. These blue imprints on the canvas make apparent the fact that they concern bodies and yet, lacking the lower part of legs, feet, hands and head, they are, in their ensemble, hardly anthropomorphic or figurative. This is especially so for someone that is not aware of the procedure through which these imprints were made. Judged from an anthropomorphic or figurative point of view and as the blue paint in all *Anthropometries* is not homogeneously applied but rather naturally follows the minutest curves and forms of the body, the blue imprints, at times, vaguely suggest bodies on

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[100] When Didi-Huberman refers to classical theory of art he has Erwin Panofsky in mind. The translation from French is the writer's. Ibid. p. 84.

[101] Ibid. Didi-Huberman associates the imprint with the readymade. Ibid. p. 86.

the canvas. Their viewer can be sure of this impression when the *Anthropometries* are being given as titles the names of the female models that assisted their production. However, the largest number of *Anthropometries* were left untitled. It seems quite a paradox how Klein uses a technique whose ancient default has always been "too close resemblance" in a manner that goes against this default, to produce relatively non resemblant to the original model, outcomes. While in the monochromes he used abstract techniques to simulate classical effects, in the *Anthropometries* he employs classical techniques to simulate abstract results.

This first paradox is followed by a second, concerning Klein's use of the main core of the body for the imprint. So far, imprints concerned hands, feet or heads, either for purposes of artistic study (consider August Rodin's case for example) or for eternalizing the facial features or hands of a great personality (the funeral masks, the imprints of artists' hands). Imprints were also used to simply trace the itinerary of someone through his/her footprints or to check her/his identity through fingerprints. Klein excludes precisely those bodily organs-heads, feet, hands, fingers-that had been used for imprints in the past. He rather produces imprints with the main body parts, the torso, the breast, the stomach and the thighs.

The artist's statements do not help to solve these paradoxes; for him the *Anthropometries* mean "la résurrection

de la chair."[102] Klein goes on to add that "Bien sûr, tout le corps est constitué de la chair, mais la masse essentielle, c'est le tronc et les cuisses. C'est là où se trouve l'univers réel caché par l'univers de la perception."[103]

Yet, it is neither the techniques' employment by Klein nor his means or words that are paradoxical. Klein's *Anthropometries* rather manifest and operate under the logic of perception, which according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty is, by definition, paradoxical:

> Perception is paradoxical. The perceived thing itself is paradoxical; it exists in so far as someone can perceive it. I cannot even for an instant imagine an object in itself. As Berkeley said, if I attempt to imagine some place in the world which has never been seen, the very fact that I imagine it makes me present at that place. I thus cannot conceive a perceptible place in which I am not myself present. But even the places in which I find myself are never completely given to me; the things which I see are things for me only under the condition that they always recede beyond their immediately given aspects. Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence because it always contains something more than what is actually given. And these two elements of perception are not, properly speaking, contradictory. For if we reflect on this notion of perspective, if we reproduce the perceptual experience in our thought, we see that the kind of evidence proper to the perceived, the appearance of "something," requires both this

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[102] "The resurrection of the flesh," translation of the writer, see Millet, op. cit. p. 60.

[103] "Of course, the entire body is composed by flesh, but the essential mass is the trunk and the thighs. There, is found the real universe, concealed by the universe of perception." Translation is the writer's. Ibid.

presence and this absence.[104]

Perception according to Merleau-Ponty is exemplary in painting. Contrary to science, art "lives in things," "comes face to face with the world," issues from the "there is," "the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body."[105] "Art and especially painting draws upon this fabric of brute meaning which activism [or operationalism] would prefer to ignore. Art and only art does so in full innocence."[106]

Thus, in the *Anthropometries* the apparent confusion and blending among painter, model, audience and work of art, the artist's studio and the exhibition space, the fact that the one takes the place of the other, render explicit the rules that mark all perception. In this blending, Klein makes explicit the fact that the work of art exists in so far it becomes imbued with human presence. In coming to contact with the world, humans perceive not only the world but also themselves, through the imprint their presence leaves on this world. In other words, coming to contact with the world means not only defining the limits that separate me from this world but also blurring these limits, becoming one with the world,

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[104] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences" The Primacy of Perception. Trans. James Eddie, (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 16.

[105] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind" Trans. Carleton Dallery, ibid. pp. 159, 160.

[106] Ibid.

becoming lost in it. Finally, coming to contact with the world means that all humans discover in reprospect how they have always been implied in the world, even in those moments when the world seemed most external to them. The very moment they achieve such a realization they also understand how they are still one with the world even at the very moment they pronounce "I" with the greatest certainty. Being one with the world, being fashioned by it and yet being also separate from it, the self as presence and absence, Rimbaud's "I" as also some other, these all are alternative formulations of the same paradox.[107]

Klein puts at work this paradox of perception in his *Anthropometries*. The female models' blue body imprints on the canvas offer the image of distorted bodies and suggest that even the most elementary artistic commerce with the world generates novel forms of self and of the world which are all familiar while at the same time, highly unrecognizeable. No other artistic procedure than the imprint can be more elementary, no representation simpler.[108] Nevertheless, the form that the imprint generates, the very copy of the female model, is one in which the model is unrecognizeable. Art

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[107] In "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences" Merleau-Ponty refers to contradiction as "the very condition of consciousness" in The Primacy of Perception. op. cit. pp. 19, 26. See also in the same text his remarks on Arthur Rimbaud, p. 41.

[108] Didi-Huberman relates the imprint to the readymade. See ibid. p. 86.

captures the mystery of passivity at the center of human activity. Humans lack total control not only over their acts but also and perhaps more primarily over themselves. Their daily activity to support and regenerate themselves inevitably has the side effect of regenerating them as others. The work of art has always been deemed to be, apart from a window to the exterior world, a mirror of humanity, the mirror-image of self. In view however of the above, it is more than a mirror of the self. It is also a mirror of the other.[109] Thus in artistic creation as much as in perception, the self mingles with the other.

What precisely allows the mingling between self and other is what the world has in common with me, my body. The body is the locus of passivity and activity and the provenance of the paradox of perception: for every time that I perceive, "a blending of some sort"[110] takes place. This blending of the

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[109] Jacques Lacan has described in a magnificent way the fundamental condition of humanity in scission in his famous essay "Le stade du miroir comme fondateur de la fonction du Je" Ecrits I. (Paris: Seuil 1966), pp. 89-97. This text was translated to English as "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanlytic Experience" in Ecrits, by Alan Sheridan, (New York and London: W.W.W. Norton & Company, 1977). It largely inspired this analysis and echoes in it. The issue how the active and perceptive consciousness presents a fatal side or enacts a death drive, dissolving itself in the world which it tries to conquer, is as much fundamental as perplexing and fascinating and could form a point of departure to examine the relation between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty.

[110] "Eye and Mind" op. cit. p. 163. See also the definition of perception at "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences" op, cit. p. 42: "To perceive is to render oneself present to something through the body."

body with the world, produces perception and is produced by it.[111] If art is the privileged realm of perception, the realm where all the rules of perception are most conspicuously revealed, it is by "lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings."[112] Every artwork is consequently a result of this "lending," a stage in the process of perception, a momentary testimony of the commerce with the world which takes place in and through my body. Therefore the artwork's value does not derive from its material form, conceived as a matrix of fixed meanings, but rather stems from the process of perception which this material form traces and to which it testifies.[113]

In his late work, Merleau-Ponty elaborated further the "blending" with the world taking place in perception, in terms

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[111] "Mon corps modèle des choses et les choses modèle de mon corps." ("My body as a model of things and things as model of my body" translation is the writer's). See the footnote in the essay "L'entrelacs-le chiasme" Le visible et l'invisible. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 173.

[112] "Eye and Mind" op. cit. p. 162.

[113] It is obvious from what has been so far said that perception and its subject occur in time, constantly, in the course of life, and not once and for all. Merleau-Ponty characteristically states:

> Perceived things like geometrical objects are open inexhaustible systems which we recognize through a certain style of development although we are never able to explore them entirely and even though they never give us more than profiles and perspectival views of themselves...the perceiving subject undergoes a continued birth; at each instant is something new.

See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of his Work" The Primacy of Perception. Trans. Arleen B. Dallery, op. cit. pp. 5, 6.

of the "flesh." The flesh is the meeting point between the world and consciousness or the "carnal being," *l'être charnel*, another term Merleau-Ponty has to refer to consciousness.[114] The imprints of the female models' bodies on the *Anthropometry* canvases can, under a first approach, be understood in a literal manner, as illustrating that the relation between the world and consciousness or the work of art and the artist, occurs through the flesh. At a second stage, however, the role of flesh acquires an even greater pertinence. For as the imprints of the female bodies on the canvases cannot be easily attributed to their original models, and yet suggest some bodies or at least a human presence, they become empty signs ready to host and reflect in them the presence of their onlooker. The *Anthropometry* imprints, then, become "indexial signs," because "their meaning depends on the existential presence of a given speaker [or viewer]."[115] The viewer is

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[114] For Merleau-Ponty's quite elaborate and perplexing definitions of flesh, consciousness and carnal being see "L'entrelacs-le chiasme," op. cit. pp. 175, 178, 179, 182, 186, 187, 192, 193, 194.

[115] Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1" The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), p. 198. Krauss' analyses of that type of signs which she call s indexial depends of course on Peirce and is very pertinent to apply in the case of Klein's use of the imprint. According to her views:

> As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are the marks or the traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify. Into the category of the index we would place physical traces (like footprints), medical symptoms, or the actual referents of

precisely allowed to identify with the *Anthropometry* imprints because the imprints represent the core of the body and not a fragment, like the head or the hands which besides their small size, are too personal parts of one's body. The body fragments such as hands, head, feet, fingers are used to distinguish one human from the other, whereas the main core of the body is what humans share in common. Thus, the main body core is anonymous and it largely remained in the state of anonymity and negligence through the centuries of art history. However, as anonymous, the main body core reveals most, the locus of flesh that all humans have in common. Klein's remarks on his use of the body mass, which constitutes our meeting point with the world, may seem hermetic at a first reading, but prove to be quite accurate for an understanding of his *Anthropometries*.

As "things have an internal equivalent in me,"[116] and I also and simultaneously, belong to the things outside myself on the basis of an "embodied reason,"[117] communication and intersubjectivity is possible. It is precisely this incarnate intersubjectivity and communication that the *Anthropometries* propose to their viewer. Painting has far too long been conceived to be operative in a solipsistic dual, having on one

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the shifters.

[116] See "Eye and Mind" op. cit. p. 164.

[117] Expression appropriated from Merleau-Ponty's "disembodied reason" when he writes about seeking communication with others. See "The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences" op. cit. p. 26.

side the artist and on the other the world. Klein brings forth and renders explicit the theatrical, ritual and performing aspects of painting, what connects painting and the painter to the world. The originality of painting is the view it proposes to the originary human passivity finding each time its locus in the community of flesh, "one single body in front of one single world," as Merleau-Ponty characteristically indicates.

> Ce qui veut dire que chaque vision monoculaire, chaque toucher par une seule main, tout en ayant son visible, son tactile, est liée à chaque autre toucher, de manière à faire avec eux l'expérience d'un seul corps devant un seul monde, par une possibilité de réversion, de reconversion de son langage dans le leur, de report et de renversement, selon laquelle le petit monde privé de chacun est, non pas juxtaposé à celui de tous les autres, mais entouré par lui, prélevé sur lui, et tous ensemble sont un Sentant en général devant un Sensible en général.[118]

Epilogue: The Phenomenology of Kitsch

In his brief career, Klein explored diverse notions of artistic space to reveal each time the several dimensions of

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[118] "L'entrelacs-le chiasme," op. cit. pp. 186, 187. My translation of the passage is:

> Which is to say that every single, one-sided vision, every touch by a single hand, while having its visibility and its tactility, it is related with every other vision, with every other touch, in a way that it experiences with them one single body in front of one single world, through a possibility of reversion, of reconversion of its language to their language, through a possibility of transfer and reversal, according to which the little private world of everyone is not juxtaposed to that of all others but rather surrounded by it, deduced in advance by it and all together are a general Feeling in front of a generally Perceptible world.

its production and finally its contingency.[119] In all cases examined, the monochromes, the void experiments and the *Anthropometries*, artistic space is neither the result of a designed idea, nor a logically derived system out of the artist's manual creation. Rather, artistic space is contingent, because it becomes materially indeterminate, conceptually presented and ultimately dependent upon the presence and response of the beholder, his/her bodily disposition, perception, existence and experience.

This having been said, it becomes less difficult to understand why Klein became vehemently despised by many and was simply disregarded as a charlatan. Klein's experiments, as the experiments of all great modern artists, anyway, bet to be art;[120] Klein draws the artistic conventions to such an extreme that the work he produces, oscillates between the artistic and non-artistic and finally makes it an issue for its viewer to decide for its status. But the viewer also must bet that what he/she witnesses is art because she/he is in no way in a position to know it. Klein's work disappoints quite easily the viewer whose predisposition is anchored in

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[119] See Thomas McEvilley's major Klein essay "Yves Klein, Conquistador of the Void" printed in 3ZU Revista d'Arquitectura, Número 2, gener 1994, which claims that Yves Klein was "a myth making artist" and refers to Roland Barthes who attributed to myth the task of making contingency appear eternal. McEvilley continues his analysis by maintaining that the appearance of eternity was reduced back to contingency, in Klein's work. See p. 97, in particular and pp. 98, 99.

[120] See Heller, op. cit. pp. 11-16, about the discussion of the wager and its importance for existence.

traditional and axiomatic notions about what is and what is not art.

Klein's work is very diverse and can be interpreted in many different ways. Yet all the different aspects of his work do have one thing in common, which concerns their presentation and which adds one more aspect in their contingency. Klein's work, almost always involved some pompous setting, decorum, spectacle or act. In the case of the monochromes, for example, the opening night at the gallery Iris Clert, on May 10, 1957 was marked by a blue balloon procession and on the invitations sent to the artworld were affixed blue stamps (See Fig. 18).[121] Likewise, in the void exhibition at Iris Clert, one year later, the public was startled to discover the gallery's exterior decorated with blue drapery, underneath which stood two republican guards in full uniform.[122] Finally, the *Anthropometry* paintings had a similar character of an official and pompous, private artistic ceremony the day of their first presentation to the public, at the *Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain*, in February 1960.[123] To the extent that all the paraphernalia with which Klein chose to accompany his artwork were perhaps showy, pretentious and superficial, to the extent that they were deemed as not really necessary to achieve the main core of his ends, they were indeed kitsch and

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[121] See Stich, op. cit. pp. 91, 91.

[122] Ibid. pp. 136, 137.

[123] Ibid. p. 173.

certainly manifested vestiges of bad taste of their author.[124] However, Klein seems not only to be aware of this bad taste but to point to a positive use of it in his work.[125] In more than one circumstances, he explicitly advocated the positive role of kitsch and gladly accepted the qualification of "kitsch" or "corny" for his work. His views are best resumed in one of his statements from "The Chelsea Manifesto": "At present I am particularly excited by 'bad taste.' I have the deep feeling that there exists in the very essence of bad taste a power capable of creating those things

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[124] Kitsch is here meant in its simplest definition, that of Clement Greenberg. Clement Greenberg was the art critic who defined kitsch as the central trait of "rear-garde," the opposite of avant-garde's genuine culture. Its main characteristic is the insensibility it promotes, its raw material is "the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture" and its experience is "vicarious" and is based on "faked sensation." In sum, kitsch is based on all that is "spurious in the life of our times." See his "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in op. cit. p. 10.

[125] The positive use of kitsch cannot in principle be excluded. Theodor Adorno wrote about kitsch as the "poison admixed to all art" and countered Greenberg's idea that kitsch is "the mere refuse of art." See his Aesthetic Theory. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 239. Finally, the analysis of Yves Hersant which is the most up to date reflection on kitsch, departing from the literary works and reflections of Hermann Broch and Milan Kundera, alludes to a possible positive use of kitsch, that he traces in Kundera's work The Unbearable Lightness of Being. See his "Milan Kundera: la légère pesanteur du kitsch" in Critique 450, Novembre 1984, pp. 877-887 and pp. 886-887, in particular. However, it is Yve-Alain Bois who, clearer than everybody else, points to a positive use of kitsch taking his examples from postwar visual art tendencies. Bois examines how such tendencies use kitsch as a strategy in order to foster anew artistic creation. See Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, "Kitsch" L'informe. Mode d'emploi. Exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996), p. 110.

situated far beyond what is traditionally termed 'the work of art.'"[126] Hence one might infer, as many critics did, that the kitsch aspect of his work's presentation compromised Klein's aspirations to liberate the production of artistic space from the constraints of logical systems and first formal principles. The otherwise extremely serious endeavors of his work are being moderated by the employment of kitsch.

Yet, the conflict among the several facets of Klein's work has already been identified as a strategy of his artistic practice. As a matter of fact, according to Nan Rosenthal, the practice of proposing to the viewer "...a range of alternative meanings shuttling between the idealistic and the cynical, the utopian and the conspicuously fraudulent, the ideal and the actual, the heroic image of the artist and its debunking..." is inscribed at the very center of Klein's work.[127] Rosenthal continues by maintaining that "his presentation of a range of alternative meanings" works so that "no one meaning may be settled upon as exclusively correct."[128] It would be indeed inconsequent for an artist like Klein, engaged in such antisystematic values and pursuits, to adhere to a systematic defense of whatever thesis. His exploitation of kitsch rather shows that his negation of formalism goes along with the negation of a notion of genuine culture which formalism

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[126] See Klein's "The Chelsea Manifesto" op. cit. p. 16.

[127] See Rosenthal op. cit. p. 92.

[128] Ibid. p. 97.

presupposes. Thus, according to Klein, the contrast between genuine and spurious culture, is also a contingent contrast. With a typically modern gesture, Klein revalues the domaine of the purported ingenuine culture, considers precisely what is supposedly improper material or subject matter for art and retrieves whatever powers are deposed therein, for positive creation. Furthermore, and most importantly, by "gladly" allowing kitsch to be infiltrated in his work, Klein makes explicit Adorno's view, that kitsch is always "the necessary poison" operating at the center of artistic activity, even when it is most vehemently exorcised from it, and perhaps most predominantly then. His typically modern gesture of espousing what was previously repressed is thus accompanied by a gesture questioning a certain self-conception of modernism as a pure and autonomous domaine of high culture.

Furthermore, Klein's employment of kitsch alongside the main core of his artistic pursuits, also reflects the philosophical state of affairs of his time, in France. For it was precisely in the nineteen fifties when phenomenology gained an immense popularity in the French intellectual circles. The readings of Husserl and Heidegger were, however, quite creative and the philosophical reception of German phenomenology was creatively understood or misunderstood, under the lenses of a reigning existentialism.[129] The result

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[129] See David Farrell Krell's discussion of the French reception of Heidegger in his introduction to Martin Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" in Heidegger's Basic

was an alleviation of the systematic aspects of phenomenology by the notion of human existence, so central in both Jean Paul Sartre's reading of Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl.[130] The notion of human existence and individuality was thought to be regulative of all systemic order rather than submitted to it. According to this Kierkegaardian point of view, human existence is only indirectly submitted to system. But the existentialist mistrust and criticism of systematicity that is also adopted here by Yves Klein, alongside a persistent exploration of artistic conventions is also communicated in an indirect manner. For Klein apparently did not aim at substituting one order with another, a systemic one with another non-systemic. His espousal of spurious culture, is therefore a supplement to his work implementing his free address to the viewer, an address to the viewer's freedom and in particular to his freedom of choice. This is how Klein chose to approach anew the art viewer, by challenging her/his individuality and by making him/her reflect anew on the world and his/her place therein.

For it is precisely the experience of paradox that art

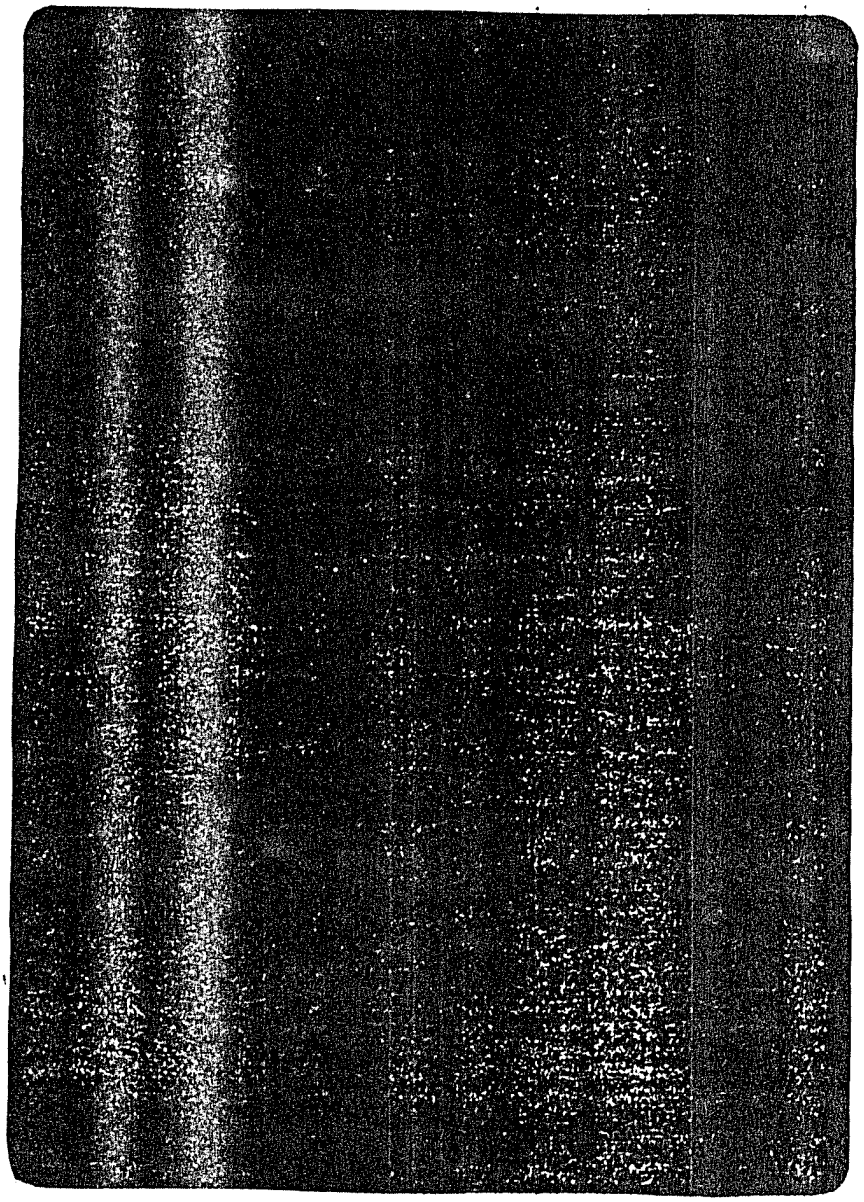
Writings. Ed. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), pp. 190-192.

[130] See Merleau-Ponty's essay "The Battle over Existentialism" resuming very well the way phenomenology is mixed with existentialism in both his views and the views of Jean Paul Sartre. In Sense and Non-Sense. op. cit. pp. 71-83, particularly pp. 71, 72.

has the power to convey to its viewer, that challenges the viewer's individuality, if individuality is the result of one's existential choice. Art's measure of authenticity then is the extent to which it accounts for the world, in which humans are immersed, revealing, every time, the paradoxes composing this world's actual state. Klein's artistic practices heralded an emmerging world after the shock of a world war and pointed from the standpoint of art but also, well beyond it, a way to face and cope with the historical contingency that marked this advent.

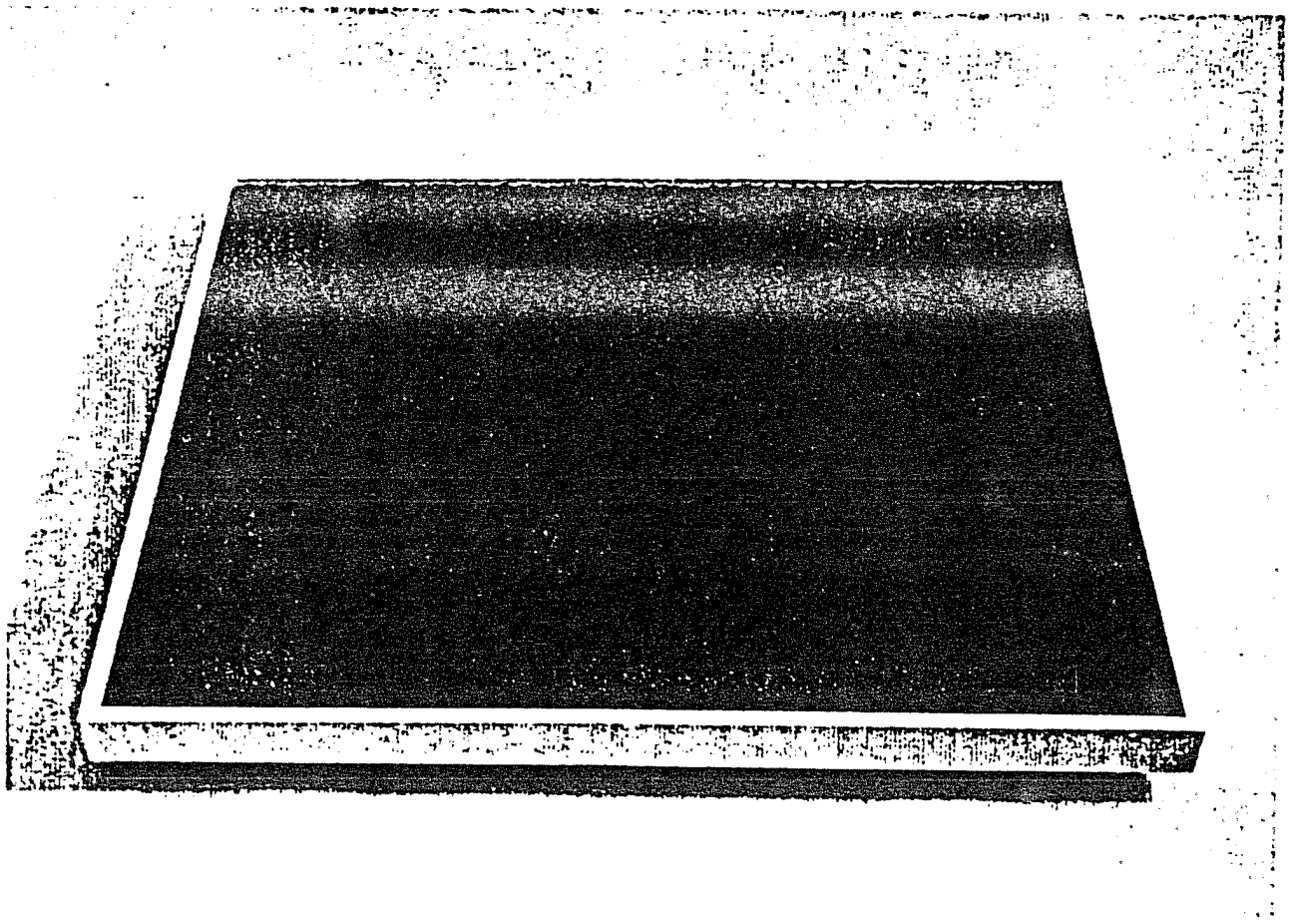
Yves Klein, 1961

Fig. 1



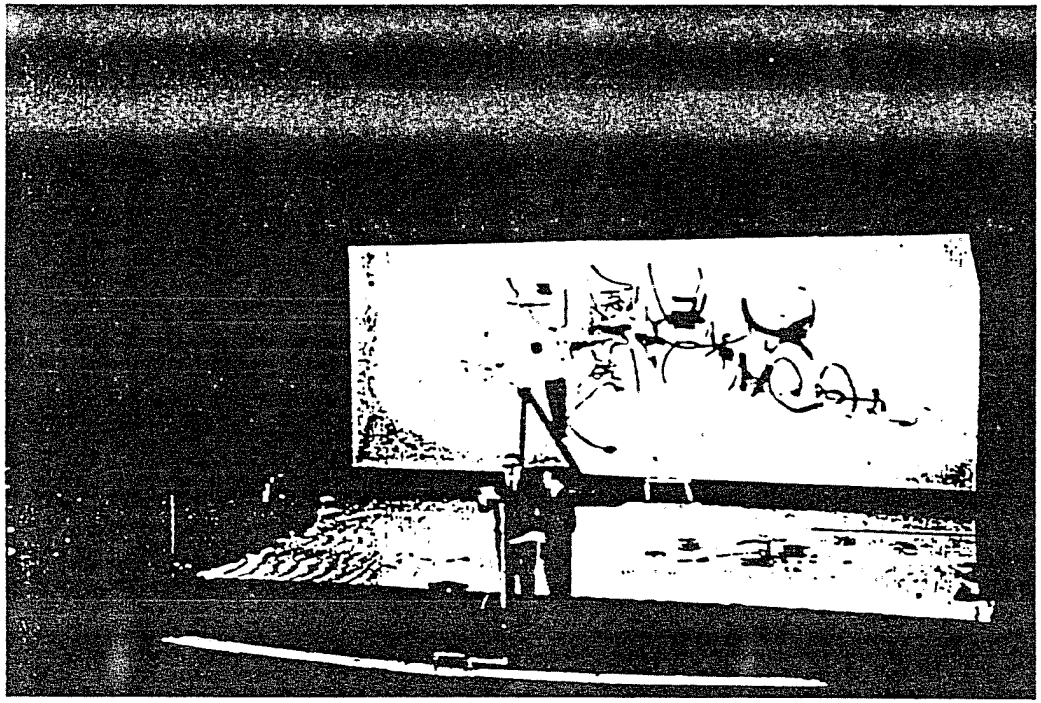
Untitled blue monochrome (IKB 193), 1957, 78 × 55.5 (30¾ × 21¾), private collection

Fig. 2



33. *Pigment pur bleu (Pure Blue Pigment)*, facsimile of 1957 and 1961 presentations of pure pigment

Fig. 3



Georges Mathieu,
creation of a 4 x 12 meter
(13 ft. 3 in. x 39 ft. 4 in.)
painting on the stage
of the Théâtre Sarah-
Bernhardt, Paris,
May 28, 1956

