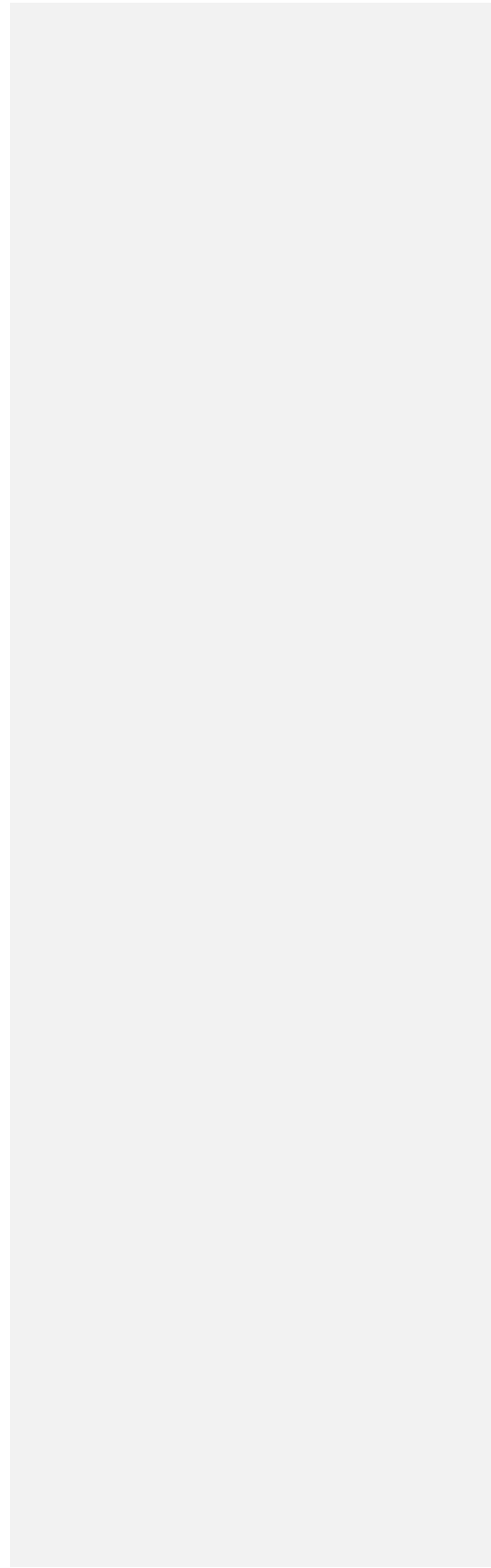


The ends of painting



The ends of painting

Art in the 1960s and 1970s

Edited by David Homewood and Paris Lettau

Power Publications

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David Homewood and Paris Lettau

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Introduction

David Homewood and Paris Lettau

One of the most-reported events in contemporary art is the death of painting in the 1960s and 1970s. No ordinary event, it has become one of the origin myths of contemporary art. The paradigm of **medium-specificity** was finally buried, and the radical pluralism of contemporary art began.

Of course, painting continues in contemporary art, but freed from its former essentialism, historical teleology and the old avant-garde succession of styles. Today, painting is without beginning or end. This pluralist condition impedes the possibility of writing about contemporary practices—whether painting or otherwise—in terms of a universal historicism. Any claim that a particular practice is determined by a historical teleology is immediately met with a counter-claim. The historiography of contemporary art thus promotes productive anachronisms and **multiple-numerous** temporalities, unconstrained by the linear temporality and historical determinism previously associated with painting. Yet contemporary art has never been able to shake the latent avant-gardism and linear historicism of its own origin myth: that painting and the paradigm of **medium-specificity** ended so **that** contemporary art could begin. This fact alone calls for a return to the question of painting circa 1970.

This book is a post-mortem of this moment—a beginning as much as an end—which has been eternally replayed in art practices and art histories that have examined painting's last breath from every angle.

The following essays all **address-consider** the question of painting in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, but they have been written by historians whose research varies in method and style as well as subject matter. As a consequence, from the perspective of the book as a whole, painting appears curiously emptied of any single substance, except perhaps for the name itself. No single form, concept or standard of painting prevails. Indeed, this editorial approach has yielded a book that covers a dispersed constellation of phenomena: from Sol LeWitt shovelling dirt outside the Arsenal Gallery in New York (1968) to Peter Bradley swapping a Stetson hat with Clement Greenberg in a Houston ghetto (1971); from the first canvas-boards by Australian Aboriginal artists at

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Commented [BN4]: 'address' is another very over-used term, and has thus lost most of its meaning. I try for something more specific.

Papunya Tula in the Australia's Western Desert (1971) to the Collective Actions Group's presentation of patterned arrangements of coloured envelopes in the snowfields outside Moscow (1979); from Andy Warhol's *Cow wallpaper* at Leo Castelli's gallery (1966) to the ancient Lascaux cave paintings in central France (15,000 BCE).

This heterogeneity is deliberate. It signals a primary aim of this book: to generate a new image of 1960s and 1970s art in and through the traditional art-historical category of 'medium'. It is not posed in the spirit of nostalgia for modernist painting's heroic last stand, or in Greenberg's reductive theory of medium-specificity. Nor is the heterogeneity of the collected essays meant as a celebration of eclecticism for its own sake. Rather, returning to the idea of medium-specificity that also died with late-modernist painting is a means—a strategy—to re-imagine the emergence of a new paradigm of contemporary art not limited by the avant-gardist historiography described above. This is not an obstinate refusal to bury medium-specific art history, but a disinterment of the body of painting for further examination.

Today, it is generally accepted that a medium-specific art history cannot account for the novelty of the 1960s and 1970s. The period was one of artistic, cultural and political transformations with little or no direct relationship to the traditional forms and categories of painting. Artistic practices related to the readymade and installation, for example, became widespread. The 'artist's hand' disappeared as work was outsourced for fabrication. The Instamatic camera, Xerox copier and Portapak video became standard means of artistic production. New artistic genres also emerged: performances resembling everyday actions, ephemeral artworks located inside and outside the gallery, site-specific works, institutional critique and theoretical essays about art presented as artworks themselves. Discourses of identity, civil rights and post-colonialism also gained traction within the art world. Many artists engaged-were involved in direct political agitation—in student protests, labour movements and feminist collectives—and moved away from the traditional institutions of art. Meanwhile, the nascent figure of the 'star curator', usurping many of the traditional roles and functions of the artist, entered these institutions.

In returning to a medium-specific historiography, the book does not sideline these developments in favour of a strict focus on painting. Instead, it refocuses these

Commented [BN5]: 'Papunya' is the geographical place. 'Papunya Tula' is the cooperative (est. 1972).

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Commented [BN7]: I avoid 'engaged' – it is very over-used.

heterogenous novelties *through* and *in relation to* painting, even if this relation is one of adjacency or negation, substitution or opposition.

Take for example Hikosaka Naoyoshi, an ~~important key~~ protagonist of ‘Non-Art’ (*Hi-geijutsu*) in Japan circa 1970. His work *Floor event* (1970–75) (Figs 1.1 and 1.5) began as a nine-day documented performance in which Hikosaka poured latex over the *tatami* mats on the bedroom floor and wooden veranda of his house in Tokyo. Hikosaka’s pouring of the latex was ~~initially~~ photographed, ~~as was along with~~ the subsequent material transformation of the drying latex from white to translucent to clear, documenting a process that de-familiarised his domestic setting. Initially a performance *for* documentation, the work rapidly became a performance *of* documentation.

The performative and documentary aspects of *Floor event*, its industrial materiality and non-institutional context, ~~seems~~ to have little connection to painting. Yet as Reiko Tomii explains in Chapter 1, *Floor event* developed from Hikosaka’s training as an oil painter and his student experiments with monochrome surfaces and industrial materials. She identifies precedents in Hikosaka’s earlier work for the all-over covering of the horizontal plane as well as the play of opacity and transparency in *Floor event*. But Tomii goes further than observing the biographical and formal connections between *Floor event* and painting: she argues that it was only by moving through the realm of ‘non-painting’ in *Floor event* that Hikosaka developed and resolved what were for him a set of theoretical problems about the medium and artistic production more generally—a resolution that then allowed him to forge a practice that Tomii calls ‘post-painting painting’, which emerged in his *Practice by wood painting* (1977–present). In the case of Hikosaka, ‘painting’ and ‘non-painting’ are not ~~alternati~~ve but complementary categories, the one neither comprehensible nor even possible without the other. Although ostensibly immersed in the realm of non-painting at the time of *Floor event*, in Tomii’s analysis Hikosaka was continuing to work through the medium.

This theme of painting’s malleability—its continuation or transformation under the sign of its apparent negation—is carried through a number of the book’s chapters. In Chapter ~~24~~, Claire Gilman ~~outlines~~ ~~describes~~ Michelangelo Pistoletto’s projection of painting into the realm of theatre. As part of the Italian collective Lo Zoo, ~~Pistoletto~~ ~~staged his~~ semi-improvised theatrical and musical performances of the late 1960s

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~~occurred~~ in settings ranging from an art gallery in Naples, to a Turin nightclub, to the streets of Amalfi (Fig. 4.32). At first glance these performances appear as a neo-avant-garde conflation of art and life, in which the conventions that governed Pistoletto's earlier *Mirror paintings*—fixed material form, the picture plane, pictorial space—are negated for the immediacy of theatrical gesture. As Gilman argues, however, rather than simply negating painterly conventions, Pistoletto's performances were a conscious attempt to make them manifest in real space and time. An ~~important key~~ aspect of the Lo Zoo performances was foregrounding the separation of the actors from the audience through scenic devices including chalk circles, bed sheets, and ladders, as well as costumes and props. Whereas Allan Kaprow's Happenings dissolved the boundary between artwork and audience, Lo Zoo's objects served to demarcate and thus recognise this boundary. Like Pistoletto's *Mirror paintings*, where images of people and objects are collaged onto silvery surfaces that also reflect images of the viewer and their surroundings, Lo Zoo sought to heighten—rather than efface—an awareness of the mediating elements of representation.

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In Chapter 3, Carel Blotkamp shows that, although painting was viewed with suspicion by the Dutch avant-gardists circa 1970, the medium continued to exert a strong hold over their imagination in the irreverent photographic homages to modernists like Mondrian and Klee by Bas Jan Ader's and Ger van Elk's. Ader's *Pitfall on the way to a new neo-plasticism, Westkapelle, Holland* (1971) (Fig. 3.1) casts the artist in the role of Mondrian lying alongside a blue blanket, a yellow jerrycan, and a warning triangle in its red plastic cover, in the background the Westkapelle lighthouse famously depicted in the early paintings of his predecessor. In a similar vein, van Elk's *Paul Klee—Um den fisch, 1926* (1970) (Fig. 3.23), a slideshow of eight photographs projected onto a slanted table and tablecloth, shows the artist's hands progressively consuming a meal inspired by Klee's earlier painting, photographed from a similar aerial vantage. Around the time that painting was following Ader and van Elk into photography, the unusual light sources and hanging techniques of Daan van Golden, another protagonist ~~of in~~ Blotkamp's essay, enigmatically pushed painting towards installation.

This, therefore, ~~figures as~~ one of the book's ~~key-principal~~ themes: that something of painting was carried forward beyond painting, into the realms of process art, performance, photography and installation.

A similar point can be made about painting's relationship to 1960s and 1970s counter_culture. Painting is not generally associated with the civil rights, feminist and anti-war movements. If anything, painting—especially late_modernist painting—is usually identified with a conservative refusal of the relationship between art and politics.

There is an obvious truth to this claim, yet as Darby English demonstrates in Chapter 5, it is also a partial truth, even a form of 'colour blindness'. English's essay focuses on two 1971 exhibitions of predominantly modernist paintings (alongside some sculptures): the *DeLuxe Show*, organised by Peter Bradley (Fig. 5.4) at a converted movie theatre in a Houston ghetto, and *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, curated by Robert M. Doty at the Whitney Museum in New York. Focussing on the question of inter-racial politics, English argues that the contingency and relationality of 'colour' in modernist painting—both on the canvas and across racial relations—manifests modernism's potential as an aesthetic project as well as a social experiment. English unearths the black modernist artist as a figure who has been silenced by conventional accounts of the period. Art histories that decouple modernism from politics thus fail to glimpse the way that black artists' refusal to ~~practice-practise~~ modernism constituted a politics of its own. On the other hand, African_American art histories, argues English, tend to reduce black art to a political cause ~~not un~~associated with modernism, let alone ~~with~~ painting.