Fig. 4

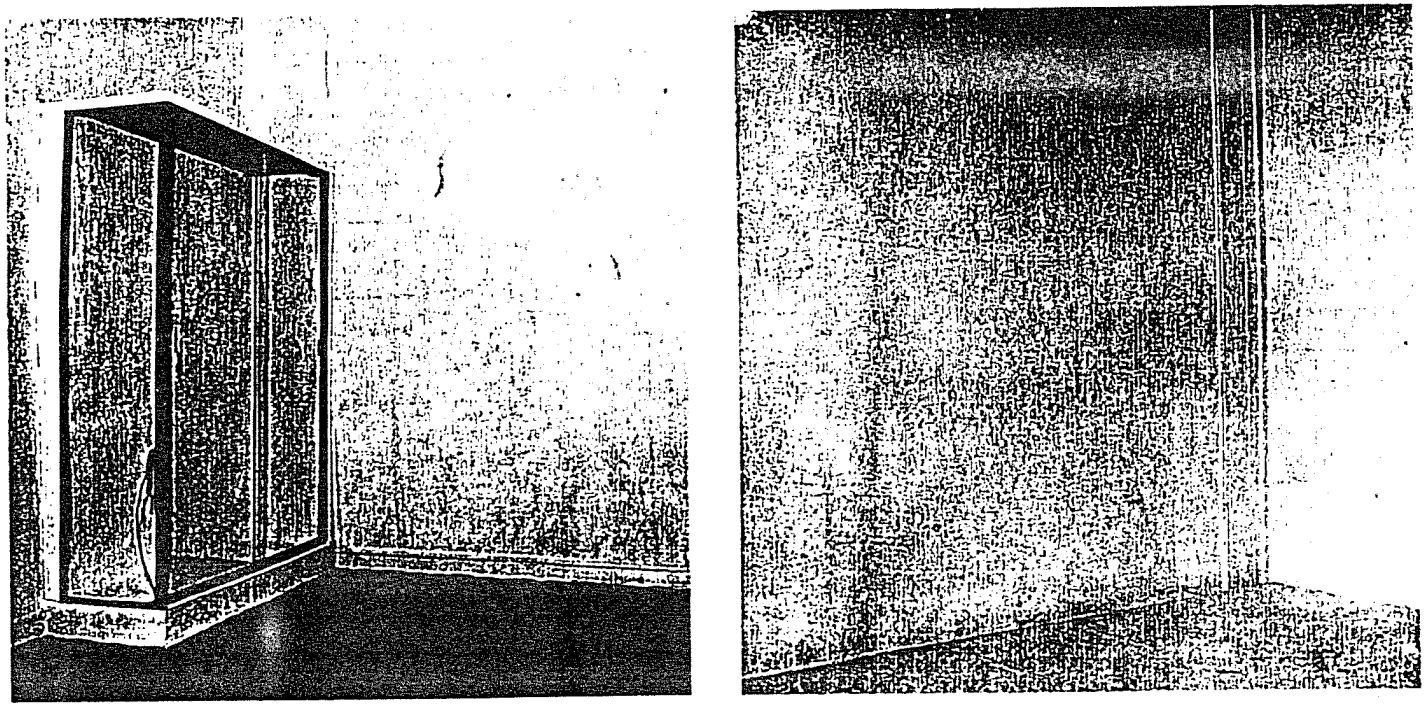


Fig. 5, Interior views of *Le vide*, Galerie Iris Clert, Paris 1958

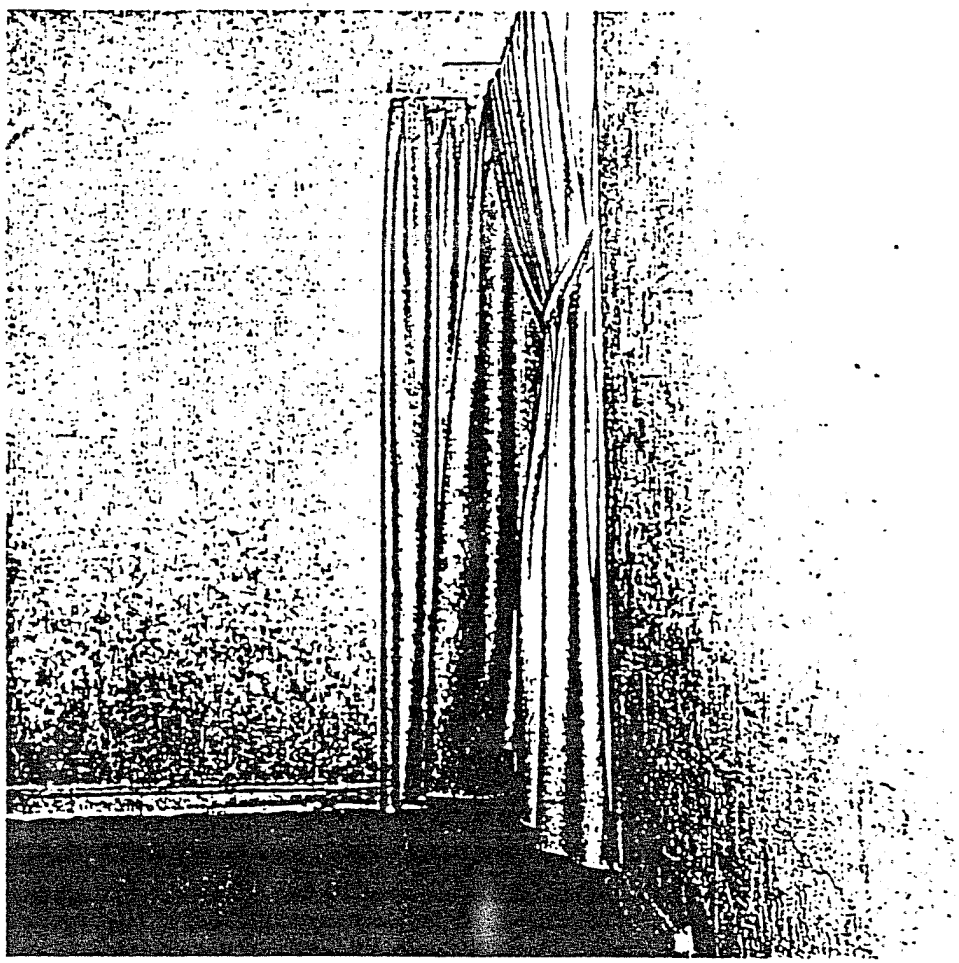
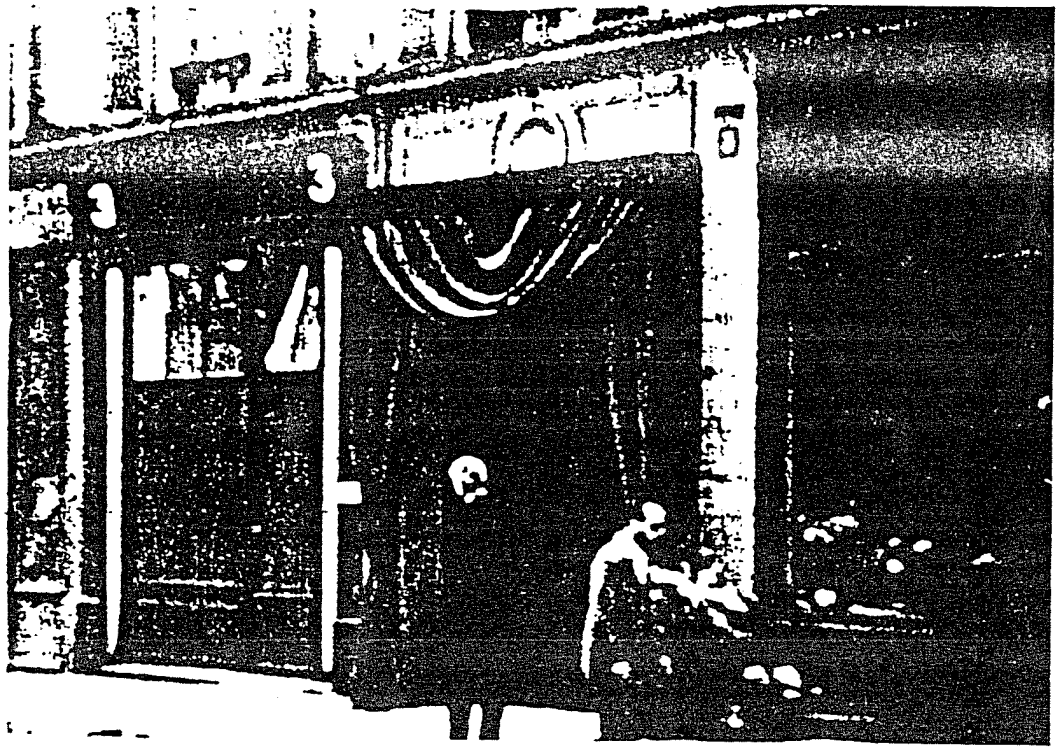


Fig. 6

Le vide,
interior views of
Yves Klein exhibition at
Galerie Iris Clert, Paris,
April 28-May 12, 1958;
entry doorway covered
with white curtains,
empty vitrine, and
whitened room



Le vide,
exterior view of
Yves Klein exhibition at
Galerie Iris Clert, Paris,
April 28-May 12, 1958;
windows painted blue
and blue drapery hung
around the carriage
doorway that served as
a grand entrance

Fig. 7

Hans Namuth,
photograph of
Jackson Pollock
in the process
of creating a
drip painting, 1950

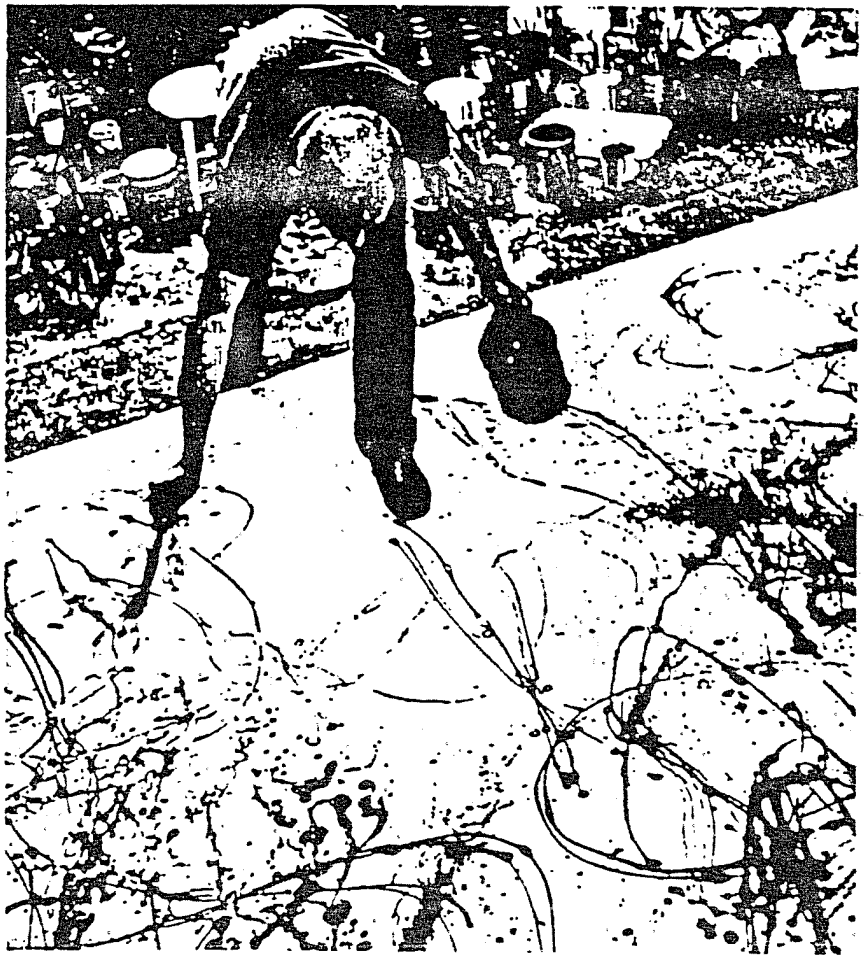


Fig. 8

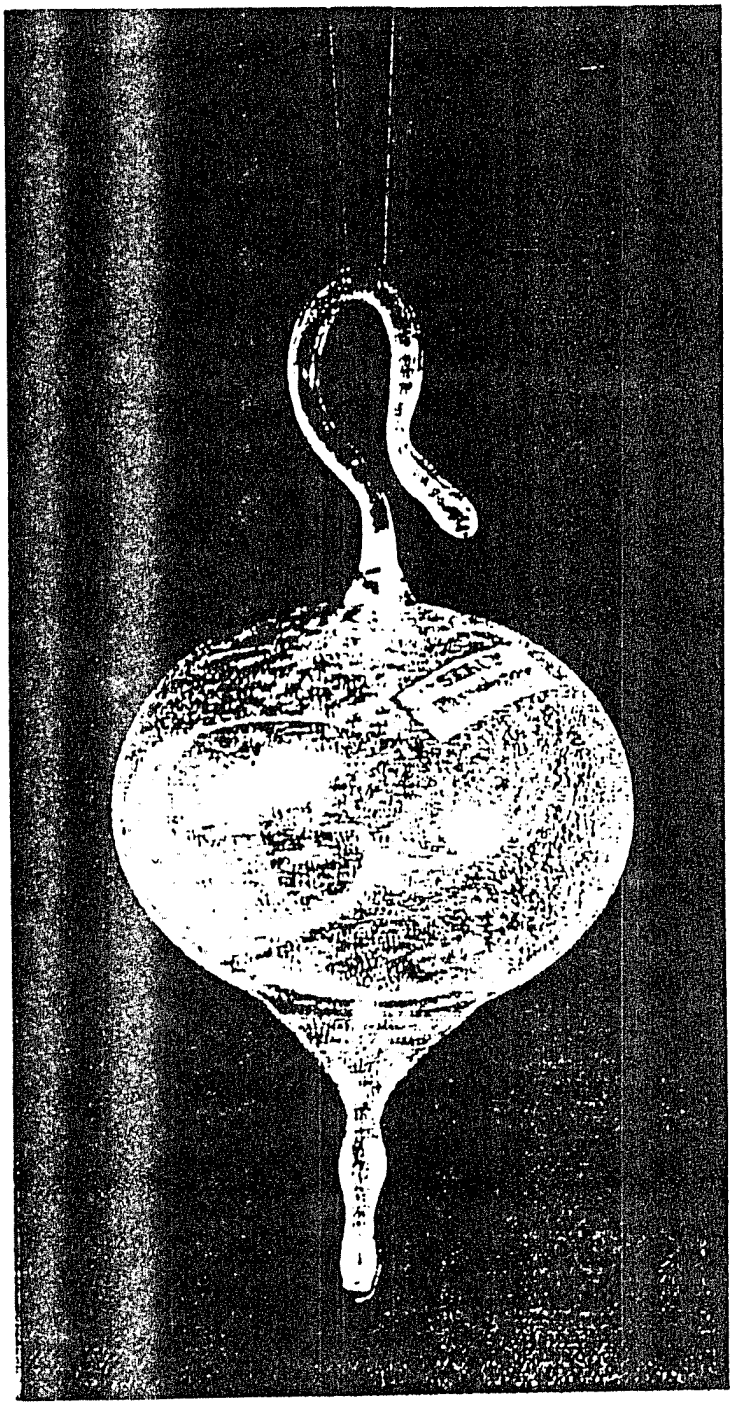
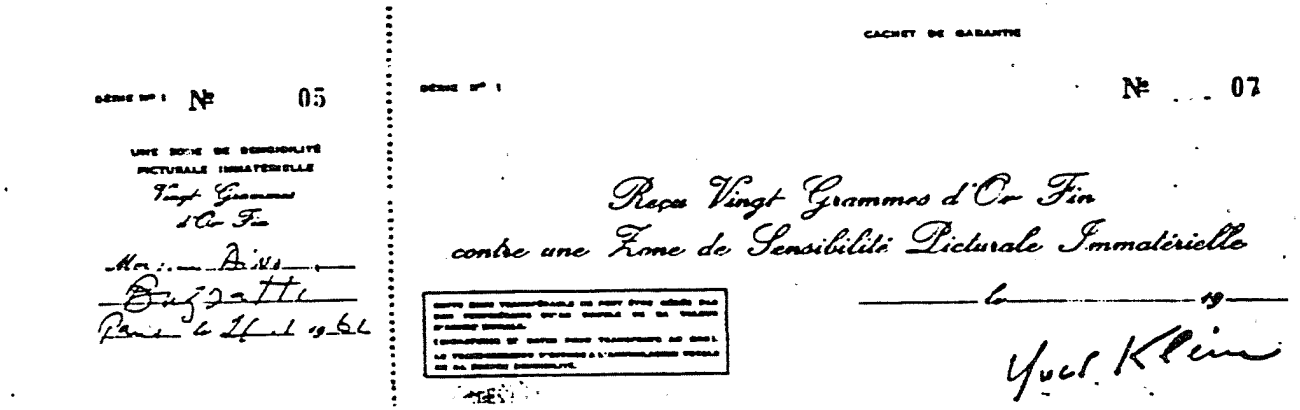


Fig. 9 Marcel Duchamp, Air de Paris, 1919



102. Receipt book for *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility*, series 1, item 5

Fig 10

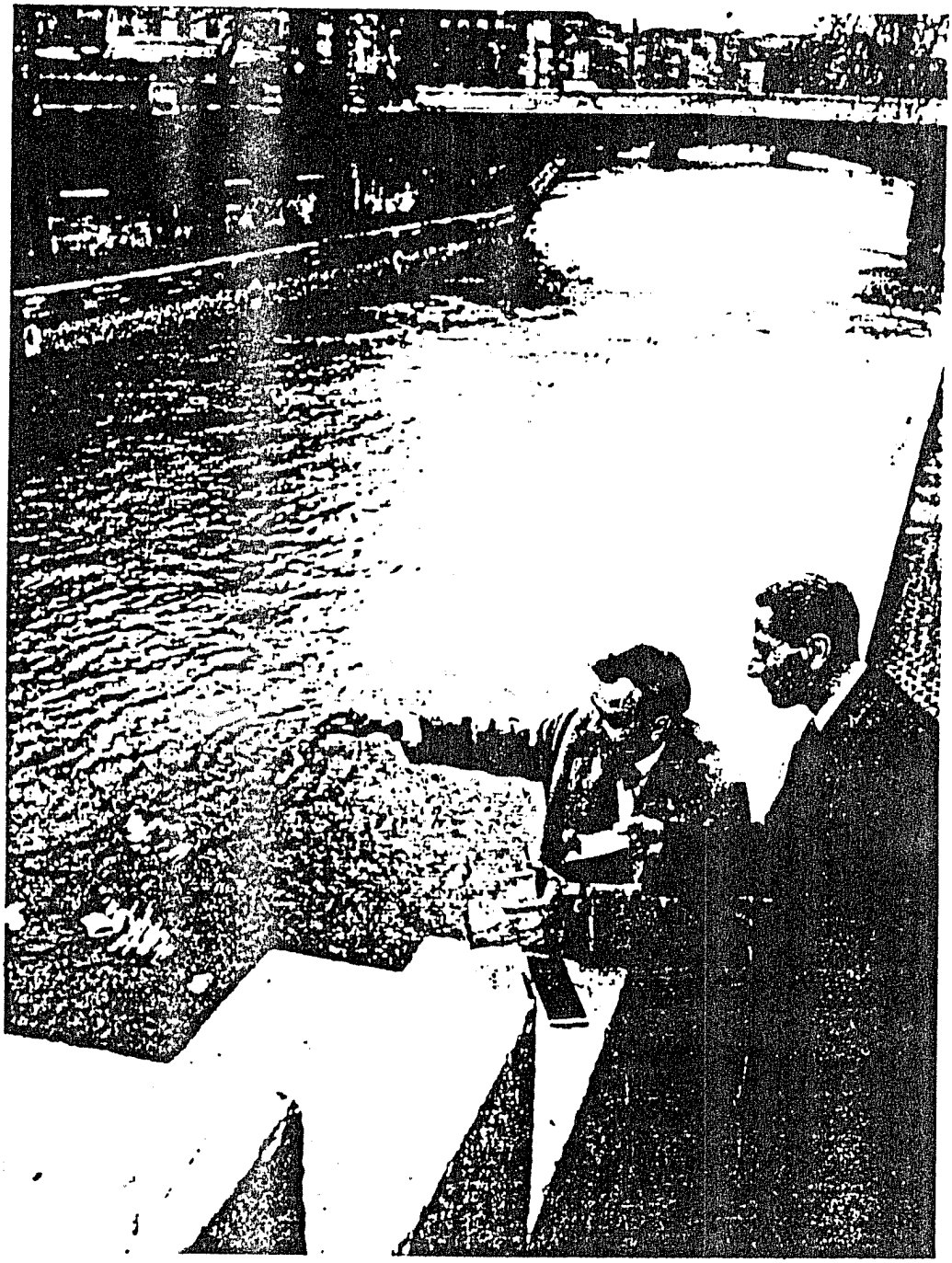


Fig. 11, Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility, 1962

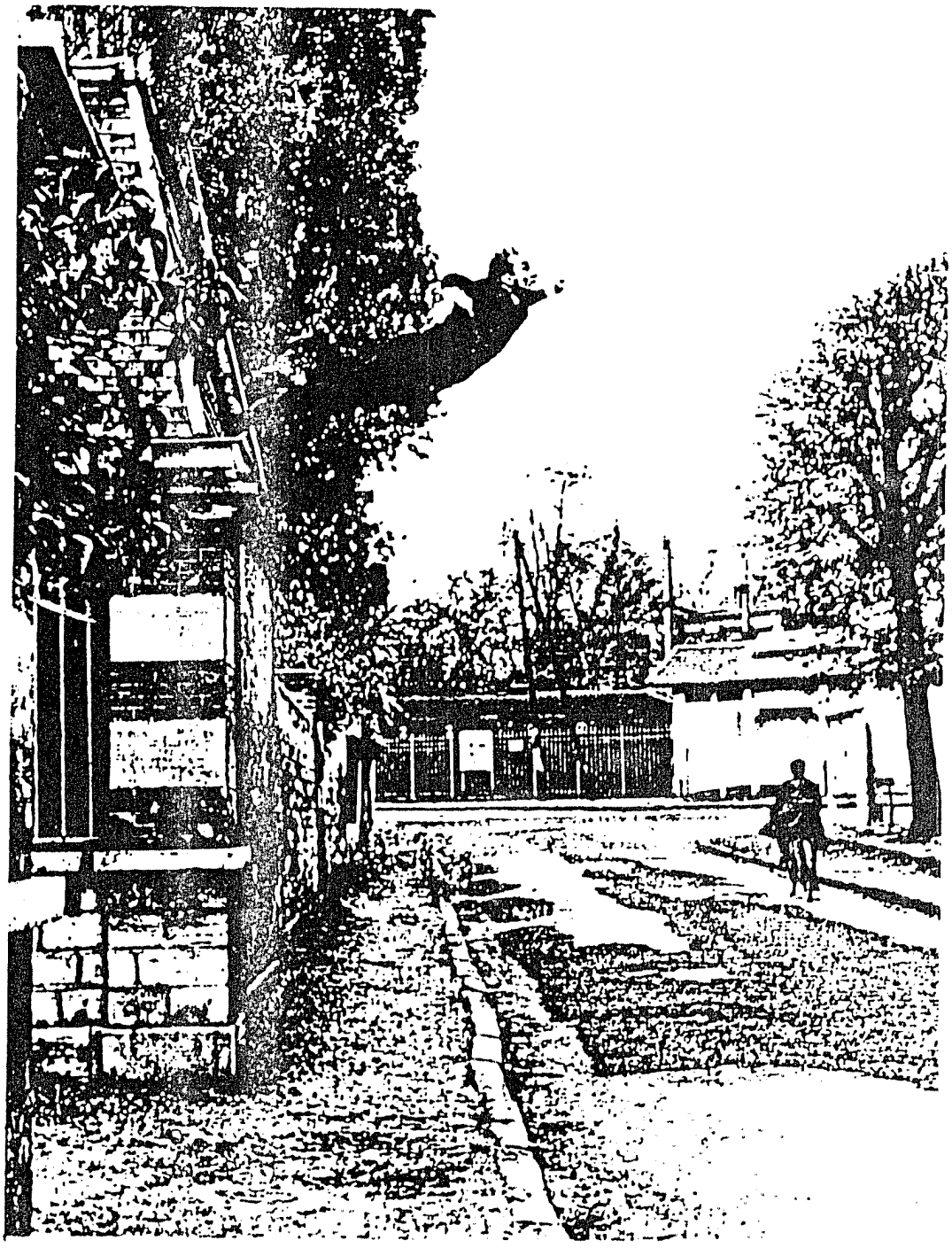
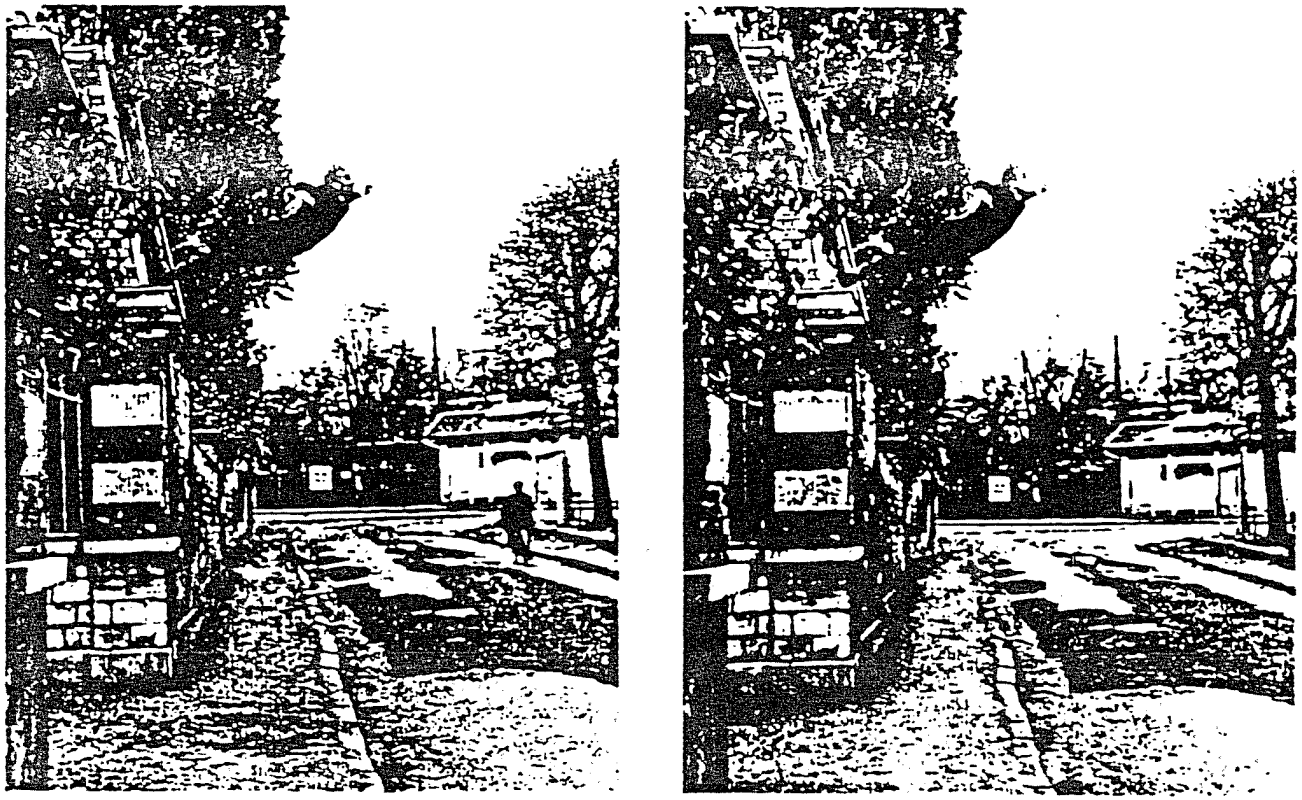
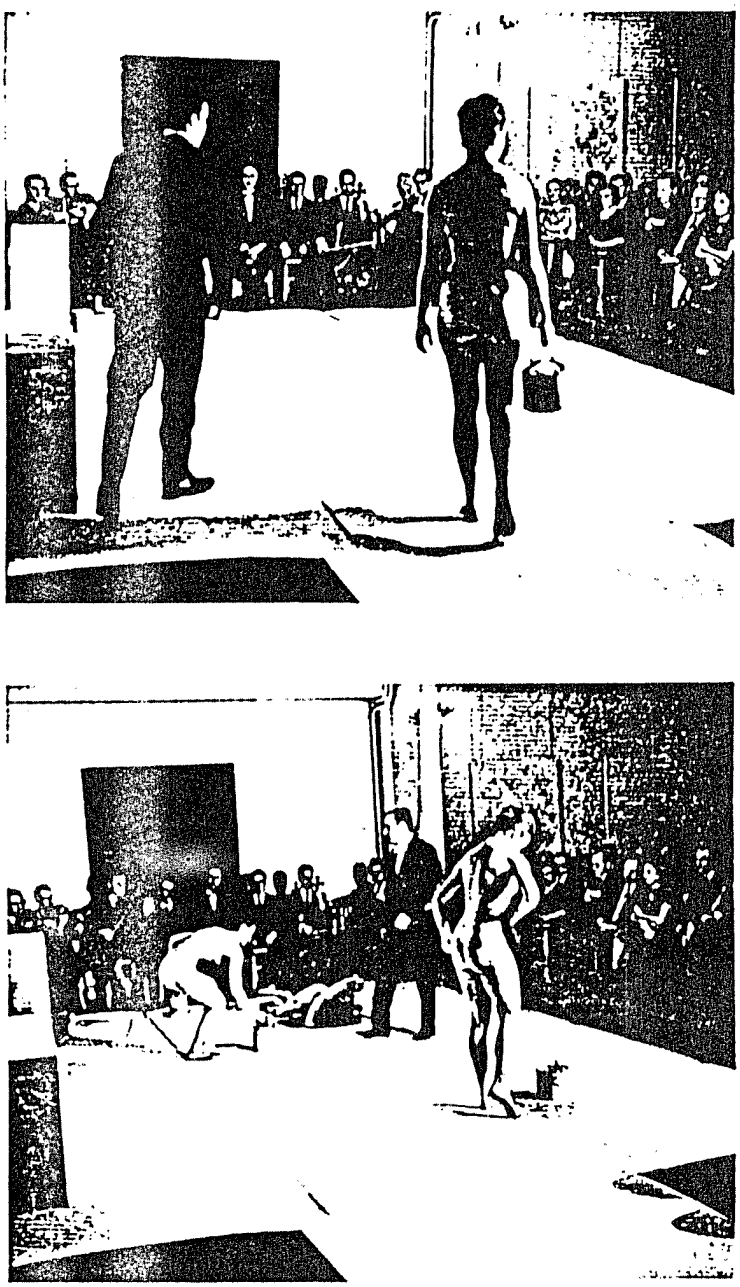


Fig. 12, Leap into the Void, 1960



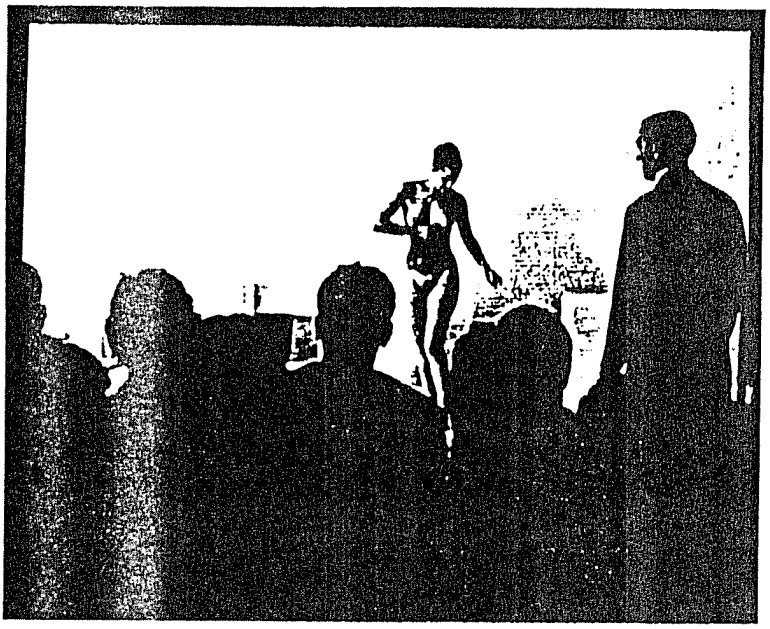
104. *The Leap into the Void*, 1960; at left, as published in *Dimanche*; at right, as published in Klein's Krefeld exhibition catalogue

Fig. 13



95. *Anthropométries de l'époque bleue (Anthropometries of the Blue Period)*, March 9, 1960, performance at Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain, Paris

Fig. 14



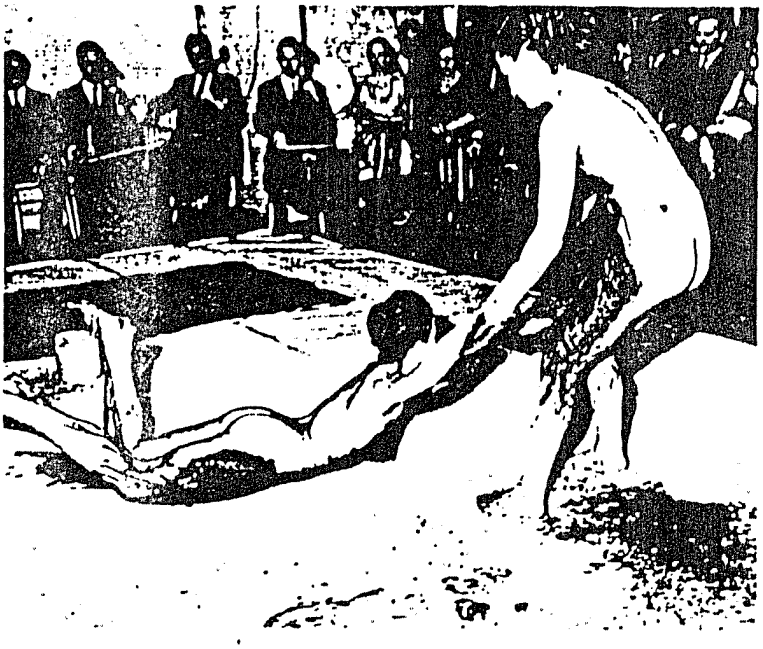


Fig. 15, Anthropometries

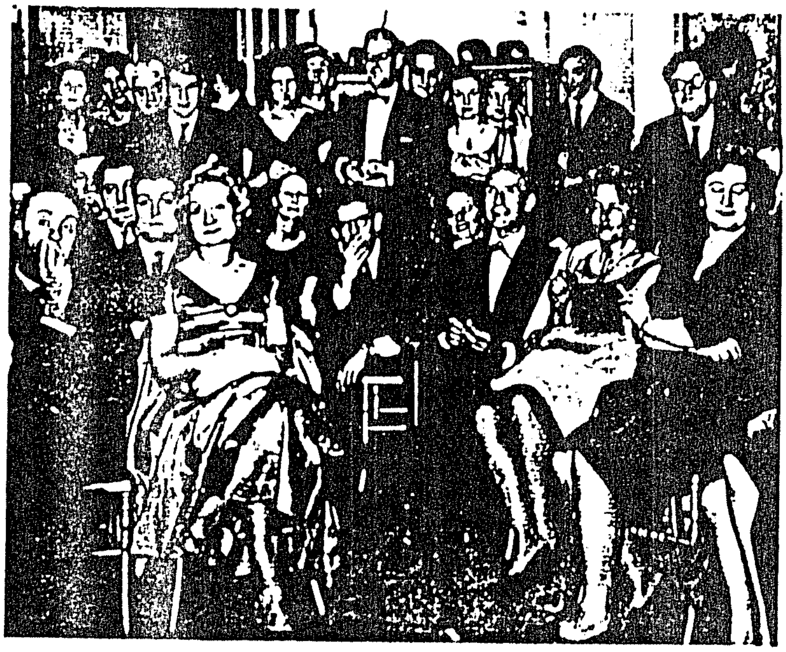
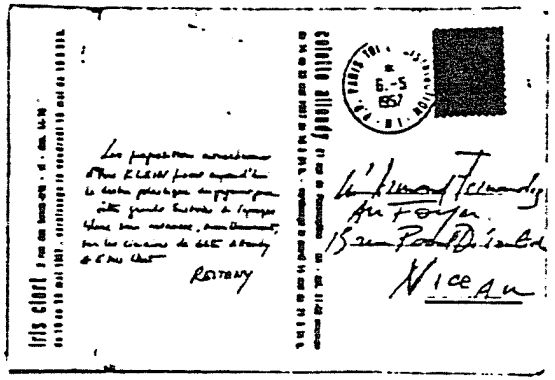


Fig 16 Anthropometries

Fig. 17, Anthropometries

Opening-night procession with blue balloons for Yves Klein: Propositions monochromes, Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, May 10, 1957

Fig. 18



Invitation card with blue stamp for Yves Klein: Propositions monochromes, Galerie Iris Clert and Galerie Colette Allendy, Paris, May 1957, 10 x 15 cm (cat. 27)

Chapter 2

Topographies of Loss and Commemoration in Joseph Beuys' Installations and *Actions* Around the Nineteen Sixties

Introduction

The only thing that art critics seem to agree about when they consider Joseph Beuys is the most elementary biographical details around the artist, namely his date of birth at Krefeld, Germany in 1921 and his death at Düsseldorf in 1986 (fig. 19). Then, some proclaim him as the most interesting postwar artist in Germany, while others as the greatest charlatan.