In June 1971, coinciding with the cultural work of black modernist artists in America, but on the other side of the Atlantic, the radical French painting collective Supports/Surfaces, whose work was partly inspired by American colour_field painting and Greenbergian aesthetics, had disbanded. Alongside Salon de la Jeune Peinture and BMPT, Supports/Surfaces ~~were-was~~ one of three groups of French collectives active from the late 1960s that are discussed by Sami Siegelbaum in Chapter_8. Inspired by the writings of philosopher Louis Althusser, ~~the-work-of~~ these collectives sought to navigate the French government's officially sanctioned expressive gesturalism of *art informel*, as well as the traditional academicism of socialist realism and the increasingly

liberalised tendencies of the French Communist Party. Siegelbaum argues that the difference between their works—which ranged from stained patterned fabrics tacked to the gallery wall, to socialist realist depictions of Duchamp’s torture and murder, to non-compositional paintings performatively withdrawn from the art gallery—partly resulted from their different readings of Althusserian theory, used to mount what they understood as an anti-humanist ideological critique of bourgeois art.

In the eighth frame of one of Jeune Peinture’s *key-most significant* works, *Live and let die, or The tragic end of Marcel Duchamp* (1965) (Fig. 8.15), stands an expressionless Andy Warhol—in military trappings and gleaming aviator *glasses*—cast as the chief pallbearer at Duchamp’s funeral, the Frenchman’s coffin draped in an American flag. The destiny of the ‘bourgeois’ Duchamp, the painting implies, is the cynical, apolitical and commercial irony of New York pop art. Warhol is depicted as the new idol of post-war American art, raised on all that is wrong in European culture. Yet Warhol’s work also embodied a kind of anti-humanism, *though* different ~~to~~ *from* Althusser’s; one that contained a more tenuous, non-committal relationship to politics. This is the argument of Sebastian Egenhofer in Chapter 9. For Egenhofer, Warhol’s work brings into critical focus the interconnection of various forms of abstraction dominant in post-war American culture: the abstraction of the picture in modernism, images in the mass media, exchange-value in money, and subjectivity in post-modernity. Although Egenhofer identifies this residual critical function in Warhol’s 1960s silk-screen prints (Fig. 9.56), he argues that Warhol’s society portraits of the following decade, which re-animate the humanist genre of portrait painting along with an exhausted version of the painterly gesture, fetishise the commodity status of the artwork in the market economy.

The idea that painting has lost its critical potential and succumbed to the devices of capitalist culture has currency today. In an email declining our invitation to contribute to this book, a prominent British art historian justified his decision in these terms:

I haven’t written about painting for a long time; and if I did I could only frame it philosophically and politically within an ‘end of’ discourse. Painting is unfortunately too caught up now in the rituals and rites of finance capital, and therefore a major prop of the sclerotic social relations of the

dominant art world. There is still life in painting, but as a private ‘token’ or ‘gift’; anything else is business as usual.

The allegation is not that no one paints anymore, but rather that due to its inculcation in the art market, painting has lost its critical cultural value. Although commonplace in casual, sceptical conversations about painting in contemporary art, such a view is rarely articulated so bluntly in scholarly discussions.

By titling the book *The Ends of Painting: Art in the 1960s and 1970s*, we deliberately allude to the singular meaning of an ‘end’ that continues to shape impressions of painting in art of the 1960s and 1970s and also in the decades since. Even if the narrative is not entirely believed, historical accounts of painting during this period are typically tinged with the rhetoric of the ‘end’ or ‘death’ of the medium. From a broader perspective, the finality of such claims seems incredulous/lacks credibility; whether triumphant or sorrowful, similar claims have accompanied painting throughout modernity. Circa 1920 the Russian critic Nikolai Tarabukin proclaimed the death of the easel picture, and his friend Alexander Rodchenko announced that he had reduced painting to its logical conclusion; circa 1865, critics shocked by Manet’s flat, crudely modelled canvases saw them as harbingers of the destruction of painting; in 1840, photography was instantly recognised as spelling the demise of painting.

The legacy of painting’s end circa 1970 also coincides with various other endings associated with the 1970s: the end of ideology, end of industrialism, end of colonialism, end of authorship, end of man, even the end of history. In Chapter 2 (fig. 7) Rex Butler and A. D. S. Donaldson connect the demise of the medium-specificity of painting to another end: the demise of nationalism. Just as modernist histories have been written as the gradual reduction to the purity of a medium, they argue, the history of Australian painting had been written in terms of a gradual discovery of the essence of ‘Australia’. By the 1970s both the category of painting and the category of the Australian were put under increasing pressure: during that decade, artists’ increasing avoidance of distinctive Australian imagery was bound up, Butler and Donaldson argue, with the transposition of painting onto computer screens, multi-media collage, the

Commented [BN12]: Is this really what you mean? Or do you mean incorporation in the art market?

Commented [BN13]: I think this is what you mean – that we cannot believe the finality of the claims? ‘Incredulous’ here would mean that the finality is unwilling to believe something – is sceptical. Does not quite make sense to me.

Commented [BN14]: All authors (and designer) please note. If you have reveal characters operating, you will see these small circles that look like a degree sign. They are non-breaking spaces. Please do not delete them! I have put thousands into the book so that at typesetting stage we will not have awkward line breaks that will need correcting. Many thanks, Belinda (copyeditor).

painting of shops. Ultimately, both painting and nationalism would re-emerge, but in the guise of Australian postmodernist appropriation art of the 1980s, which they ~~polemically~~ read polemically as a revival of nationalist painting.

Figures of repetition and deferral, such as those arising in Butler and Donaldson's essay, are central to accounts of modernist painting that have sought to avoid the reductivism of teleological conceptions of modernist painting. Reductivist accounts tend to ~~either~~ cast modernist painting as either a smooth historical progression or as a series of ruptures with past traditions, and, through archaeologies and models of deferral and repetition, find buried in painting heterogenous historical temporalities. In an influential 1986 essay, criticising the common perception of the death of modernist painting, Yve-Alain Bois framed modernist painting as a 'task of mourning', a perpetual working-through of a tradition that is renewed only ~~through~~ by being pushed again and again to the brink of its own exhaustion.

Although unmentioned in Bois' essay, the principal focus of which was modernist abstraction, the work of Gerhard Richter has often been understood as another type of mourning: an aesthetic response to the trauma of World War ~~II-2~~. The source material for Richter's 1960s photo-paintings ~~were~~ was culled from the visual archive of post-war 1960s Germany, from private collections and from mass-media, showing the problem of memory and the archive in post-war Germany. In Chapter ~~106~~, Graham Bader demonstrates that a related circuitous and melancholic temporal relationship to the history of painting can also be discerned in Richter's *Annunciation after Titian* (1973) (Figs 6.1a-e8), a cycle of five paintings inspired by a postcard reproduction of Titian's *Annunciation* (~~1559-1564~~1535) (Fig. 6.2), ~~that~~ which saw him move away from his earlier figurative painting into the realm of painterly abstraction.

Whereas Titian's miracle was that he succeeded in making manifest the figuratively unrepresentable miracle of the Annunciation, ~~Bader argues that~~ Richter's 'miracle', Bader argues, was not that of the Annunciation itself but rather the historical possibility of its non-figurative presentation through the medium of painting. Richter's work is framed as an interrogation of the means by which something approaching spiritual meaning as represented by the work of the old master might be figured, or made manifest, in the contemporary painted mark. By basing his series on a postcard reproduction of Titian, Richter invoked the modern denigration of painting and at the

same time the memory of its former miracle. This, argues Bader, allowed Richter to continue painting through its apparent end.

The deferred temporality of painting circa 1970 is manifest in many other ways, including the common story of painters dropping out and then returning to their art. In Chapter 10, Suzanne Hudson gives a critical account of Agnes Martin's 1967 departure from the New York art world, and her subsequent return in 1973. Hudson explains that Martin's final paintings from 1967 (*Tundra*, *Trumpet* and *Adventure*) have often been equated with the general narrative of the death of painting during these years (Figs. fig. 9.10.1–10.5). They are read retrospectively through Martin's imminent departure from the art world, either by underscoring their chronological status as the 'last' paintings or by reading them as apocalyptic allegories of the 'Last Judgement'. For Hudson, however, reading Martin's 'last' paintings through her personal biography or sweeping historical narratives sidelines other temporalities inherent in these paintings. It is this incipient temporal potential that Hudson attempts to recuperate: moments of becoming and 'adventure' inscribed on the picture surface.

Martin also appears as one of the central protagonists of Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's essay (Chapter 7). Here she is a member-as-one of an elite cadre of New York abstractionists, alongside Jules Olitski (Fig. 10), Robert Ryman and Frank Stella. As a counterpoint to the various endings, returns and repetitions that populate the present volume, Gilbert-Rolfe identifies 'immediacy'—presence beyond or before representation—as one of the aesthetic principles that unites the work of these painters. Gilbert-Rolfe argues that immediacy is one of a network of pictorial issues pertinent to painting circa 1970, lost sight of by historicist developmental narratives that downplay the presence of a messy contingency in the history and making of art. The relationship of painting to its time, he argues, is always oblique. Gilbert-Rolfe's meandering semi-autobiographical narrative (itself a genre of art history that interrupts painting's grand-narratives) can be read as an attempt to restore to painting an agency:—the ability to move laterally, to view the historical adventures of the medium as a performance reminiscent of the process through which an individual work is created. It evokes a model of art history based on contingency and chance, rather than on linear logical development.

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This linearity is partly a legacy of the idea of the death of painting that became rampant in many avant-garde circles around 1970. Among the most enthusiastic harbingers of the destruction of painting were conceptual artists. ~~—and~~ Ironically, most of them ~~were had~~ trained as painters.

Aside from painting being a symbol of outdatedness, the anti-painting sentiment of conceptual artists was based on the perception that the medium was an obstacle to the conceptual artist's newly discovered historical task: ~~to inquire~~ self-reflexively ~~inquiry~~ into the concept of art in general. Painting was denigrated as merely a specific category of the general category of art, and thus ill-equipped to ~~engage-serve or represent~~ the universalism of the conceptual artist's inquiry. The philosophical ambitions of early conceptual art have lost their lustre, but the historical association of painting circa 1970 with the 'end' of the medium persists today as one of the legacies of the movement.

Ian McLean's account of conceptual art, provocatively conducted against the grain of typical historicist accounts of the movement, is partly a refusal of the typical identification of conceptual art with an avant-gardist break with the medium of painting. Even recent revisionist art-historical attempts to trace ~~multiple-the many~~ global origins of conceptual art still define the movement in these terms. The latent Westernism of these historicist accounts, argues McLean in Chapter 110, has led them to exclude Australian Aboriginal painting from histories of conceptual art. Any interconnection between the contemporaneous appearance of Papunya Tula painting—which was initially conceived by many as the end of Aboriginal art—and conceptual art around 1970 has therefore been excluded and written off as inconceivable. McLean, however, traces a speculative history of beginnings and ends that spans the mythical origins of painting in performance, ancient rock art and its discovery by Europeans in modern times, French surrealism's fascination with the primitive and tribal origins of art, to Duchamp and the supposed negation of painting in conceptual art. Against the avant-gardist logic of the historical break, McLean carries out an archaeology of conceptual art defined in terms of 'ancestrality', and in so doing uncovers what he argues is 40,000 years of conceptual art (from this perspective, Joseph Kosuth (Fig. -11.7) is seen as one of a long lineage of conceptual artists). In a self-consciously provocative turn, ~~he~~ McLean thus catches a glimpse of Papunya Tula painting's participation in conceptual art.

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My task is to tidy the house, rather than My task is the tidying of the house.

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Commented [BN19]: 'Multiple' implies many repetitions of the same thing (such as an edition of prints), but I think here you mean many different origins. Could also use 'numerous'.

Commented [BN20]: Please confirm – not clear here if you are referring to Kosuth or McLean.

Let us further pursue these two seemingly irreconcilable manifestations of painting circa 1970, in conceptual art, on the one hand, and Papunya Tula on the other. From seemingly unrelated contexts, and corresponding to different fields of scholarly expertise, ~~on at~~ first glance the pair ~~share have~~ little in common, except perhaps this: both contain, or are contained by, painting.

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Whereas Greenberg claimed that modernist painters had hunted the medium back to its essential territory, conceptual artists hunted the medium to the brink of extinction. Painting survived through negation, through the very theoretical performances and globally transmitted information that condemned the medium to the dustbin of history. At the same time that New York conceptual artists were orating the death of painting, a new tradition of painting emerged at Papunya ~~Tula~~. Papunya Tula arose as a new centre of painting, a Renaissance in the red centre of Australia. Designs that had originated from ancient forms of body and sand painting, as well as rock carving, rapidly multiplied across murals and canvas-boards—looking to some like a merger of ancestral forms with advanced modernist painting.