In any case, Beuys remains an emblematic figure for all the dilemmas and enigmas that accompany today's reception of contemporary art. The extreme variety of responses that Beuys' work has produced and continues to generate, is a sure sign that his work's import has not yet been adequately exploited. However, this extreme variety of responses to Beuys' work is in part also a function of his artwork that has uniquely intertwined with the artist's persona, itinerary, life experience and biography.

This fact of the artist, his work and his personality being inextricably tied together, has created numerous confusions, riddles and debates, even court trials, whenever there has been as attempt to catalogue, let alone to exhibit Beuys' works since the artist's death.[131] Being difficult to assemble or to exhibit, Beuys' work was proved to be even more difficult to account for, critically. Hence, Fabrice Hergott, who organized the most recent major Beuys retrospective exhibition at the Center Pompidou, Paris, France, writes about "the frustratingly partial view" to which Beuys' work obliges the critic. The task of confronting Beuys' practices and thinking is "intimidating," according to Hergott.[132]

Likewise, Jean-Philippe Antoine, in one of the most incisive essays ever written on Beuys, remarks a similar difficulty that equally affects the most varied audiences of the latter's work. Thus, on the one hand, the general public is most often astounded to discover in the most respectable museums quotidian objects and detriments of everyday life, seeming to have been assembled together, without any

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[131] With regard to these problems of Beuys' reception and the general "brouhaha about legacies" see David Galloway's essay "Beuys and Warhol: Aftershocks" Art in America, 76, July 1988, pp. 113-122.

[132] Fabrice Hergott, "L'art comme un couteau aiguisé" Joseph Beuys. Exh. cat. (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1994), p. 67. All translations from French in this chapter are the present writer's unless otherwise indicated.

particular care and being displayed as art.[133] On the other hand, the more specialized audience of art connoisseurs, curators, critics, artists and others, often gather in three fiercely opposed camps. One blinded by uncritical adulation, another, all too eager to ostracise, dismantle and banish anything having to do with Beuys, and a third, all too ready to condenscendingly and complacently tame Beuys' work into fitting, traditional, art historical canons.[134]

In the midst of the general phanaticism, Beuys' actual work finally suffers a compromised image, as it is never considered thoroughly, independently of the stakes and the debates of those around it. Nor is it ever viewed with due consideration to its complex premises. Consequently, if Beuys' work is nowadays deemed pertinent or significant, this is by no means due to study of or reflection on it. It is rather because of the serious controversy that still lingers around it. The serious and far-reaching stakes of the controversy

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[133] See David Thistlewood's "Joseph Beuys' 'Open Work': its Resistance to Holistic Critiques" Joseph Beuys. Diverging Critiques. Ed. David Thistlewood, Tate Gallery Critical Forum Series, Volume 2, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpoool, 1995), pp. 1-19. Thistlewood mentions the "evident lack of "studio" discrimination" in Beuys' work. See p. 15.

[134] Jean Philippe Antoine, "Je ne travaille pas avec des symboles. Expérience et construction du souvenir dans l'oeuvre de Joseph Beuys" Les cahiers du musée national d'art moderne, 58, Winter 1996, p. 51. For the views of those rejecting Beuys' art see Donald Kuspit, "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" Joseph Beuys. Diverging Critiques. op. cit. pp. 27, 28, 32. See also Johannes Cladders, "Joseph Beuys: Origins and Affinities" Joseph Beuys. Diverging Critiques. op. cit. p. 21.

around Beuys has drawn interest in his work and have in fact made it a point of reference and inspiration for a large number of contemporary artists.[135]

In the stakes of this controversy lie still unveiled the latent meanings of Beuys' art and not in any arbitration of what his art offers to our senses. For like a lot of contemporary art, Beuys' work rarely offers immediate gratification of our senses.[136] It is therefore of no substantial use to attempt to resolve the controversy surrounding Beuys by proposing definite interpretations,

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[135] Beuys exerted a great influence in the postwar artistic scene of the Western hemisphere. In Germany he was a teacher of Imi Knoebel, Anself Kiefer, Walter Dahn and Jörg Immendorf and he was associated with artists like Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke. He also remained renowned for his brief connection to the Fluxus group and the joint performances he organized in Germany and the USA. In the USA, in particular, his work has inspired Robert Morris, Eva Hesse and Richard Serra to mention simply a few established American artists. See Kim Levin's *Introduction* to Energy Plan for the Western Man: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist. Ed. Carin Kyoni, (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993), pp. 3, 4, and Cornelia Lauf, "The Word that Produces All Images: Reading the Drawings of Joseph Beuys" Arts Magazine 64, March 1990, p. 67. Beuys' influence was notable beyond the domaine of arts as well; he helped found the German Green Party and ecological movement and remained renowned for his ideas and initiatives for political and educational reform. See Heiner Stachelhaus, Joseph Beuys. Trans. David Britt, (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1991), pp. 106-124.

[136] It is Hegel of course who prophetically determined this condition of a lot of contemporary art. See G. W. F. Hegel, Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics. Trans. Bernard Bonasquet, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 13. As Antoine brilliantly suggests the spectators' reactions in front of Beuys' objects, installations or actions are always extreme and vary between shock and surprise, boredom and indifference. In any case Beuys' work is far from offering "immediate gratification" of the senses although its reception involves the senses, albeit in a complicated way, as Antoine indicates. See Antoine op. cit. pp. 55, 67.

delimiting his work's potential for meaning once and for all. In order to let Beuys' work utter its meanings, it rather seems more useful to attempt an interpretation that meaningfully situates this controversy's several aspects. For Beuys was an artist that, more than anyone else in Europe of his time, created site-specific works, namely works whose meaning depended on their context of production, display and reception.[137] Thus he practically and consciously allowed and explored "open works" that make explicit the constant regeneration of meaning which is typical of all artwork, viewed under different circumstances or after a time lapse. As meaning for him did not merely reside in the artwork's material form, meaning was multifarious and could never be exhausted.[138]

The attitudes of sealing in one judgement Beuys' artwork, framing it once and for all, blocking all access to it or

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[137] Galloway, op. cit. p. 116.

[138] Like Auguste Rodin, Beuys often casted the same works after a decade or more, changing slightly a few details, or creatively using elements from one work to produce altogether new results. One famous example of his attitudes and working habits is the *Fettstuhl* which has at least two versions, one from 1963 another from 1985. Beuys practically showed how he believed that the change of context of display or integration altered the artwork. His work confuses the limits between "original pieces" and fragments or documenting materials. See Joseph Beuys exh. cat., op. cit. pp. 150-151. See also Stachelhaus, op. cit. p. 150 and Thistlewood, op. cit. pp. 7, 9, 13 about Beuys' opposition to "taxonomic classification," "the modernist preoccupation with completed form" and his advocacy of "incomplete or open work." For Rodin's practices see Rosalind Krauss' "The Originality of Avant-Garde" The Originality of Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 151-170.

becoming the privileged and incontestable mediators of other approaches, characterize both Beuys' advocates and critics. Many of Beuys' admirors resort to "eulogical" and "hagiographical"[139] methods to close his file by adopting a much too reverent point of view in their critical analyses. By proclaiming an infallible master and shaman in the face of the artist, they ultimately fail to account for the stakes, issues and problems that his work puts forth. Many of Beuys' critics resort to exactly the opposite attitude. Disconcerned by the frivolity of some of Beuys' supporters, their criticism addresses those, rather than Beuys' work. This is the case for Thierry de Duve, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Thomas Crow and, to a lesser extent, Robert Storr and Annette Michelson, who all reject Beuys' work. For example, Krauss and Buchloh in discussion with Michelson, condemn Beuys' work as involving an "aesthetic ideology," as being "utopian and non pragmatic," "distasteful," "extraordinarily naive," "appalling," "archaic" and ignoring, falsifying and mythifying history.[140] Thierry de Duve claims Beuys to be the last proletariat of this world in an essay that attempts to show the vain impertinence of both Beuys'

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[139] The expressions "eulogical" and "hagiographical" are Rosalind Krauss' and Annette Michelson's respectively from "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim" October 12, Spring 1980, pp. 4, 12.

[140] See "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim Museum" op. cit. pp. 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17. For Rosalind Krauss' and Yve-Alain Bois' views, see Krauss' "Non à Joseph Beuys" L'informe. Mode d'emploi. (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1996), pp. 136-138.

actions and persona as well as his "pathetic" "uninteresting," "non aesthetic" "incongruous" and "frustrating" artwork.[141] Buchloh, repeats more or less these same verdicts and further substantiates his judgement, by claiming that Beuys' practices lack originality when seen from a strictly formal point of view, since his experiments were preceded by earlier avant-garde artists, the futurists, the constructivists and certain postwar American artists. In view of the latters' constructive use of sculptural materials, Beuys' use of similar materials is deemed as "abusive."[142] Besides the fact that the vocabulary of vehemence is only rarely proper for an art critic, the characterizations that it conveys in these specific cases, are too broad, lack specificity, seem to be a clearing of accounts and finally reveal more about the various authors' shared passions, than about any other subject.[143]

Trying to be neither in the camp of Beuys' advocates nor in that of his critics, I shall attempt to give a close, but not closed, reading of a few of Beuys' works, in an effort to

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[141] Thierry de Duve, "Beuys ou le dernier des prolétaires" Cousus de fil d'or. (Villeurbanne: Art édition, 1990), pp. 19, 22.

[142] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Twilight of the Idol. Preliminary Notes for a Critique" Artforum, Jan. 1980, vol. XVIII, no 5, p. 41. For the views of Thomas Crow see "The Graying of Criticism" Artforum 32, September 1993 and for the views of Robert Storr see "The Idea of the Moral Imperative in Contemporary Art" Art Criticism 7, January 1992, pp. 38, 39, both cited in Kuspit's "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. p. 48.

[143] See Kuspit's extremely interesting and pertinent criticism of Buchloh in particular, in "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. pp. 27-49 and pp. 27-31 in particular.

propose a rather partial and open-ended interpretation of them. Beuys' work rarely lends itself to the coherent "whole" which is customarily defined as "artistic creation," by being radically fragmented and resistant to integration into concrete art historical contexts and discussions, such as that of "originality," with which Buchloh takes issue. This is certainly one of the work's major difficulties, as well as one of its greatest merits, namely, the extent to which it requires from its viewer a suspension of many certainties about art.[144] Likewise, the critic or art historian engaging with Beuys' work is obliged to adopt a point of view, which also puts everything at stake and questions all known art historical premises, including the notion of art itself. Without pretending to propose any classification of Beuys' work, I shall examine his first decade as a sculptor, around the nineteen sixties, a time when his interests and preoccupations took a definitive form that was quite crucial for the rest of his artistic career.[145]

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[144] See Beuys' own remarks with regard to his mistrust of the notion "work of art." In Volker Harlan, Joseph Beuys. Qu'est-ce que l'art?. Texte francais Laurent Cassagnau, (Paris: L'Arche, 1992), p. 135.

[145] See a number of important works whose first version is located in the sixties and later versions subsequently. It seems that according to Beuys's biography, he reached his period of creative and personal maturity in the sixties. His concept of action was invented in 1962 with the *Earth Piano.* Around the nineteen sixties, Beuys overcame a psychological crisis, decided to become a sculptor, assumed a professorship of sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art, got briefly involved with the *Fluxus* movement and married Ewa Wurmbach. See Steichelhaus, op. cit. pp. 126, 187, 188.

I. Ethics and Politics of the Primary Materials in Joseph Beuys' Installations

Most works by Beuys have had the form of installations or of performances ultimately serving the artist's renowned "actions," the term he preferred to use for his site-specific, "theatrical," eventlike or performance works. Being bound to the time and place of their inception or performance, these installations and actions are difficult to experience in retrospect. One can nevertheless get a glimpse of what they were like through the existing documentation about them.

Among all of Beuys' works, the assembled objects constitute his simplest installations and as they are also the ones that have most obviously remained in the same state as they were meant to be, they will occasion our point of departure. Beuys never excluded regarding them as autonomous objects, even if many of them were relics of his actions. However, the fact that these objects were relics of his actions and were specifically employed to serve a time and space specific event or performance and were not therefore primarily "aesthetic objects" meant for mere display, plays an important role as we shall see later.

Such an object is the famous *Stuhl mit Fett* (Chair with Fat), that remained known under this name, since the time of its original inception in 1963 (fig. 20). A second version of the same work appeared as untitled in 1985, and was

alternatively referred to as *Fettstuhl* (fig. 21).[146] In the original work, one can see an ordinary kitchen chair, made of wood on which a triangular volume of fat (margarine) has been placed in such a way so as to cover the entire sitting surface. The triangular volume of fat composes what seems like a three-dimensional rectangle whose hypotenouse unites the end of the seating surface and the chair's top handle. A wire made of steel is around the top chair handle, indicating perhaps that the object was originally meant to be hanging, possibly from a ceiling. In the more recent version of the work, less fat has been placed on the chair and without any particular care, but rather amorphously. Now it looks as if someone had sat on the chair because the volume of fat is compressed and its top is flattened. The wire is missing but now a new element, a medical thermometer has been inserted into the fat.[147]

The object oscillates between an assemblage,[148] a Duchampian readymade and sculpture without being able to be convincingly contained in any of these art-historical categories. On the one hand, it is neither merely an assemblage nor a readymade, as there is an elementary attempt

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[146] See Joseph Beuys. Exh. cat. op. cit. pp. 150-151.

[147] For description and commentaries on both versions of this work, see ibid and Kuoni, op. cit. p. 125.

[148] Assemblage is defined as some sort of collage in three dimensions that finds its origin in cubism. See Robert Atkins, Petit Lexique d'art contemporain. Trad. Jeanne Bouniort, (Paris: Abbeville Press, 1992), p. 53.

to sculpt or form the mass of fat appended to the chair, more conspicuously in the first version of the work, less so in the second. On the other hand, it is not merely sculpture as the most central element constituting the piece, namely, the kitchen chair, is a found object, left intact and the material manipulated (margarine) is unqualified for sculptural creation, at least by traditional theory of sculpture.[149]

Nonetheless, the most striking thing about the *Chair with Fat* is not solely its defiance of such art historical categories. It is also the fact that this work largely depends on a quotidian object, a kitchen chair, which is rendered almost unrecognizeable and unfamiliar by the volume of fat placed on it. In fact, the fat obstructs what the chair supposedly serves: it obstructs sitting and therefore renders

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[149] Despite the fact that Beuys was the first to systematically find recourse to materials such as fat, felt, wax, honey and others he was not unprecedented with regard to the use of all types of eccentric materials in sculpture. See Umberto Boccioni's *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture* (1912) where the first modern appeal is being made to the use of all kinds of different materials in sculpture, in order to go beyond the boundaries of the art practiced. This claim will be repeated several times before the second world war by different representatives of the avant-garde. See Kurt Schwitters' *Merz* (1921) and Naum Gabo's "Sculpture: Carving and Construction in Space" (1937) instances when this same appeal is repeated from the point of view of dada and constructivism, respectively. All in Theories of Modern Art. Ed. by Herschel B. Chipp, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1968). Noone else before Beuys had such an extensive and systematic use of materials such as fat, felt, wax, and the like, despite Buchloh's contrary claims that evoke Degas and Medardo Rosso. See Buchloh op. cit. p. 41. In any case, the point is not who used a material first but what kind of use artists reserve for the materials they employ in their work. As we will see later the use of these materials by Beuys was unique for his case.

the chair not only practically unusable but also quite mysterious as a material entity or synthesis. Actually, a number of Beuys' objects, follow the same "compositional" logic. For example, a piece from 1966, with the title *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel,* (Homogeneous Infiltration for Grand Piano) has a grand piano totally covered with felt, in a way that its felt cover follows like a skin the forms and corners of the piano. On one side of the covered mute piano, two pieces of red fabric have been sawn on the felt to compose the sign of a red cross (fig. 22). A similar piece appeared in 1967 with the title *Infiltration Homogen für Cello,* (Homogeneous Infiltration for Cello) substituting this time the piano with a cello (fig. 23).

Observing this range of objects, as well as many others from around the same period of Beuys' career,[150] reveals a paradoxical logic that they all have in common: on the one hand, they are extremely familiar and quotidian objects, tools or instruments which remain clearly recognizable as such and seem to occupy a rather important place in the work. On the other hand, these objects are also employed, slightly changed or presented, in a way that obfuscates their utilitarian purpose and consequently makes them appear rather mysterious,

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[150] For example the untitled kitchen knife (1962) with a wooden handle and with a piece of adhesive plaster covering a little more of one third of its metallic extension from the sharp end and with Beuys' stamp on one of its metallic sides, *Feldbett (Felt bed)*, (1963-1964), *Jason*, (1961), *Erdtelephon, (Earth Telephone)*, (1968), and several others. See in Joseph Beuys. exh. cat. op. cit. pp. 66, 209, 142, 169, respectively.

estranging and disconcerting. What the viewer clearly retains in encountering these common everyday objects is that in fact they are hardly common at all: one can neither sit on the chair, nor play the piano.

Indeed, in all visual arts, what is displayed is not meant to serve the beholders' use but only to satisfy their sight. Even the most recent aesthetic theories claim that all artworks primarily cater for aesthetic pleasure and only incidentally for any utilitarian value.[151] But according to the same aesthetics, pleasure of the sight is the result of the artist's work, the transformation of raw material, into a self subsistent entity which pleases in this self-subsistence and difference from all other things. Except for the fat appended on the kitchen chair and the felt attached to the grand piano, no other material transformation takes place which regards these objects. Even this transformation regards solely the presentation of these objects and not at all their material construction. It is more than anything else a transfiguration rather than a transformation. Furthermore and as mentioned previously, the chair and the piano are part of the artist's actions and were not simply meant to be autonomous artworks offering to the beholder a spectacle for aesthetic contemplation. This is clearly observed in the way

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[151] For example, see Mikel Dufrenne, The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience. Trans. Edward Casey, Albert Anderson, Willis Domingo and Leon Jacobson, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 92-96.

they are presented. For, were someone to attempt to just look at them and describe them in the most formalist of ways, as a conglomeration of lines and shapes, this attempt would be in vain, as their shapes are being distorted by the addition of formless elements like the fat and the felt which by definition, cannot be susceptible to formalist description.[152] Therefore, the quotidian objects that Beuys employs in his actions, do not have a definite and assured status as artworks, but rather oscillate between art and utilitarian objecthood, having an intermediary status between the two.[153]

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[152] Some of Beuys' favorite materials for sculpture, like fat, felt, honey, wax and others seem to have been selected precisely for their radical formlessness. See the artist's commentary on the *Fat Chair* in Kuoni, op. cit. p. 125. Beuys seems to have appraised materials in exactly the opposite way René Descartes did. See the latter's example of the wax, described as if it was a fierce ennemy of form, in the "Meditations on First Philosophy," The Philosophical Writings of Descartes. Vol. II, Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothof, Dugald Murdoch, "Second Meditation" (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 20, 21. Beuys' derisive and humorous comments particularly on the *Fat Chair*, indicate a certain affinity with the views of Georges Bataille who became famous for his literally formless definition of the formless. Bataille compared the formless with a spit, the spider's net and he likened it with the state of the universe. See Georges Bataille, Oeuvres Complètes, I. (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 217. Thus Bataille's notion seems quite akin to Beuys' despite Rosalind Krauss' opposite assertion, in L'informe: mode d'emploi. op. cit. pp. 136-138.

[153] With regard to this issue see Beuys' response in an interview with Volker Harlan, to the question that the latter posed in reference to the usefulness of the objects employed by the artist and how this usefulness affects their status as objects as well as their reception by the viewer. Beuys' response was that he did not wish to block any kind of reception from the part of the viewer and that all receptions would be valid, as far as he was concerned. See Harlan, op. cit. p. 68.

By blocking the way, these quotidian objects as the chair and the piano, are presented, Beuys chooses to block their utilitarian function as objects and thus inevitably draws attention to these blocked functions.[154] As the objects he employs lay bare, stripped of their purpose and as the viewer stands helplessly in front of them, wandering what to make out of them, the most essential and most elementary fact about these objects becomes explicit to the viewer: their suspended usefulness.

The helplessness with which humans stand before things which are unusable, either because they are broken, missing or standing in the way and obstructing a concern, was called a "deficient mode of concern" by Martin Heidegger in Being and Time.[155] Heidegger introduced the phenomenon exemplified by the deficient modes of concern in a crucial part of his seminal book, in order to explain "the worldhood of the world." The thesis associated with the worldhood of the world, is the fact that we all get "a glimpse of the world" in everyday life, without necessarily having first to interpret or thematize this world by employing ontology or phenomenology.[156] The deficient modes of concern, give us

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[154] I am grateful for this insight to David Raskin's remarks about the *Fat Chair* in his unpublished paper, for Prof. Donald Kuspit's seminar, with the title "Hunting for Coyote: The Art of Joseph Beuys" May 18, 1993, p. 18.

[155] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time. Trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 103.

[156] Ibid. p. 102.

this glimpse, make us "ontically" discover things around us before all theory and ontology. Heidegger seems to indicate that the only access we have to the presence of all things is through their absence, obtrusiveness to a purpose or unusability. Only in this kind of "negative" or "privative" way the entities of this world and this world itself, become explicit to our view and consideration. When all the world's things are "ready-to-hand," readily available to our needs, Heidegger claims, their mere presence escapes our attention. We tend to take both their presence and use, for granted and do not notice things except as mere means to achieve our everyday assignments. From the moment they stop being ready-to-hand, they become "present-at-hand," explicit in themselves and in their environment, precisely because our assignment with them has been disturbed.[157]

The logic of construction of Beuys' objects under consideration, can be best described, in the above Heideggerian terms. The things and the world they are part of, become first revealed in the "negative" and "privative" experiences, stemming from their non-availability, from the fact that they cannot serve in Beuys' actions what they were purpotedly made for. Therefore, it is not by looking at things that we experience them. It is rather the opposite: we can get a first glimpse of all things after we have exprerienced their suspended usefulness. It is the experience of privation with

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[157] Ibid. pp. 103-105.

the things and their world, that precedes the aesthetic experience, traditionally conceived as an experience of fulfillment and plenitude.[158] Or, in other words, the aesthetic interest we demonstrate in certain objects and things is subsequent to our commerce with them in everyday life, and especially to the cases when we fail to have any commerce with them at all. Then and only then we are really able to see things for the first time.

This is why the aesthetic, traditionally speaking, has in Beuys a derivative and secondary status. Hence also Beuys' notorious remark that "our most urgent need is not to create pictures or sculptures but to shape the economy," a task that he nevertheless considered to be the ultimate task of his expanded theory of art and sculpture.[159] Likewise, the

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[158] It would be possible to interpret towards this direction of plenitude and emotional fulfillment several passages from traditional texts on the philosophy of art. See for example Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement. op. cit. p. 77, about the necessary satisfaction accompanying the feeling of beauty, or Hegel's aesthetics in which he writes about art's satisfaction of "spiritual wants," op. cit. p. 12. Dufrenne writes about "the depth of aesthetic feeling," which may also be interpreted in this direction, op. cit. pp. 405-407.

[159] See Frans Haks' interview with Beuys in 1976, in Joseph Beuys. Diverging Critiques. op. cit. p. 54, for his expanded theory of art and creativity see also pp. 56, 57. The expanded concept of art and creativity with its special political ramifications that Beuys cherished and practiced from the nineteen sixties until the end of his life is what distinguishes Beuys from dadaists like Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp who questioned the notions of art without however implementing this questioning with a sociopolitical vision. Beuys was especially preoccupied with the work of Duchamp to whom he dedicated one of his most well known actions with the title *Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* (Marcel Duchamp's silence is overestimated) in Düsseldorf, 11 of December 1964. To Duchamp's art which the artist thought, already since its

concomitant order that traditionally accompanies the aesthetic, namely that order which dictates that sight precedes and conditions experience, gets reversed: it is rather experience which precedes and conditions all sight.[160] Beuys is among the twentieth century artists that became famous for advocating a non-retinal art.[161]

The experience that the artist cherishes as fundamental for all art is rather that of warmth, an experience that has never before been valued in aesthetics.[162] Humans seem to be the most fragile organisms with regard to warmth; they can hardly maintain the certain body temperature essential to their survival by themselves, unlike most of the animals. Thus, since their first apparition on earth, they have been

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very inception, that it anticipated or even preceded all subsequent forms of contemporary art and which oscillates between art and non art, Beuys counteracted his expanded model of art. According to Beuys' model, art needed to overcome the traditional conventions only in order to be able to aim at social action and reform. See Joseph Beuys exh. cat. op. cit. pp. 275, 276.

[160] Beuys was very adamant on this point that we must experience his objects first before resorting to judgement and interpretation. For him, it did not simply suffice to see them. See Antoine, op. cit. p. 51.

[161] Another artist famously associated with non-retinal art is of course Marcel Duchamp with whom, as explained previously, Beuys had a difficult, almost paternal relationship of affinity, closeness and distance. For the non-retinal values of Beuys see Beuys' remarks in Harlan, op. cit. p. 30 and Christopher Philips "Arena: the Chaos of the Unnamed" Joseph Beuys. Arena-Where Would I have Got If I Had Been Intelligent!. Eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelley, (New York: Dia Center of the Arts and Distributed Art Publishers, 1994), p. 53.

[162] For warmth and its importance for Beuys see Harlan, op. cit. p. 119.

using felt to cover themselves and have been consuming fat to be able to bear their energy losses. The invention of fire and in short, a complex array of issues that have marked all civilizations, relate to warmth and had essentially to do with maintaining the body temperature and recuperating the daily energy losses.

Fat and felt for the use of which Beuys has become famous, are well known for their insulatory capacities and their ability to help the human organism replenish quickly large amounts of lost energy. Thus fat and felt have been and continue to be essential for keeping warm or, in other words, for human survival. Furthermore, the smaller elements in the objects under consideration, reinforce the reference to warmth and human survival. The thermometer in the recent version of *Fettstuhl* (fig. 21) is an object indicating a concern with the body temperature which rises only when the organism is in some form of danger or defense and cannot therefore maintain the regular body temperature. The red cross sawn on the felted piano (fig. 22) has the exact same shape, appearance, dimensions and color of the Red Cross Foundation sign, a neutral foundation providing medical first-aid to victims of war-striken countries and places worldwide. Beuys knew, admired and was reportedly inspired by the work of Henry Dunant, the founder of Red Cross and the visionary artist.[163] Even separated from its context, the red cross sign

[163] Levin, op. cit. p. 3.

indexically points to the Red Cross Foundation and thus to war and survival. Thus these appended elements on Beuys' quotidian objects whether they occupy an important and conspicuous role or not, establish an indexical relation to the event of warmth and human survival. As Jean-Philippe Antoine remarks: "An indexical logic put at work...lies undoubtedly at the center of Beuys' work."[164] Antoine relies on Charles Peirce's notion of the index, defined as:

> ...a sign, or representation which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to possess, as because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection both with the individual object, on the one hand, and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it serves as a sign, on the other hand.... Indices may be distinguished from other signs, or representations, by three characteristic marks: first, that they have no significant resemblance to their objects; second, that they refer to individuals, single units, single collections of units, or single continua; third, that they direct the attention to their objects by blind compulsion.[165]

If, indeed, all materials like the fat, the felt, the thermometer and the cross are indexically related to warmth and survival, the red cross gives us an additional clue that the survival we specifically refer to, is survival from war. Thus Beuys' appended materials on his quotidian objects are indexically related to the event of survival from the closest

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[164] See Antoine, op. cit. p. 55. The original is as follows: "La mise en oeuvre des logiques indicielles...est au coeur de l'entreprise de Beuys."

[165] Charles Peirce, Philosophical Writings. Ed. Justus Buchler, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1955), pp. 107, 108.

in memory, war for Beuys and his audiences, namely the Second World War, the memories of which they propel to them. It was certainly of primary importance to Beuys and to some of his generation, not to forget, but to actively remember the vicissitudes of their survival through the Second World War and Nazism. Having been drafted to serve the German Nazi forces at the age of twenty, almost right when the war started and having been wounded and risked his life, five times until 1945, when he was released from a British camp of German prisoners, Beuys surely had reasons to try to find a meaningful way to cope with his traumatic experiences.[166]

This is also the reason why Beuys himself often talked about the role of his *Erinnerungsstütze*, his "memory accessories" among the materials he employed in his works.[167] As Jean-Pierre Antoine remarked, through his "memory accessories," Beuys went even further than merely contemplating his own war survival:

> ...the role of crutch or of the "memory accessory" [*Erinnerungsstütze*] [has] developed in Beuys' production in the context of a greater social and political project: to overcome the trauma caused by the Second World War and Nazism, in Germany but also more broadly in Europe, and through the "hard labor of remembrance," to retrieve the symptoms of illness of the culture that made this catastrophe possible, so that once these symptoms are

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[166] See Kuspit, "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. pp. 35-40, and Stachelhaus, op. cit. pp. 18-25.

[167] See Antoine, op. cit. p. 52.

identified, to heal the social corpus.[168]

It is precisely by blocking, through fat and felt, the access to the quotidian objects and the world that these evoke, that Beuys attempts to commemorate these objects and their world, as lost, unable to correspond to their function. Indeed, the world must have felt this way for a German after the Second World War, even if it is rare and understandably difficult for some, to also think of Germans as war victims. But, according to Heidegger, Beuys' strategy of commemorating the quotidian objects and their world as lost, would also mean rendering them explicit, retrieving them for memory and conscience and valuing them, all perhaps for the first time.[169] Furthermore, the fat, the felt, the thermometer and the cross with which these objects are mainly appended, indexically relate to the event of survival from their single, unique and monstrous referent, the Second World War, and thus historically situate Beuys' work in a firm and pertinent manner. Both effects of his work certainly qualify Beuys' artistic attempts for a new and meaningful beginning, after

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[168] Antoine, op. cit. p. 52. The French text is as follows: "...le rôle de "béquille" ou d'"accessoire pour la mémoire" [*Erinnerungsstütze*] [est] dévolu à la production beuysienne, dans le cadre d'un plus vaste projet social et politique: dépasser le trauma causé par la Seconde Guerre mondiale et le nazisme, en Allemagne mais aussi de facon plus large en Europe, et au moyen du "dur labeur du ressouvenir" retrouver les symptômes de la maladie de la culture qui a rendu possible cette catastrophe, pour, une fois ceux-ci identifiés, en guérir le corps social."

[169] Heidegger, op. cit. p. 105.

the sharp end to everything that the war imposed.

Of course Beuys' work does not exactly involve a direct tribute to the war and its many monstrosities, in the sense that its does not address directly the atrocities committed. However, it was a common conscience after the Second World War that a direct artistic representation of the atrocities committed, was not only inefficient but also totally out of question. Representation, having been the crux of modern European culture for the recent past centuries could not simply be employed again to account for this enormous, modern European cultural fallacy and perversion of the war.