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Papunya Tula and conceptual art are two elements ~~with in of~~ a heterogeneous constellation or network of practices, discourses as well as influences, references, associations, allusions, correspondences, and resonances. Still, for all their differences, the juxtaposition of Papunya Tula and conceptual art gives rise to a surprising resonance with an unlikely bedfellow: the Moscow-based Collective Actions group of the 1970s. The iconic photograph of the Papunya Tula artists, including Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, Timmy Payungka Tjapangati and Geoffrey Bardon, standing in a row in front of their local community centre, each holding up a painted canvas-board (Fig. ~~4211.3~~), is curiously mirrored in a photograph of the Collective Actions group of the 1970s, where participants including the artist Ilya Kabakov and art theorist Boris Groys are depicted in the work *Pictures* holding up ~~for the camera~~ their geometric compositions in a snowfield on the outskirts of Moscow, ~~for the camera~~ in a private documented performance (Fig. ~~11.63~~).

The photograph of the dissident Muscovites, their surrogate paintings (actually arrangements of coloured envelopes) referencing the outlawed tradition of non-representational painting, not only evokes an earlier historical apocalypse of painting in suprematism. Another antecedent for the Moscow conceptualists' linguistic

experimentation, autodidacticism and reduction of art to information for global dissemination and reproduction is undoubtedly Art & Language, whose work, indeed, was smuggled into Soviet territory and provided a crucial antecedent for local artists' own brand of so-called romantic conceptualism.

This chain of intersections of times and places may strike the reader as too cursory, even glib; yet this is but one of the surprising outcomes of a book that is both proposition and provocation. Needless to say, as a proposition the book is necessarily incomplete, and could be furnished with ~~countless-many~~ other examples and methodologies. The collection proposes an experimental ~~historiography~~ ~~real model~~ grounded in the medium of painting and yet one that is sufficiently malleable to accommodate these diverse historical events. Side by side, the photographs of Papunya Tula and Moscow conceptualist artists offer a glimpse of the historiographical premise underpinning this collection. They depict an alternative and unfamiliar constellation—an unruly ~~structure-network~~ (inherited as well as constructed) of influences, associations, correspondences and resonances—of painting in art of the 1960s and 1970s.

We do not seek to cut ourselves free from the avant-gardist historiographical method of the kind that shaped conceptual art and that continues, as we proposed at the beginning of this introduction, to exert a hold on the historiography of contemporary art—for to cut ourselves free from an avant-garde temporality would ~~merely~~ be to ~~merely~~ replicate its logic. It would also risk denying that such a temporality exerted a strong grip on the historical self-consciousness of many artists working in the period in question. Instead, the avant-gardist historical temporality is absorbed as one historical mode among others, ~~interwoven-within~~ ~~woven into~~ the ~~heterogeneous~~ array of ~~heterogeneous~~ practices that together comprise painting circa 1970. It is one of the many ways that history is brushed by painting, and painting by history.

Commented [BN23]: 'countless' is hyperbole. I avoid it.

Commented [BN24]: I also avoid 'model' in this sense. I do not think it is necessary here. You are proposing a new historiography – it could be used as a model by someone else, as could anything really?

Commented [BN25]: I think this is more what you are aiming at – a constellation is a mere illusion – the stars that supposedly form the shape of a bear or a saucepan are thousands of light years from each other?

Or you could use 'overlay' instead of 'network' perhaps?

1

An unlikely prelude to post-painting painting: Hikosaka Naoyoshi and three modes of seeing, 1969–1973

Reiko Tomii

Introduction: Hikosaka Naoyoshi's *Practice by wood painting*

Widely known for his radical performative work, *Floor event* (1970–75) (Fig. 1.1), Hikosaka Naoyoshi (b. 1946)¹ is an important practitioner in global conceptualism.² He was a central member of Bikyōtō (short for Artists Joint-Struggle Committee), a collective that was established in 1969 amid the nationwide anti-war, anti-establishment, and student movements, to pursue institutional critique through activist strategies. Hikosaka served as the group's lead theorist in its reincarnation after the failed 1970 struggle against the extension of the U.S.-A-Japan Security Treaty almost completely brought down New Left activism in Japan. *Floor event* was conceived and executed in this post-1970 phase of Bikyōtō, as was the theoretical investigation of photography that he conducted under the auspice of the Group of Five *Revolution* Photobook Editorial Committee (a ~~Bikyōtō~~ ~~Bikyōto~~-subgroup).³ These activities make Hikosaka a major figure of Non-Art (*Hi-geijutsu*) that characterized the dematerialized state of postwar Japanese art from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s.

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.1 near here

Less known outside Japan is what came after Hikosaka's Non-Art phase: *Practice by wood painting* is a vast body of work initiated in 1977 that continues to this day. Through this series, the artist has systematically and diligently explored the viability of painting, the medium he once rejected and dismantled—put to death—with *Floor event*. His return to 'painting' via 'non-painting' (namely, that which is not painting)⁴ makes Hikosaka an intriguing subject to study in the context of 'painting, circa 1970'.

Above all, *Practice by wood painting* (hereafter abbreviated as *PWP*) is a strange object, contradicting a number of our assumptions of what a painting should look like (Fig. 1.2). It is not made on canvas, but on wood, as its title unambiguously declares.⁵ This fact is not concealed in practice, either, as the artist customarily applies a film-thin layer of transparent or opaque acrylic that reveals not only the material of the support but also its construction, made up of vertical wood components. In the mature iterations of the series, the irregularly shaped of the picture support, each is made of components, each of which has is given a different height and bottom contour—either rounded or horizontally straight. The surface of the individual components is flat, but the overall surface of the painting is not flat, because each component is given a varying has a different depth, which generates a series of shallow, seemingly random steps. Laid over this disjunctive support is an often-transparent variegated skin of paint that creates an overall design of abstraction marked by angular and fractal forms exuding a hard-to-decipher yet assured aesthetic sensibility.

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.2 near here

Hikosaka's *PWP* series, which began in 1977 and reached its mature form by 1981, roughly coincided with the return to painting that occurred in many areas of the world with the waning of the sober and often dispassionate tendencies characteristic of conceptualism. Still, its unusual appearance immediately alerts us to the necessity of carefully studying its genesis and local contexts. Most significantly, the Greenbergian concept of flatness, a prime driver that propelled gestural abstraction into minimal and frequently monochrome painting, did not take root in the art discourse of 1960s Japan,⁶ even though the descriptive concept of *heimen* (literally 'flat surface') entered the vocabulary of *gendai bijutsu* (literally 'contemporary art') to replace *kaiga* (painting) in the late 1960s, assuming the sense of 'two-dimensional work'. It should be noted that this terminological conversion, which did not so much represent a theoretical concern as a practical concern, followed the renaming of *chōkoku* (sculpture) as *rittai* (literally 'standing entity') or 'three-dimensional work'. Japan's open-call exhibition system, which helped the mainstreaming of *gendai bijutsu*,⁷ needed more explicit categories than *kaiga* and *chōkoku* (sculpture) in the face of the diversifying and category-defying vanguard practices. Notably, the transition from *kaiga* and *chōkoku* to *heimen* and *rittai*

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Commented [BN27]: I prefer to italicise such non-English terms on their first appearance only – once you have explained their meaning they can be part of the accepted vocabulary of the essay. Makes for a smoother read.

corresponded in Japan that from *kindai* (the modern) to *gendai* (the contemporary) in art.⁸

Only in the late 1970s did the critical concept of flatness in the vein of the modernist flatness enter the discourse of contemporary painting in Japan.⁹ Critics thereby retroactively acknowledged such pioneering ‘flatness’ painters as Yamada Masaaki and Kusama Yayoi, as well as younger artists who increasingly accepted minimalist flatness as their starting point, as demonstrated by the works of Hori Kosai, Tatsuno Toeko, and Nakamura Kazumi, among others. Following this was a burst of ‘new wave’ painting that paralleled American neo-expressionism and European transavant-garde, which distanced itself from the earlier local lineage of flat painting.¹⁰

This local development represents a ‘similar yet dissimilar’ manifestation that exemplifies the state of ‘international contemporaneity’ ~~within~~ a world art history of postwar painting.¹¹ Even ~~within~~ this local context, however, Hikosaka’s *PWP* stands out, because he refused to obey the new orthodoxy of flatness. Indeed, his unyielding refusal of the accepted convention of flatness forced him into a lonesome position among his own and subsequent generations. Yet, ~~by combining these~~ with his ~~committed-dedicated~~ exploration of what painting could still be, he managed to ~~reconceptualize-reconceptualise~~ and reconstitute a version of painting—a distinct type of ‘post-painting painting’¹²—an approach to painting that became possible after the so-called death of the medium.

Hikosaka’s path to post-painting painting was complex; it ~~unexpectedly~~ began ~~unexpectedly~~ in his non-painting phase, from 1969 to 1974. During this period, he laid the theoretical foundation for his subsequent post-painting painting in several ways: ~~1)first~~, trying to understand the basic nature of painting by deconstructing it; ~~2)second~~, learning to ~~scrutinize-scrutinise~~ *jimei-sei* or ‘self-evidence’, ~~that-which~~ permeates both life and art, through *Floor event*; and ~~finally, 3)~~ interpreting non-painting and other Non-Art acts in the context of art history through the concept of *purakutisu* (practice). Characteristically, this process was ~~informed~~, as I will demonstrate in this article, ~~informed~~ by a practitioner’s eye that ‘sees to think’. A symbiotic relationship between theory and practice would continue into Hikosaka’s post-painting painting phase, ~~as-in~~ ~~which~~ he progressed towards formulating a new pictorial vocabulary, as demonstrated

Commented [BN28]: ‘Within’ is nearly always used incorrectly these days. Most of the time ‘in’ or ‘inside’ is correct.

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Commented [BN30]: I avoid ‘committed’. It is over-used and therefore very vague in meaning.

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Commented [BN32]: avoid two consecutive clauses starting with ‘as’.

by a set of numerous drawings made in the mid- to late 1970s, now housed at the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art.

As the chief theorist of post-1970 Bikyōtō, Hikosaka wrote and published a considerable amount; however, there is scant textual trace of his thoughts on his own work.¹³ Instead, we need to ‘read’ his painting and non-painting practices to uncover logics and ideas hidden behind the works. Which is to say, we will have to see what he saw in his own practices, and sometimes those of others, and what he thought about them. It will thus be necessary to augment this study with biographical and contextual readings.

4- Seeing painting on the wall

As we L-ooking at Hikosaka’s 1970s trajectory, one of the questions we may have-ask is why Hikosaka returned to ‘painting’ after making such an innovative and radical start with *Floor event*. One biographical factor was his familiarity and engagement experience with oil painting since his childhood.¹⁴ Born in 1946 in Tokyo, Hikosaka began studying oil painting as a first-grader under Kiyohara Keiichi, a salon painter famed for his realistic rendering of roosters, and gained-acquired the foundations of painting through the teens during his teenage years.¹⁵ A sickly child who suffered a few prolonged hospitalizations-hospitalisations through his teens, he pored over books of literature and philosophy, while teaching himself Eastern and Western art history by closely examining *bijutsu zenshū*, literally ‘art compilation volumes’, that-which became a respectable fixture of-in postwar middle-class households. Prior-to/Before going to art school, to some extent he also became aware/familiar, to some extent, of with the development of postwar art, through art magazines. For example, he distinctly remembers seeing articles on such American artists as Pollock and Rauschenberg by art critic Tōno Yoshiaki that he found in back issues of the magazine *Mizue*^{2-s}, which his mother brought home from the library of a middle school where she taught Japanese.

In 1967, Hikosaka’s poor health became a hindrance-to/prevented him from realising his dream of going to medical school in order to help treat his younger brother’s cerebral palsy.⁷ Instead, Hikosaka decided to become an artist. But as early as the spring of 1967, when two of his paintings were accepted to-by the annual salon of the Kōfū Society, a reputable art organization-organisation with which his teacher

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Kiyohara had long been affiliated, he was already experiencing doubts about painting. He recalls feeling disgusted at seeing his works hanging alongside others in a three-tier salon style. After the show, he burnt his two works.

In April 1967, Hikosaka entered Tama Art University (hereafter abbreviated as Tamabi) in Tokyo as an oil-painting major. During his freshman and sophomore years he took advantage of Japan's college campus culture ~~during his freshman and sophomore years~~, actively pursuing the possibility of expression outside painting and expanding his horizon of knowledge beyond the classroom. He joined three campus circles focusing on literature, film, and mural painting. Off campus, he frequented underground cultural scenes, including Sōgetsu Art Center's film series. Through his off-campus activities, he became acquainted with Hori Kosai, a fellow painting major at Tamabi and the future chairman of Bikyōtō, who encouraged Hikosaka to stand on stage during performances put on by his theatre troupe.

During Hikosaka's time at Tamabi, contemporary art practices were changing rapidly. For the budding artist, it was shocking to witness the dematerializing dematerialising state of contemporary art, both in Japan and abroad. In what he would later characterize-characterise as a 'minimal shock', he was particularly unnerved by the reduction of painting and sculpture to the bare fundamentals.¹⁶ To understand its ramifications, he put minimalism to the test in a series of paintings that included *Ying and yang: Two dimensions of* (1968). ~~It~~ This was a large (162 ~~×~~ 130 cm) black-on-white rectangular canvas, with dozens of acrylic coats patiently applied with a spray gun. The following year, he further reduced painting to its bare-bone form, that is, canvas laid over a wooden stretcher. (These works were presented-exhibited on campus at the time.) Hikosaka's experiment paralleled that of his associate Hori Kosai, who was then exploring the relationship ~~of-between~~ canvas and stretcher, one example of which was submitted to the 1969 Mainichi Contemporary's new open-call section, *Rittai B*, for three-dimensional non-sculpture works.¹⁷

Among this set of experiments, one in particular sustained Hikosaka's attention: a thin canvas stretched over a frame, in which he could see the wall behind the canvas. The next step was taken in June 1969, when Zōkeidō, an activist group prefiguring Bikyōtō, held a group exhibition within the barricaded campus of Tamabi. Hikosaka accentuated the see-through effect by replacing canvas with a sheet of transparent vinyl.

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~~this, which constituted was~~ the first step in his three-step deconstruction. In the second step, he inserted a wooden panel ~~within into~~ the frame to hide the exposed wall. In the third step, he dropped the vinyl sheet ~~onto~~ the floor, ~~with leaving~~ the panel frame ~~left~~ on the wall. The last two elements constituted his final work (not extant but ~~documented~~ photographically ~~documented~~) (Figs 1.3 and 1.4), and ~~these two elements~~ became the prototypes of *Floor event* and *Practice by wood painting*, respectively.

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.3 and Fig. 1.4 near here.

Hikosaka made no recorded comment about this experiment at the time. Still, with the benefit of hindsight we can ~~recognize~~ ~~recognise~~ a singular theoretical position ~~that~~ the young artist had ~~unearthed~~ ~~taken~~. In a nutshell, he had set aside the modernist premise of painting as an autonomous, self-sufficient entity (on which Greenberg built his formalist criticism). Instead, he literally put painting *on* the wall and saw it in relation *to* the wall. Generally speaking, when we look at a painting, a painting alone is visible to our modern eye, which negates from sight the wall that holds the painting. Though superfluous to ~~the~~ painting as an autonomous object, the wall does serve as an indispensable architectural support ~~of for the~~ painting. Looking back ~~in through~~ history, Eastern and Western, painting was frequently ~~imbedded~~ ~~embedded~~ in architecture. In this sense, Hikosaka's deconstruction of painting ~~inherently encompassed~~ ~~had~~ a historical dimension, recalling ~~the memory of~~ an earlier mode of relationship between painting and architecture.

On reflection, Hikosaka soon identified a ramification of his 1969 work in reference to the history of perspective. Perspective was of special importance to him, due to ~~his a~~ physical imperfection: a squint ~~in~~ his right eye, ~~which prevented him from~~ ~~-.Squinted, one cannot seeing~~ an object in depth ~~---~~ a critical shortcoming for an artist. To correct his vision, Hikosaka ~~had a~~ ~~underwent~~ surgery ~~on his right eye~~ in the spring of 1969, right before he joined the barricading students at Tamabi. ~~Thi~~ ~~se~~ surgery was followed by a self-imposed training ~~regime, in an effort~~ to see correctly with both eyes. In his avid study of perspective, an important source was an ~~encyclopedia~~ entry in the authoritative *Sekai dai hyakka jiten* (World encyclop~~a~~edia), a 33-volume publication from 1972 by Heibon-sha.¹⁸ In its ~~four~~ ~~th~~ volume, Hikosaka found a three-page ~~long~~ survey of perspective by Yoshikawa Itsuji and Yonezawa Yoshiho, two acclaimed art historians who had long taught at the University of Tokyo. The volume (indeed the

Commented [BN36]: to 'unearth' a position is a mixed metaphor

whole set) remains in the artist's library today. The relevant pages are indicative of what the young artist learned from it, showing three different sets of underlininges, in black, blue, and red pencil respectively, some of which overlap, indicating his repeated reading.

The entry is titled *enkin-hō* (遠近法), the Japanese translation ~~for of~~ 'perspective methods', which literally means 'method (法) for [portraying] far (遠) and near (近)'. It consists of two sections, 'West' and 'East', ~~authored-written~~ by Yoshikawa and Yonezawa respectively, reflecting ~~their respective each author's specialty-specialties~~. Yoshikawa's rather dry prose begins by acknowledging the invention of a scientific perspective system in Renaissance Italy, while prefacing ~~its-the~~ discussion with a substantial description of pre-Renaissance methods in the West, which must have attracted Hikosaka's attention, as ~~indicated-shown~~ by his underlininges. In the discussion of scientific perspective, his marking also suggests that he took note of Alberti's idea of 'placing a thin membrane between the eye and the object, which was subsequently adopted as a glass pane used by Leonardo and Dürer'.¹⁹ Fascinatingly, ~~Hikosaka's underlining of the line he drew below~~ 'thin membrane' is markedly thicker, accompanied in the margin by the word 'frame' (*waku*) and a double circle added for a special emphasis. It is likely that he saw a parallel between Alberti's method and his 1969 work.

The 'East' section by Yonezawa, an eminent specialist ~~of-in~~ Chinese landscape painting, spans from ancient times to the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), when the 'three distances' method was perfected. The high-point of ~~his-the~~ narrative is given to Zong Bing, a ~~5th-fifth~~-century artist. Yonezawa explains enthusiastically, in contrast to Yoshikawa's neutral tone:²⁰

The discovery of a 'seeing through' [*tōshi*] method as explained in Zong Bing, a literati painter in the Liu Song dynasty [420–479], in his *Huashanshuixu* [Preface on Landscape Painting], is of particular note in the development of perspective in the East. According to Zong Bing, if one stretches a thin white silk cloth on a frame and sees remote mountains through it, any gigantic mountains can be placed in a small picture, thereby effortlessly transferring the far–near relationship [*enkin*] onto a flat surface.²¹ This is exactly the same method as the Western 'seeing through'

method [~~ie, that is,~~ one-point perspective] discovered in the Renaissance, but only ten centuries earlier. As has been touted by Chinese art historians, this is indeed a great invention (~~pp. 62–63~~).²²

It should be noted that *tōshi* (透視), literally ‘seeing through’, is customarily reserved to signify ~~the~~ Western ‘one-point/linear perspective’, but the Chinese scholar intentionally used it for its literal meaning, the usage that strongly resonates with Hikosaka’s vinyl-stretched frame. Although few underlines are found in this part, Hikosaka echoed Yonezawa’s entry in his 1980 essay, ‘Perspective Methods in Joseon-Dynasty Folk Painting’:

When we compare Eastern perspective methods with Western ones, their respective aerial perspectives are almost the same. As are their revolutionary methods of ‘seeing through’ [*tōshi*]. The fundamental differences lie in the [Eastern] ‘three distances’ method and the [Western] linear perspective.

In the fifth century, Zong Ding, a literati painter of the Six Dynasties (Song), discovered a method to see distant mountains through white silk stretched on a frame, whereas in the fifteenth century, Alberti, a Florentine painter, considered the picture plane as a window that opened to the world, and invented a method of seeing through a thin membrane between the eye and the object.²³

Although Hikosaka’s study of perspective post-dated his 1969 experiment, he ~~likely probably~~ became aware of the work’s significance by the time he returned to painting in 1977. Its historical legitimacy may have encouraged him to re-examine his 1969 experiment as a starting point for his post-painting exploration.

Hikosaka’s interest in the history of perspective prompts us to bring a local element into this discussion: Tricky Art, and its icon, Takamatsu Jirō’s *Perspective* series. What I have termed Tricky Art, or the so-called ~~“tricky”~~ (*torikkī*) tendency, arose in the latter half of the 1960s, and was ~~characterized~~ ~~characterised~~ by a shared interest in visual trickery in two- and three-dimensional forms.²⁴ It attracted attention from two critics, Nakahara Yūsuke and Ishiko Junzō, who co-~~organized~~ ~~organised~~ the landmark exhibition, *Tricks and Vision: Stolen Eyes*, for Tokyo Gallery and Muramatsu Gallery in 1968.²⁵ Somewhat comparable to op art in the West, Tricky Art in Japan was less retinal

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Commented [BN38]: Using ‘so-called’ makes quote marks redundant.

and more cognitive, as codified by Nakahara and Ishiko, who followed ~~in~~ the footsteps of Miyakawa Atsushi, an influential critic who articulated the issue of seeing in reference to French theory and philosophy.²⁶ In practice, the indisputable leader of Tricky Art was Takamatsu Jirō, a former ~~Hi Red Center~~ member ~~of Hi Red Center (a collective co-founded by Akasegawa)~~, who developed his Anti-Art engagement with ‘point’ into a broader exploration of *ninshiki* (cognition).²⁷ He was also a Tamabi instructor and ~~the~~ star of the ~~then-mainstreaming~~ contemporary art ~~that was at that time becoming part of the mainstream~~, and thus a ~~familiar~~ figure ~~familiar for to~~ the young Hikosaka. Takamatsu’s *Perspective* series of the late 1960s, included in *Tricks and Vision*, exemplified Tricky Art’s investigation ~~into of~~ the uneasy relationship between ~~the~~ two-dimensional painting and the three-dimensional world that ~~painting it was~~ historically tasked to represent. By returning a disfigured representation of, say, a dining table set that exists as an illusion in two dimensions back to three dimensions, Takamatsu ~~thereby~~ exposed the visual trickery wrought by the codified seeing of linear perspective.

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Simply put, Takamatsu critiqued the Renaissance perspective ~~which that~~ had been transplanted to Japan and ~~internalized internalised there~~ as *the* system of seeing in painting. by calling it no more than a visual trick. Yet, Takamatsu’s series in particular ~~—~~ and Tricky Art in general ~~—~~ can be faulted for ~~trivializing trivialising~~ the medium of painting by ~~literalizing literalising~~ its pictorial technology. Hikosaka remembers not taking his instructor’s work seriously at the time, for he deemed works based on such visual tricks ~~were to be not in~~ authentic expressions. In retrospect, his 1969 work offers a rebuke to Takamatsu’s literalism. It is not an overstatement to say that linear perspective ~~was a~~ ground zero for modernist painting, which defied the Albertian premise of painting’s pictorial support as ~~a~~ window onto ~~a the~~ world, and instead embraced the idea of painting as an autonomous world unto itself. In a sense, Hikosaka recalled and even reclaimed the rich legacy of perspective methods worldwide by his inspired move: ~~—~~ literally introducing a vinyl ~~—~~ made ~~—~~ transparent ‘see ~~—~~ through’ picture plane ~~—~~ in order to put ‘painting’ in a historical perspective, so to speak.

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2-Seeing 'self-evidence' (*jimei-sei*) on the floor

In June 1969, Hikosaka saw a painting on the wall, and eventually saw it in a historical perspective. It would take him as long as eight years to return to the issues raised by this early experiment in his post-painting painting phase. In the meantime, he decided to give up painting and pursue photography as his primary means of expression. He put this decision into practice in *Floor event* of October 1970.

Many things happened ~~over the course of more than fifteen months~~ between the June 1969 experiment and the first *Floor event* ~~more than fifteen months later.~~ By the spring of 1970, the viability of the protest movement had almost evaporated under the state's relentless deployment of forces, as had the formerly lively political life of Bikyōtō. Hikosaka dropped out of Tamabi, with an intention to extend Bikyōtō's struggle in the realm of art, thereafter serving as the group's chief theorist and strategist. Although now out of school, he had gained a mentor during the first phase of Bikyōtō: he had met with Tone Yasunao, a Tokyo Fluxus musician-theorist, through the group's recruitment efforts in the summer ~~and fall~~ ~~autumn~~ of 1969. Even though Tone did not join the group until the following year, he became Hikosaka's mentor and later his collaborator. Thanks to Tone, Hikosaka ~~greatly expanded his engagement with~~ ~~became~~ ~~more~~ ~~deeply~~ ~~involved in~~ philosophy and ~~with~~ history, while learning about the instruction-based events and performances of John Cage and Fluxus.

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In his first concrete action plan for the post-1970 phase of Bikyōtō, Hikosaka ~~organized-organised~~ a subgroup, ~~the~~ Bikyōtō Revolution Committee, to produce a series of solo exhibitions of members' work, ~~held in 1971~~ outside ~~the~~ standard institutional sites of the museum and gallery ~~with that charged admission~~, ~~charged during the year in~~ ~~1971.~~ (~~Through In~~ 1974, he would ~~organize-organise~~ a few more subgroups; to investigate the institution of art, explore photography, and secure a site of discourse.)

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Commented [BN44]: Not sure if you meant in 1974, or between 1971 and 1974 – please confirm.