The role of the term counter-image, *Gegenbild*, that Beuys often employed in his interviews and statements, demonstrates his conscious rejection of image as mere representation and describes the indirect and positive way that his works commemorate the events of the Second World War. In his own words: "These events [of the war and the Holocaust] can only be commemorated through a positive counter-image, to the extent that all this is really eliminated from the world and from man so that the rest of inhumanity may be surmounted."[170] Thus, the blocked chair with fat and the felt-covered piano are counter-images, rendering explicit these quotidian objects and their world and thus indicating a

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[170] Cited in Antoine, op. cit. p. 52. The passage in French is as follows: "Ces événements ne peuvent être mémorisés qu'à partir d'une contre-image positive, dans la mesure où tout cela est vraiment éliminé du monde et de l'homme afin que le reste de cette inhumanité soit surmonté."

new point of departure. At the same time they indexically commemorate the event of survival so that "the rest of inhumanity" may be surmounted and not repressed in the act and fury of the new beginning.

However, as Peirce warned his reader "...it would be difficult, if not impossible, to instance an absolutely pure index, or to find any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality."[171] Furthermore, both icons and symbols, permeate to a certain extent all things and it can therefore be inferred that Peirce's threefold distinction of signs in icons, indices and symbols is also valid in the interior of each sign.[172] Beuys also worked with symbols and assumed the expressionist stance they are usually accompanied with, in continuation with the prewar avant-garde tradition of expressionism in Germany. Thus, he consciously employed in his art fat and felt, and other degenerate, formless and quotidian materials that would have had his work surely banned during Hitler's era.[173] Moreover, he created a personal and collective mythology of remedy and healing through his art and life, in order to cope with the legacies that he, his country and Europe, in general,

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[171] Peirce, op. cit. p. 108.

[172] Ibid. pp. 105, 108, 112, 114.

[173] See Kuspit, "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. p. 40.

were left with, after the end of the Second World War.[174] And yet, as much as Beuys' expressionist stance is true and as much as the symbolic content of his works should not be excluded, this symbolic content is too often overemphasized in his critical reception. For simply noting the symbolic references of his materials does not suffice to illuminate the logic with which these materials are assembled or presented, and have, thus, so far, mostly closed rather than opened venues for the analysis of Beuys' oeuvre.[175] It is certainly true that Beuys himself, with his incessant, and at times contradictory and obscure statements and interviews, has also been responsible for his symbolically overinterpreted and yet hardly understood work. However, despite his faults in this regard, it is Beuys himself, again, who also emphatically stated several times and on different occasions, that he does

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[174] See for example Beuys' account of his experience with the Tartars who saved his life by wrapping his wounded and burned body in fat and felt after his plane crashed in their area. The facts that account of this experience have been contested by several critics but this contestation by itself, does not suffice, of course, to disqualify Beuys' art. Kuspit provides an answer for the artist in his remarks about the mythological impact of these events, without regard to their factical or fictional status. See his "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. pp. 29, 30, 31, 34, 35, 36. Also his "The Body of the Artist," op. cit. pp. 96, 97, 98, 100. For the account of the experience with the Tartars see also Stachelhaus, op. cit. pp. 18-25. For the contestation of this experience see Buchloh, op. cit. p. 38 and Buchloh, Krauss, Michelson, op. cit. p. 8.

[175] It is almost the entirety of Beuys' critics, particularly those who are favorably disposed towards him that empahsize the symbolic and mythological associations in his work as for example Kuspit, Stachelhaus, Adriani, Tisdall and others.

not work with symbols but only with materials.[176]

While with his quotidian objects Beuys tried to launch a new beginning in art, thought and action, with his appended materials, he attempted to safeguard the memory of the past so that this new beginning, after the war, that he strived to herald, avoids the past's grave mistakes.

II. Possibility and Dialectics of the Encounter with the Other in a 1965 *Action* by Joseph Beuys

An examination of Beuys' work would not be thorough if it did not consider his actions, the performances that constituted the major part of his work. One of the earliest, most famous, as well as most enigmatic actions, remained known under the title *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*, (How to Explain the Paintings to a Dead Hare) (See Fig. 6, 7) and took place during the opening night of Beuys' first exhibition at the Schmela Gallery of Düsseldorf, the 26 of November 1965. The artist held in his hands close to his body a dead hare as if it was a child and went around the gallery exhibition, whispering to it and pretending to explain to it, the paintings, for three hours. Having attached under his right foot an iron sole, his right foot banged loudly on the floor causing him to limp rather than walk. For three hours,

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[176] See his interview with Louwrien Wijers in the Energy Plan for the Western Man: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist. op. cit. p. 252. See also Mark Rosenthal, Joseph Beuys, Blitzschlag mit Lichtschein auf Hirsch. (Frankfurt am Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1991), p. 36 and Antoine, op. cit. p. 54.

while the first part of the action lasted, the audience was not allowed inside the gallery but attended the event by looking through the gallery's glass door and window. All during the action, Beuys' face and head were shaved and covered with honey and gold leaf. As soon as three hours elapsed, Beuys took a seat on a stool, with one of its legs partly coated with felt and which was placed upon a file cabinet, occupying thus a high and conspicuous place in the gallery. Always keeping the hare in his hands, he continued whispering to it. Two microphones, one hidden inside a bone, under the seat and, another, in front of the artist, transmitted Beuys' murmuring around the room, where the audience was now allowed to enter and see the rest of the action, its second part, along with the exhibition of Beuys' other works, drawings etc.[177]

The most troubling and enigmatic element in this action is also its most central element, the dead animal, around which all the action's components, including its title, are arranged. Beuys' interest in animals and particularly in certain among them like the hare, the stag, the elk, the sheep, the swan and the bee, is well known and documented from his drawings which his critics see as an early depository of

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[177] For a more analytic description of the action see the report at Joseph Beuys exh. cat. op. cit. pp. 279-280.

his ideas for later work.[178] Noone else before Beuys was so artistically "concerned" with animals. Yet, this concern whose importance by far exceeds the category of subject-matter, to acquire a structural role in Beuys' work, remains largely unqualified among Beuys' critics.[179]

What paralyzes thinking and interpretation in this action is the dead hare, the role of which nonetheless, offers no immediate clue for its deciphering and seems beyond conceptual reach. If already the animal, poses many difficulties for thought due to its alterity, the dead animal presents an even more complicated case and is indeed one of the most extreme cases of otherness. Thus, the dead animal is something that could be named as "altogether other" or "totally other" or

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[178] See Stachelhaus, op. cit. p. 54, and Lauf, op. cit. p. 67. The importance of animals in Beuys' work may be further attested by the famous action he performed at the gallery René Block of New York, in 1974 with the title, *I like America and America likes me*. The artist lived for a week in the gallery space with a coyote. For a detailed historical, critical and photographic account of the action, see Caroline Tisdall, Coyote. Trad. Dominique Le Bourg, (Paris: Hazan, 1988).

[179] See for example Hergott who insinuates that the reason why Beuys employs the dead hare is to test and ultimately prove his ability to communicate with everybody, as if the "fact" of this communication had already been established. See Joseph Beuys. exh. cat. op. cit. p. 74. However, everybody knows that communication with anyone dead is not so simply possible. It has been claimed by Kuspit that the hare is the victim or Beuys himself, in Kuspit's "The Body of the Artist" in Thistlewood, op. cit. p. 101, or that the hare stands for "the intuitive power of human thought" by Florence Malet in Joseph Beuys. exh. cat. op. cit. p. 280 or even that the hare symbolizes the Egyptian God Thoth, the God of writing, by Gregory L. Ulmer, Applied Grammatology. Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 257 but none of these arguments about what stands for what, addresses really the problems that Beuys opens up with his action.

"completely other" to borrow Jacques Derrida's expression "tout autre" from his essay *Tout autre est tout autre* (All other/every other is totally other, altogether other, completely other.)[180] What is "altogether other" refers to radical alterity, and first and foremost to the case of God. Indeed God is so infinitely Other that it is "altogether Other," in the most radical way; God is the most radical alterity one can think of and noone else showed this better than Soren Kierkegaard, as Derrida reports.[181] However, the dead animal too is a case of radical alterity, less perhaps than God but certainly more than the alterity of humans, since we have less clear notions about its life, customs, feeling and behavior than what we have about humans. Responsibility, in the case of God, is founded beyond knowledge, in the relatively blind domain of faith, as indicates the Kierkegaardian interpretation of the story of Abraham, asked by God to sacrifice to Him, his only and beloved son Isaac.[182] As Derrida indicates, one of the messages of this story is that responsibility against cases of radical alterity of which we only have a vague notion, is, in part, founded beyond knowledge.

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[180] Jacques Derrida, "Tout autre est Tout Autre" The Gift of Death. Trans. David Wills, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 82-115, pp. 82-83 in particular, for the tautological and heterological interpretation of the phrase.

[181] Ibid. pp. 83-84.

[182] Ibid. pp. 84-85.

This is also one of the messages that Beuys' action conveys: responsibility against the radical alterity cannot be entirely founded on a concept but must also be based on non conceptual notions, such as faith, belief, hospitality, mourning and others. Moreover, responsibility against the radical alterity depends on a certain welcoming of the unknown, or the secret, in the same way as Beuys welcomes and holds closely in his hands the dead hare.[183] This unfounded conceptually responsibility against radical alterity, the human responsibility in the case of animals, dead or alive, may authorize all our various decisions to speak for them, claim or defend their rights, protest the environmental pollution that destroys their natural habitat, etc. Talking to a dead hare which cannot answer, addressing him with a gaze which it cannot reciprocate, describes the relation to the other in "an absolute disymmetry," beyond vision and communication, in some strange economy seemingly unmarked by exchange.[184] If Beuys' address is deemed to be obviously irrational, it is this irrationality or rather non rationality, that necessarily permeates decisions of the most rational kind. For, to take such rational decisions, one needs to integrate the irrational, as faith, belief, hospitality, mourning and the like, in the economy of rational decision.

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[183] Ibid. and pp. 88-91.

[184] Derrida calls this economy "sacrificial," ibid. pp. 82-115 and in particular pp. 90, 91, 93, 94, 95.

If it has become clear that responsibility cannot be or be founded on a concept, this perhaps indicates a limit of rationality, in all senses of the term limit as limitation, point of departure and principle of authority. It is precisely this limit of rationality that Beuys has been talking about and has been questioning all along his life as much as he has been talking and acting on ecological initiatives.[185]

But neither Derrida's essay "Tout autre est tout autre," nor Beuys' action solely concern the "radically other." For as Derrida's essay title indicates, *every single other* is totally other, altogether other and even radically other.[186] This clearly means that not only God or animals but also every single human being, every man and woman is other, no matter how close or familiar they are to the one who utters this sentence. It finally means that even the most familiar other to me, me, myself, to the extent that I am always unknown, also to myself, I am also always some other, this self of mine is also a case of radical alterity. Every kind of responsibility is therefore permeated and founded in its basis by the unknown, by something that cannot become conceptually ordered or rendered, even that elementary responsibility I

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[185] See Harlan, op. cit. p. 144-147 and Stachelhaus, pp. 106, 146 about his ecological contribution and his initiative/action *7000 Oaks*. See also his critique of rationality in Götz Adriani, Beuys. Σχέδια, Αντικείμενα, Χαρακτικά. Μεταφ. Αικατερίνη Στεφανάκη, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Μακεδονικό Μουσείο Σύγχρονης Τέχνης, 26 Μαρτίου-30 Απριλίου 1997), p. 7.

[186] Derrida, op. cit. pp. 83, 84.

take for myself, which concerns my actions and decisions. And yet, for centuries now, we have been repeatedly told, that it is precisely this conceptual ordering or rendering of my actions and decisions, in short rationality, that distinguishes me as human and confers to me the degree of luxury in the animal and vegetal kingdoms. For, according to popular philosophical conviction humans are "rational animals," *animalia rationalia*, *ζώα λόγον έχοντα*. [187] We should at the moment leave aside the fact that this strange designation, "rational animal," constitutes today a dubious philosophic heritage which has been undergoing long translating mutations over its many centuries' ripening, until the twentieth century, when it has been consistently found "wanting."[188] For our considerations, the most important thing about this designation is that it places humanity between two open halves, animality and rationality, leaving the gap between them undetermined and precisely ignoring the non rational or non conceptual part determining responsibility and decision which characterize humans. The result of such a designation, "rational animal," is then the repression of both rationality and animality, if I am allowed to state so elliptically an intuition that certainly merits a much longer

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[187] Heidegger, op. cit. pp. 208, 209.

[188] See for example both Heidegger's critique in Being and Time, op. cit. pp. 74-75 and particularly pp. 208-209, as well as Hannah Arendt's critique in her book The Human Condition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 84-86 of humankind's definition in the designation "rational animal."

consideration.[189]

Beuys would thus be inconsistent to consider the radical alterity of the other, in the form of the dead animal, without acknowledging the alterity that resides in himself. This is precisely the reason why he attempts to change identity, to mask his own proper identity in order to explicitly pay tribute to his own alterity. It is indeed remarkable as Florence Malet indicates, that exceptionally for this action, Beuys did not wear his famous hat.[190] He rather applied to his face and head, honey, traditionally a sign of affluence and one of his favorite materials, bearing an indexical relation with the transformation of energy, particularly between the vegetal and the animal world. On honey he stuck gold leaves, a material that, at least since Leon Battista Alberti's times, has strongly been associated in art, with the representation of majesty.[191] He set around him bones and felt and wore an iron sole which banged loudly on the gallery floor, every time he moved. On the one hand, he seems to have literally assumed an ancient armour with his simulated golden majestic mask, his "iron heel," the protective devices of the

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[189] The history of this repression is admirable and has at times had, according to Derrida, opposite than the expected effects. See his reading of Nietzsche's and Patocka's analyses of Christianity, in Derrida, op. cit. pp. 113-115.

[190] Reported by Florence Malet, Joseph Beuys. Exh. cat, op. cit. p. 279.

[191] See Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting. Trans. John R. Spencer, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 85.

felt and the bone, his honey as his emblem of affluence, health and plenitude, his high and conscpicuous position in the second part of the action and finally and most importantly his loud banging and limping while walking, during the first part of the action. On the other hand, the honey on his face and head, indexically related to both the animal and vegetal worlds, the felt which is like an animal's skin, the bone with its associations with hunting and the prey, all combined with the close association he attempts to show that he is building between himself and the dead hare, irrevocably point to the side of the animal. With these two antithetical gestures, Beuys seeks to demonstrate the contrast between the animal and the human, as a contrast interior to oneself, a contrast that always remains tense and unresolved, and finally a contrast that qualifies one's own alterity of self.

It is this ancient contrast, ancient in both senses of primordial with respect to humanity and premature with respect to one's own self evolution, growing and aging, that Jacques Lacan places at the center of the function of the I. The subject, according to Lacan, is and has been eternally divided not only since its birth but also since the founding of its conceptual and symbolic apparatus in modern times. This division and contrast is being psychoanalytically thematized in a succession of fantasies, during the subject's individual life. According to the one end of them, the subject assumes "the armor of an alienating identity," "a form of totality"

which is "orthopaedic" and which "will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development."[192] According to the other end, the subject's fantasies about itself, involve "a fragmented body," manifesting itself in dreams, "in the form of disjoined limbs" as well as in many other forms of individual disintegration and fragilization.[193] Beuys interiorizes the subject's division and presents it as such to the viewer, as a division between his rational armour and his animal fragmentedness. The designation of humanity, conveyed in the locution "rational animal," is a designation pointing to the self's destiny of eternal division, in the same way as Lacan's I, the subject, is eternally divided. Like Lacan, Beuys opposes this designation, "rational animal," by experientially demonstrating the two unreconciled halves it opens for oneself, and consequently its repressive ramifications.[194] Beuys' constant, impulsive and monotonous murmur to the dead hare, enacts his conscience of and opposition to rational animality, by the impossible bridge it attempts to build between himself and the dead hare. For this obviously futile

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[192] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" Ecrits. A Selection. Trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. 4.

[193] Ibid. pp. 4, 5.

[194] Lacan indicates that "It is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the Cogito." Ibid. p. 1.

attempt to address a dead hare, fits neither to the animal nor to the human, in the sense that it is neither rational nor instictive, to put it schematically. But it is this futile attempt that conveys Beuys' conscience of the two halves in between of which humanity is located. Furthermore, it indicates a conception of self oscillating between the two halves and therefore a conception of self as a locus of an irredeemable radical alterity.

From a certain different point of view, the emphasis that Beuys seems to be placing on death indicates a conception of humanity that parallels Heidegger's own view of Dasein in his early work. The structural and defining centrality of death is something that Beuys here, shares with Heidegger's writings about Dasein in Being and Time, and the two are indeed motivated by "being towards death," an issue so important for Heidegger. And yet despite the extreme resemblance or even thanks to it, Beuys' views seem to be clearly different from Heidegger's on these specific topics of death and of what it finally means to be human. For even if both Beuys and Heidegger place mortality at the center of their considerations, mortality for Heidegger only concerns the Dasein. As it is known, Heidegger never stopped insisting both in his early and late work that only Dasein properly dies, or in some cases demises (*ableben*).[195] Death is Dasein's own

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[195] See Heidegger, Being and Time. op. cit. pp. 282, 284, 291, 294, 299, 303, 306, 307 for Dasein's proper death or demise. See also his later collection of essays under the title Poetry,

most innerproper possibility and animals only perish (*verenden*).[196] He thus denied mortality from animals. And yet as Derrida indicates "against or without Heidegger, one could point to a thousand signs that show that animals also die."[197] Beuys' disymmetrical address of the dead animal, his constant murmuring to him and guiding him around the exhibition gallery is thus not only difficult to fit into Heidegger's existential analytic but is also rather organized against it, in accordance with Derrida's assumption, that animals finally do die. Moreover, this death of animals is also constitutive of my death, of my self and of my humanity, as it is from this death that I derive any notion of death that I might have. And Derrida continues by maintaining that:

> ...one can say that animals have a very significant relation to death, to murder and to war (hence to borders), to mourning and to hospitality and so forth, even if they have no relation to death nor to the "name" of death as such, nor by the same token, to the other as such. But neither does man, that is precisely the point! Nor does even man as Dasein, assuming that one could rigorously say man and man as Dasein. Who will guarantee that the name, the ability to name death (like that of naming the other and it is the same) does not participate as much in the dissimulation of the "as such" of death as in its revelation, and that language is not precisely the origin of the nontruth of death, and of the other?
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> For, conversely, if death is indeed the possibility of the impossible and therefore the possibility of appearing as such of the impossibility of appearing as

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Language, Thought and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" in particular, Trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 150-151.

[196] See Heidegger's Being and Time, ibid.

[197] Jacques Derrida, Aporias. Trans. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 75.

> such either, then man, or man as Dasein, never has a relation to death as such, but only to perishing, to demising, and to the death of the other, who is not the other. The death of the other thus becomes again "first," always first. It is like the experience of mourning that institutes my relation to myself and constitutes the egoity of the ego as well as every *Jemeinigkeit* in the *différance*-neither internal nor external-that structures this experience. The death of the other, this death of the other in "me," is fundamentally the only death that is named in the syntagm "my death," with all the consequences that one can draw from this.[198]

It would take a long time to delineate Derrida's detailed itinerary that leads him, through a critique of Heidegger, to such a conclusion and on which is based this reading of Beuys' action under consideration. At this point it could be said with simplification and quite elliptically, that if, according to Heidegger, death as such is mine and is what defines me but can never be known, it is only through the other's death, according to Derrida, that we acquire some idea of what death means, be that other a human or an animal. But if it is the other' death that constitutes my humanity, as it gives me an idea of my own death, however distorted and inauthentic this idea or notion may be, then my humanity besides being constituted by my being towards death, is also constituted by an "originary mourning."[199] Why in the first place should my humanity be constituted by one thing alone? Already in 1924, Walter Benjamin alluded to mourning as a fundamental condition of humanity, always in latency, to be "awakened" by the

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[198] Ibid. p. 76.

[199] Ibid. p. 60.

Trauerspiel, the German tragic drama.[200] And more recently Derrida in Specters of Marx defines mourning as an attempt

> to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead (all ontologization, all semantization-philosophical, hermeunetical or psychoanalytical-finds itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet think it; we are posing here the question of the specter, to the specter, whether it be Hamlet's or Marx's, on this near side of such thinking).[201]

Mourning is thus one of the defining traits of my humanity. And Beuys' whispering and murmuring to the dead hare conveyed precisely this, an attempt to ontologize the remains of the dead hare, to identify and localize them, in the context of art, by addressing the specter of the hare. Grieving over the dead hare, Beuys rendered the public gallery space to a semi-private place, by initially allowing only partial view of his acts by the audience, and finally, by making the audience part of his mourning, through the microphone that transmitted the undecipherable sounds of his whispering all around the gallery. Through this ritual he transformed the gallery space to a place, proper to the values that dictate all cultures of mourning. A place where he can grieve the loss of the animal and commemorate its lost world, a part of his own world as well, through art, traditionally

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[200] Walter Benjamin, The Origin of the German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osborne, (London: NLB, 1977), p. 119.

[201] Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx. Trans. Peggy Kamuf, (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.

the most fierce opponent and conqueror of nature.[202]

III. Myth and Reality in Joseph Beuys' Art

Mourning and commemoration play indeed such an important role in Beuys' work, that they constitute the aspects of his work which precisely distinguish him from Marcel Duchamp, the dadaists, the early avant-garde artists as well as his contemporary Fluxus artists and peers. For as it is already mentioned, Beuys conceived of and practiced art in a very positive and specific to himself and to his time manner. He thought of art in an expanded and "anthropological" manner, without seeking to transgress it.[203]

Thus, he spoke of teaching as his "greatest work of art,"[204] claimed that sculpture should "obstinately question the basic premises of the prevailing culture"[205] and that art should aim to social reform and economic change.[206] He

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[202] See Hegel, op. cit. p. 55. Hegel reports that art's task is to raise man "above and away from mere sunkenness in nature."

[203] See his interview with Frans Haks, in Thistlewood, op. cit. pp. 55, 56, 57.

[204] Ulmer departs from this statement that he combines with the analysis he procures for Beuys' work as a kind of writing (riteing) to finally declare that "The best way to appreciate the specific nature of this Writing (riteing) is not as art, science or philosophy but as pedagogy." See Ulmer, op. cit. p. 245.

[205] See the 1969 interview with Willoughby Sharp, in Kuoni, op. cit. pp. 85, 86.

[206] See Joseph Beuys, Par la présente je n'appartiens plus à l'art. Ed. Max Reithmann, Trad. Olivier Mannoni et Pierre Borassa, (Paris: L'Arche, 1988), pp. 24, 29, 30, 36. See also "A public dialogue in New York City" in Kuoni, op. cit. pp. 34, 35, for

further called everybody an artist and attempted to propose a new theory of "creativity," along with a sociological critique of art and culture in his time. In his own words:

> Creativity isn't the monopoly of artists. When I say that everybody is an artist I mean that everybody can determine the content of life in his particular sphere, whether in painting, music, engineering, caring for the sick, the economy or whatever. The dilemma of museums and other institutions stems from the fact that culture is such an isolated field and art is even more isolated: an ivory tower in the field of culture surrounded first by the whole complex of culture and education and then by media-television, radio, the press-which are also part of culture. We have a restricted idea of culture which debases everything; and it's the debased concept of art that has forced museums into their present weak and isolated position.[207]

Finally, he even claimed that his lectures and interviews "do not constitute interpretations but exist at the same level as even as part of (verbal expressions of) the art."[208]

With all these claims and ideas that he explicitly and repeatedly voiced in whatever occasion was given to him, it is clear how much Beuys attempted to channel by himself the reception of his work.[209] He not only seems to have considered this reception as also part of his job but seems to

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Beuys' conception of art as a revolutionary power. For Beuys' several political activities during the entire course of his artistic career see Stachelhaus, op. cit. pp. 107-121.

[207] See the interview with Frans Haks, in Thistlewood, op. cit. p. 53.

[208] See Ullmer, op. cit. 228.

[209] See Beuys' work at the exhibition Documenta 5 in Kassel, in 1972 where his presentation consisted of "one hundred days of debate with the public on democracy, art and all related issues." See Stachelhaus, op. cit. pp. 109, 110, 112.

have recognized no border between his private life and persona and his work, going to such extremes as declaring all his utterances as art! It is therefore understandable that those who met him and saw him, spoke of his charisma and placed the value of Beuys' work, neither in the craftsmanship of his creations, nor in the originality of his works' inception, but in the person himself, who with his life and comportment elicited the impression of "a real artist!"[210]

But the fact that his artwork had such a dependence on his persona and cannot even be imagined without him, has also one more important aspect. Beuys consciously brought a lot of his own personal history and biography into his artwork. A number of his objects, besides being part of his actions, were also objects that simply surrounded him and which he employed, without hiding the fact that they were quotidian articles of his house, his past, his family and the like.[211] Beuys' critics are right about pointing the importance of the autobiographical references and aspects of his work in relation to his sociopolitical interests and

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[210] I am here referring to Dore Ashton and her oral testimony about Beuys, communicated to the author in person, on Wednesday, December 3, 1997.

[211] For example the grand piano of the piece *Homogeneous Infiltration for Grand Piano* or the cello from *Homogeneous Infiltration for Cello* were his own musical instruments. Likewise, the bathtub in *Badewanne* (1960).

preoccupations.[212] And yet Beuys' activity as his moderate statements in that regard, clearly indicate, did not aim to follow a model like that of the 19th century German idealists or romantics, who attempted to turn their entire life into a work of art. Although this point needs a detailed consideration, one can briefly say that if his life mattered indeed for his art, as his art for his life, his life was only "a tool" for his art, as he declared, and he did not, by any means, seek to make it totally coincide with his art.[213]

Drawing from his own life and even using all of his activities and their relics, even the most personal ones, as materials for his art, Beuys was a *bricoleur* in Claude Lévi-Strauss' sense of the term which is unfortunately

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[212] See for example Alain Borer's "Déploration de Joseph Beuys" in Joseph Beuys. Exh. cat. op. cit. p. 30, where Borer defines Beuys' oeuvre as a some sort of theurapetical practice for both himself and society. According to Heiner Bastian the motive behind this therapeutic work was Beuys' sense of guilt from his participation as a German in the Second World War. See his essay "Rien n'est encore écrit" Trad. Eliane Kaufholz-Mezzmer, pp. 41-42, also in the above exhibition catalogue. Ulmer mentions Beuys' statements which, on the one hand, confirmed that his materials did not merely carry autobiographical allusions but were "elements of a theory to do with the potential and meaning of sculpture" and, on the other hand, affirmed the importance of autobiography in his work. See, for example, Beuys' statement that "My personal story is of interest only in so far as I have attempted to use my life and person as a tool and I think this was so from a very early age." See Ulmer, op. cit. pp. 235, 239.

[213] This is the danger of some well-intentioned advocates of Beuys who neglect the moderation of his statements and attempt to relate his work to Schelling, Novalis and others by committing a risky and potentially compromising for the artist anachronism. See Max Reithmann, "Langue et liberté" Joseph Beuys: La mort me tient en éveil. Trad. Edmond Marchal et Annie Reithmann, (Paris: Editions ARPAP, 1994), pp. 215-284.

untranslatable to English.[214] Lévi-Strauss defines the *bricoleur* as follows:

> The "bricoleur" is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project. His universe of intruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever" is "at hand," that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is always heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions. The set of the "bricoleur's" means cannot therefore be defined in terms of a project (which would presuppose besides, that, as in the case of engineer, there were, at least in theory, as many sets of tools and materials or "instrumental sets," as there are different kinds of projects). It is to be defined only by its potential use or, putting this another way and in the language of the "bricoleur" himself, because the elements are collected or retained on the principle that "they may always come in handy." Such elements are specialized up to a point, sufficently for the "bricoleur" not to need the equipment and knowledge of all trades and professions, but not enough for each of them to have only one definite and determinate use. They each represent a set of actual and possible relations; they are "operators" but they can be used for any operations of the same type.[215]

Beuys sought to use for his art, exactly like the bricoleur, and unlike the craftsman or the engineer only what was immediately available around him, no matter how heterogeneous and limited this was. Hence his "poor," ephemeral and precarious materials, employed again and again

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[214] Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind. Trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, Ltd, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 16, 17.

[215] Ibid. pp. 17, 18.

for the same or different versions of his works.[216] Borrowing here and there from all things surrounding him, he thus did not distinguish between his art and life but gave an account of both, in the set of his limited possibilities.[217] Beuys consciously did not seek to put any new materials or elements at his disposal as the process of commemoration and mourning was so essential for him. To achieve both of these processes he had to use and reuse the relics of what was around him, no matter how elementary or destroyed. He thus attempted to ontologize and localize remains, ruins or detriments of everyday life in order to herald a new beginning, from whatever was left behind, from the end of the Second World War.

This is perhaps another one of the meanings of Beuys' generalized call for creativity. It was essentially a call addressed to everybody, to work with whatever poor means were available, in order to generate a new beginning, one that would heal the wounds of the past while at the same time secure the memory of this past in the future.[218]

This is also precisely why it has been so essentially difficult to catalogue, install, exhibit, or consider Beuys' work. For Beuys' work, like the work of the *bricoleur* is

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[216] Ibid. p. 21.

[217] Ibid. p. 21.

[218] Lévi-Strauss reports how the bricoleur works with signs and in particular with the index as his/her constructions always bring to mind their original point of departure. Ibid. p. 18.

extremely specific to the circumstance, site and time of its inception. Each structure and intervention was unique because it depended so much on the constraints of the circumstance and therefore on Beuys' own *bricolage*.[219] Each event in Beuys' life and work called for a structure much in contrast to science that, as Lévi-Strauss reports, the events are less important to the final achievement of a structure, catering for all of them at once.[220]

Furthermore, *bricolage* has another essential aspect, namely the fact that it is closely related to mythical thought, always according to Lévi-Strauss. For, "the characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if excessive, is nevertheless limited."[221] Mythical thought is thus a kind of "*intellectual bricolage*."[222] Mythical thought which lies "half-way between percepts and concepts" is by no means an inferior intellectual activity, according to Lévi-Strauss but is, on the contrary, put on the same intellectual level as scientific thought.[223]

The total of convoluted and contradictory statements of Beuys who did not really attempt to build an intellectual

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[219] Ibid. p. 19.

[220] Ibid. p. 25.

[221] Ibid. p. 17.

[222] Ibid.

[223] Ibid. pp. 17, 18.

consistency of the type of the critic, the art historian or the scientist, can indeed be termed as an "intellectual bricollage," a private mythology. This mythology serving each time different needs, makes it difficult, if not irrelevant to control it, by attempting to distinguish myth and reality or truth from fiction in it. Therefore, to contest the "facts" of Beuys' life with which the latter accompanied his work, does not mean to disqualify his work, as Krauss and Buchloh think.[224] For neither Beuys' sayings, nor his life can be easily and strictly separated from his work. His sayings, mythical or real, fictional or true, are part of the specific works to which they refer, and which they accompany even if it is impossible for the critic to take under consideration everything that Beuys has said about them. For the critic works with the problematic, albeit unavoidable at this historical stage, conventions of art history and necessarily presupposes opposite her/him, some material given, which he/she then brackets or delimits as "the work of art." Therefore, as Kuspit indicates, mythology is indeed important for Beuys,[225] however not for some of the reasons he indicates. Mythology is important, neither as a method of an authentic, poetic existence, nor as an effect of interiority,

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[224] See Buchloh, Krauss, Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim" op. cit. pp. 7, 8.

[225] See Kuspit, "Joseph Beuys: Between Showman and Shaman" op. cit. p. 30.

spirituality or subjectivity,[226] but as a supplement for Beuys' material work, that enhances its intellectual power and meanings. Thus Beuys' mythology enhances his works' power to institute places for commemoration and mourning for the loss of a certain old and worn out world and to call for a new world, built from the ruins of the old one.

Epilogue: The Cross, the Signature and the Cat

None in the artworld will deny the fact that the cross has nowadays become a kind of index of Beuys' work, activity and presence as a contemporary artist. However, the centrality of the cross in Beuys' work does not solely stem from mere observation but is also explicitly or implicitly reconfirmed in the artist's words or actions. The cross has become something like his signature, as Beuys declared without however excluding other meanings for this elementary mark. In his own words: "One could take the cross as a signature or maybe as a symbol of life. I fear always this declaration of symbols. Normally I do not work with symbols."[227] Then Beuys has been consistently talking about the Christ[228] and his sacrifice on the cross, about the lack of "the religious

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[226] Ibid. pp. 29, 30, 31, 34, 35.

[227] See interview with Wijers, op. cit. p. 252.

[228] For two examples among many see Reithmann, Par la présente je n'appartiens plus à l'art. op. cit. p. 27, and Beuys' manifesto for the foundation of a "Free International School for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research" written with Heinrich Böll, in Kuoni, op. cit. p. 175.

element" in art,[229] or has been designing crosses to indicate that one should reflect on things horizontally and vertically,[230] perhaps in Mondrian's manner. As mentioned before, Beuys' critics have also offered the indication that the cross is not accidentally similar to the sign of the Red Cross Foundation.