Hikosaka planned to stage his 1971 solo exhibition ~~at in~~ his bedroom, in his parents' house. His initial idea was a photographic project that involved a performance element and an installation element. It would consist of two separate parts. The first part would take place as preparation in October 1970. The performance component would involve him pouring latex (a liquid form of rubber suspended in ammonium) ~~in his~~ ~~room~~ over the tatami floor of his bedroom and the wooden veranda that extended into his backyard. The act would 'turn my room all white', ~~thus~~ generating the installation

component. The process would be photographed for the second part, ~~which that~~ would take place in May 1971 as his solo exhibition under the auspices of the Bikyōtō Revolution Committee. The exhibition would entail ~~presenting selected~~ prints ~~selected~~ from the earlier shoot as a sort of time-lapse ‘information art’ (as he later called it) ~~presented~~ in the very same room.

Hikosaka’s starting point was a simple idea of ‘turning my room all white’. Straightforward ~~as though it this~~ may sound, the artist improvised and adjusted the work in the process. The most crucial adjustment, prompted by Tone, was to switch the poured substance from plaster, the material he had originally planned to use, to latex. While plaster was an ~~familiar~~ art supply ~~familiar that to~~ any art student ~~would know~~, latex was a relatively unfamiliar industrial material. Neither Hikosaka nor Tone ~~were~~ ~~was~~ aware of Lynda Benglis’s 1969 post-minimalist work *Contraband*, for which the New York artist poured latex mixed with pigment on the floor. This is a case of ‘resonance’ without connection ~~—~~ ~~T~~ that is to say, a resonance between the form and materiality of two geographically ~~dispersed-distant~~ works in which the artist, Hikosaka, had no knowledge of Benglis’s use of latex one year earlier. (For that matter, until much later, he was unaware of a whole range of experimental floor works by Benglis’s female peers in New York and elsewhere into the 1970s, contemporaneous with his floor work.)²⁸ Although similar materially, their intentions were different: whereas Benglis used latex as a binder to create a painting on the floor, Hikosaka was less interested in painting: the act of pouring was primarily intended as a performative event.

Latex proved to be a superb material for Hikosaka’s event. Not only was it far less damaging to the tatami mats of his room (as the dried coat of latex could be relatively easily ripped ~~off-away~~ from the floor); it also changed its appearance from opaque to translucent to transparent as it dried, thereby extending the time-based event beyond the conclusion of the artist’s pouring act, ~~which that~~ lasted merely fifteen minutes or so. The changing appearance prompted Hikosaka to take up the camera himself at this second stage, after his pouring act was documented by Tone, who pressed the shutter of a 35-mm camera set up in the garden.

The two deployed completely different modes of photography. Tone pressed the shutter for the artist, who could not do so himself, documenting the pouring event in an ‘objective’ and ‘mechanical’ way. ~~It-This~~ was reminiscent of serial photo-based

Commented [BN45]: Who is being quoted here? If nobody in particular, delete quotation marks. If you are quoting someone, an endnote is needed.

conceptualism, representative examples of which were seen at the Tokyo Biennale 1970 (~~for examples such as~~, Jan Dibbets, Nomura Hitoshi, and Kawaguchi Tatsuo). After the initial pouring event, as Hikosaka lived his everyday life in the latex-covered room over the next nine days, he began to intently study the changing state of the latex. In an attempt to capture the changing scenery ~~ies~~ in his room, his photographic style ~~significantly~~ departed significantly from Tone's objective documentary approach (Fig. 1.5). As the days passed ~~by~~, Hikosaka increasingly focused his camera on the tatami or the wooden veranda floorboards emerging from beneath the latex coating, as well as on the relationship between the latex and such everyday objects as a kerosene stove and a pair of slippers ~~immobilized~~ immobilised in the sea of latex. Eventually, on the morning of the tenth day, the artist saw a luminous glow of the latex skin in the morning sun that could not possibly be captured by the camera's mechanical eye. He wanted to share this discovery with Hori Kosai, ~~a post 1970 Bikyōtō member~~, with whom he was in close contact in those days. It so happened that when Hikosaka telephoned, Hori was not at home. Unable to show this stunning sight to Hori, Hikosaka was utterly disappointed, and decided to change his plan and re-stage the event to share it with others physically, instead of photographically ~~sharing it~~, ~~for in~~ his *Revolution* exhibition in May 1971. Ultimately, Hikosaka's most significant divergence from his plan would be his decision to ~~re~~-enact *Floor event* a second time. This in turn sparked his experiments with variations; all told, *Floor event* ~~it~~ was performed eight times, alone or in combination with other elements, through to 1975.²⁹

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.5 near here.

The process of making and documenting *Floor event* prompted Hikosaka to reflect, through photography, on the theoretical ramifications of using the floor as a technical support ~~through photography~~. From the beginning, *Floor event* was premised on dissimulation, as conveyed by the artist's remark, 'I wanted to turn the room all white.' The camera's viewfinder helped Hikosaka to focus and frame his gaze, transforming the floor into a site of slow reflection. By October 1972, when he published his 'instructions' for 'Floor, Sea, ~~and~~ Tool', in the contemporary art monthly *Bijutsu techō*, Hikosaka defined the objective of his floor experiment: 'self-evidence' (*jimei-sei*).³⁰ In poetic prose (see Fig. 1.6 and translation below) he wrote:

Commented [BN46]: You have introduced Hori already.

The floor we stand on is the most self-evident plane for us because it supports our physical beings. In comparison, the walls and the ceiling of this room appear too lacking in terms of self-evidence

We gaze too intently at what cannot be rendered self-evident. Therefore, we don't like to gaze again at what has become self-evident

Commented [BN47]: Should there be a full stop at the end of each paragraph?

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.6 near here.

Designer, this is a translation of Fig. 1.6, can be typeset as an inset, like figures, placed close to the reference

Floor

The floor is covered by you with a certain transparent matter

The floor we stand on is the most self-evident plane for us because it supports our physical beings. In comparison, the walls and the ceiling of this room appear too lacking in terms of self-evidence

The floor covered by the transparent matter

The transparent matter that covers the floor

Self-evidence that covers another self-evidence. Self-evidence covered by another self-evidence

The floor covers another floor

The floor covered by
another floor

From Hikosaka Naoyoshi, 'Yuka, umi, dōgu' [Floor, Sea, Tool], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 359, (October 1972). Translated by Reiko Tomii.

The notion of 'self-evidence' was closely entwined with the institution (*seido*) of art. As I have discussed elsewhere, Bikyōtō's institutional critique was based on the institution discourse (*seido-ron*) in 1960s Japan, ~~where-in which~~ 'the institution' was understood not only as social system or infrastructure, as in the museum and the gallery, but also in terms of received ideas, such as what 'painting' or 'sculpture' should look like.³¹ ~~Within-In~~ this context, to question the status quo of the institution was to question its 'self-evidence'. It is the ~~basic~~ starting point for any kind of institutional critique, especially for ~~a critique of~~ the latter manifestation of institution, ~~i.e., that is,~~ accepted cognitive patterns.

This broader understanding of the institution enabled Bikyōtō to shift its battlefield of institutional critique from the (more external) political realm to the (more internal) aesthetic realm in 1970. The goal of interrogating the 'internal institution' (*uchinaru seido*), ~~that-which the~~ Bikyōtō Revolution Committee set for ~~themselves-itself~~ in the 1971 solo exhibition series, was precisely that: to confront the idea of the institution, in this case the museum or gallery, that would arise in the mind of artists whenever they started contemplating showing their works. Their decision to stage their solo exhibitions outside the institutional venues was not motivated by a superficial ~~'anti-museum'~~ sentiment, but by a more rigorous theoretical concern. Venues used by the artists who presented solo exhibitions ranged from an underground theatre (Hori), Tamabi's campus (Tajima Renji), a ~~river~~bank of the Tama River (Yamanaka Nobuo), and at home (Hikosaka). (Tone, ~~though~~ a member of ~~the~~ Bikyōtō Revolution Committee, did not stage a solo show.) Of the four exhibitions, only Hikosaka's would subsequently ~~address-explore~~ the theoretical issue of self-evidence per se.

~~In Hikosaka's theorisation, latex was more had advantagesous over than plaster in Hikosaka's theorization. Certainly, T~~the white surface of plaster would have ~~certainly~~ generated an immense effect of dissimulation, turning the most self-evident sight of his room into something utterly unfamiliar. Yet, by making the floor invisible, plaster

would be unable to illuminate the self-evidence of the latter. In contrast, the poured latex at first dissimilated the familiar room, just as plaster would have, and-but then gradually revealed the tatami mats and the wooden veranda. These elements became visible, yet their self-evidence was put in 'brackets'? by the latex skin, as it were, immensely amplifying the sense of dissimulation. The act of gazing at the floor through the latex membrane was intensified by the artificially enhanced-concentrated focus of the photographic gaze. As Hikosaka shifted his gaze in an attempt to see more closely, the camera moved freely, hovering above the tatami mats or looking up at the suddenly monumental stove, or crouching down to inspect the wooden flooring of the veranda. A quiet excitement, caused by-of seeing the familiar objects afresh thanks to the dissimilating effect of the drying latex, is palpable.

Notably, Hikosaka was deeply influenced by Husserl's advocating for 'philosophy as a rigorous science',³² aspiring to shape his own practice into its own kind of rigorous science. Although Hikosaka himself did not link his investigation of self-evidence to Husserlian phenomenology in writing, it is a fitting reference, given his ardent study of the philosopher's work through a reading group that he and Tone had eo-organized-organised with Tone after their meeting in 1969. Fundamental to Husserl's thinking is the method of 'bracketing' out (or *epoché*) of objects other than as they are received as phenomena in consciousness, a method he first developed around 1906. Through 'bracketing', the phenomenologist can 'focus on the essential structures that allow the objects naively taken for granted in the "natural attitude" ... to "constitute themselves" in consciousness',³³ with the outcome-result of this process being termed a 'phenomenological reduction'. In Herein-T the 'natural attitude', as defined by Husserl, concerns 'everyday life as a whole as well as the positive sciences operate', and s Seen with this attitude, 'the world is for us the self-evidently existing universe of realities which are continuously before us in unquestioned givenness'.³⁴

If *Floor event* of 1970 constituted a phenomenological reduction that revealed the self-evidence of the floor, Hikosaka soon moved to present his case to the audience in a more explicit manner, by creating 'variations' on the 'thematic act' of pouring latex. In February 1972, for his solo exhibition at galerie 16 in Kyoto, he devised a significant variation for-on *Floor event* by combining it with *Delivery event*, for which he transported the whole room, consisting of the tatami mats and all the fixtures on

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Also, as it is in quote marks, we don't need 'as it were'.

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them. This act of delivery, which undermined the self-evidence of the floor as a stable foundation of one's quotidian existence, set a stage for the act of pouring latex onto the floor, to constitute a double bracketing. Four months later, Hikosaka made another important variation, called *Carpet music*, for a group concert, *The white anthology*, at Runami Gallery in Tokyo. (In addition to Hikosaka, the presenters included Tone, along with the vanguard/avant-garde dancer Kuni Chiya and the Anti-Art practitioner Kazekura Shō.) In this work, a carpet that stood in for the tatami mats in his room was contributed by Tone. The work began with Hikosaka removing Tone's carpet from his apartment and delivering it to the gallery, thereby disturbing its self-evidence. The carpet was then laid out for the audience on the gallery floor. It was turned upside down five times during the course of the all-night program. As a dawn finale, with the audience still present, the artist poured latex onto the carpet, ~~with the audience still present~~, once again disturbing the self-evidence of the floor. The last act was exceptionally violent, because Hikosaka exposed the audience to the foul smell of ammonium, a latex binder, forcing them to flee onto the street.

The last time Hikosaka undertook *Floor event* with his tatami mats was 1975, when he reprised his *galerie 16* exhibition for the Paris Biennale. At the conclusion of the project, the tatami mats and all the fixtures of his room were shipped ~~back~~ from Paris back to Yokohama, where the customs office confiscated and burned the tatami, which they deemed a banned agricultural product. Losing his 'floor', Hikosaka had no choice but to conclude his *Floor event* cycle, ~~which-that~~ he had developed during the first half of the 1970s.

3-Seeing 'practice' (*purakutisu*) in history

By 1975, the year that saw the end of *Floor event*, Bikyōtō was effectively over; its final project, undertaken by the Bikyōtō Revolution Committee II, involved making a pact of 'not making or showing one's work' throughout the whole year of 1974. Entering the second half of the 1970s, Hikosaka sorely needed a new start as an individual artist. The driving force for a new development was 'practice' or *purakutisu* (プラクティス), rendered in *katakana* syllabary to indicate an imported word. From 1975 to 1977, he devised a rapid succession of 'practices'. The first was *Practice by 51 sounds* (1975–76), a series based on fifty-one Japanese phonetics; the ensuing *Practice*

by historicization (1977) was a reprisal of his 1969 deconstruction of painting. These works led to *Practice by wood painting* in 1977, through which he eschewed the self-evidence of painting—made with pigment on a rectangular canvas support.