Perhaps this is only a small number of possibilities that indicate several directions for interpretation of Beuys' cross. This ubiquitous mark has thus indeed become some kind of signature of Beuys' style or presence as an artist, as it is "absolutely singular" to his case in the history of modern and contemporary art, and, yet, "purely reproducible" at the same time.[231] Moreover, this mark has also become typical of all Beuys' artwork which is equally determined by a disseminated content, harboring therefore, practically endless possibilities of interpretation. For expanded theories of art

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[229] The importance of religion and religiosity in Beuys' art is very significant. As he himself said:

> Art can no longer tackle the problems of life because it's ceased to radiate religion. The religious element is lacking- we don't know how men enter the world or how they leave it- these are all unresolved mysteries. But it seems to me that these are precisely the subjects that art should deal with and they 've been excluded.

In Haks, op. cit. p. 7.

[230] Beuys, Kounellis, Kiefer, Cucchi. Bâtissons une cathédrale. Entretien. Ed. Jacqueline Burckhardt, Trad. Olivier Mannoni, (Paris: L'Arche, 1988), p. 147.

[231] For the contradictory defining traits of signature see Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" Limited Inc. Trans. Saluel Weber, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 20.

naturally require expanded theories of interpretation. To choose how to interpret, one not only has to look into the artwork examined, but also outwards, towards the proper values and urgencies of one's own working and living environment.

These dialectics of the inside and outside have for a long time, now, been guiding the philosophical animal, be that an *animale rationale*, a blond beast[232] or a beast of burden.[233] Views from the outside often determine what is, or what was inside, they commemorate it or pretend to know it only in order to better mourn its loss and inaccessibility. The journey to capture essence has many stops and surprises.

> Farewell to savages, then, farewell to journeying! And instead, during the brief intervals in which humanity can bear to interrupt its hive-like labours, let us grasp the essence of what our species has been and still is, beyond thought and beneath society: an essence that may be vouchsafed to us in a mineral more beautiful than any work of Man; in the scent, more subtly evolved than our books, that lingers in the heart of a lily; or in the wink of an eye, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that sometimes, through an involuntary understanding, one can exchange with a cat.[234]

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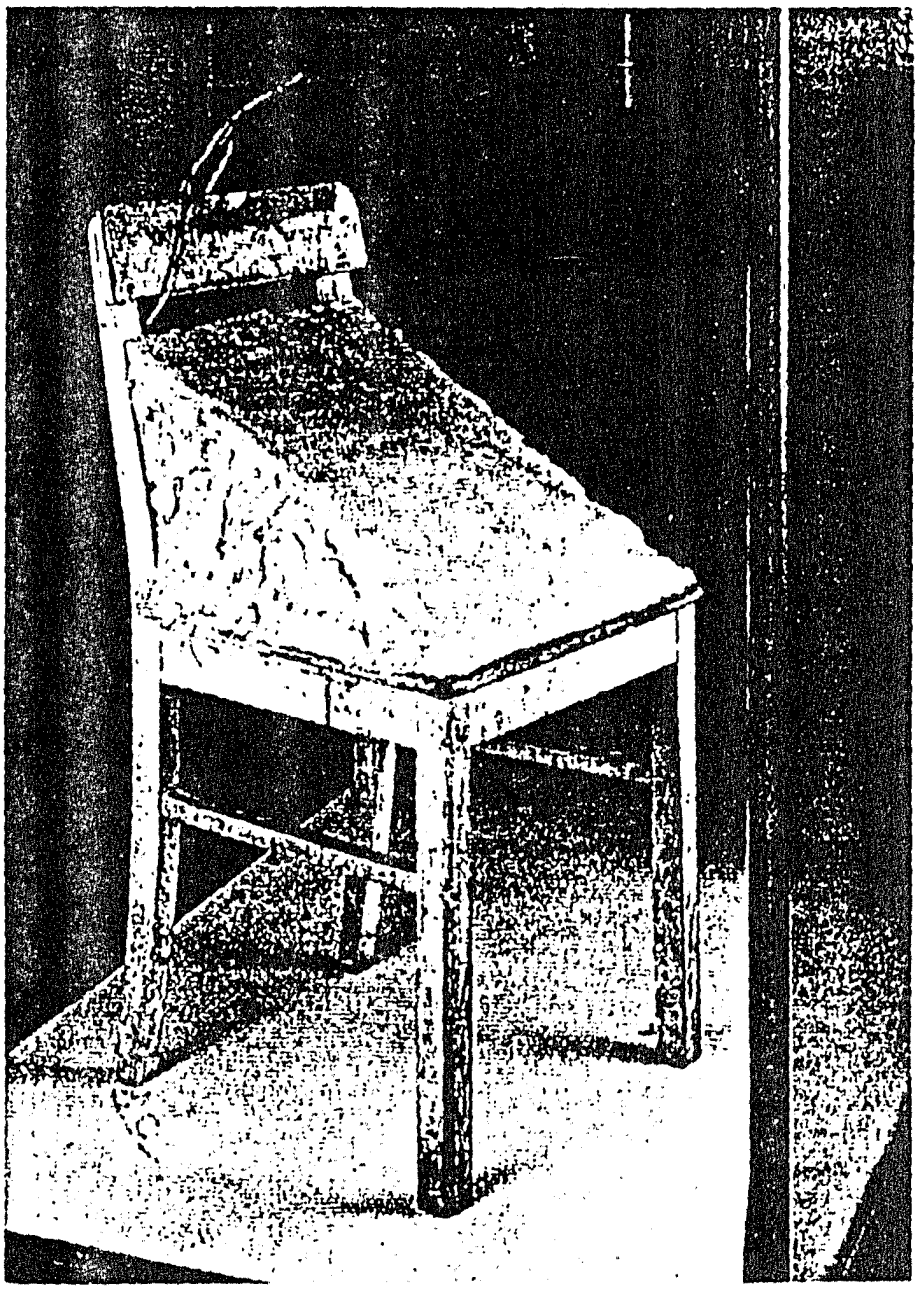
[232] Friedrich Nietsche, On the Genealogy of Morals. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, (New York: Random House, Inc, 1989), pp. 41-42, 86. Nietzsche's notorious "blond beast" or the "beast of prey" two names he reserved for his fellow Europeans, were also freely translated by Francis Golffing as "a pack of savages, a race of conquerors."

[233] Martin Heidegger, "Dépassement de la métaphysique" Essais et Conférences. Trad. André Preau, (Paris: Gallimard, 1958). p. 82. The exact reference in French is *bête de labeur* and Heidegger refers to what has become of the "rational animal" in his day. An abridged form of this essay has also appeared in English but the passage we refer to, has been ommitted in the English version.

[234] Claude Lévi-Strauss, Tristes tropiques. Trans. James Russell, (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 398.

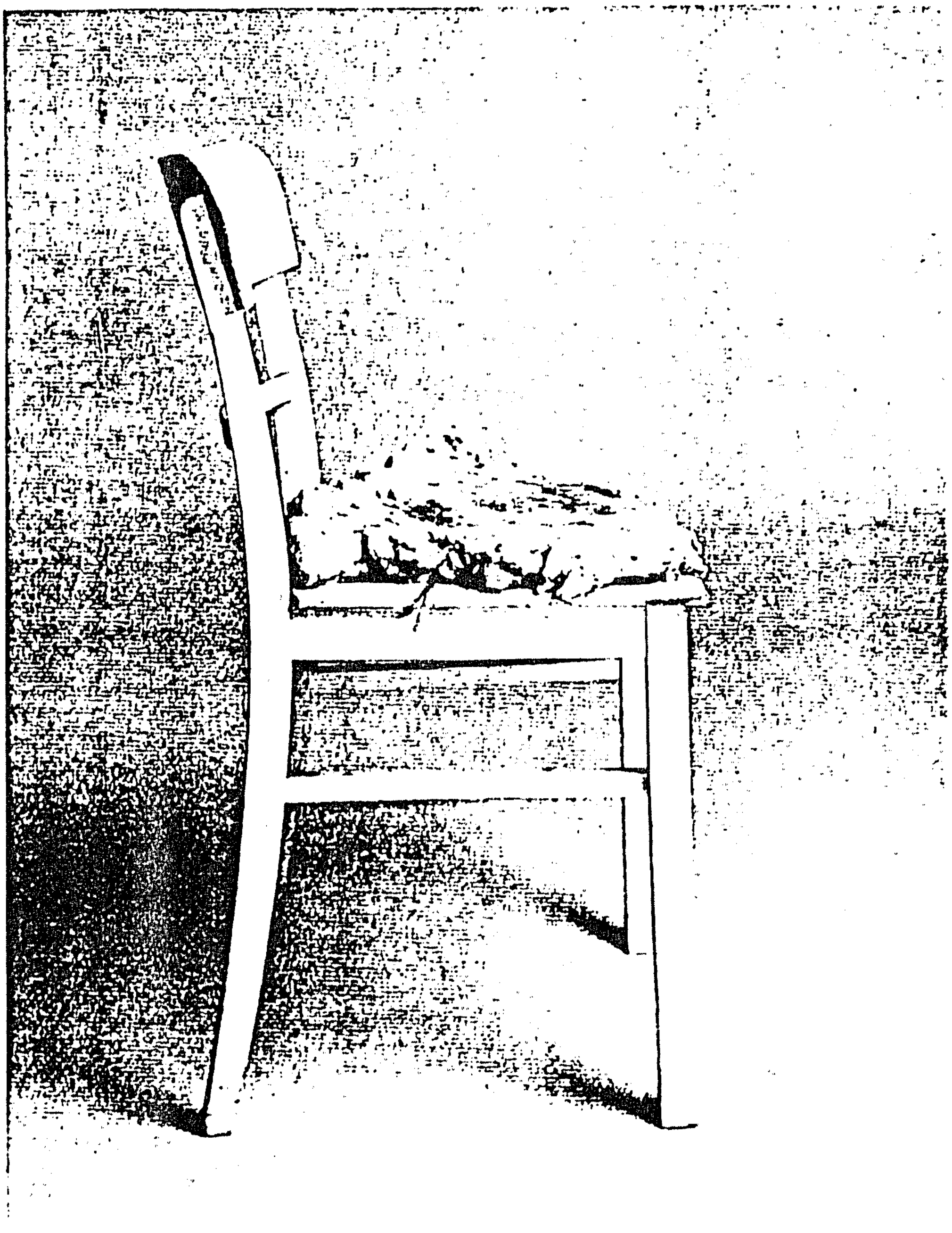
[illegible] *Titus Iphigenie* (Titus Iphigenie), Festival de théatre Experimental, Theater am Turm, Francfort sur le Main [illegible]

Fig. 1



Stuhl mit Fett (Chaise avec graisse), 1963. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt

Fig. 2



Fettstuhl I 1963/85 (Chaise de graisse), [illegible] 1985 Collection Céline et Heiner Bastian

Fig. 3

[illegible] Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

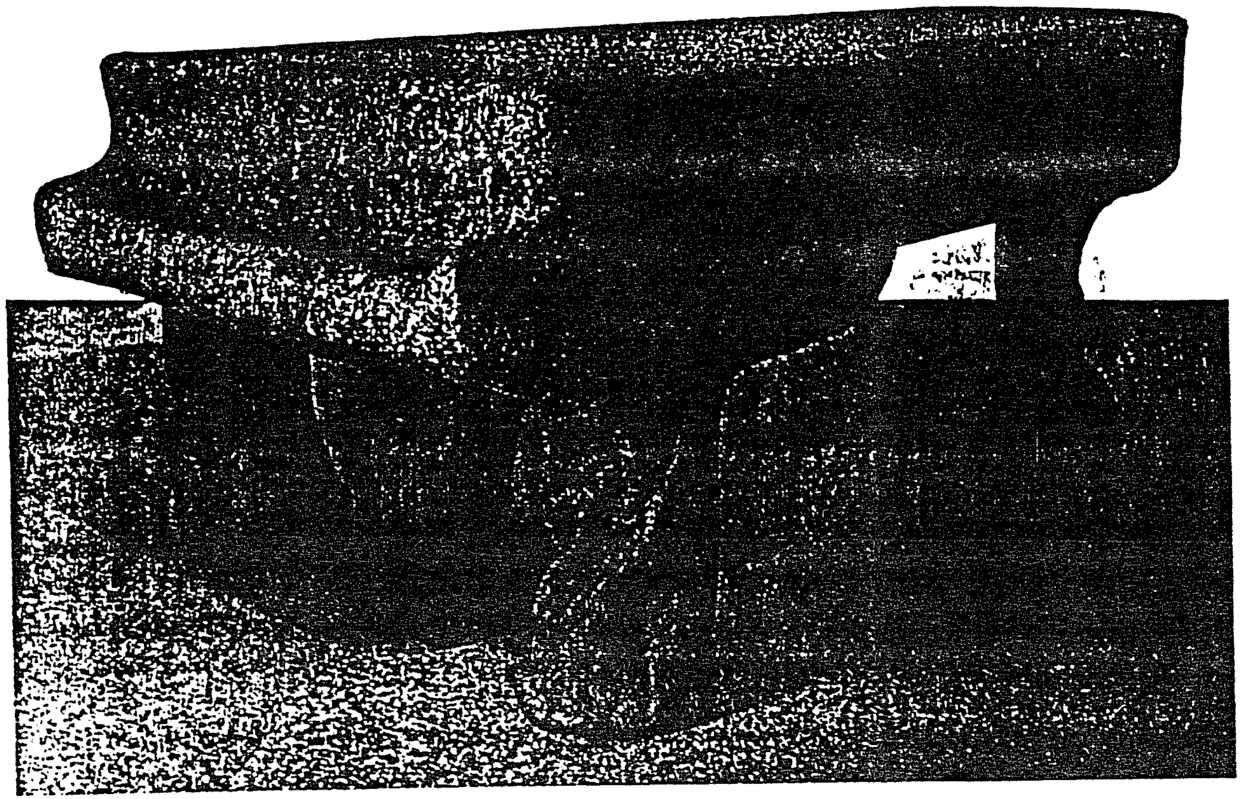
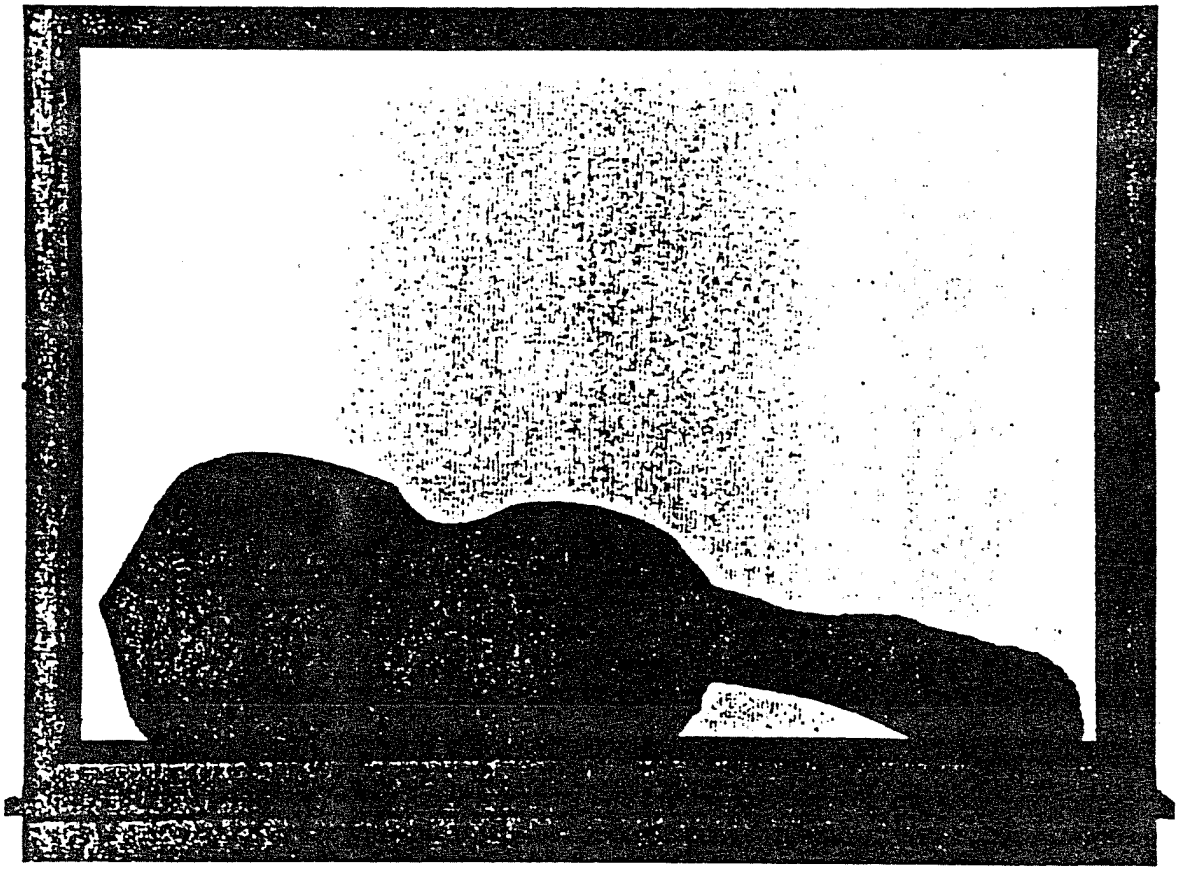


Fig. 4

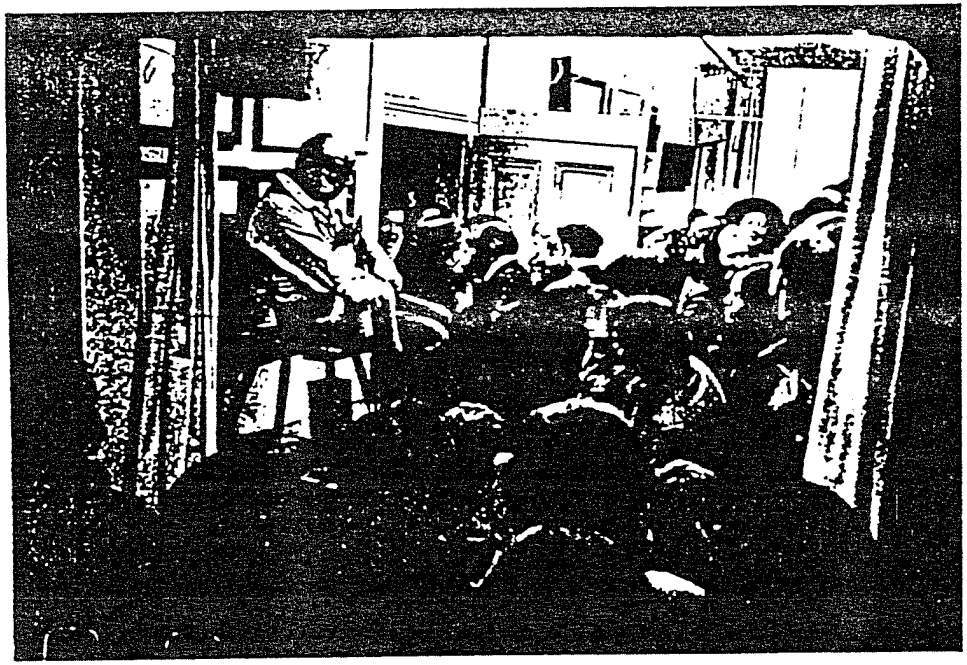


Infiltration Homogen für Cello, 1967-85 [Infiltration homogène pour violoncelle]. ***Infiltration Homogen für Cello*, 1966-85**. Collection Céline et Heiner Bastian

Fig. 5

Joseph Beuys lors de l'action *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* [Comment expliquer les tableaux à un lièvre mort], galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1965

Fig. 6



Le public pénètre dans la galerie après l'action *wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* [Comment expliquer les tableaux à un lièvre mort], galerie Schmela, Dusseldorf, 1965

Fig. 7

Chapter 3

The Place of Art in Martin Heidegger's Writings of Maturity

> Art is the setting-into-work of truth. In this proposition an essential ambiguity is hidden, in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting. But subject and object are unsuitable names here. They keep us from thinking precisely this ambiguous nature, a task that no longer belongs to this consideration. Art is historical, and as historical it is the creative preserving of truth in the work. Art happens as poetry. Poetry, is founding in the triple sense of bestowing, grounding and beginning. Art, as founding, is essentially historical. This means not only that art has a history in the external sense that in the course of time it, too, appears along with many other things, and in the process changes and passes away and offers changing aspects for historiology. Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history.[235]
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> One may thus say no more about the matter than this: philosophy's role is to open the way by which an unutterable experience may be given, but such an experience would no longer be answerable to philosophy; it would be the

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[235] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" Poetry, Language, Thought. Trans. Albert Hofstadter, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 77.

> prerogative of the one to whom it was granted.[236]

Introduction

Art may be "the setting-into-work of truth" but if, according to Martin Heidegger, truth is both subject and object of this setting, then truth also sets-into-work. What truth sets-into-work, by being the subject of this setting, is not here clearly indicated by Heidegger. However, in the addendum to "The Origin of the Work of Art," written some twenty years later, in 1956, Heidegger acknowledges the lack of clarity or difficulty of his point; he also briefly indicates that "truth's setting itself into work," and this means that "art is then concieved in terms of disclosive appropriation."[237]

One can thus infer from the passages under consideration, that if art sets into work truth and if truth also sets into work, then truth sets into work *art* or truth sets itself into work *through art*, however perhaps not exclusively through art, for, in any case, it still remains unclear what art means, according to Heidegger. Certainly deliberately so. For in the same addendum, Heidegger informs his reader that "reflection

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[216] Reiner Schürmann, letter to an anonymous correspondent relating the content of his discussion with Martin Heidegger during his visit at Heidegger's home, on March 11, 1966. See "Reiner Schürmann's Report of His Visit to Martin Heidegger" Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, In Memoriam Reiner Schürmann, New School for Social Research, Trans. Pierre Adler, vol. 19, Number 2-Vol. 20, Number 1, 1997, p. 71.

[237] See Addendum in "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. p. 86.

on what art may be is completely and decidedly determined only in regard to the question of *Being*."[238] As art is closely related to the question and meaning of Being, art therefore, like Being, cannot be defined. This is why "what art may be is one of the questions to which no answers are given in the essay."[239] And yet, Heidegger suggests some delimitation of art's domain. For he claims that art happens as truth and truth happens as art, or emerges from the "founding" that art procures, if indeed "art happens as poetry" and "poetry is founding in the triple sense of bestowing, grounding, and beginning."

However, the relation among art, poetry and truth, in what concerns their "happening," their taking place, is only passingly and very "unsuitably" demarcated in this essay, as Heidegger himself confesses, despite the fact that this essay is his most decisive and explicit confrontation with the problem of art.[240] The reason might be that the essay on the origin of the work of art was written in the middle of the troublesome nineteen thirties decade, during which Heidegger

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[238] Ibid.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid. For this relation depends on two ambiguities which are indicated but not resolved. The first refers to art as both a subject and an object of creation and also neither of them at the same time. The second ambiguity which is not unrelated to the first, refers to the problem of ontological difference and concerns the question of who does the setting into the work of truth, Being or any human being. The relation of human being and Being with regard to art remains undecided but is, apparently each time, decidable, according to Heiddegger. See ibid. p. 87.

achieved his philosophical maturity, international success and recognition, as well as his disillusioning and, in subsequent years, defamatory involvement with National Socialist politics. Perhaps the essay evoked too much of that decade of unfortunate political involvement some of the moments of which Heidegger had all but a few reasons to try to forget.[241] As his political involvement coincided more or less, with his confrontation with art, both art and politics were more indirectly and more separately thematized in Heidegger's writings after the nineteen thirties. This would already be a first sign, on the one hand, encouraging a joined examination of the two issues, art and politics and on the other, indicating that any reflection on the question of art, in Heidegger's writings, should take under serious consideration the dates during which writings appeared.[242] To be sure, the happening of art, poetry and truth and their relation, in

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[241] See the text of Pierre Bourdieu interviewed by Robert Maggiori in which Bourdieu mentions Heidegger's characterization of his involvement with politics as the "great blunder" (*grosse Dummheit*). In Pierre Bourdieu, "Back to History: An Interview" The Heidegger Controversy. A Critical Reader. Ed. and Trans. Richard Wolin, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), p. 267.

[242] David Farrell Krell reports in his analysis of the Nietzsche lectures that "...in the 1930s literature and art came to occupy the very center of Heidegger's project, for they became essential to the question of truth as disclosure and unconcealement." See Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche. vol. 1 & 2, Trans. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 248.

short the problem of art,[243] re-emerged as a concern in later writings. Nevertheless, the references to this problem were too sporadic to constitute a more elaborate or suitable treatment of the problem.[244] This is the reason why Heidegger found himself again wondering, in front of the question of art, about "the place of art," even in his later thinking.[245]

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[243] I say here the problem of art not to suggest that the problems I touched upon so far can be rightly or properly subsumed under the problem of art but in order to indicate my own point of view, the vantage from which I plan to develop these reflections. Besides the fact that this point of view has been dictated by the previous chapters, by the necessity to turn to a philosopher who systematically criticized the commonly held, narrow conception of art in order to propose a broader one, I expect that by the end of this chapter, it will have been made clear, also in immanent terms to Heidegger's thinking, why I selected art as my vantage point.

[244] The only other place where Heidegger reflects extensively on art is in his Nietzsche lectures, which had been given between 1936 and 1940, and thus belong with the "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936) to the same chronological family of texts. During the first course of Nietzsche lectures Heidegger reworked the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art." In the subsequent to the Second World War writings, art is notably addressed in the 1946 essay "What Are Poets For?" pp. 91-142, in the 1954 essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" pp. 145-161 and in "...Poetically Man Dwells..." from the same year, pp. 213-229, all in Poetry, Language, Thought, op. cit. See also the more scarce but decisive references made in the 1953 essay "The Question Concerning Technology" Basic Writings. ed. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), pp. 287-317. Finally see Heidegger's last essay on the topic of art, available in English, with the title "Art and Space" (1969) Man and World, Trans. Charles H. Seibert, vol. 6, no 1, Feb. 1973, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1973.

[245] See Martin Heidegger, "Martin Heidegger interrogé par *Der Spiegel*" Ecrits Politiques. 1933-1966. Trad. Jean Launay, (Paris: Gallimard 1995), p. 271. Heidegger's response to a remark by his interviewer that he demands more of art than of thinking was: "Je n'exige rien de l'art. Je dis seulement, il y a une question qui est de savoir quel lieu l'art occupe". (I do not demand anything of art. I only say that there is a question, namely, to know which place art occupies) All translations from French to English are mine and will also be mine from this point onward. In his 1969 essay "Art and Space" op. cit. pp. 3, 8, Heidegger devotes the

Heidegger's wonders about art may have contributed to augmenting the already vast Heideggerian scholarship, exegetical, analytical or critical.[246] Nonetheless, this vast scholarship has not yet resolved the problem of art in Heidegger's writings. Not because it has not adequately dealt with this problem, that is without due consideration to its rich and various implications and ramifications and particularly the political ones. But given the indeterminacy

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beginning and ending lines of his essay to affirm that "art, space and their interplay remain questions even if they are uttered in the form of assertions." In this manner one is presumably supposed to understand the ending reference to Goethe evoking the "non-embodiment" or material indeterminacy of truth.

[246] Indicatively see Joseph J. Kockelmans' very detailed and highly exegetical Heidegger on Art and Art Works. (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985) and Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity. Technology, Politics, and Art. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology and Politics" The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger. ed. Charles B. Guignon, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 289-317 which gives a general and brief exegetical overview of these topics without however elaborating in detail the questions of their connection. Reiner Schürmann relies a lot on the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" which he argues, contains "the only viable argument against those who believe they can read fascist tendencies into Heidegger's works." Schürmann further reports and criticizes the efforts that have been made to "extract" a political philosophy out of the essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." He refers to Alexander Schwan's Politische Philosophie im Denken Martin Heidegger (Cologne, 1965), to Jean-Michel Palmier's Les écrits politiques de Heidegger (Paris, 1968), to Otto Pöggeler's Philosophie und Politik bei Heidegger (Freiburg, 1972) and to Bernard Dauenhauer's "Renovating the Problem of Politics," Review of Metaphysics XXIX (1976): 626-641. In Reiner Schürmann's Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy. Trans. by the author with Christine-Marie Gros, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 33, endnote 2, p. 316. However all these attempts reflect either on politics or on art but rarely on both, in their relation.

of Heidegger's word, this problem is almost doomed to be never resolved. The intricate happening of art, poetry and truth in Heidegger's texts, entails endless ramifications and harbors several possibilities for developing the implicit meanings, latent directions or appropriate the explicit views in his writings.

But it is already well known that Heidegger, with the entirety of his writings, stands as the most typical example of all great authors who can be endlessly interpreted but never once and for all. His case has also an additional peculiarity, stemming from his unfortunate political involvement in the nineteen thirties, which, as it is broadly known, has also generated an enormous amount of scholarship about the relation between philosophy and politics. Heidegger has therefore become some sort of an existential test for every student of continental thought. For personal confrontation of the riddles that this thinker presents has come to mean the most decisive reflection on the benefits and perils of all great thinking.[247]

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[247] Robert Bernasconi has demonstrated the significance of the "Heidegger affair" for "...philosophy's self conception-and to a certain extent its self-justification-..." and in particular for questioning the presupposition of "the nobility of the philosophical life." His conclusion at the end of his essay suggesting that Heidegger enacted the end of philosophy in both his life and works-the end of a certain self-conception of philosophy-leaves the reader quite skeptical for it seems that Bernasconi relies on these conceptions of philosophy and life which both he and Heidegger condemn, in order to pass his verdict on Heidegger. See his "Habermas and Arendt on the Philosopher's "Error": Tracking the Diabolical in Heidegger" Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal vol. 14, number 2-vol. 15, number 1, 1991, pp. 6, 7, 20, 21.

In what follows I shall examine the problem of art, namely the happening, taking place and relation of art, poetry and truth, mainly departing from the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art" and the Nietzsche lectures, however, also with reference to later, postwar essays.[248] I shall first inquire into Heidegger's reflections on art in the way that they present art as an enigma while situating it between *techne* and *poiesis*. Then, I shall examine how Heidegger's reflections indeed provide "an alternative framework for the discussion of art," particularly the discussion of post Second World War art, taking under consideration but also disagreeing with Robert Bernasconi's warning.[249] Finally, I shall pay

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[248] A lot has been written about the difference between the early and late Heidegger and indeed the reader of Heidegger's early and late texts notices a change with regard to the style, the vocabulary, the intentions, tonality and even the mood. However, it seems more productive and correct, in a way that agrees with what we know about the Heideggerian intentions, to conceive of his work as a whole and read him without strict separation of his authorial production. This is the direction that many among Heidegger's analysts and critics have proposed, like David Farrell Krell, David Wood and Reiner Schürmann, to name just a few. The latter based on a 1969 methodological remark by Heidegger himself, has convincingly argued that reading Heidegger backwards from the last writings to the first, from the Topology to the Existential Analytic, produces the most authoritative understanding of Heidegger. See Reiner Schürmann, "How to Read Heidegger" Graduate Philosophy Journal vol. 19, number 2-vol. 20, number 1, 1997. Hannah Arendt has pointed the exact significance of Heidegger's *Kehre* in terms of the self and the will in The Life of the Mind, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1978), pp. 172-194.

[249] The words in quotation marks are Robert Bernasconi's from his book The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc. 1985), p. 35. Bernasconi warns the reader that:

> But irrespective of the formal and historical difficulties it raises, any reading of *The Origin of the Work of Art* as an attempt to provide an alternative framework for the discussion

particular heed to how art relates to politics, by attempting a reading of the "Heidegger affair" in light of his reflections on art, in an effort to sort out another position, my own, about the scandal of his political involvement during the thirties.[250]

I. Art between *Techne* and *Poiesis*

Both in the Nietzsche lectures and in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger endeavors to conceive art beyond its customary understanding in aesthetics.

> In recent decades we have often heard the complaint that the innumerable aesthetic considerations of and investigations into art and the beautiful have achieved nothing, that they have not helped anyone to gain access to art, that they have contributed virtually nothing to artistic creativity and to a sound appreciation of art. That is certainly true, especially with regard to the kind of thing bandied about today under the name

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of art will simply not do justice to Heidegger's text. However, and by the same token it seems that any reading that will neglect this specific Heideggerian contribution of providing with an alternative framework for the discussion of art will also do an injustice to Heidegger's text.

[250] Heidegger's political involvement, strictly speaking, was shortlived for it only lasted during his rectorship for about a year in 1933-1934. However, more broadly speaking, his thinking during the entire thirties decade gives signs of his reflection on politics, in contrast to his postwar attitude in which he denied seeing any practical consequences of his thought. See Schürmann, "How to Read Heidegger" op. cit. p. 5. There is a forceful claim according to which the entire production of Heidegger before the Second World War and even shortly after it, is permeated by the political and there can be no best evidence for this than Heidegger's own language, his terms which not only echo but are also anchored in a certain right wing conservatism, prone to the National Socialist ideals. See Johannes Fritsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger" Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal. New School for Social Research, vol. 18, no 1, 1995.