In ~~terms of~~ Hikosaka's titles ~~terminology~~, after 1975 'practice' replaced 'event' and 'music'—the terms ~~with by~~ which he had previously ~~aligned-placed~~ himself ~~within~~ ~~in~~ the transnational lineage of John Cage and Fluxus via Tone. The transition was more than semantic, for as we shall see 'practice' was the concept that ~~he Hikosaka himself~~ articulated in response to the local history of performance art to which his *Floor event* unmistakably belonged. (This transition enabled him to reconsider painting, the medium he had dismantled and rejected.) Hikosaka's idea of 'practice' differs by a few shades from the conventional English definition of the word. In fact, his starting point was Greek philosophy—in particular, the three modalities of human activity posited by Aristotle: *theoria* (~~theorizing~~~~theorising~~), *poiesis* (making), and *praxis* (acting). (Hereafter, when ~~referring to~~ Hikosaka's specific use of the word ~~is referenced~~, I ~~enclose~~ 'practice' ~~is enclosed~~ in quotation marks to differentiate it from conventional uses ~~of the word~~.) In the aftermath of sober Non-Art, he ~~recognized~~~~recognised~~ that Aristotelian praxis could fill the place of poiesis, or 'making', negated by Non-Art's embrace of 'not making'.

The ~~key text~~ that precipitated this shift is 'Beyond the Closed Circle: What to Learn from Gutai's Trajectory', published in the August 1973 issue of *Bijutsu techō*.³⁵ Credited as the first substantial art-historical assessment of Gutai,³⁶ Hikosaka's text is not so much a dispassionate study of ~~this pioneering Japanese post-war group as an~~ artist's urgent deliberation ~~about on~~ what remained possible after contemporary art ~~ran~~ ~~had run~~ its course from Gutai to Anti-Art to Non-Art. Evidence that Hikosaka was already ~~engaged~~~~considering with~~ the question of the historical identity of recent art is found in his collaboration with Tone on the compilation of a massive, ~~500-plus-page~~ ~~text of more than 500 pages~~, 'Chronology: Five Decades of Contemporary Art, 1916–1968', published in the April and May 1972 issues of *Bijutsu techō*.³⁷ ~~Their~~ dedicated ~~eight-month examination study over eight months~~ of primary documents and sources that could fill six pickup trucks was part of an effort to build a 'rigorous' body of knowledge from a practitioner's perspective.³⁸ As the short text accompanying the

Commented [BN52]: I don't think 'key' adds anything here. It is a very over-used term. I avoid it except in the literal sense.

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‘Chronology’ explains, the compilers’ intention was to create a kind of ‘temporal tableau’ in which

~~we can discover *bijutsu* either as segments outside the art establishment or as ‘expressions’ not yet institutionalized/institutionalised, and visualize~~
~~visualise~~ the process of their transformation into ‘expressions’ socially integrated and fully ~~institutionalized/institutionalised~~.³⁹

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On the strength of this project and associated publications ~~he worked on~~, some suggested that Hikosaka should become an art critic. However, his mind was set on being an artist, and when writing ‘Beyond the Closed Circle’, he looked to history in search of the possibility of expression. One of Hikosaka’s aims was to distance himself from Anti-Art and its proposition; ‘This is Art, too’, which had been advocated by Akasegawa Genpei and others in his *Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident* (1963–1974), partly for legal expediency in a real-life courtroom. The problem with Anti-Art, according to Hikosaka, was its utter inability to dismantle Art, with a capital A, or *geijutsu*.⁴⁰ Reflecting on *Cleaning event* (1964) by Hi Red Center, ~~a collective co-~~
~~founded by Akasegawa~~, in which members ~~engaged-undertook in~~ an absurdly meticulous cleaning of the streets of Tokyo, Hikosaka elaborated his theory of ‘practice’:

Figuratively speaking, as opposed to saying ‘It is also Art [*geijutsu*] to clean the streets’ (Nakanishi Natsuyuki on Hi Red Center in *Bijutsu Journal*, no. 56, 1966), an artist [*bijutsuka*, literally a ‘person engaged in making *bijutsu*’] may clean the street as a ‘practice’ from the perspective of art [*bijutsu*]. Although both engaged in the same act of cleaning the streets, the former can constitute *poiesis* [making] but the latter cannot. Therefore, the former may result in a work of art [*sakuhin*], the latter may not.

Likewise, take writing. As opposed to saying ‘It is also art to write a text’ or ‘A text is also art’, an artist may write a text as a practice from the perspective of art. The former is a work of art, the latter is not.⁴¹

Hikosaka’s exacting, even fastidious, logic was his attempt to counter Non-Art’s injunction against ‘making’. The idea of ‘practice’, for him, offered an escape route not only from ‘making’ but also from ‘not making’. Mindful of the dominance of Non-Art,

he must have been aware that Non-Art's embrace of 'not making' still resulted in a *sakuhin* (work of art), as amply demonstrated by Mono-ha, the originators of 'not making'. In Japanese art, *sakuhin* was as potent yet as self-evident a notion in art discourse as *geijutsu* (Art) and *bijutsu* (art).⁴²

This sets a stage for the next paragraphs, in which Hikosaka argues that art must be taken out of the realm of making:

My exacting attitude about the depth of the act of non-making and the realm of non-work may appear foolish to those who limit [the discussion about] the goal of an artist to 'work' and 'making'.

However, the space of 'exhibition'—no, the space of 'culture'—swallows everything, giving it a golden sheen that is Art and permitting anything. Therein, the work merely exists as an entity, just like 'gold' is a peculiar entity.

I suspect that we mistake this sucking power of *culture* for our act of making. If so, art is nothing but a black hall that swallows everything.⁴³

With these words, Hikosaka extended his critique of Anti-Art to ~~that of~~ the avant-garde in general. Whether the avant-garde's goal was to blur the boundary between art and life (the Western formulation) or descend to the everyday (the Japanese formulation posited by the critic Miyakawa Atsushi), Hikosaka argued, it merely expanded the territory of Art by the very act of negation. Indeed, the Anti-Art practitioners themselves knew of this dilemma; in 1961, Nakanishi Natsuyuki, a Hi Red Center member, confessed his frustration about it: 'we will eventually be sucked into a gaping maw: whatever we do will be absorbed into the category of Art [*geijutsu*]. It's so frustrating.'⁴⁴ Echoing Nakanishi, Hikosaka had a clearer insight a decade later.

It was a dire indictment of the avant-garde. Aspiring to blur the boundary between life and art, the avant-garde ended up expanding the definition of Art (hence art) ad infinitum, thereby turning practically everything into Art. Without saying so explicitly, Hikosaka must have understood that if this situation eventuated, one of the three fundamental Aristotelian modes of human activity, poiesis, risked losing its relevance—if anything can be Art and art, what is the meaning of 'making'? This was the prospect he could not possibly stand. In response, he offered a modest proposal that was intended to recover the potential of the badly undermined poiesis:

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That is why the only way to make art art is for an artist to discover acts of non-making and spaces of non-making that underscored the infinite depth of art. Although it may sound contradictory, by continuously seeking them, we may, I wonder, be able to discover an occasion to positively affirm the human act of *poiesis*.⁴⁵

If the avant-garde, on the one hand, saw art and life in antagonistic dichotomy, ~~and while Non-Art~~ on the other ~~hand Non-Art~~ contrasted ‘making’ and ‘not making’ as hostile entities, Hikosaka differentiated himself by understanding such pairs as more complementary than incompatible. Hikosaka’s view was informed by mathematical set theory, according to which ‘A’ and ‘Ā’ (not A) constitute the whole in an elemental Venn diagram (Fig. 1.7). What was at stake for him was not so much seeing the boundary separating life ~~and from art~~, as acknowledging it as self-evident but not absolute.

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.7 near here.

It is instructive here to repeat what Hikosaka and Tone wrote for ‘Chronology’:

We can ~~discover~~ *bijutsu* either as segments outside the art establishment or as ‘expressions’ not yet institutionalized, and visualize the process of their transformation into ‘expressions’ socially integrated and fully institutionalized.⁴⁶

In this historicised and socialized view, the boundary ~~of between~~ art and life (or, ‘not art’) is never absolute, but mutable. On the surface, the expansion of Art/art in the avant-garde and Anti-Art may appear similar to Hikosaka and Tone’s view of expansion by social integration and ~~institutionalization~~ *institutionalisation*. But this is wrong: they envisioned the negotiation between the spheres of art and life (‘not art’) in far greater terms; the accumulated efforts must be made by the both sides of art and life. After all, *not* everything cannot be art, because an actual murder in the name of art would still be a crime, as Akasegawa understood,⁴⁷ and most likely ~~would~~ never be art, either. That is why the young Hikosaka contended that the realm of non-making should sustain and enrich that of making (art).

With this understanding, Hikosaka proposed that in order to break the impasse of Non-Art, the artist must look at both realms, and cultivate ‘non-making’ to recover

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Commented [BN60]: Is ‘not art’ different from ‘Non-Art’? If they are the same thing, please use ‘Non-Art’ throughout (including in the Venn diagram, Fig. 1.7, to avoid confusion). If they are NOT the same thing, I think ‘not art’ needs a definition.

‘making’. This idea intimates his conception of the artist—an ultimate agent of poesis. As such, he was committed to recovering ‘making’, while insisting on putting practice over theory. In search of an escape route from the binds of Non-Art and its dictate on ‘non-making’, he took up praxis, while undertaking theoria based on seeing, as though harking back to the original meaning of theoria—to look at and speculate.

In lieu of conclusion: beyond painting

To recap, these three modes of seeing—seeing painting on the wall, seeing ‘self-evidence’ on the floor, and seeing ‘practice’ in history—induced ~~his~~ Hikosaka’s ~~theorizing~~ theorising and prepared him for *Practice by wood painting*. Theoretical exploration in the realm of non-painting may appear an unlikely prelude to the return to painting. However, if we borrow Hikosaka’s thinking, the realms of painting and non-painting complement each other, and the depth of non-painting sustains and enriches that of painting. Hikosaka himself plumbed this depth by interrogating self-evidence in three ways, using the artist’s basic instrument: seeing. In his 1969 project, Hikosaka dismantled the self-evidence of painting as an autonomous object. In his *Floor event* series from 1970 to 1975, he endeavoured to see through the self-evidence of the floor (and one’s environment) as an absolute given. And in his 1973 text, he constructed a method of ‘practice’ to counter the self-evidence of making and non-making, art and non-art, as being mutually exclusive.

Having discovered the complementary ~~nature~~ relationship of ~~between~~ non-making ~~to~~ and making, it was logical for Hikosaka to return to making after five years of intensive investigation of non-making. The five years he had spent examining the notion of the ‘self-evident’ enabled him to return to the most self-evident in a twofold sense: painting as the most self-evident in art, and abstraction, ~~which~~ ~~that~~ was privileged as the ~~purist~~ ~~purest~~ and thus most self-evident in modernism. The path he took back to painting was systematic, beginning with a reassessment of his 1969 project. In 1977, for his *Practice by historicization*, he re-staged the wood panel on the wall and the transparent vinyl on the floor. The fact that a ‘transparent matter’ (in his 1973 instruction) on the floor was an element of continuity between the 1969 vinyl and the 1970 latex would not have escaped his attention, but that was the path once taken. With the wood panel on the wall as his starting point, he moved on to reconstitute ‘painting’

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while seeking to avoid its self-evidence. Canvas was already gone, replaced by wood. The next thing to go was the rectangular support. He modified the rectangular support first with the 5-7-5-7-7 poetic meters of *waka* (Fig. 1.8). ~~The~~ His use of Japanese phonetics had begun with *Practice by 51 sounds*, the series based on ~~51~~ fifty-one Japanese phonetics, ~~and while his~~ the use-adoption of *waka* structure ~~was adopted in~~ reference ~~referred~~ to his mother, who was a *waka* poet. Then he introduced the rounded bottom to some components (Fig. 1.9). To lessen the weight of the wooden support, he eventually devised a hollow box-like construction for components. (~~Prior to~~ Before this, he had used readymade pieces of lumbers, sometimes carving them out ~~for to reduce~~ their weight ~~reduction~~.) This made the production of large-scale works a practical possibility. Throughout this development, he preserved a token amount of flatness, winking at the modernist dictate, by making the surface of each component flat. (This feature sets his *PWP* apart from Frank Stella's relief paintings of the late 1980s onward, ~~which that~~ are informed by the deep space of Baroque painting.) ~~As~~ While Hikosaka progressed with the exterior form (the support), he ~~separately~~ worked separately on the interior form, by inventing a method of 'regulated automatism', in which he first drew a complex web of triangular grids and randomly selected fragments of line, before filling them in with colours (Fig. 1.10).

Designer, please take in Fig. 1.8, Fig. 1.9 and Fig. 1.10 near here (they don't all have to be together)

Hikosaka thought of *PWP* as a 'practice' that, in his theory, would not result in 'work' as such. Implicit in his claim was that *PWP* was a 'practice' but not necessarily a painting. His trepidation can be placed in the context of the newly introduced orthodoxy of modernist flatness of the late 1970s, which existed alongside the continued practice of Non-Art, especially its Mono-ha manifestation. What Hikosaka did not know then was that, with his three seeings and ~~theorizations~~ theorisations, he stood at the threshold of post-modernism. ~~Here,~~ What I mean here by post-modernism is the strain of thought introduced to Japan in the 1990s, especially by the cohort of *Hihyō kūkan* (Critical Space), which included ~~the~~ literary critics Asada Akira and Karatani Kōjin, along with the artist-theorist Okazaki Kenjirō, who re-evaluated ~~the~~ modernist discourse in light of the ongoing postmodern discourse that was under way in Euro-America.

It was not until the mid-1990s that Hikosaka ~~he~~ began to explore the non-painting potentials of his ~~theorization~~ theorisation. Central ~~in to~~ this development was

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his willingness to take an external point of reference—, an attitude consistent with his three modes of seeing. In seeing painting on the wall, he stood ‘outside’ painting by bracketing its autonomy. In seeing ‘self-evidence’ on the floor, he adopted the artificial eye of the camera, ~~which-that~~ enabled him to ~~at-once~~simultaneously lose and gain distance from the object. And in seeing ‘practice’ in history, he stood outside the present to adopt a longer view. (Not coincidentally, a longer view helped him to coin the term ‘wood painting’ in parallel to ‘rock painting’.) His desire to adopt an external point of reference was a lesson he had drawn from Husserlian reduction to expose the self-evident, which allowed him to work with others in the non-painting world, as he repeatedly demonstrated in his works after 1995. One such example was *Tower of the reconstruction* (2011), which he constructed for the temporary housing community of Minami Sōma, and a related book project—a-of waka anthology—in the ~~devastating~~ aftermaths of the ~~devastating~~ 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.⁴⁸

Together with *Floor event*, Hikosaka’s *Practice by wood painting* has a place in the ~~world-art-international~~ history of postwar art. Not only because the Japanese artist contributed his theoretical and visual inventiveness, but also because his work points to the ~~multiple-many~~ endgames of modernism. If the historical framework of ~~multiple many~~ modernisms has ~~often~~ been ~~often~~-studied by focusing on their respective origins and developments, ~~then~~ their consequences (endpoints), too, must be fully considered. Just as modernism manifested itself in many ~~localized-localised~~ guises, its endgames, too, were explored differently according to local exigencies. In the 1970s and onward, the state of international contemporaneity grew significantly, ~~and~~-the differences ~~among between~~ locales ~~have-become~~becoming less obvious and indeed more self-evident. In this regard, Hikosaka’s unwavering scrutiny of the self-evidence of art is a mirror that helps to bring into view the invisible structures and assumptions of modernism that ~~are~~ often ~~go~~ unnoticed.

~~Translation 3~~

Notes

Japanese and other East Asian names are given in the traditional order, surname first.

All translation from Japanese materials is by the author.

¹ [Japanese and other East Asian names are given in the traditional order, surname first.](#)

² *Floor event* was included in the landmark exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s* at Queens Museum of Art, New York, in 1999. The 1971 announcement card, ~~which that~~ incorporates a photo of *Floor event no. 1* (1970), is featured on the cover of its exhibition catalogue. The early in-depth study is Reiko Tomii, ‘Gurōbaru-ka no naka de sengo Nihon bijutsu o kangaeru: Hikosaka Naoyoshi “Furoa evento” o kēsu sutadī toshite’ / ‘Thinking about Postwar Japanese Art in the Globalization: A Case Study with Hikosaka Naoyoshi’s *Floor Event*’, in *Wakayama Eiko sensei go-taikan kinen ronbunshū* / *Professor Eiko Wakayama Memorial Volume*, DVD/offprint, Osaka University, 2006. This has been updated in [Reiko Tomii](#), ‘Hikosaka Naoyoshi’s *Floor Event*: An Endgame of Modernism’, and ‘Hikosaka Naoyoshi no “Furoa evento”’: Kōi, shashin, kaiga’ [Hikosaka Naoyoshi’s *Floor Event*: Act, Photography, Painting], [both](#) in *Hikosaka Naoyoshi: Floor Event No. 1 1970*, booklet insert to portfolio, Misa Shin Gallery, Tokyo, 2017, pp. 3–7, 9–15.

³ For Hikosaka’s theory of photography, see Reiko Tomii, ‘*Revolution* in Bikyōtō’s Photography: Naoyoshi Hikosaka and the Group of Five’, in [Yasufumi Nakamori](#) (ed.), *For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968–1979*, ed. [Yasufumi Nakamori](#), exhibition catalogue, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2015, pp. 148–53.

⁴ This usage of ‘non-painting’ here parallels Hikosaka’s reference to a Venn diagram, as will be discussed.

⁵ Precedents for the use of wood as painting support abound in history, including Christian icons and Japanese cedar door decorations. What sets Hikosaka’s work apart is his thorough rejection of the received notion of painting—pigment bound by oil (or other substances) laid on canvas (or other more- or-less flat surfaces).

⁶ ~~For~~ [On](#) the reception of Greenberg in Japan, see Kajiya Kenji ‘Gosadō suru buki: Kuremento Gurinbāgu, bunka reisen, gurōbarizeshon’ [Malfunctioning weapon: Clement Greenberg, the cultural cold war, and globalization], *Amerika kenkyū* / *The American Review*, [vol.](#) 37, 2003, pp. 83–105.

⁷ ~~For~~ [On](#) the mainstreaming of contemporary art, see Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness*:

International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016, pp. 33–38.

⁸ The mainstreaming of *gendai bijutsu* and the shift from *kindai bijutsu* to *gendai bijutsu* took place in tandem. See Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness* *Ibid.*, pp. 33–38.

⁹ For the survey of modern painting in Japan, see Reiko Tomii, ‘Chapter 13: Infinity Nets—Aspects of Contemporary Japanese Painting’, in Alexandra Munroe (ed.), *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe, exhibition catalogue, Abrams, New York, 1994, pp. ??–??.

¹⁰ Japanese art of the 1980s *art in Japan* has recently been gaining museological attention. See For example, see *Kiten to shite no 80-nendai / Starting Points: Japanese Art of the '80s*, exhibition catalogue, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, 2018.

¹¹ For my proposed methodology of world art history, see Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness*, pp. 12–25.

¹² The term was first proposed by Michael Craig-Martin in ‘Post-Painting Painting and Other Thoughts’, a lecture given at the Slade Art School in 1997. See Michael Craig-Martin, *On Being An Artist*, Art/Books, London, 2015, p. 231.

¹³ Hikosaka’s writings ~~is are~~ anthologized ~~into~~ two books: *Hanpuku* [Repetition/Reversal], Tabata Shoten, Tokyo, 1974 (reprinted and expanded, Alpha Beta Books, Tokyo, 2016); and *Hikosaka Naoyoshi no ekurichūru* [Writing by Hikoaka Naoyoshi], Sanwa Shoseki, Tokyo, 2008.

¹⁴ Hikosaka’s biography is pieced together based on the chronology in *Hikosaka Naoyoshi no ekurichūru*, pp. 560–89; Oral history interview with Hikosaka Naoyoshi, conducted by Reiko Tomii and Gen Adachi, 26 March 2012, Oral History Archives of Japanese Art, www.oralarthistory.org; and running dialogues I have conducted with the artist since 1994.

¹⁵ For Kiyohara, see *Kiyohara Keiichi: Tokubetsu chinretsu* [Special Display], exhibition catalogue, The Shōtō Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1992.

¹⁶ Hikosaka specifically recalls a special feature on Robert Morris in *Bijutsu techō*, no. 310, vol. 21, March 1969, which includes an essay by Yamaguchi Katsuhiro with ample reproductions (pp. 30–61) and

the translation of Morris's 1966 essay, 'Notes on Sculpture' (pp. 62–65).

¹⁷ For the *Rittai* section of Mainichi newspaper company's [biannual-biennial](#), *Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*, see Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness*, pp. 35–36. Conventional sculptures were accepted into another section, *Rittai A*. In a broader context, Hori's and Hikosaka's experiments resonate with those by Support/Surfaces in that they similarly deconstruct painting into canvas and frame. While the Japanese artists focused more on the relationship between frame and canvas, the French artists extracted canvas as the essence of painting. [I assume it is held every two years \(biennial\), not twice a year \(biannual\)?](#)

¹⁸ Yoshikawa Itsuji and Yonezawa Yoshiho, 'Enkin-hō' [Perspective methods], in *Sekai dai hyakka jiten* [World Encyclopedia], vol. 4, Heibonsha, Tokyo, 1972, pp. 61–63.

¹⁹ Yoshikawa's description ([ibid.](#), p. 62).

²⁰ [All translations from the Japanese are by Reiko Tomii.](#)

²¹ The original text by Zong Bing reads: 'Now, if one spreads thin silk to capture the distant scene, the form of K'un-lun's Lang peak can be encompassed in a square inch.' For an English translation of this text, see Tsung Ping (Zong Bing), 'The Significance of Landscape', in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih (eds. ~~and comps~~), *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1985, pp. 36–38.

²² [Yoshikawa and Yonezawa, 'Enkin-hō', pp. 62–3.](#)

²³ Hikosaka Naoyoshi, 'Richō minga no enkinhō' [Perspective Methods in Joseon-Dynasty Folk Painting], *Mizue*, February 1980, p. 56.

²⁴ Despite its importance in understanding the state of contemporary art in 1960s Japan, this tendency has by now lacked a convenient movement label beyond being 'tricky'. My terminology is an effort to assign a rightful place to it in postwar art history as an under-appreciated precursor to Mono-ha and conceptualism, two main strains of Non-Art in Japanese art in the expanded 1960s.

²⁵ For this exhibition, see Mika Yoshitake, 'The Language of Things: Relation, Perception, and Duration', in [Doryun Chong \(ed.\), Tokyo, 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde](#), ed. [Doryun Chong](#), exhibition

catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2012, pp. 128–29.

²⁶ For Miyakawa's art criticism and his use of French theory, see Reiko Tomii, 'Historicizing "Contemporary Art": Some Discursive Practices in *Gendai Bijutsu* in Japan', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 12, no. 3, Winter 2004, pp. 611–41, in particular pp. 619–23.

²⁷ For Takamatsu and cognition, see Mitsuda Yuri, 'Jirō Takamatsu and the Photographic: Toward the Integration of Imagery', in *For a New World to Come*, pp. 114–19.

²⁸ For these examples, see Katy Seigel (ed.), *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967–1975*, ed. Katy Seigel, exhibition catalogue, Independent Curators Incorporated/International, New York, 2006.

²⁹ For the chronology of *Floor event*, see Tomii, 'Gurōbaru-ka no naka de', pp. 271–76; Hikosaka Naoyoshi: *Floor Event No. 1 1970*, pp. 42–43.

³⁰ Hikosaka Naoyoshi, 'Yuka, umi, dōgu' [Floor, Sea, Tool], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 359, October 1972, pp. ??–??.

³¹ Reiko Tomii, 'The Impossibility of Anti: A Theoretical Consideration of Bikyōtō', in Mathieu Copeland and Balthazar Lovay (eds.), *The Anti-Museum: An Anthology*, ed. Mathieu Copeland and Balthazar Lovay, exhibition catalogue, Fri Art and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Fribourg and Cologne, 2016.

³² The idea is expressed in his Husserl's essay 'Philosophy as a Rigorous Science' in the journal *Logos*, 1910–11. For On Husserl, see Panos Theodorou, *Husserl and Heidegger on Reduction, Primordially, and the Categorical: Phenomenology Beyond its Original Divide*, Springer, Cham, Switzerland, 2015, especially 'Chapter 2: The Phenomenological Reductions in Husserl's Phenomenology', pp. 17–66; Sebastian Luft, 'Husserl's Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction: Between Life-World and Cartesianism', *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 34, 2004, pp. 198–234; [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): 'Edmund Husserl', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003, revised 2016, plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl; and [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#): 'Phenomenology', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003, revised 2013, plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology, both accessed-viewed 16 January 2018.

³³ [Edmund Husserl](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/), plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/, [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/), ‘Edmund Husserl’, [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/).

³⁴ Husserl, quoted in Theodorou, [Husserl and Heidegger](#), p. 24.

³⁵ Hikosaka Naoyoshi, ‘Tojirareta enkan no kanata wa: [“Gutai”](#) no kiseki kara nani o’ [Beyond the Closed Circle: What to Learn from Gutai’s Trajectory], [Bijutsu techō](#), no. 370, August 1973, pp. 72–92.

³⁶ Shiryōshū, ‘Gutai sankō bunken’ [Gutai Literature], in [Shiryōshū](#), [full citation needed here?](#) p. 434. A nascent form of this idea outlined in the present and following paragraphs can be found in his 1973 text on ‘practice’, in which he discussed the ‘realm of non-production’.