"aesthetics."[251]

But Heidegger's critique equally extends to the discipline of art history, or at least to a certain conception of it, as regards its capacity to produce knowledge about art.

> Corresponding to the growing incapacity for metaphysical knowledge, knowledge of art in the nineteenth century is transformed into discovery and investigation of mere developments in art history. What in the age of Herder and Winckelmann stood in service to a magnificent self-meditation on historical existence is now carried on for its own sake, i.e., as an academic discipline. Research into the history of art as such begins.[252]

To be sure, Heidegger notes the exceptions of art historians like Jacob Burkhardt or Hippolyte Taine. However, his verdict against a certain, well known in twentieth century positivist conception of aesthetics and art history as well as a certain philology and philosophy, is only confirmed by the brilliant exceptions that occasionally, these fields may know. The segmentalization and quantification of knowledge, typical of all these academic, compartmentalized disciplines, have common metaphysical roots. According to Heidegger, their roots may be traced to a deep metaphysical misunderstanding of the nature of things surrounding us, material or immaterial, to which the metaphysicians lend their attention.[253]

For whether conceived either as a "substance with accidents," as "a unity of a manifold of what is given in the

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[251] Heidegger, Nietzsche, op. cit. p. 79.

[252] Ibid. p. 89.

[253] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. pp. 27, 31, 32, 38.

senses," or as "formed matter,"[254] the thing is conceived too narrowly.[255] The thing cannot be exclusively defined by its properties, its concept, its outward appearance, its form, its matter, its presence, its objectivity, its materiality or its independence, the several ways in which all sciences and philosophy have historically endeavored to examine it.[256] "Only what conjoins itself out of world becomes a thing," Heidegger suggests.[257]

All the false "thing concepts" assault things and distort our view of them, in fact make us view them in a worldless manner, as if they were not integral and inseparable parts of the world in which we live.[258] But the "thingness" of the thing is not so easy to articulate as it relates to the thought of the "Being of beings."[259] So much more in the case of art where we have to do with things of a very special kind, namely art works. For art works are neither equipments, nor mere things.[260] Their work aspect rather means that they "set

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[254] Ibid. pp. 23, 24, 25, 26.

[255] Ibid. p. 38.

[256] "The Thing" Poetry, Language, Thought, op. cit. pp. 165-182, and in particular, pp. 170, 171, 175, 176, 177.

[257] Ibid. p. 182.

[258] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. p. 25.

[259] Ibid. p. 32.

[260] Ibid. pp. 38, 39.

up a world" and they "set forth the earth."[261] Earth and world are constantly on strife and stand for the conflict in the work between the Open and the Closed, "clearing and concealing."[262] Clearing and concealing mean the opening up of certain possibilities for human being and acting, always within certain restrictions and limits. Furthermore, they mean that taking up these specific possibilities and following their indications necessarily entails closing and excluding others. Thus the artwork opens up a world like all things do, according to Heidegger, but its relation to earth renders it the locus of a strife between contrasting possibilities.[263] How is it that the artwork becomes such a locus, this is precisely the question, Heidegger indicates. For "in a work, by contrast, [to the equipment] this fact that it *is* as a work, is just what is unusual."[264] Heidegger never stops reminding his reader that "the foregoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle."[265] No doubt, according to Heidegger, one cannot expect an artwork to be simply exhausted in the

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[261] Ibid. pp. 44, 45, 46, 47, 48.

[262] For the strife between world and earth see ibid. pp. 48, 49, 55.

[263] Ibid. p. 63.

[264] Ibid. p. 65.

[265] Ibid. Epilogue, p. 79.

message that it purpotedly delivers. Nor can one expect, in a quasi-Platonic fantasy, that an artwork simply depicts, imitates or advocates **something real**, having thus a "second degree" relation with reality. But by piercing through the enigmas of an artwork, one can certainly expect to find oneself in a place where he/she has never been before. A place harboring in itself a number of possibilities unavailable hitherto. The artwork is this kind of unique being, "such as never was before and will never come to be again."[266]

Bringing forth such a being, the artwork, instituting its place, is "the establishing of truth in the work."[267] "The nature of art would then be this: the truth of beings setting itself to work."[268] It is not because artworks depict or represent things of the world that art is worth our consideration; it is rather because in this representation, if there is any representation at all, "the reproduction of the thing's general essence" takes place.[269] In the work of art therefore we get, perhaps for the first time, the true insight in things, we see what things are in truth.[270] We see things in their reality, for "the true is what corresponds to the

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[266] Ibid. p. 62.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Ibid. p. 36.

[269] Ibid. p. 37.

[270] Ibid. p. 50.

real and the real is what is in truth."[271] In the midst of a world where Heidegger supposes things to be generally concealed, truth is unconcealement, and is therefore meant, in the ancient Greek manner, as *aletheia*, "the unconcealedness of beings."[272] The unconcealedness of beings reveals their reality and constitutes their truth. However, this truth is in reality double. Truth can also include its opposite[273] and this is precisely why the artwork opens up a strife and points to contrasting possibilities. This truth is therefore revelation as much as concealment.[274] For, "truth happens as the primal conflict between clearing and concealing."[275] And beauty is only "*one way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness.*"[276]

If we were to ask who are the agents of this truth, in the sense of who brings it about and who is this truth destined to, Heidegger is quite keen to reminding his reader, all during the essay on the origin of the work of art, that the nature of art is such that "the truth of beings sets *itself* to work."(syntax slightly altered and emphasis

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[271] Ibid.

[272] Ibid. p. 51.

[273] Ibid. p. 55.

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Ibid. p. 56.

added)[277] For art has a "pure self-subsistence."[278] "It is precisely in great art-and only such art is under consideration here-that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emmerge."[279] Heidegger goes even further to suggest that the fact that "artistic creation" is "an activity of handicraft" is only "an appearance."[280] He explicitly states that "it never is."[281] It is rather "a use of the earth in the fixing in place of truth in the figure."[282] Neither the artist nor the circumstances of creation of the work of art play the primary role in the latter's emmergence,[283] claims Heidegger contrary to the most widely accepted premises of all aesthetics and art history. Even the work's reality, its material subsistence, cannot be exhausted in the fact of its createdness.[284] Thus, neither the artist, nor the circumstances of his/her production, not even the material outcome of what she/he creates as an artwork primarily matter for the truth of the

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[277] Ibid. p. 36.

[278] Ibid. p. 40.

[279] Ibid. p. 40.

[280] Ibid. p. 64.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Ibid.

[283] Ibid. p. 65.

[284] Ibid. p. 66.

work of art.

What really matters for this truth, is that from which truth emmerges, namely *history*. What also really matters for the truth of the work of art is that to which this truth is destined to, namely *a historical people*. For, as seen previously, the work emerges as the setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth.

> The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth just through the world.(...)Whenever art happens-that is, whenever there is a beginning-a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again. History means here not a sequence in time of events of whatever sort, however important. History is the transposing of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment.[285]

If art is "*the becoming and happening of truth*"[286] then we may further inquire how this truth emerges historically to address a specific people and to introduce this "thrust" in history, which, in its own turn, "transposes of a people into its appointed task." Heidegger gives no real answer to this problem:

> Does truth, then, arise out of nothing? It does indeed if by nothing is meant the mere not of that which is, and if we here think of that which is as an object present in the ordinary way, which thereafter comes to light and is challenged by the existence of the work as only

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[285] Ibid. pp. 48, 49, 77.

[286] Ibid. p. 71.

> presumptively a true being. Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent in thrownness (*Geworfenheit*).[287]

History then and ultimately nothingness are the origins of the truth of the work of art. The artist in this truth has a lesser role as an origin.

But Heidegger does not write so much about the artist as he writes about the creator, two designations which implicitly seem to differ. For the creator may also stand for the people in the context of which an artwork was born and not necessarily the craftsman of the work. In any case as important as the artist and creator and, from one point of view, even more important than them, seems to be the role of "preserver." For "in the work, truth is thrown toward the coming preservers, that is, toward an historical group of men."[288] It is the preservers who let the work be a work, i.e. let the work "yield itself in its createdness as actual."[289] Preserving the work means assuming the place the work leads to and taking up the possibilities that the work opens up. In Heidegger's language preserving means "standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work,"[290]

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[287] Ibid. p. 71.

[288] Ibid. p. 75.

[289] Ibid. p. 66.

[290] Ibid. p. 67.

coming in contact with its truth.[291] "It is the work that makes the creators possible in their nature, and by its own nature is in need of preservers."[292]

Recapitulating, one could say that the origin of truth in the work of art is first and foremost in nothingness. Truth in art is basically *ex-nihilo* for it ultimately establishes itself without regard to any traditional principle or rule, but rather abruptly and arbitrarily. Then, the origin is history in the broad Heideggerian sense. Third in importance come the preservers, fourth the creators and last the artist.

If the artist in the Heideggerian analysis matters little, so is the case with what we commonly understand as art too. It matters equally little. This is the reason why despite the fact that the term art is retained in the title and surfaces a few times in the essay, Heidegger does not deal extensively with this term but only to write, that he has nothing to say about it. He rather writes extensively on the thing and the work and, presumably, by extension, his reflections may be illuminating for the artwork, as well.

Heidegger prefers to write about *techne*, rather than about art, in order to indicate not so much craft but most of all "a mode of knowing."[293] Then he also claims that "*All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what

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[291] Ibid. p. 68.

[292] Ibid. p. 71.

[293] Ibid. p. 59.

is, is, as such, *essentially poetry.*"[294] For poetry lets "the Open" happen and "brings beings to shine and ring out."[295] Poetry is meant in such a broad manner that all arts may be subsumed underneath it.[296]

> If all art is in essence poetry, then the arts of architecture, painting, sculpture, and music must be traced back to poesy. That is pure arbitrariness. It certainly is as long as we mean that those arts are varieties of the art of language, if it is permissible to characterize poetry by that easily mininterpretable title. But poesy is only one mode of the lighting projection of truth, i.e., of poetic composition in this wider sense. Nevertheless, the linguistic work, the poem in the narrower sense, has a privileged position in the domain of the arts.[297]

The broad conception of poetry combined with the privilege accorded to poetry in the narrow sense, as the art of composing verse, are the result of Heidegger's emphasis on language. Language is what creates "the openness" for human beings. In other words, language endows human beings with possibility, therefore with their humanity.[298] Furthermore, "language by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance."[299] Poetry is "projective

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[294] Ibid. p. 72.

[295] Ibid.

[296] Ibid. p. 73.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid. When I refer to possibility here I imply the Heideggerian notion of *Entwurf*, projection, which refers to the existential character of human being "referring to its driving forward, toward its own possibility of being." See the translator's note in pp. 71, 72.

[299] Ibid.

saying" of "the unconcealedness of what is"[300] and not only art is poetry in its very nature[301] and "the nature of poetry is the founding of truth"[302] but "language itself is poetry in the essential sense," as well.[303]

Thus, Heidegger understands art in its broadest possible sense, as an activity located between *techne* and poetry, *poiesis* and explains this more succinctly in his Nietzsche lectures.

> If by "art" we mean primarily an ability in the sense of being well versed in something, of a thoroughgoing and therefore masterful *know-how*, then this for the Greeks is *techne*. Included in such *know-how*, although never as the essential aspect of it, is knowledge of the rules and procedures for a course of action.... Finally if by "art" we mean *what is brought forward in a process of bringing-forth*, what is produced in production, and the producing itself, then the Greek speaks of *poiein* and *poiesis*.[304]

It is easy to infer from the context of this discussion of art that what Heidegger claims for the Greeks, he himself also espouses. In the same context of his discussion of Plato's meditations on art, Heidegger provides with a supplemental definition of *techne* as *melete, epimeleia*, both translated as "carefulness of concern," "care," explicitly "in order to preserve it [*techne*] from sheer 'technical' interpretation of

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[300] Ibid. p. 74.

[301] Ibid. pp. 74, 75.

[302] Ibid. p. 75.

[303] Ibid. p. 74.

[304] Heidegger, Nietzsche, op. cit. pp. 164, 165.

later times."[305]

Heidegger derives the names *techne* and *poiesis* from his meditation on Plato. Only in reference to Plato can we understand why Heidegger so vehemently rejects traditional aesthetics and art history in his meditations on art. For Plato asked about art in a "political" fashion, in *Politeia*, the Republic, in the context of "his magnificent discussion on the "state" as the basic form of man's communal life."[306] Political here means the "theoretical," what is associated with the essence of *polis*, therefore what is associated with *dike* and *dikaiosyne*, which are badly translated as justice.[307] *Dike* should rather translate "a metaphysical concept" naming "Being with reference to the essentially appropriate articulation of all beings."[308] As

> knowledge of dike, of the articulating laws of the Being of beings, is philosophy...it is essentially necessary that philosophers be the rulers (see *Republic*, Bk V, 473). The statement does not mean that philosophy professors should conduct the affairs of the state. It means that the basic modes of behavior that sustain and define the community must be grounded in essential knowledge, assuming of course that the community, as an order of being, grounds itself on its own basis, and that it does not wish to adopt standards from any other order. The unconstrained self-grounding of historical Dasein places itself under the jurisdiction of knowledge, and not of faith, inasmuch as the latter is understood as the proclamation of truth sanctioned by divine revelation. All knowledge is at bottom commitment to beings that come

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[305] Ibid.

[306] Ibid. p. 165.

[307] Ibid. pp. 165, 166.

[308] Ibid. p. 166.

> to light under their own power. Being becomes visible, according to Plato, in the "Ideas." They constitute the Being of beings, and therefore are themselves the true beings, the true.
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> Hence, if one still wants to say that Plato is here inquiring politically into art, it can only mean that he evaluates art, with reference to its position in the state, upon the essence and sustaining grounds of the state, upon knowledge of "truth." Such inquiry into art is "theoretical" in the highest degree. The distinction between political and theoretical inquiry no longer makes any sense at all.[309]

Heidegger's reflection on art as intermediary between *techne* and *poiesis*, places art exactly like Plato, in the midst of both the theoretical and the political domains. Furthermore in Plato, Heidegger confirms his own insights about art as a form of knowledge and an occurence of truth.

And yet even Plato, to the extent, that he defined art as *mimesis*,[310] he established a distance between art and truth, he claimed that "art stands far removed from truth," for art produces "not the *eidos* as *idea* (*physis*,) but *touto eidolon*, which is but the semblance of pure outward appearance."[311] Platonism, a certain, mainly subsequent to Plato conception of the latter's philosophy which maintains his legacy to the expense of the complexity of his views, would further divorce art, as the sensuous, from truth, as the supersensuous.[312] In any case, the entire philosophical tradition since Plato,

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[309] Ibid. p. 166.

[310] Ibid. p. 169.

[311] Ibid. p. 186.

[312] Ibid. pp. 151-161, particularly pp. 151, 161.

according to Heidegger has been marked by an "oversight" of "the question of the essence of truth."[313]

> That the question of the essence of truth is missing in Nietzsche's thought is an oversight unlike any other; it cannot be blamed on him alone, or on him first of all-if it can be blamed on anyone. The "oversight" pervades the entire history of Occidental philosophy since Plato and Aristotle.
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> That many thinkers have concerned themselves with the concept of truth; that Descartes interprets truth as certitude; that Kant, not independent of that tendency, distinguishes an empirical and a transcendental truth; that Hegel defines anew the important distinction between abstract and concrete truth, i.e., truth of science and truth of speculation; that Nietzsche says "truth" is error; all these are advances of thoughtful inquiry. And yet! They all leave untouched the essence of truth itself.[314]

And if, according to Heidegger, Plato, the first of metaphysicians, has some responsibility for the misinterpretation of the relation between art and truth, Nietzsche also, as the last metaphysician, is responsible for this misinterpretation, too. For seeking to overturn Platonism, he interpreted "truth or true being as the sensuous," relying, however, on the same discordance between truth and beauty that Platonism had, according to him, posited.[315] For Heidegger, however, the distinctions between art and truth, sensuous and supersensuous do not hold. According to him, art happens, takes place as truth and truth happens and takes place as art.

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[313] Ibid. p. 149.

[314] Ibid. p. 149.

[315] Ibid. p. 161.

II. Heidegger and the History of Contemporary Art

One must note that Heidegger's wondering about art in the thirties would encapsulate the attitude of the entire twentieth century, particularly during its last half, against the phenomenon of art. For it suffices to go to a museum, nowadays, in a big European or American city in order to experience that among the herds of visitors tarrying in its luxurious rooms, rarely is one able to define what is seen beyond simply uttering the same name, art. Some have argued that the growing proliferation of museums is analogous to the increasing ignorance about art.[316] And if one turns to contemporary artists themselves one can be sure to end up with as many definitions of art as the artists inquired. What prompted Heidegger to condemn certain positivist tendencies in both art history and aesthetics is the extent to which both of these disciplines merely jot down developments in art, too, without furnishing an understanding of what these developments mean, with regard to whatever shared conception of art they operate with.

There are of course numerous exceptions, cases when art historians or critics teach in a more fundamental and deeper

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[316] Jean Clair, Considérations sur l'état des beaux-arts. Critique de la modernité, (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), pp. 21-22. Jean Clair advances the possibility of the end of the idea of modern art, by claiming that the proliferation of the modern art museums does not indicate "a spiritual renaissance" but rather an opposite symptom.

way about the ways of art, thereby illuminating the phenomena around it. However, even among these exceptions, one encounters cases of historians who illuminate things as much as darken and assault them. The so-called formalists could not be a better example. The formalists are those who base their exegetical models on ancient but dubious notions of thinghood, dependent on metaphysical distinctions such as matter and form and on a unique privilege accorded to form. No better example of formalism could be given here than Clement Greenberg, the American art historian and critic who associated his name with the emancipation of American plastic arts from the tyranny of the European, after the Second World War.[317] While his contribution for understanding contemporary art is unique and inestimable, an entire generation of art historians today works to correct his immoderate blunders and distortions.[318]

Heidegger's analysis of the thing which always relates to a world has anticipated the importance that certain contemporary art historians place on the "context," a powerful consideration to render justice to every artwork by means of establishing what makes it at once a unique event and part of

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[317] See Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture. Critical Essays. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). Indicatively see his "American-Type Painting," pp. 208-230, so full of important insights mingled with blatant stereotypes.

[318] See Rosalind Krauss, Six, The Optical Unconscious. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 243-320. In a sense not solely the last chapter of this book but the entire book is written under and against Greenberg and constitutes a clearing of accounts from the part of its author with the latter's ideas.

a general historical structure.[319] Furthermore, Heidegger's discussion of the work as rendering the beholder to a place wherefrom contrasting possibilities open up, has in recent decades been systematically taken up in many great and momentous analyses of contemporary artworks, not conceived any longer as *loci* of single and unique messages.[320]

Likewise, the truth of the work of art is not external, distant to it or in discordance with it but belongs to it and to its world. It is therefore and to this extent, both internal (in the work) and external (in the world) and even if not as single truth or plural truths, at least as decision

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[319] See the analysis that Jacques Derrida furnishes in his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" about the structuralist antithesis between structure and event, in Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 278-293, pp. 278, 279, in particular. For an exemplary analysis of late nineteenth century painting which takes under consideration the importance of the historical context without stripping the work of its uniqueness see T. J. Clark's The Painting of Modern Life. Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984); see in particular, "Olympia's Choice" pp. 79-146.

[320] Here we may indicatively refer to several authors who in our view are typical of these tendencies and see the artworks as *loci* of multiple even disparate meanings. See, for example, Rosalind E. Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), Thierry de Duve, Pictorial Nominalism. On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to Readymade. Trans. Dona Polan and Thierry de Duve, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), Yve-Alain Bois, Painting as Model. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1990). For a theoretical account concerning the status of meaning in visual analyses, see Mieke Bal, On Meaning-Making. Essays in Semiotics. (Sonoma, California: Poleridge Press, 1994), pp. 200-203.

about the truth.[321] Moreover, one could point to numerous examples of artworks and their analyses that indicate that this truth is as self-subsistent as the work itself; the work and its truth are self-subsistent in that they depend less and less on craftmanship, materiality or their author.[322] In fact, as the work becomes increasingly detached from dependence from its author so its reception tends to account for it by taking this detachment as a fact.[323] The work is thus accounted of, with little if not with no references to its authorial agency. The work is rather accounted of exclusively in its own terms, i.e. in terms of its world, its historical context or its "preservers," the ones who receive

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[321] See Jacques Derrida's La vérité en peinture. (Paris: Flammarion, 1978) where a detailed analysis between "the letter, the discourse and the painting" is being attempted in order to demonstrate that the truth in painting is at once internal and external to it. See in particular, pp. 13, 296, 343.

[322] See our analyses of Yves Klein's and Joseph Beuys' works, in the previous chapters. See also our analysis of Jannis Kounellis' work, in "Fire onto the Square" Tracing Cultures. Art History, Criticism, Critical Fiction. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994). The deconstruction of both the author and the work as ideal unities was undertaken by many around the nineteen sixties. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" and "From Work to Text" The Rustle of Language. Trans. Richard Howard, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 49-55 and 56-64 respectively. See also Michel Foucault's "What is an Author?" The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 101-120, particularly pp. 103, 119.

[323] The rage of today's most prominent art historians against the biographical art history and their systematic deconstruction of its premises, is best depicted in Krauss' "In the Name of Picasso," The Originality of Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. op. cit. pp. 23-41.

the work and to whom the work yields its meanings.[324]

The uniqueness of the work is a measure of all these above mentioned parameters. This uniqueness means that the happening of this work provides unique possibilities which would not have been provided otherwise or are differently provided by other works. Ultimately this uniqueness also means that the work's truth arises indeed out of nothingness, for nothing could exhaust the work's provenance, origins and destinies. Therefore the fact that neither the museum visitors, nor the museum professionals, indeed, nobody nowadays, has a succinct idea of what art is, is not lamentable, to the extent that it points to a rightful and long prepared decline of the designation "art." For the majority of artistic work produced nowadays, cannot be rightly subsumed under neither what is widely regarded as the Platonic *mimesis*, nor representation with which art is usually associated. *Mimesis* or representation have to a great extent become impertinent terms with which to address the contemporary state of affairs in art.

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[324] The increasing importance of the reader, beholder, the receiver or, in Heideggerian language, the "preserver" of the work is another major evolution of contemporary art history. See Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception. Trans. Timothy Bahti, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and the collection of essays in The Reader in the Text, Essays on Audience and Interpretation. Ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), as an indication of a few authors and works that have had a deep influence in the recent course of affairs in art history.

On the contrary, many would agree today that what we witness as art may be better explained through *techne*, in all the semantic resonances to which Heidegger translated this term and which he employed in his analyses, namely a "bringing forth," a "know-how" and a form of care.

Furthermore, the emphasis on language which makes Heidegger subsume all arts under poetry, in the broad sense he gives to this term, is something that all arts share since the Second World War. And this increasingly defining mark of all arts has been noted by many authors since the Second World War, but has perhaps been given the most succinct description by Michel Foucault.

> Mais voici l'exemple d'une autre orientation possible. On peut, pour analyser un tableau, reconstituer le discours latent du peintre; on peut vouloir retrouver le murmure de ses intentions qui ne sont pas finalement transcrites dans des mots, mais dans des lignes, des surfaces, et des couleurs; on peut essayer de dégager cette philosophie implicite qui est censée former sa vision du monde. Il est possible également d'interroger la science, ou du moins les opinions de l'époque, et de chercher à reconnaître ce que le peintre a pu leur emprunter. L'analyse archéologique aurait une autre fin: elle chercherait si l'espace, la distance, la profondeur, la couleur, la lumière, les proportions, les volumes, les contours n'ont pas été, à l'époque envisagée, nommés, énoncés, conceptualisés dans une pratique discursive; et si le savoir auquel donne lieu cette pratique discursive n'a pas été investi dans des théories et des spéculations peut-être, dans des formes d'enseignement et dans des recettes, mais aussi dans des procédés, dans des techniques, et presque dans le geste même du peintre. Il ne s'agirait pas de montrer que la peinture est une certaine manière de signifier ou de "dire", qui aurait ceci de particulier qu'elle se passerait des mots. Il faudrait montrer, qu'au moins dans l'une de ses dimensions, *elle est une pratique discursive* qui prend corps dans des techniques et dans des effets. Ainsi décrite, la peinture n'est pas une pure vision qu'il faudrait ensuite transcrire dans la matérialité de

> l'espace; elle n'est pas davantage un geste nu dont les significations muettes et indéfiniment vides devraient être libérées par des interprétations ultérieures. Elle est toute traversée-et indépendamment des connaissances scientifiques et des thèmes philosophiques-par la positivité d'un savoir.[325] (emphasis in the text added)

It would indeed be possible to parallel word by word this passage by Foucault with Heidegger's analyses of art. What is important to note here, for the purposes of this analysis, is that Foucault gave a decisive interpretation to what Heidegger tried to name by *poiesis*, namely the linguistic and discursive

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[325] Michel Foucault, L'archéologie du savoir. (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 253. The translation of this passage is as follows:

> But here is the example of another possible orientation. We can, for example, in order to analyze a painting, reconstitute the latent discourse of the painter; we can seek to retrieve the murmur of his intentions which are not finally transcribed in words but in lines, in surfaces, in colors; we can try to extract this implicit philosophy which supposedly forms his vision of the world. It is equally possible to interrogate science, or at least the views of the times, and to seek to realize what the painter could have borrowed from them. The archeological analysis would have a different task: it would seek if space, distance, depth, color, light, proportions, volumes, contours were not in those specific times, named, enunciated, conceptualized in a discursive practice; and if the knowledge to which this discursive practice gives place, was not perhaps invested in theories and speculations, in the forms of teaching and in guidelines but also in procedures, in techniques and even in the gesture of the painter himself/herself. It (archeological analysis) would not mean to show that painting is a certain manner of signification or of "saying," which would have the particularity of dispensing with words. It would have to show that at least in one of its dimensions, *painting is a discursive practice* which is emboddied in techniques and in effects. Thus described, painting is not a pure vision which we should then transcribe in the materiality of space; nor is painting a nude gesture whose tacit and indefinitely empty signification should be liberated by subsequent to it interpretation. Painting is in its entirety permeated from the positivity of a certain knowledge-independently of scientific knowledge and of philosophical themes.

foundations of all arts.[326] The profound relation between all arts and language that Heidegger sensed and articulated during the nineteen thirties, and which became explicit in subsequent years, perhaps led him to name poetry, in a narrow sense, as the most important art.

Given the linguistic basis and foundation of all arts, it would make little sense for Heidegger, as for Plato and for Foucault, to separate the artistic from the theoretical and the political. Art, then, in itself, i.e., in its own terms, is in the midst of all theory and politics; art is inherently theoreticopolitical, an insight that many artists and critics would readily share nowadays. It is clear that Heidegger through this stance, struggled against the culture of expertise, largely a product of the advanced technologization of society, producing the segmentalization and compartmentalization of all knowledge with the familiar results of fatal blindness and inertia. Indeed, in his analyses on art, Heidegger envisioned a certain *ethos*

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[326] For the pruposes of this analysis no distinction is made between linguistic and discursive. Discursive is generally meant to mean liguistic although Foucault's term, of course, points to many more directions which however are not pertinent at this time, in this analysis. In another text, his famous The Order of Things, Foucault comes back to the problem of painting and language via his notorious analysis of *Las Meninas* painting, claiming that the relation of painting to language is an infinite one but this is not a stumbling block but a proper point of departure.

> It is perhaps through the medium of this grey anonymous language, always over-meticulous and repetitive because too broad, that the painting may, little by little, release its illuminations.

See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 10.

according to which art, truth, *dike* and philosophy are inseparable.[327] Through his silence on art, traditionally defined as representation and via his reflections on *techne* and *poiesis,* Heidegger managed to provide an alternative framework for the discussion of contemporary art and its history. This was the purpose of the rather oblique association of his views expressed in his essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art" as well as in his Nietzsche lectures, with the developments which determined contemporary art and its history in the last half of the twentieth century. Continuing the Hegelian tradition, Heidegger heralded the emergence of a kind of art that is associated with truth beyond *mimesis* and representation.[328] By the same token, he attempted to divorce not only truth, but also all thinking as well from

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[327] For a critical analysis of the "ethical" significance of *ethos* among Heidegger's concerns see Richard J. Bernstein's, "Heidegger's Silence? Ethos and Technology" The New Constellation. The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), particularly pp. 88-89, 120.

[328] Indeed, Heidegger's fusion of art, creation, truth, thought and action corresponds to what Hegel remarked: "Art invites us to consideration of it by means of thought, not to the end of stimulating art production, but in order to ascertain scientifically what art is." See G. W. F. Hegel, Introductory Lectures on 'Aesthetics. Ed. Michael Inwood, Trans. Bernard Bonasquet, (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 13 and the famous passages about "art as a thing of the past" (pp. 12-13) to which Heidegger refered to in his epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art," op. cit. p. 80. If Heidegger brought art and thinking very close to each other, he was always attentive not to say that they were identical. See his 1951 lecture "...Poetically Man Dwells..." Poetry, Language, Thought. op. cit. pp. 213-229, published in 1954, where he specifically claims that "poetry and thinking meet each other in one and the same only when and as long as, they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature." (p. 218).

representational constraints.

III. Art, Truth and Politics

Given the dates of Heidegger's reflections on art, the relation of art to politics, via truth, merit to be further dwelled upon. From one point of view the relation among art, truth and politics seem to be unproblematic, for these terms, as already seen, are remarkably and convincingly fused one upon the other, in Heidegger's writings on art. But before further examining how Heidegger makes this fusion possible, it is necessary to note the presence of G. W. F. Hegel who is predominant all through Heidegger's reflections on art. It is not solely, as mentioned previously, that Hegel is paid his tribute in the decisive epilogue to the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art." At times, the extent to which Heidegger's reflections almost indexically point to Hegel, is startling. For a statement such as "the true is what corresponds to the real and the real is what is in truth"[329] seems to have been directly extracted from The Phenomenology of Spirit. Likewise for Heidegger's statement:

> The proposition, "the nature of truth is untruth," is not, however, intended to state that truth is at bottom falsehood. Nor does it mean that truth is never itself *but, viewed dialectically, is always also its opposite.* (emphasis added)[330]

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[329] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. p. 50.

[330] Ibid. p. 55. Compare both passages cited from "The Origin of the Work of Art" with par. 18 from the preface of G. W. F. Hegel's Phenonemenology of Spirit. Trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford:

Jacques Derrida also notes the importance of the Hegelian theme *Geist*, Spirit, in Heidegger's famous rectorship speech (1933), almost right on the period under our consideration. Derrida accords such an importance to this term, Spirit, that he even claims that it "decides for the meaning of politics as such."[331]

It is on the background of Hegel's presence that the fusion among art, truth and politics is better comprehended and should indeed be examined. For as we have already seen, art is located between *techne* and *poiesis* precisely because it is the happening, the taking place of truth. Art is one way of happening or taking place of truth. To create which "is to cause something to emerge as a thing that has been brought forth" is the more general way through which truth takes place and happens.[332] Apparently all creation is a bringing forth in unconcealedness, for all that is real is true and vice-

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Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 10. Hegel remarks that "Further the living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*, or, what is the same is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itsef, or is the mediation of its self-othering with itself." A bit further Hegel concludes his thought with the following words: "Only this self-*restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself-not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such-is the True." On truth and falsity as not absolutely opposed see also ibid. par. 39, pp. 22-23 and on truth as *being in itself* see par. 82, pp. 52-53. Of course this parallel between Heidegger and Hegel that we draw here a bit too hastingly merits more detailed consideration and analysis which however cannot be endeavored here and for the purposes of this argument.

[331] See Jacques Derrida, De l'esprit et autres questions. (Paris: Flammarion 1990), p. 17.

[332] "The Origin of the Work of Art," op. cit. p. 60.

versa. Therefore the different modes through which this creation takes place are equivalent, equally true and equally important. This is why Heidegger claims that:

> One essential way in which truth establishes itself in the beings it has opened up is truth setting itself into work. *Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state.* Still another way in which truth comes to shine forth is the nearness of that which is not simply a being, but the being that is most of all. Still another way in which truth grounds itself is the essential sacrifice. Still another way in which truth becomes is the thinker's questioning, which, as the thinking of Being, names being in its question-worthiness. (emphasis added)[333]

According to the essay on "The Origin of the Work of Art," the origins of all truth are, as already seen, in history and ultimately in nothingness. This is presumably the meaning of the statement that "art is by nature an origin" with which Heidegger at the end of his essay, playfully repeats the tautology about the origin of art, with which he started his argument.[334] Art as creation, ultimately creates *ex-nihilo* what it supposedly responds to. Furthermore, creation creates *ex-nihilo* and so is truth ultimately emmerging, *ex-nihilo*. Likewise, with "the act that founds a political state" and by extension, with all politics, so far as this act and all politics, are the result of creation.

Therefore, the happening, the taking place of truth is, like in the Phenomenology of Spirit, a precarious and temporary localization of truth whose origins are ultimately

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[333] Ibid. pp. 61, 62.

[334] Ibid. pp. 78, 17.

unknown.[335] All truth in Heidegger is localization, or passes through localization and Reiner Schürmann is right in pointing this out, as well as in emphasizing the character of the Heideggerian project, as "a topology of being."[336] Schürmann implies that the problem of space in Heidegger with all its rich and various ramifications is not a major problem, if one adopts the right angle to read his writings.[337] In any case, the point may finally be that there are indeed many angles from which one can read Heidegger, as is the case with all

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[335] About the creation or localization *ex-nihilo*, see "Building Dwelling Thinking" Poetry, Language, Thought op. cit. where Heidegger defines building with reference to *techne*, as making something appear, as a "letting appear," before giving to it its ultimate definition as "a distinctive letting dwell." (p. 159) See also his discussion in the same essay of how space and spaces are produced by locations which are themselves produced by things (pp. 154-158). Therefore, it is ultimately the things we bring forth that produce their truth as localization. We produce things and things generate locations and us. What we have here is the vicious circle of metaphysics, once again.

[336] The expression "topology of being" is Heidegger's. See Reiner Schürmann's "How to Read Heidegger" op. cit. p. 3.

[337] Didier Franck refers to the problem of flesh in Heidegger which according to his view is not accounted of in the early work by Heidegger and notably in his Being and Time. See Didier Franck, Heidegger et le problème de l'espace. (Paris: Minuit, 1986), indicatively pp. 29-39, particularly pp. 32, 38, 126-132. Franck's interesting and insightful book points to a series of problematic ramifications that the inadequate treatment of space which he reads in Heidegger's early work produces. But one could counterargue with Franck on the role of the body and the treatment of sexual difference which Franck counts among the problematic consequences of Heidegger's treatement of space, with Jacques Derrida's essays "Différence sexuelle, différence ontologique. Geschlecht I" and "La main de Heidegger. Geschlecht II" Heidegger et la question. De l'esprit et autres essais op. cit. pp. 147-172, and pp. 175-222, respectively. For an account of the problems around Heidegger's treatment of space see also Maria Villela-Petit, "Heidegger's Conception of Space" Critical Heidegger. Ed. and Trans. Christopher Macann, (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 134-155.

great authors.

However, the possibility of many readings is not solely something honorable for Heidegger. It can also be something deplorable. For, one can easily imagine someone, in bad faith towards both Heidegger and his best-intentioned readers like Schürmann, develop from Heidegger's reflections on "The Origin of the Work of Art" a fascist scenario, a possibility which, as mentioned earlier, Schürmann excluded. For if art is beyond the specificity of art history and aesthetics and is rather highly theoretico-political, one can indeed imagine some art which would be proper to a certain politics, be that national socialist, communist or anything else. This art would open to a world, reflect this world of politics and only reinforce it by pointing to the restrictions of the earth; in fact pointing to this restrictions would mean for this world to emerge "as native ground." In any case, the terms "world" and "earth," "the native ground," "the people," and their "destiny" to which this art appoints them, already resonate with references to the National Socialist rhetoric.[338]

There is nothing that prevents the self-subsistent, nearly authorless art that Heidegger heralded, to be identified with the signature epics of National Socialism

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[338] See Lacoue-Labarthe's La fiction du politique. op. cit. pp. 92-113, where the author presents the *national-esthétisme*, the national-aesthetism with which Heidegger's project comes awfully close.

proclaiming its self-subsistent truth.[339] Especially when both art and truth are fused and ultimately emerge out of "nothingness," if by this term one chooses to characterize the devastating state of Germany after the end of first World War. The return to *techne* and *poiesis* to which Heidegger prompts, through Nietzsche and Plato, may be the call of history dictated to the Germans, to return to the Greeks. This call prompts the return of a nation, the German nation, to its origins, the ancient Greek civilization, to the Greek temples and the Aegina sculptures which, in any case, are, perhaps not accidentally, in the Munich collection.[340] The return to the origins means the return of the nation "to itself for the fulfillement of its vocation."[341] It might be that only the Germans can let the Greek art be, for the work of art, as every work "remains tied to its preservers," it pleads and waits for them "to enter into its truth."[342] It is very unlikely that the preservers of the Greek art are others than

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[339] The debates around Leni Riefenstahl and Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, both famous artists whose celebrity rose with the Nazi regime are quite instructive in this regard. For these artists' postwar career was marked by their and their defendants' attempts to divorce their work from their authorship in order to claim no responsibility for collaboration with the Nazi regime. See Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism" Under the Sign of Saturn. (New York: Farrar Strauss, 1980), pp. 73-105.

[340] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. pp. 40, 42, for the references to the Aegina sculptures and the Greek temple, respectively.

[341] Ibid. p. 42.

[342] Ibid. p. 67.

the Germans. We have reasons to believe that it is neither the Americans, nor the Russians or the French.[343] For, the history is determined by a break between Greek and Roman thought. "*Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word.*"[344] The return to Greek thought must not be mediated by the Romans. This return cannot either mean the return to the sites of the Greek temples because "the world of the work that stands there has perished."[345] This return rather means "the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people."[346] One might even be as perverse as imagining in these "broad paths" the *Autobahnen*, the highways that Hitler built. One may continue in this trend and consider that these "simple and essential decisions" are arbitrarily proclaimed by a *Führer*, as "every decision, however, bases itself on something not mastered, something concealed, confusing; else it would never be a decision."[347] The

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[343] See Heidegger's remarks which show a profound enmity, if not to these people, to their languages or states in the famous interview taken by *Der Spiegel*, in "Martin Heidegger interrogé par *Der Spiegel*" Martin Heidegger, Ecrits Politiques, 1933-1966. (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), pp. 256, 257, 268.

[344] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. p. 23.

[345] Ibid. p. 41.

[346] Ibid. p. 48.

[347] Ibid. p. 55. See Jacques Derrida's essay "The Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority" Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice. Ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld and

"thrust" that enters history and makes history begin or start all over again when art happens,[348] may be the thrust of a failed representational artist, Adolf Hitler, who decided to change style and make politics, rather than colors and canvases, his artistic media. Hitler promised a new starting point, a renaissance of the humiliated Germany after the First World War. One may think of the conflict that Heidegger locates in the establishing of truth in the work as a strife among people and nations.[349] The resoluteness, *Entschlossenheit*, characterizing the knowledge of preservers may be "the compliance" with the decision, the exiting from captivity[350] in order to assume the truth in the work, which "is thrown toward the coming preservers, that is toward an historical group of men."[351] The entire history may be "the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment."[352] History may, in short, be a call by the National Socialists to transport German people into their task of conflict with the other leading powers as

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David Gray Carlson, Trans. Mary Quaintance, (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67. In this essay Derrida expands on this Heideggerian insight to reflect on the unmastered and concealed aspects in the foundation of all authority.

[348] Ibid. p. 77.

[349] Ibid. p. 63.

[350] Ibid. p. 67.

[351] Ibid. p. 75.

[352] Ibid. p. 77.

this conflict emerges inevitably from the Germans' Greek endowment. In the final analysis, this scenario may be a simple fantasy. However, it is Heidegger again who prompted his readers to listen to what "hovers about" and "floats through the air" like "the sound of a bell."[353] And the hostile sounds of this bell cannot be ignored while reading Heidegger's reflections on art. On the contrary they must be always kept in mind.

Epilogue

Heidegger's reflections on art are decisive not only for an understanding of the state of contemporary art, nowadays, but also for the delimitation of truth and politics in and beyond the Heideggerian project itself. For the fusion among art, truth and politics that Heidegger established in a Hegelian manner, is extremely pertinent if one wishes to think of politics not as another isolated domain of some political scientists, analysts or any corrupt and honest politicians. Politics is intimately related to metaphysics and art and should be viewed this way if we do want to resist leaving this domain to the culture of the experts. The place of art, if by this term one understands anything like *mimesis* and representation is nowhere in Heidegger. If however, by art we mean *techne* and *poiesis*, then art is everywhere and plays the most important role in Heidegger's writings as it is

[353] Heidegger, "Art and Space" op. cit. p. 8.

intimately connected with both truth and politics. It is, indeed, the case that "the history of the nature of Western art corresponds to the change of the nature of truth."[354] The history of the nature of Western art does indeed correspond to the nature of political truth as well but this can only be programmatically ascertained here for another future analysis.

And yet it is dangerous to think of politics together with truth and art and Heidegger certainly paid the price of this danger. But it is equally dangerous to think of politics, truth and art separately and it would be an injustice to Heidegger's writings if we did not retain the lesson of their connection from them. For all great thinking is dangerous and despite the difficulty that this conclusion entails, it is something that we increasingly have to come to terms with. This is a particularly important consideration when it comes to reviewing Heidegger's reception.

As an example, one can take one of the most insightful recent critics of Heidegger, Miguel de Beistegui and his work Heidegger and the Political Dystopias. Despite the fact that de Beistegui acknowledges the danger of delivering politics to the culture of experts and thereby making it "a technical matter," we cannot thoroughly accept his argument that Heidegger failed to think the specificity of the "political

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[354] "The Origin of the Work of Art" op. cit. p. 81.

sphere."[355] De Beistegui claims that by "folding the political onto the artistic" and generally by "wanting always to hand the essence of politics over to something which would not be political (namely being, presence)," Heidegger lacked "an original and reflected political vision."[356] By putting Heidegger's politics aside as mythical and unreflected, de Beistegui probably wants to salvage the rest of Heidegger's work from the taint of National Socialism but this gesture from his part ultimately compromises Heidegger's original contribution which precisely consisted of thinking art, truth and politics together. Heidegger's reflection on politics was original and reflected, not only because it brought separate domains under a unitary view, but also because it attempted to correspond to his times politics and indicate a way for these politics. And this should not be underestimated either, for this engagement was crucial for the understanding of Heidegger's writings during that time. Besides Heidegger's support for the National Socialists being timely it was also a localization of truth, and even a true one, in perfect accordance to his thinking. A true, albeit monstrous localization. The result of this localization, its mythical,

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[355] Miguel de Beistegui, Heidegger and the Political Dystopias. (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 61, 103.

[356] Ibid. pp. 55, 55-62, 103, 160, 158-162.

even kitsch dimensions[357] and monstrous consequences, cannot be separated from the insights it brought forth about art, truth and politics. In fact both good and bad results of this localization go hand in hand, but many people have a problem with that.

These remarks do not mean to say that Heidegger's support of the National Socialism should be excused or forgiven. In view of the course of historical events, there is no excuse or forgiveness, even in the unlikely case that we ever managed to artificially separate the political views or implications of his project from the rest of Heidegger's thinking. Of course, there is no way of knowing what would have happened if things had taken the course Heidegger had hoped. Maybe things would not have had such a disastrous course. But this is hypothetical. Given what followed the rise of National Socialism in Germany, Heidegger's political positions were not only unfortunate but monstrous indeed, and in retrospect no forgiveness can be provided as no forgiveness was sought anyway, in the first place. If Nazism ultimately sprang from nothingness, the decision to comply with its politics must have also been for Heidegger, a personal decision, based on something concealed and uncalculated. Given the general structure of all decision about which Heidegger taught us, it would be inconsequent with his own teachings to forgive him.

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[357] See Fritsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger," op. cit. p. 156, who refers to the kitsch aspects of Heidegger's engagement with the National Socialists.

But to the extent that Nazism sprang from history, to the extent that it was not an accidental arrival, that it was not born in the desert, as Derrida constantly asks his readers to remember,[358] but it was prepared for a long time, through a multifaceted and complicated historical process, it would still be impossible to forgive Heidegger. Nonetheless, it would be easier to understand him, especially if we, more or

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[358] See Derrida, De l'esprit. op. cit. p. 139. I cite here the very suggestive paragraph of Derrida, for, my own thinking has been in constant dialogue with it.

> Le nazisme n'est pas né dans le désert. On le sait bein mais il faut toujours le rappeler. Et même si, loin de tout désert, il avait poussé comme un champignon dans le silence d'une forêt européenne, il l'aurait fait à l'ombre de grands arbres, à l'abri de leur silence ou de leur indifférence mais dans le même sol. De ces arbres qui peuplent en Europe une immense forêt noire je ne ferai pas le relevé, je ne compterai pas les espèces. Pour des raisons essentielles, leur présentation défie l'espace du tableau. Dans leur taxinomie touffue, elles porteraient des noms de religions, de philosophies, de régimes politiques, de structures économiques, d'institutions religieuses ou académiques. Bref, ce qu'on appelle aussi confusément la culture ou le monde de l'esprit.

Here is my translation of the passage:

> Nazism was not born in the desert. We know this well but ought to always remind it. And even if, away from all desert, it had grown like a mushroom in the silence of a European forest, it would have done it under the shadow of grand trees, in the shelter of their silence or their indifference but in the same ground. I shall neither reveal nor count the species of these trees which populate in Europe an immense black forest. For important reasons, their presentation defies the space of the present analysis. In their dense taxonomy, they would carry names of religions, philosophies, political regimes, economic structures, religious or academic institutions. In short, what one calls quite confusingly culture or the world of the spirit.

See also Derrida's interview "Heidegger, the Philosophers' Hell" Points. Interviews 1974-1994. Ed. Elizabeth Weber, Trans. Peggy Kamuf, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 184, 185, and the criticism to the "good conscience" that results from a tendency "to act as if Nazism had no contact with the rest of Europe, with other philosophers, with other political or religious languages..."

less, accept his analyses on the history of being. For Heidegger was guilty as all the Germans who supported Nazism were guilty. He was guilty as all the Europeans who supported fascism and antisemitism in all their many and various forms during the troublesome nineteen thirties and even before. It is even possible and instructive to read nazism, fascism and antisemitism as cultural products of the entire twentieth century, the entire European history, philosophy and culture. Finally, even today, it is possible to see such fascist phenomena repeating themselves in disguised forms in many corners of the planet.

These remarks however, are not mentioned in order to make excuses or to forgive anything or anybody. They are rather mentioned in order to emphasize the importance of vigilance for thinking. In thinking we may always breed the monstrous even while having the impression that we foster contact with the Other. Perversion is an immanent danger to all thinking, even to the most virtuous or insightful. No guarantees can be given by philosophy. Philosophy opens ways to unutterable experiences but such experiences are no longer simply answerable to philosophy, although they still have a great deal to do with it. They are the prerogative of those to whom they were granted.

To understand does not therefore mean to forgive. Heidegger is unforgivable for his political involvement with National Socialism. Perhaps he, himself, sensed that,

otherwise he would not have remained silent. If a philosopher of Heidegger's prewar status, caliber, reputation and shortlived involvement with National Socialism had feigned a sincere repentance after the war to which he had added a few dramatic, yet modest words, pointing, however, that it was not entirely his fault, that his philosophy had nothing to do with it but National Socialism, in fact, exploited him and his people and was the product of other people's thought, we would not have had such a huge scholarship on the "Heidegger affair." Many people would probably have been happy. After all, this was what many did in Germany after the war and among them there must have, in all probability, been a few famous philosophers. For now we even know of cases of philosophers with less stakes and involvement than Heidegger, who asked for forgiveness.[359] Fortunately Heidegger did not choose to do this. Or was this choice finally unfortunate? The sincerity of

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[359] Tom Rockmore reports in the context of his discussion of the reception of the "Heidegger affair" Theodor Adorno's "...famous but clearly exaggerated claim that everything Heidegger ever said or did was impregnated with this [the Nazi] ideology. This claim, which reflects a defensive kind of *Schadenfreude*, arguably not unrelated to the discovery of Adorno's own unhappy compromise with Nazism is unsatisfactory." Fritsche cites Adorno's exact phrase about Heidegger, "*dessen Philosophie bis in ihre innersten Zellen faschistisch ist*" in Fritsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger" op. cit. endnote 64, p. 186. Rockmore in the endnote accompanying the passage just cited, explains, in detail, the incident of the unhappy compromise of Adorno with National Socialism in 1934 for which Adorno excused himself and by the way "said that his work could not be compared to Heidegger's, which was fascist in its most intimate components." See Tom Rockmore "On Heidegger and National Socialism" Heidegger and the Political, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, New School for Social Research, vol. 14, no 2-vol. 15, no 1, 1991, p. 424 and endnote 3, p. 437.

what Heidegger did and how he behaved after the war, is still debatable and perhaps will always be, but at this point, this question of sincerity is besides the issue. For accepting the guilt through his silence or conceding to say the minimum about this guilt, when forced by a society, always hungry for crime retribution, he remained in the dignity of the guilty person, to the extent that such a guilt has some dignity.

It is high time we begun questioning the "Heidegger affair" from the point of view of its reception. For it is rather interesting and instructive to begin to wonder about our, very European indeed, need for repression, a need for pointing to guilty murderers, real or fictional, that make us forget our own responsibility in matters of everyday conduct. As Hannah Arendt implies in her analysis of the Eichmann trial, the insatiable desire to point to the guilty and finish with the crime retribution as quickly as possible, in order to strip oneself not only from all guilt but also from all moral challenge, is the greatest injustice one could do to the victims of the Second World War.[360] Does this mean that we have to live on by constantly reminding ourselves that we have been, are and always will be guilty? Not necessarily, although if this works to constantly fuel our thinking and alert our responsibility, then yes. As Agnes Heller wrote:

> At the time of the battle of Stalingrad, Heidegger not only rewrote the history of Germany but also the history

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[360] Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil. (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 23.

> of Europe, the history of modernity, the history of the Christian world, the history of philosophy, and the history of the Greek people; and, he writes from above them as from above the history of Being. There is something we can call urgency in this philosophical concern blown out of all proportion. Although moral responsibility cannot find a rail to grasp, it is not irresponsibility that occupies its place, but the commitment to thinking; or rather, the practice of committed thinking.[361]

When we read Heidegger today, it is a strong temptation to attempt to separate from our view the battle of Stalingrad and Heidegger's disproportionate concerns and immoderate ambitions. Likewise it is tempting not to consider his blindness before, during and even after the Second World War, to forget his lamentable behavior and strictly concentrate on his "philosophy." If this is what demythologizing Heidegger amounts to, we are doomed to miss most of Heidegger's important phenomenological and historical insights. But if to demythologize Heidegger means conceiving the Heideggerian writings in a polysemous way, recognizing "another Heidegger, a Heidegger against Heidegger, a Heidegger who represents all that Heidegger fought against,"[362] then this demythologization does not mean an abandonment of the mythical elements in Heidegger's thought, of all those elements which

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[361] Agnes Heller, "Parmenides and the Battle of Stalingrad" in In Memoriam Reiner Schürmann, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal, New School for Social Research, vol. 19, no 2-vol. 20, no 1, p. 251.

[362] The expression "demythologizing Heidegger" is John D. Caputo's from his book Demythologizing Heidegger. (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). The citation is from p. 214.

were blunders, fictions, ideologies. For this demythologization, rather means a remythologization or a different mythologization, in any case, a dislocation of the mythical elements in Heidegger's writings, as a living evidence to "the practice of committed thinking." For any attempt of demythologization which would sanitize Heidegger, to borrow Fritsche's term,[363] stripping his writings of all dangerous ramifications, would be unjust to both Heidegger as a thinker and to thought in general. Thinking should be able to confront the monstrous, the perversions of its own history and generate out of them whatever good may be generated. Heidegger's reflections on art, truth and politics, in their mythical albeit important, insightful, pertinent and highly historical and political fusion, remain still in want of decisive confrontation. One of the main tasks of this chapter was to solely call attention to this.

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[363] Fritsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger" op. cit. p. 156.

Chapter 4

Writing Before Art, Morality, Reason. Reflections On Jacques Derrida's Account of an Ancient Practice.

> **ECRITURE** [ektityr]. n. f. (XIIe; *scripture*, 1050; lat. *scriptura*) 1. Représentation de la parole et de la pensée par des signes. *Ecriture pictographique, idéographique. Ecriture phonétique* (syllabique ou alphabétique). *Déchiffrement des écritures anciennes.* V. **Paléographie**. *Système d'écriture des aveugles.* V. **Braille**. *Ecriture secrète, chiffrée.* V. **Cryptographie**. 2. Type de caractères adopté dans tel ou tel système d'écriture. *Ecriture égyptienne, grecque, arabe, gothique.-Ecritures employées en calligraphie* (anglaise, bâtarde, moulée, gothique, ronde). *Ecriture dite* script, 3. manière personelle dont on trace les caractères en écrivant; ensemble des caractères ainsi tracés. *Avoir une belle écriture.* V. **Gribouillage, griffonage**. *Etude du caractère par l'analyse de l'écriture.* V. **Graphologie**. *Reconnaître, imiter l'écriture de qqun.* 4.(1879) *Littér.* manière d'écrire, de réaliser l'acte d'écrire. V. **Style**. "*L'écriture artiste*" (GONCOURT). "*L'écriture automatique*" (BRETON), technique surréaliste visant à traduire exactement la "pensée parlée". Acte d'écrire. "*Il invente qu'on écrit pour soi seul ou pour Dieu, il fait de l'écriture une occupation métaphysique*" (SARTRE)- Par anal. (*Bx-arts*) Graphisme. "*Le Greco n'y prend d'abord qu'une écriture souple et forte*" (MALRAUX) 5. Droit. Ecrit. *Ecritures privées, publiques-* (Plur.) Actes de procédure nécessaires à la soutenance d'un procès. *Les faits énoncés par les écritures. Compt.* Inscription au journal ou sur un compte correspondant à une opération déterminée. *Les écritures*, la comptabilité d'un commercant, d'une entreprise.-*Admin. Employé aux écritures,*

employé de bureau chargé de travaux n'exigeant pas de compétence technique comptable 6. (avec E majuscule). *L'Ecriture sainte, les Saintes Ecritures*, et absolt. *L'Ecriture, les Ecritures*: les livres saints. V. **Bible**. *Sens littéral et sens spirituel de l'Ecriture.* (Citation slightly abbreviated.)[364]

Introduction

Writing, even in its most elementary definition in

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[364] Petit Robert. Dictionnaire de la langue francaise, Paris 1990, p. 603. My translation of this entry is as follows:
WRITING french feminine noun (12th century; *scripture*, 1050; lat. *scriptura*) 1. Representation of speech and of thought by signs. *Pictographic, ideographic writing. Phonetic writing* (syllabic or alphabetic). *Decipherment of ancient writings.* **Paleography**. *System of writing for the blind.* **Braille**. *Secret, coded writing.* **Cryptography**. 2. Type of adopted characters in this or that system of writing. *Egyptian, Greek, Arab, Gothic writing.-Writings employed in calligraphy* (English, slanting/ round-hand, shaped or formed with care, Gothic, round). *Writing as* script. 3. personal manner of which we trace the characters in writing; ensemble of characters thus traced. *To have a beautiful writing.* **Scrawl, scribble**. *Study of the character through analysis of writing.* **Graphology**. *To recognize, to imitate the writing of someone.* 4. (1879) *Liter.* manner of writing, of realizing the act of writing. **Style**. "*The automatic writing*" (BRETON), surrealist technique aiming to translate exactly the "spoken thought." Act of writing. "*He claims that one writes for oneself or for God, he turns writing to a metaphysical preoccupation*" (SARTRE)-By anal. (Fine Arts) Graphism. "*First, Greco does not take there but a subtle and strong writing*" (MALRAUX). 5. Law. Writing. *Private writings, public writings*-(Plur.) *Acts of a procedure necessary for sustaining a trial. The facts enunciated by the writings. Acc.* Registration on a journal or on an account corresponding to a specific operation. *The writings*, the accounting of a salesman, of a company.-*Admin. Writing employee*, office employee in charge of works which do not require technical accounting qualifications 6. (with capital W). *The saint Writing, the saint Writings*, and *Writing, the Writings*, the saint books. **The Bible**. *Literal meaning and spiritual meaning of the Writing.*
All translations from French to English will, henceforth be mine unless otherwise noted.

English, as "making letters or other symbols on a surface"[365] denotes, in reality, a multifarious practice. The French dictionary *Robert* indicates a number of its several aspects: writing is a representation, an articulation and crystallization of speech and thought, a guide not only for pronunciation and for reading but also for coding and deciphering, as well as for secret or any other communication. Writing is the medium and the index of civilizations, it is or it indicates an artistic practice and marks a personal or collective style, it serves purposes of identification as well as it serves acts, ideas, ideologies and principles. It is employed generally for many different ways of marking as it is employed for accounting, administrative and other archival reasons. Finally, writing even embodies in itself the Word of God.

The French dictionary thus provides the most general, official, canonical and consensual context against which, or in the midst of which, all questions of the birth and reception of Jacques Derrida's book De la grammatologie[366] should be raised. By virtue of its prestigious legitimacy and

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[365] A. S. Hornby, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 996.

[366] Jacques Derrida, De la grammatologie. (Paris: Minuit, 1967). The English edition, Of Grammatology translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) will be referred to for the translation of any passages cited from this specific volume. All references will be directly taken from the French original but along with the translation, their exact place in the English volume will also be indicated with bold page numbers, next to the page numbers of the French.

remarkable brevity, this most celebrated French dictionary points precisely to the crux of Jacques Derrida's enterprise, in the 1967 seminal volume which launched his career as a philosopher, critic and, first and foremost, as a writer. For Derrida's self appointed task in this difficult volume is to challenge the primary dictionary interpretation of writing, as ancient as writing itself, defining it as a representation of speech and thought by signs. It is not that this traditional definition of writing, valid until nowadays, is entirely wrong. What Derrida takes issue with, in this traditional definition, is that it functions "à confiner l'écriture dans une fonction seconde et instrumentale"[367] whereas the general tendency, during the times that Derrida wrote, was, as he explicitly stated, quite opposite. Writing was increasingly regarded to be as broad as language. In fact, language was increasingly referred to as a part, a phenomenon, an aspect, a moment, a species of writing.[368] And this is not something that only the linguists maintained, as Derrida noted, but was also stated, perhaps all too emphatically, always according to Derrida, by many of the important protagonists of the French intellectual scene, around the time of De la

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[367] "to confine writing in a second and instrumental function," in De la grammatologie, op. cit. p. 17, p. 8.

[368] These last words are Derrida's. Ibid. pp. 18, 19, pp. 8, 9.

grammatologie.[369]

In fact, the phenomenon of the revaluation of writing manifests itself also in society.[370] According to this revaluation of writing, writing can now mean "action, mouvement, pensée, réflexion, conscience, inconscient, expérience, affectivité, etc."[371] Writing, according to Derrida, can designate physical gestures, all sorts of inscriptions, as well as what renders them possible and therefore one can talk about cinematographic, choreographic, pictorial, musical, sculptural, athletic, military and

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[369] Indicatively, see Roland Barthes, Le degré zéro de l'écriture. (Paris: Seuil 1953) particularly his essays "Qu'est-ce que l'écriture?" and "Y a-t-il une écriture poétique?" pp. 11-17 and 33-40, respectively. Barthes defines writing, essentially as "la morale de la forme" (the morality of form), (p. 15) and notes the ambiguities of writing with regard to the writer, (p. 16). See also Barthes' later essays, translated to English in the volume The Rustle of Language. Trans. Richard Howard, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), like "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" (1966), pp. 11-20, "The Death of the Author" (1968), pp. 49-55 and "From Work to Text" (1972), pp. 56-64, where Barthes will assume even more radical positions than his early ones, concerning the omnipotent "structure" of writing and of text, in front of which no other figures, like the author, for example, really matter. Michel Foucault will also arrive at similar to Barthes conclusions at the beginning of nineteen seventies, although one should consider the distinction he forwards between the authorial subject and the authorial functions. See his "What is an Author?" The Foucault Reader. Ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 101-120. Derrida will, however, deny the disappearance of the author and by analogy of the subject. See his Positions. Trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 88.

[370] See Derrida's remarks on the "convulsive proliferation of libraries," a sign for him of a death of the "civilization of the book," the "civilization of speech," in De la grammatologie, op. cit. p. 18, p. 8.

[371] Ibid. p. 19, p. 9, "action, movement, thought, refelction, consciousness, unconsciousness, experience, affectivity, etc."

political writing.[372] The designation "writing" accompanies and frames all these activities not only in order to describe "le système de notation s'attachant secondairement à ces activités mais l'essence et le contenu de ces activités elles-mêmes."[373]

What are the purposes and the meanings that, according to Derrida, dictate an emphasis on writing beyond its instrumental character, will be the first consideration of the present analysis. By examining the first and programmatic part of De la grammatologie, its "theoretical matrix,"[374] we will consider the privilege accorded by Derrida to literature and poetry in the revaluation of writing that he endeavors. Finally, we will emphasize the ethicopolitical dimensions and significance of this revaluation in an effort to give a tentative reply to some of Derrida's critics.

I. Writing beyond the Pen and the Typewriter

The liberation of writing from mere instrumentality, its "positive discovery," that Derrida not only confirms but also analyzes and radicalizes, means and presupposes a different relation with the history of metaphysics.[375] For, according

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[372] Ibid.

[373] Ibid. "the system of notation secondarily connected with these activities but the essence and the content these activities themselves."

[374] Ibid. p. 7, p. lxxxix.

[375] Ibid. p. 128, p. 86.

to Derrida, the history of metaphysics is intimately connected with the repression of writing. The outcome of this repression is the secondary role that writing has always been delegated to: "Il faut sans doute entreprendre aujourd'hui une réflexion dans laquelle la découverte "positive" [de l'écriture] et la "déconstruction" de l'histoire de la métaphysique, en tous ses concepts, se contrôlent réciproquement, minutieusement, laborieusement."[376]

The repression of writing has deep and ancient reasons. Metaphysics, or, at least, a certain dominant part of metaphysics, has always privileged presence, *parousia*, in the form of which it always conceived meaning.[377] Through this dream of full self-presence,[378] this logocentric metaphor, which can be traced back to the ancient Greek origins of metaphysics, metaphysics saw the manifestation of presence implemented in the form of "full speech," to the detriment of writing, its study and its science.[379] Therefore, "metaphysics of presence" has always privileged the voice, the *phoné*, that it deemed as the original purveyor of truth, in

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[376] Ibid. p. 124, **p. 82.** "Now a reflection must clearly be undertaken, within which the 'positive' discovery and the deconstruction of the history of metaphysics, in all its concepts, are controlled reciprocally, minutely, laboriously."

[377] Ibid. pp. 20, 75, **pp. 10, 52.**

[378] Ibid. p. 58, **p. 39.**

[379] Ibid. pp. 12, 64, 102, **pp. 3, 29, 69.**

logos,[380] the speech. The voice, and by extension, the speech, at all times, utter the truth and are the guarantors of this truth.[381] As metaphysics has always privileged presence, so it always dreamt of constructing concepts and ideas modelled after presence and as unshakeable as presence itself. This is the origin of the "phonetization of writing,"[382] the instrumentalization of writing.[383]

Metaphysics has thus always been dominated by a logocentrism that is also a phonocentrism and which is not unrelated to ethnocentrism.[384] Presence was thought to be the proper subject matter of metaphysics, with such an obsessive compulsion, that Derrida terms this kind of metaphysics, "the metaphysics of the proper."[385] The metaphysics of the proper, thus introduces a border in thought and history about what is properly thinkable and what is not. Speech is inside this border, writing is outside.[386] What is proper to thought is a kind of linear thinking, resulting in linear writing and culminating in full presence, even when this linearity is to

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[380] Ibid. p. 21, p. 11.

[381] Ibid. p. 109, p. 74.

[382] Ibid. p. 12, p. 4.

[383] Ibid. p. 45, p. 29.

[384] Ibid. pp. 23, 11, pp. 11, 3.

[385] Ibid. p. 41, p. 26.

[386] Ibid. p. 53, p. 35.

the expense or reduction of history.[387] Writing is deemed to be not only secondary and exterior but also parasitical and violent,[388] whereas the relation between voice and meaning is deemed to be natural and direct.[389]

Writing cannot, by definition, offer the guarantees of full presence, since separated as it remains from its author, is fatally attached to interpretation. In fact, writing is as attached to interpretation as it is to metaphoricity and the play of its signs, among proper, literal, and metaphorical meanings.[390] In other terms, writing could never be accorded the privilege of presence, but only the task to serve as a vehicle to it, because of the nature of signification itself. The signified, what is not written, the absent concept or the idea, is in fact the full presence and the signifier, what is written, the word or the symbol is its trace, the limited, secondary and parasitical presence.[391] The role of conscience has always been to reach this point where no signifier is any longer needed and therefore all signifiers are erased: the point of pure self-presence, the transcendental, absolute

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[387] Ibid. pp. 127, 129, pp. 85, 86.

[388] Ibid. pp. 79, 51, 52, 55, pp. 54, 34, 35, 37.

[389] Ibid. pp. 60, 84, pp. 40, 57.

[390] For the "play" see ibid. p. 16, p. 7, for the role of metaphor and the problem of proper meaning, since Plato, see ibid. p. 27, p. 15.

[391] Ibid. p. 31, p. 19.

signified.[392]

Restoring to writing its dignity, obliges a critical reconsideration of the entire history of metaphysics, a constant re-reading of this history and a certain "dwelling" in this history that Derrida names deconstruction.[393] Deconstruction puts "under erasure," i. e. in suspension, in the same way that Heidegger already did, a number of important themes and subjects that predominantly figure in the history of metaphysics, like image and representation, sensible and intelligible, nature and culture, experience, the sign, technique, and others.[394] This means that these themes are as important as they are misguiding. Putting them "under erasure" aims at pinpointing precisely this tension.

The difference between these themes' importance and problematic character is irreducible and one must always make one's way through this difference, with respect to it, but never without it. This difference may also be named, according to Ferdinand de Saussure, as the difference between signifier (acoustic image) and signified (concept), the two inseparable

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[392] Ibid., p. 33, **p. 20.**

[393] Ibid. p. 39, **p. 24.** Derrida is careful to emphasize that deconstruction does not claim a point of departure outside the history of metaphysics. It is the immanent critique of metaphysics.

[394] Ibid. pp. 89, 38, 104, **pp. 60, 23, 71.** Derrida refers to such concepts or themes that precisely have allowed writing's exclusion. See particularly pp. 89, 91, **pp. 60, 62,** for the notion of experience and the play that Derrida enacts between natural and transcendental experience. Through the impossibility of the second, the equal impossibility of the first is revealed.

parts of the sign.[395] It is possible to show, with or without reference to Saussure, that most of the central themes, concepts and ideas of Western metaphysics, suffer from this discrepancy between what they mean to be and what they finally are. They are written in one way to mean one thing and indeed they do mean this thing but by virtue of the fact that they are written, they also and eventually mean other things, as well.[396] This is a first designation of difference at the heart of the most central themes, concepts and ideas of Western metaphysics.

Saussure did not make things easier for metaphysics when he declared as the first principle of his linguistics "the arbitrariness of the sign," the fact that the connection between signifier and signified is arbitrary.[397] He even went at those lengths to declare that in language there are only differences without positive terms.[398] Derrida, who undertakes a detailed reading of Saussure, at once confirms

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[395] Ferdinand de Saussure, Cours de linguistique générale. Edition préparée par Tullio de Mauro, (Paris: Payot, 1972), pp. 97-100.

[396] De la grammatologie, op. cit. p. 41, p. 26. This is the meaning of Derrida's remark that: "Si le moment non-phonétique menace l'histoire et la vie de l'esprit comme présence à soi dans le souffle, c'est qu'il ménace la substantialité, cet autre nom métaphysique de la présence, de l'*ousia*." Spivak's translation is: "If the nonphonetic moment meances the history and the life of the spirit as self-presence in the breath it is because it menaces substantiality, that other metaphysical name of presence and of *ousia*."

[397] Saussure, op. cit. p. 100.

[398] Ibid. p. 166.

and radicalizes Saussure's theses.[399] Via Plato, Derrida criticizes Saussure, by taking the latter's theories to the extreme and by emphasizing so much the difference between signifier and signified that this difference collapses altogether. This is what enables him to affirm that "en dernière instance, la différence entre le signifié et le signifiant n'est rien."[400] This means that if there is absolute difference between signifier and signified this amounts to the fact that there is no difference at all; the signifier is the signified.[401] Following his interpretation of Charles Peirce, Derrida reinterprets Saussure's thesis that in language there are only differences, without any positive terms, to suggest that there is no distinction within the sign, between signifier and signified and therefore one sign simply leads to the other *ad infinitum*.[402] Concomitantly, there is no unique or singular sign; namely there is no sign

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[399] See the several instances in De la grammatologie, where Derrida accounts in detail of Saussure's analyses, pp. 46, 49, 50, 51, 86, 107, 108, pp. 30, 32, 33, 34, 58, 72, 73.

[400] De la grammatologie, p. 36, p. 23. Spivak's translation is: "in the last instance, the difference between signified and signifier is *nothing*."

[401] Ibid. p. 108, p. 73.

[402] Ibid. p. 70, p. 48. This is also where Derrida diverges from several notable intellectuals of his times, in France, who privileged the signifier to the detriment of the signified. Derrida calls for a deconstruction of the distinction between signifier and signified, in itself, and not for a mere reversal of this distinction. Likewise with speech and writing. The attention accorded to writing by Derrida, does not mean a privilege to it, to the detriment of speech. See his footnote 9 in p. 32, endnote 9, p. 19, on the alleged "primacy of the signifier."

which has an absolute privilege among all others, no transcendental signified, for all signs ultimately depend upon one another.[403] The signs are therefore in a condition of constant play.[404]

What remains from this play, what allows us to cast a glance at it, is not a sign, for, as Derrida showed, no sign can ever be isolated; it is rather the difference which is generated in the passage from one sign to the other. This difference which Derrida named *différance* is best configured in writing.[405] In fact, this difference has to do with what remains from the passage of one sign to the other, precisely the non phonetic elements of writing, which make this passage possible in the first place. This is not to indicate that *différance* could ever be pinpointed. It rather means that *différance* makes us conscious of itself, in the very passage that it, itself, makes possible from one sign to the other. For *différance* is "la trace (pure)" as much as it is "la formation de la forme."[406] As a matter of fact, Derrida

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[403] Ibid. p. 138, **p. 91.**

[404] Ibid. p. 73, **p. 50.** This is also why Derrida refers to writing as the play in language. For another important articulation of the notion of play see Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" Writing and Difference. Trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), pp. 278-293.

[405] Ibid. pp. 38, 92, 142, **pp. 23, 63, 93.**

[406] Ibid. p. 92, **pp. 62, 63.** Spivak's translations are: "the (pure) trace" and "the formation of form." We cite the broader passage in which these definitions appear in order to make Derrida's thesis more explicit.

writes about the trace as much as and even more than he writes about *différance*. In one of the first instances of delimitation of this key term in Derrida's analyses, he reports:

> La trace où se marque le rapport à l'autre, articule sa possibilité sur tout le champ de l'étant, que la métaphysique a determiné comme étant-présent à partir du mouvement occulté de la trace. Il faut penser la trace avant l'étant. Mais le mouvement de la trace est nécessairement occulté, il se produit comme occultation de soi.[407]

Sans une rétention dans l'unité minimale de l'expérience temporelle, sans une trace retenant l'autre comme autre dans le même, aucune différence ne ferait son oeuvre et aucun sens n'apparaîtrait. Il ne s'agit donc pas ici d'une différence constituée mais, avant toute détermination de contenu, du mouvement *pur* qui produit la différence. *La trace (pure) est la différance*. Elle ne dépend d'aucune plénitude sensible, audible ou visible, phonique ou graphique. Elle en est au contraire la condition. Bien qu'elle *n'existe pas*, bien qu'elle ne soit jamais un *étant-présent* hors de toute plénitude, sa possibilité est antérieure en droit à tout ce qu'on appelle signe (signifié/signifiant, contenu/expression, etc.), concept ou opération, motrice ou sensible.... La différance est donc la formation de la forme.

Spivak's translation is:

Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is differance*. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.) concept or operation, motor or sensory.... Differance is therefore the formation of form.

[407] Ibid. p. 69, p. 47. Spivak's translation is:
The trace where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace. The trace

Derrida substitutes trace for origin, despite the fact that he claims the trace to be "la disparition de l'origine;" in any case, trace and origin are intimately interconnected in the sense that the one is the condition of the other.[408] As noted by Derrida himself: "*La trace est en effet l'origine absolue du sens en général. Ce qui revient à dire, encore une fois, qu'il n'y a pas d'origine absolue du sens en général. La trace est la différance* qui ouvre l'apparaître et la signification."[409]

Having no privileged connection with present time, the trace rather evokes "an absolute past," and is therefore connected with an oblique memory, for it is the "archi-phénomène de la mémoire."[410] The trace exceeds the question of "what is," for it is not a being and yet, at the same time, renders this question "what is" possible.[411] The trace, this other name for *différance*, should be understood, as Derrida

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must be thought before the entity. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself as self-occultation.

[408] Ibid. p. 90, **p. 61**. Spivak's translation is "the disappearance of origin".

[409] Ibid. p. 95, **p. 65**. Spivak's translation is: "*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the differance* which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification."

[410] Ibid. pp. 97, 103, **pp. 66, 70**. Spivak's translation is "the arche-phenomenon of memory."

[411] Ibid. p. 110, **p. 75**.

suggests, in association with Emmanuel Levinas' thought.[412]

In his footnote 33, Derrida even points the essay of Levinas, he refers to, with the title "La trace de l'autre,"[413] which is crucial for understanding the notions of trace and *différance* in the former's writing. Levinas' essay, already in the opening pages, states that "la philosophie occidentale coïncide avec le dévoilement de l'Autre où l'Autre, en se manifestant comme être, perd son alterité."[414] The Other is beyond the Same, is solicited by desire rather than by need and always emerges without any mediation.[415] The Other's face is outside the world, it is beyond being; to welcome it means a suspension of conscience, a questioning of one's own self and the assumption of an infinite responsibility, the desire for the infinite which ultimately renders the unity of the self possible.[416] As an idea, the "pure beyond being" of the Other is manifested in the trace. "L'au-delà dont vient le visage signifie comme

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[412] Ibid. pp. 102, 103, pp. 69, 70.

[413] Emmanuel Lévinas, "La trace de l'autre" En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger. (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1994), pp. 187-202.

[414] Ibid. p. 188. My translation is: "Western philosophy coincides with the unveiling of the Other where the Other in being unveiled as being, loses her/his alterity."

[415] Ibid. pp. 190, 193, 194.

[416] Ibid. pp. 194, 195, 196, 197.

trace."[417] The trace is a sign but also exceeds the order of signs, for it upsets the world's order and obliges one to infinity and to the absolutely Other.[418] Finally, "Etre à l'image de Dieu ne signifie pas être l'icône de Dieu, mais se trouver dans sa trace.... Aller vers Lui, ce n'est pas suivre cette trace qui n'est pas un signe, c'est aller vers les Autres qui se tiennent dans la trace."[419]

Therefore the trace, as Derrida employs it, is fundamentally close to the use that Levinas makes of it. For both Levinas and Derrida, the trace is always in and out of the world, a product of the world but also beyond the world as that which makes this world possible. Furthermore, in both their cases, the trace not only obliges to the Other but also becomes a sign for the Other, which cannot however be pinpointed without the alterity of the Other becoming compromised. Derrida diverges from Levinas in that he expands and radicalizes the notions of the Other and the trace as he discovers both of them operative at the heart of language and writing, through *différance*. The notions of *différance* and trace do have a mystical element, to the extent that they are marks of alterity and therefore can neither be pinpointed nor

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[417] Ibid. p. 198. "The beyond from which the trace emerges signifies as trace."

[418] Ibid. pp. 199, 200.

[419] Ibid. p. 202. My translation is as follows: "Being in the image of God does not mean to be God's icon but to find oneself in his trace. Going towards Him, is not to follow his trace but it is to go towards Others who find themselves by the trace."

defined. This is not solely because of God, who may be a constitutive power of alterity but also because of all other, human or non-human, that is equally constitutive of alterity as well.[420]

Thus, "Si "écriture" signifie inscription et d'abord institution durable d'un signe (et c'est le seul noyau irréductible du concept d'écriture), l'écriture en général couvre tout le champ des signes linguistiques."[421] But besides covering the domain of linguistic signs, writing provides the ground for an essential reflection on these signs: "La réflexion sur l'essence du mathématique, du politique, de l'économique, du religieux, du technique, du juridique, etc., communique de la manière la plus intérieure avec la réflexion et l'information sur l'histoire de l'écriture."[422]

Reflection on the essence of mathematics, politics, economics, religion, technology, jurisdiction and jurisprudence is

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[420] It seems to me that Derrida does not exclusively refer to the other as a human and this is where he diverges from Levinas. This is the reason why we write "other" with a lower case when we refer to Derrida's notion of the other.

[421] De la grammatologie, op. cit. p. 65, p. 44. Spivak's translation is: "If 'writing' signifies inscription and especially the durable institution of a sign (and that is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), writing in general covers the entire field of linguistic signs."

[422] Ibid. p. 134, p. 88. Spivak's translation is: "Reflection on the essence of mathematics, politics, economics, religion, technology, law, etc., communicates most intimately with the reflection upon and the information surrounding the history of writing."

essentially, as we shall see in more detail later, a reflection on the other, on trace and on *différance*. Thus, writing has such a broad scope that it constitutes a difficult and laborious domain of study.[423] At least, the enormous length and scope of writing, its apparent difficulty, pointing beyond the limits of science, *épistémè*, or phenomenology, have the benefit of rendering explicit its importance. Writing is simply beyond both the pen and the typewriter.[424]

II. The Artist, the Moralist, the Monster and the Philosopher

There are reasons, intrinsic to writing, why this is so important for the formation of meaning. For writing is, first and foremost, a notational practice. As in every notational practice, punctuation and a number of other similar phenomena of notation play an important role for meaning, without necessarily having any phonetic function.[425] These non-phonetic, notational elements of writing, like "pause, blanc, ponctuation, intervalle en général, etc," together with the

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[423] Ibid. pp. 141, 142, pp. 92, 93.

[424] Ibid. pp. 142, 99, pp. 93, 68. See also Derrida's essay "La main de Heidegger" Heidegger et la question. De l'esprit et autres essais. (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), pp. 173-222 where Derrida comments on Heidegger's hatred of the typewriter and obsession with handwriting and his old-fashioned pen (p. 186).

[425] Ibid. p. 60, p. 40. In the context of a reference to Edmund Husserl, Derrida gives the example of "the empty symbolism" of mathematical-technical writing.

phonetic, generate "spacing."[426] Spacing, as "l'articulation de l'espace et du temps, le devenir-espace du temps et le devenir-temps de l'espace" is "toujours le non-percu, le non-présent et le non-conscient" as such and is the origin of signification.[427] Not even the proper name escapes spacing, to the extent that the proper name too, is always caught in a chain or system of differences, in some elementary but important form of spacing.[428] Apart from the arrangement of writing in space and time, there is a spatiotemporal arrangement of every written form in itself to the extent that every written form has a graphic aspect which besides being phonetic is also ideographic.[429] It is in the ancient writings that the importance of the graphic elements of all writing becomes most conspicuously and explicitly pronounced,[430] as it is also in the most recent and advanced technological and electronic forms of communication. Finally, the *grammé*, the line, if one can risk such a translation,

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[426] Ibid. pp. 59, 99, pp. 39, 68.

[427] Ibid. p. 99, p. 68. Spivak's translation is: "the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space" is "always the unperceived, the nonpresent and the nonconscious."

[428] Ibid. p. 136, p. 89. Derrida qualifies further this thought around the proper name in the same page. His argument around the proper name is important because it enables him to assert the primordial historical origin of writing and even discover writing among those people who were deemed not to possess one. See p. 124, p. 83.

[429] Ibid. p. 135, p. 89.

[430] Ibid. p. 137, p. 91.

provides all graphic aspects of writing and, through its history, illuminates their history.[431]

Thus, it is also due to its spatiotemporal and graphic aspects that writing has become so important. For when writing is worked, studied or revealed in its spatiotemporal and graphic dimensions, in its "graphic poetics," a pioneer of which still remains Stephane Mallarmé,[432] then not only is writing's broad scope revealed, but also the way in which the entire world is, in a sense, written. And all signs today, from the history of ancient languages and linguistics to the newest forms of communication, have worked, studied and revealed writing's graphic poetics. The entire world signifies in the way that writing signifies, in its spacing and through its graphisms. In this sense the entire world is a text. *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte.* There is nothing outside the text.[433]

The notational aspect of language, its spacing and "graphic poetics," appear more predominantly in places where there is less control and pressure for linearity and the full

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[431] Ibid. pp. 125, 126, **pp. 84, 85.** In fact the history of writing is developed on the basis of the history of *grammé* as "the adventure between the face and the hand," not in the sense that we usually give to these, but in a sense that still waits to become determined. Again, the references to Levinas and the ethical dimensions of writing and *grammé*, their relation to the other, are the underlying concerns of these remarks by Derrida.

[432] Ibid. p. 140, **p. 92.** We isolate an explicit reference to Mallarmé here but implicit or explicit references to him are operative in the entire text of De la grammatologie.

[433] Ibid. p. 227, **p. 158.**

presence of meaning. In places where there is an indulgence in metaphor and, in fact, a play among antagonistic metaphors.[434] These places are predominantly those of literature and poetic writing.[435] Literature and poetic writing are the places where we can glimpse an alternative for the inherited traditional relation between writing and speech.[436] Apparently Derrida does not mean to privilege any meaning of literature and poetic writing, much less the current one. But his frequent references to Mallarmé lead the reader to assume that when he writes about literature and poetic writing, he means this tradition that was formed around and after Mallarmé and which has radically extended the scope of writing. Such a literature and poetic writing are so broad and so radical, from a graphic point of view, that they are indistinguishable from certain pictorial-artistic and even musical practices. Therefore, literature and poetic writing, in Derrida's sense, would not be incompatible with the rest of the known arts. This fact enables us to conclude that, on the one hand, art, in general, becomes a practice that serves as a model for an alternative formulation of the relation between

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[434] Ibid. pp. 98, 99, pp. 67. "Comme on n'a pas de langage non métaphorique à opposer ici aux métaphores, il faut, comme le voulait Bergson, multiplier les métaphores antagonistes," claims Derrida. Spivak's translation is: "Since there is no nonmetaphoric language to oppose to metaphors here, one must, as Bergson wished, multiply antagonistic metaphors."

[435] Ibid. p. 139, p. 92.

[436] Ibid.

writing and speech, the basic task of grammatology. On the other hand, grammatology, which is more than the science of writing, is crucial for determining the levels of signification in all the arts, namely their writerly aspects.

Departing from Saussure's notion of semiology, Derrida defines grammatology as a science which, however, also questions and exceeds scientificity.[437] Grammatology has the task to question and criticize logocentrism but, given the analysis of Derrida, there is no outside place, "uncontaminated" by logocentrism from which to launch a critique of it. However, by tracing and espousing as a positive moment, "the totally other," *le tout autre*, which, according to Derrida's semiotic analyses, announces itself as such, there, in the sign,[438] grammatology inhabits the limits of science, metaphysics, phenomenology, even logocentrism. Precisely because these limits are not set and are fluid, they cannot be pinpointed in advance, but, every time, depend on the way that grammatological practice operates in front of a specific task. These limits are every time unique. Grammatology therefore depends, for its very definition, on this "every time." Grammatology has an important and irreducible performative aspect.

There has always been a complicity between rationalism

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[437] Ibid. pp. 74, 109, **pp. 51, 74.**

[438] Ibid. p. 69, **p. 47.**

and mysticism.[439] The other has always been domesticated by *logos* in the very way that it was invested with certain conceptual schemas.[440] Despite this investment and even thanks to it, the other has also always been, to a certain extent, escaping this investment; it has always finally been remaining the other. Language, even Saussure curiously confirms this, has always been writing.[441] The artifice has always been discovered and repressed, in the midst of "nature."[442] The secondary and derivative status of writing has been imposed despite or even thanks to the fact that language had always been writing. This *archi-écriture*, arche-writing, has always been dissimulating itself, presenting itself as other than it really is, by propagating the myth of a simple origin.[443]

It is as if Derrida proposes that it is high time we came to terms with this dissimulation, we accepted the complicity between rationalism and mysticism not as a stumbling block for thought but as a point of departure. There is no proper to logos, language, or nation, that is "uncontaminated" by otherness. This fact does not make logos, language or nation impossible but builds a certain resistance to "pure logos,"

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[439] Ibid. p. 120, p. 80.

[440] Ibid.

[441] Ibid. p. 75, p. 52.

[442] Ibid. p. 56, p. 37.

[443] Ibid. pp. 82, 83, 88, 140, pp. 56, 57, 60, 92.

"pure language" and "pure nation," or logocentrism, phonocentrism and ethnocentrism. Only God, the Savior, knows how urgently we need this resistance, today, in front of the contemporary state of affairs in European politics, for example. This is one of the lessons we get from the late Heidegger and is the point of departure of Derrida's project.

The other has thus always left its trace in signification. Furthermore, signification itself was always made possible because of this trace. This is not to indicate that this has only now been discovered by Derrida himself. For nobody, according to him, "discovers" the trace, as such, although everybody can "sense" something about it. Quite on the contrary, the trace "discovers" the self, in the sense of enabling oneself, to assume selfhood. For language, as Saussure indicates "n'est pas une fonction du sujet parlant."[444] And Derrida adds that:

> ...l'écriture est autre que le sujet, en quelque sens qu'on l'entende. Elle ne pourra jamais être pensée sous sa catégorie; de quelque manière qu'on la modifie, qu'on l'affecte de conscience ou d'inconscience, celle-ci renverra, par tout le fil de son histoire, à la substantialité d'une présence impassible sous les accidents ou à l'identité du propre dans la présence du rapport à soi.... Or l'espacement comme écriture est le devenir-absent et le devenir-inconscient du sujet. Par le mouvement de sa dérive, l'émancipation du signe constitue en retour le désir de la présence. Ce devenir-ou cette dérive-ne survient pas au sujet qui le choisirait ou s'y laisserait passivement entraîner. Comme rapport du sujet à sa mort, ce devenir est la constitution même de la subjectivité. A tous les niveaux d'organisation de la vie, c'est à dire de *l'économie de la mort*. Tout graphème

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[444] Cited by Derrida, ibid. p. 100, p. 68. Spivak's translation is: "is not a function of the speaker."

> est d'essence testamentaire. Et l'absence originale du sujet de l'écriture est aussi celle de la chose ou du référent.[445]

Like in Levinas' thought, the subject in Derrida's writings, is not possible but as a secondary phenomenon. It follows the relation with the trace, the other. Memory, desire, responsibility are presubjective phenomena, they are, in fact, what endow the self's selfhood.[446]

In fact, to be human, to be *anthropos*, is a "équilibre précaire lié à l'écriture manuelle-visuelle."[447] But Derrida goes on to add that: "Cet équilibre est lentement menacé."[448] For,

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[445] Ibid. pp. 100, 101, pp. 68, 69. Spivak's translation is: ...writing is other than the subject, in whatever sense the latter is understood. Writing can never be thought under the category of the subject; however it is modified, however it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, by the entire thread of its history, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the selfsame [*le propre*] in the presence of self-relationship.... Spacing as writing is the becoming-absent and the becoming-unconscious of the subject. By the movement of its drift/derivation [*dérive*] the emancipation of the sign constitutes in return the desire of presence. That becoming-or that drift/derivation-does not befall the subject which would choose it or would passively let itself be drawn along by it. As the subject's relation with its own death, this becoming is the constitution of subjectivity. On all levels of life's organization, that is to say, of *the economy of death*. All graphemes are of a testamentary essence. And the original absence of the subject of writing is also the absence of the thing or the referent.

[446] Ibid. p. 103, p. 70.

[447] Ibid. p. 126, p. 85. Spivak's translation is: "precarious balance linked to manual-visual script."

[448] Ibid. Spivak's translation is: "This balance is slowly threatened."

> On sait du moins qu'"aucun changement majeur" donnant naissance à un "homme futur" qui ne serait plus un "homme", "ne peut plus guère se produire sans la perte de la main, celle de la denture et par conséquent celle de la station debout. Une humanité anondote et qui vivrait couchée en utilisant ce qui lui resterait de membres antérieurs pour appuyer sur des boutons n'est pas complètement inconcevable."[449]

Two pages further, in a long footnote appended to the idea concerning "the end of the book" and related to the end of linear writing, Derrida comments on the uncertain future of linear writing, with regard to technological progress. He claims that linear writing and the culture of the book which have been the "vehicles" of thought up to now, may be, in the near future, totally eclipsed or substituted by electronic devices for information storage which will certainly change more than the institutional status of philosophy and literature.[450] Technological evolution may change the question of the name of man, with which grammatology occupies itself.[451] This change may take place in relation to the notion of "program" which should be understood in its cybernetic designation.[452]

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[449] Ibid. p. 126, 127, **p. 85**. Spivak's translation is:
It is at least known that "no major change" giving birth to "a man of the future" who will no longer be a "man," "can be easily produced without the loss of the hand, the teeth, and therefore of the upright position. A toothless humanity that would exist in a prone position using what limbs it had left to push buttons with, is not completely inconceivable."

[450] Ibid. pp. 129, 130, **pp. 86, 87**.

[451] Ibid. p. 124, **p. 83**.

[452] Ibid. p. 125, **p. 84**.

One cannot help thinking about a toothless humanity, living in prone position and using other members besides the hands to press buttons, in order to satisfy its needs as well as its quest for knowledge. This humanity might be thought under the category of monstrosity. "La perversion de l'artifice engendre des monstres,"[453] writes Derrida. For writing, when fixed and removed from the living history of the natural language, participates in the monstrosity, in the deviation from nature, in the natural deviation within nature.[454]

This reflection on monstrosity is clearly more than apocalypse, messianism, futurology or science fiction. For it simply indicates that the price that we may have to pay for the correction of the relation between writing and speech is great indeed. This reflection on monstrosity clearly stems from the living present as a logical possibility of what has so far been delineated. For it may be that while abiding with memory, desire and responsibility, by the trace of something "as yet unnameable," the other, which grants us subjectivity, we might confront "the species of nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity."[455] This is an immanent and irreducible danger of grammatology. For

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[453] Ibid. p. 57, p. 38. Spivak's translation is: "The perversion of artifice engenders monsters."

[454] Ibid. pp. 57, 61, pp. 38, 41.

[455] "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" op. cit. p. 293.

grammatology does not give guarantees. It does not indicate whether the emergence of the other will finally be felicitous or calamitous.

Therefore, what motivates Derrida to write on monstrosity is not simply "a certain 'apocalyptic tone' as a means of drawing out the inbuilt antinomies of classical ('enlightened') reason," which Christopher Norris, one of the best intentioned critics and commentators of Derrida, concedes to the latter's opponents.[456] Norris claims that precisely because of its apocalyptic tone, the essay "'Structure, Sign and Play' is a text which, at least in its closing paragraphs, falls below the highest standards of Derridean argumentative rigour."[457] But as we saw, the closing paragraphs of the essay to which Norris refers, are not unprecedented. The issues Derrida alludes to there appear also in De la grammatologie, without compromising Derrida's argumentative rigor. But Norris' concerns point to another important commentator of Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Derrida's translator, in her preface to the English edition of De la grammatologie wonders in full line with Norris' arguments:

> Why is the opening chapter-"The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing"-full of a slightly embarassing messianic promise? If we really do not believe in "epistemological cut-off points," or in the possibility of stepping out of the metaphysical discourse by simply deciding to, or in the linearity of time, then with what

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[456] Christopher Norris, Derrida. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 140, 141.

[457] Ibid.

> seriousness can we declare a different "world to come," a world where "the values of sign, speech, and writing," will be made to tremble? (14, 5) How reconcile ourselves with this break between the world of the past and the world of the future? It seems an empiricist betrayal of the structure of difference and postponement, and any deconstructive reading of Derrida will have to take this into account.
> (We have seen that Derrida will not call grammatology a psychoanalysis of logocentrism. On page 20 [9-10] of the *Grammatology*, there is the merest hint of a psychoanalytical patterning of the history of writing that Derrida does not pursue: "This situation [the role of writing in the naming of the human element] has always already been announced. Why is it today in the process of making itself recognized *as such* and *after the fact* [*après coup*]"? Making itself recognized *as such*. Derrida makes an attempt on that page at answering that part of the question in terms of the development in ways and means of information retrieval, phonography, and cybernetics, all joining forces with anthropology and the history of writing-the sciences of man. But elsewhere in the book, as we have seen, he emphasizes that the situation can never be recognized as such, that we must surrender ourselves to being inscribed within the chain of future deconstructions and decipherings.[458]

Derrida's writing about the monstrous has precisely the task of calling attention to the constant, unending need for the alertness of thought before the other. Hölderlin's dictum, pronounced so emphatically by Heidegger, "where the danger is, there the saving power grows," should also be read in the reverse order, namely, "where the saving power is, there also is the danger."[459] And no book would ever have a reason of

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[458] Spivak, "Translator's Preface" Of Grammatology. op. cit. p. lxxxi.

[459] Cited by Martin Heidegger "The Question Concerning Technology" Basic Writings. Ed. David Farrell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 310, 316. We specifically chose to cite Hölderlin from Heidegger's essay in order to pay tribute to Heidegger's interpretation of these verses, through which these verses resonate for us in the entire analysis of Derrida's writings.

existence if it did not respond to a call for a saving power, if it did not in some sense announce a different world to come, an *à-venir*. Nor would there be any difference or postponment had there not been a promise. We can therefore indulge in imagining a world where the relation between speech and writing is rectified but it is doubtful whether this is messianic. For there is nothing wrong in setting up problems generating criticisms and proposing some way with which these problems may be resolved; even imagining or promising a world where these problems may be resolved, is not wrong either. Philosophers have always been doing this and should indeed continue to do it as a living engagement with tradition. If this is what messianism amounts to then this criticism is banal.

On the other hand, "the different world to come" is not, in the context of Derrida's analyses, a messianic promise, given the fact that it is Derrida, first and foremost, who taught us that the world has always been different and will always be different, in the sense that we inhabit a tradition which is simply and fortunately inexhaustable. And nobody would disagree among Derrida's readers that all the writers who Derrida pays tribute to while criticizing them, have to a certain extent and in a certain way, already made "the values of sign, speech and writing" tremble. All writers that Derrida examines in <u>De la grammatologie</u>, Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Mallarmé, Heidegger, Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, Levinas and

Levi-Strauss have done this already. Therefore, Derrida's book is indeed part of a very ancient genealogy.

Nonetheless, it is also fair to ask about its historical specificity, relating to the days of its inception and apparition. Derrida pays heed, as we have seen, to the circumstances of his own writing, at the beginning pages of De la grammatologie. There are the linguistic and philosophical works of his contemporaries or immediate precedents that he acknowledges together with the sociohistorical circumstances of the generalization and radicalization of writing, during his times, in ancient history, anthropology, linguistics but also in the new technologies of information and cybernetics. Whether the break that these signs indicate will mean an effacement of writing altogether, a different relation between speech and writing or altogether different prospectives, this cannot be known, for sure, in advance but nothing prevents some of these different possibilities to be considered. And Derrida does consider some of these possibilities.

To ask from Derrida to define in advance terms like *différance* is to ask him to betray his stance about wishing to locate his thought in the limits of metaphysics.[460] For if these limits are in constant flux, nothing can be located in advance; the location is defined as a result of deconstruction and *différance*, for philosophy is indeed and in the most

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[460] David Wood, "Différance and the Problem of Strategy" Derrida and Différance. Eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 65.

radical sense, "on the move."[461] Derrida calls into question any definition of différance *in advance*, as he also calls into question every definition of différance *after the fact*. He therefore indeed questions "the very possibility of warranting ethical-political positions."[462] Philosophy is a way of reading, acting, thinking and living and all philosophers have to figure this out by themselves, by their dialogue, by their encounter with their times' problems and in relation to the tradition which precedes them.

The very possibility and urgency of thinking, according to Derrida's view, depends on our constantly impossible attempt to warrant our positions. This is no excuse however for not asking for the impossible, as the students in France would do one year after the completion of De la grammatologie. For this impossibility is the condition of possibility of thinking as well as the condition of possibility of meaning

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[461] Ibid.

[462] Richard J. Bernstein, "The Ethical-Political Horizon of Derrida" The New Constellation. The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), p. 191. But in so doing, Derrida is not perhaps in sharp contradiction with other major thinkers of our times, like Jürgen Habermas as Bernstein's essay "An Allegory of Modernity/Postmodernity" (pp. 199-229) indicates, among other things. For one can possibly conceive Habermas' early "human interets" or later "theory of communicative action" as a thinking which places great emphasis on its performative aspects, on its formation in order to respond to specific claims by social movements and other similar phenomena. This is only to indicate a direction which to my view, Bernstein clearly signals all during his essay and particularly at the conclusion, replacing the logic of "Either/Or" in front of Derrida and Habermas, with "an unstable tensed Both/And" (pp. 225, 226).

and all insight. If all insight were not menaced and necessarily accompanied by blindness there would be no insight.[463] "Finite beings do not know absolute answers,"[464] but this does not make the desire for the Absolute of some of them less fervent.

"We love truth, this is our *métier*."[465]

Philosophers are writers by profession. As they love their profession they also and quite naturally love writing. Derrida specifies the reasons of this love. For in the artistic pleasure and desire of the graphic inscription, unfolds the possibility of the encounter with the other and in pondering this possibility, its delayed, difficult, impossible and dangerous offings, the gift of responsibility and reason is granted to them.

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[463] Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau" Blindness and Insight. Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism. 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 102-141.

[464] Agnes Heller, An Ethics of Personality. (Oxford UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 5.

[465] Ibid. p. 141.

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