³⁷ Tone Yasunao, Hikosaka Naoyoshi, and Akatsuka Yukio, ‘Nenpyō: Gendai bijutsu no 50-nen, 1916–1968’ (‘Chronology: Five Decades of Contemporary Art, 1916–1968’), [2 two pts parts:→ Part 1 in Bijutsu techō](#), no. 354, April 1972, pp. 1–251; and [Part 2 in Bijutsu techō](#), no. 355, May 1972, pp. 25–186. For this work, see Tomii, ‘[Historicizing “Contemporary Art”](#)’, pp. 626–29.

³⁸ [Tomii, “Historicizing “Contemporary Art””, p. Tomii, “Historicizing”, 627.](#)

³⁹ Tone, Hikosaka, and Akatsuka, ‘Nenpyō’, [Part-1](#), p. 2.

⁴⁰ See Reiko Tomii, ‘[Geijutsu on Their Minds: Memorable Words on Anti-Art](#)’, in [Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan, 1950–1970](#), ed. Charles Merewether, exhibition catalogue, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007, pp. 35–62. [Geijutsu on Their Minds](#)

⁴¹ Hikosaka, ‘[Tojirareta enkan no kanata wa](#)’, ‘[Enkan](#)’, [Full citation needed?](#) p. 85.

⁴² It should be noted that, in these paragraphs, Hikosaka made a subtle linguistic [maneuver/manoeuvre](#), changing the topic from *geijutsu* [Art with a capital ‘A’] to *bijutsu* [art with a small ‘a’], making his discussion from metaphysical (theoretical) to physical (practical), positioning himself out of Anti-Art that aimed at fervent assaults on Art and in Non-Art that focused on quiet re-examination of art.

⁴³ Hikosaka, [Enkan](#), ‘[Tojirareta enkan no kanata wa](#)’, p. 85.

⁴⁴ Nakanishi in Akasegawa Genpei, Shūsaku Arakawa, Itō Takayasu, Kudō Tetsumi, and Nakanishi

Natsuyuki, with Ebara Jun and Nakahara, 'Wakai bōken-ha wa kataru' [Young adventurers talk], *Bijutsu techō*, no.-192, July 1961, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Hikosaka, '[Tojirareta enkan no kanata wa 'Enkan'](#)', p. 85.

⁴⁶ [Tone, Hikosaka and Akatsuka, 'Nenpyō', Part 1, p. 2.](#)

⁴⁷ For Akasegawa Genpei's construction of 'Anti-Art is Art, too', see Reiko Tomii, 'State v. (Anti-)Art: Model 1,000-Yen Note Incident by Akasegawa Genpei and Company', *Positions*, vol. 10, no. 1, Spring 2002, p. 156.

⁴⁸ For Hikosaka's *Tower of the reconstruction*, see wawa.or.jp/supports/000156_10plus1.jp/monthly/2011/12/post-36.php, archiaid.org/archive/workshop/log-cabins-with-murals-and-cypress-tower-2, [accessed-viewed 5 August 5, 2018](#). For his collaboration on *waka* poetry, see Hikosaka Naoyoshi, Haganuma Sei, and Igatashi Tarō (eds), *3/11 Man'yōshū Fukkatsu no iō / March 11 Man'yōshū: Fukushima 'Tower of the Reconstruction'*, Sairyūsha, Tokyo, 2012.

2

1968–1982: From Australian painting to UnAustralian art

Rex Butler and A. D. S. Donaldson

(fig. 1)

Criticism of Bernard Smith's canonical *Australian Painting, 1788–1960*, originally published in 1962 (Fig. 2.1), has largely been ~~criticised~~ on two fronts.¹ The first is ~~for~~ its designation 'Australian' in a time of increasingly non-national histories of art. The second is ~~for~~ the limiting of its attention to the medium of painting.² Both are seen as an unnecessary restriction on the wider practices of art, both inside and outside ~~of~~ this country, now visible from the perspective of our contemporaneity. But what is not remarked upon in these criticisms—which operate ~~as separate~~ separately and are made by different constituencies—is how in Smith's book 'Australian' and 'painting' belong together ~~in Smith's book~~, each reinforcing the other and making the other possible. That is, the notion of artistic nationalism belongs to painting as a medium, and painting as a medium allows nationhood as a particular quality of art. To put it more generally, the modernism implied in the notion of medium-specificity is also a time of national art histories, and national art histories for their part can only be written in terms of a specific medium.³ In Smith's book, the development of painting is seen as the gradual discovery of the essence of 'Australia', just as modernist histories are narrated as the gradual reduction to the purity of a medium.

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In this essay, we seek to write a history of Australian painting in the 1970s, but our point is that, by the start of ~~the~~ ate decade, both the category of painting and the category of the Australian were no longer possible, or at least were under considerable pressure. Indeed, we might say that the ~~19~~ 70s began—at least in artistic if not chronological terms—in 1968, with ~~both~~ the influential American critic Clement Greenberg's inaugural Power Lecture, 'Avant-Garde Attitudes', at the University of

Commented [BN64]: I think the original order implied that the book received nothing but criticism, which of course is not true.

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Sydney and the staging of *The Field* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (Figs 2.2 and 2.3).

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We might commence with Greenberg's lecture. In it, coming out of the minimalist and post-minimalist contestation of his ideas of modernist medium-specificity then occurring in America, he ~~speaks~~ spoke of a coming 'post-modernism', in which medium and therefore something like painting would no longer be possible. It would be the end of the ~~eat~~ teleological model of art history that he had laboriously constructed, running all the way from mid-nineteenth-century France through to mid-twentieth-century America. And *The Field* ~~for its part~~, we would suggest, for all of its residual emphasis on painting and sculpture, ultimately ~~pointed~~ eds forward to the post-medium conceptual art of the 1970s, the post-modernism of the 19-80s and the expanded field of contemporary art.⁵ It would be a possibility realised as soon as 1973, when the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne ~~NGV~~ put on its follow-up to *The Field*; the overtly Duchamp-inspired exhibition *Object and Idea*.⁶

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Now what has this to do with Smith's *Australian Painting*? The first edition of the book in 1962 famously concluded with an uncredited reproduction of his 'Antipodean Manifesto' of 1959, in which he offered a certain 'defence of the image' designed to sideline abstraction in Australia because, from Smith's point of view, 'wherever we look, New York, Paris, London, San Francisco or Sydney, we see young artists dazzled by the luxurious pageantry and colour of non-figuration'.⁷ However, less than a decade later, for the book's second edition ~~of in 1970~~ 1971,⁸ Smith had to update his history and add several chapters, including one notably on colour-field painting (Fig. 2.4). This has obviously been read as something of a backdown for Smith, insofar as he was forced to recognise and acknowledge ~~the~~ abstract painting against which he had railed in the first edition, and critics have often wondered at the apparent *volte-face* or art-historical contradiction involved in his writing it. So much so that even critics of Smith have thought it a shame that he added these ~~additional~~ chapters, thus detracting from the coherence and conviction (even if they disagreed with it) of the first edition.⁹

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But here again—as with the non-reading of the full implications of the title of *Australian Painting*—the critics of the second edition do not really see the issues at

Commented [BN66]: The version you cite here is not the one illustrated in Fig. 2.2 (book version published by University of Sydney). Are the texts the same, and if so maybe cite the one illustrated for consistency?

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Commented [BN68]: Worth including full citation in note, I think.

Commented [BN69]: At first reading this was ambiguous and confusing

stake. For, in fact, those additional chapters—on colour-field, pop art and what Smith calls the ‘expressive and symbolic styles of the 1960s’—are in no way irreconcilable with the original argument of the book, because they still fundamentally deal with the medium of *painting*. Even though they do not ~~engage with~~consider subject matter that is identifiably Australian, our contention is that their medium-specificity still allows a modernism in which Australian art is possible. Each can be seen as a certain ‘defence of the image’, if we understand by this something that appears in a painting as opposed to a non-medium-specific art form. As long as we have a specific medium, we still have an Australian art. The two terms go together. (This is why, for example, Graeme Sturgeon ~~will~~would publish his correlative of and corrective to *Australian Painting* as *The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788–1975*.¹⁰ And ~~we might observe that there~~ is little or no cross-over between the two books, because each puts forward a different ‘Australia’ according to its particular medium. This is also why none of the books that followed Smith’s, with titles like ‘Australian art’, beginning with Robert Hughes’, or even ~~come those that came~~ before ~~him~~, like William Moore’s, have ever attained anything like the acclaim and influence of Smith’s account.¹¹ It is because we cannot coherently put together the terms ‘Australian’ and ‘art’.) It is indeed only in the 19⁷⁰s, when Australian art no longer takes place in a specific medium, that Smith’s history comes to an end.

Commented [BN70]: I avoid ‘engage’ and ‘engage with’ – they are so over-used and vague. I try for something more specific. I hope I have caught your meaning.

Commented [BN71]: I think this was unnecessarily wordy. You are making an argument here – no need to qualify.

In what follows, then, we will trace what ‘Australian painting’ could mean in the 19⁷⁰s, when we no longer had the category painting and hence no longer the Australian, or put otherwise, no longer the category of Australian and hence no longer painting. Can we see an ‘Australian painting’ in the 19⁷⁰s that would be no longer quite Australian and no longer quite painting? In fact, what we have in the 19⁷⁰s is the gradual move away from Australian painting towards what we would call an ‘UnAustralian art’—‘art’ because we no longer have the national, and ‘UnAustralian’ because we no longer have a specific medium. And, as though to prove the point, we suggest that, if the 19⁷⁰s began in 1968 with *The Field*, it ended in 1982 with Paul Taylor’s *Popism* (Fig. 2.5), a survey of appropriative painting, held also at the National Gallery of Victoria.¹² For what we see in Taylor’s show is a post modernism very different ~~post-modernism than from~~ the one we are concerned to trace here, in both its return to medium and its return to the national. Ultimately, can we not see in Taylor’s

Popism something of Smith's own 1959 *Antipodeans* exhibition of figurative Melbourne painting? Do we not have in both a similar 'defence of the image' and argument for the Australian, even if only ironically in Taylor's case? Is not Taylor as much as anything a *modernist* in his claims for an Australian exceptionalism through a mimetic self-reflexivity?¹³ But in the fourteen-year period between 1968 and 1982 we *do* have a proper post-modern and post-national art. And, as we will argue in our conclusion, Taylor's return to a specifically Australian painting ~~can be seen to be was~~ contested from as ~~soon early~~ as 1984, in another inaugural address at the University of Sydney.

~~Designer, please take in Fig. 2.5 near here (image file yet to be provided).~~

Between 1968 and 1982, then, we see a shift from Australian painting to UnAustralian art. ~~Needless to say~~ Of course, we are not suggesting that all the art made in Australia moved ~~s~~ this way. There were, as with an exhibition like Patrick McCaughey's *10 Australians*, which toured Europe throughout 1974 and included Fred Williams, David Aspden, Sydney Ball and John Firth-Smith, *retardataire* versions of lyrical abstraction and post-impressionist landscape painting still being made. And even a younger generation of artists from *The Field* (for example, Alun Leach-Jones, Robert Jacks, Michael Johnson and Ron Robertson-Swann) could not escape the fate predicted for them also by McCaughey in his contribution to Taylor's edited anthology on the 19^s70s, *Anything Goes: Art in Australia, 1970–1980*: 'Bright beginnings that tend to dwindle to commonplace middles and dismal ends'.¹⁴ ~~However, equally, But~~ it is also equally true ~~to say~~ that the 1970s made evident a long-running non-national thread that had wound unnoticed through ~~out~~ twentieth-century Australian art. Feminist art historian Janine Burke put on *Australian Women Artists: One Hundred Years, 1840–1940*, at the Ewing and George Paton Galleries at the University of Melbourne in 1975, which in part sought to recuperate our hitherto lost women expatriate artists.¹⁵ Equally too, the long history of artistic immigrants arriving and making work in this country was recognised in such projects as the Society of Latvian Artists' encyclopaedic *Latvian Artists in Australia* ~~of~~ (1979), which sought to account for all ~~of~~ the artists from that small Baltic state who arrived in Australia after ~~the~~ World War II.¹⁶

Commented [BN72]: If it is needless to say, it is needless to say! 😊
I avoid even 'of course', for much the same reason – you could delete this too if you like.

More generally, of course, the 1970s were a decade of social movements: not only feminism, but the counter-culture, Vietnam War protests, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, community art, anti-uranium marches and Aboriginal land rights. The works of art that have become iconic—both in their own right and as embodying something of the ‘spirit’ of the times—are such things as Melbourne photographer Carol Jerrens’ image of a topless young woman surrounded by three bare-chested young men staring at the camera (*Vale Street*, 1975) or her own naked self-portrait in a hotel mirror with her then-lover Ebsen Storm (*Mirror with a memory*, 1977). Or we can think of the political poster-making of Ann Newmarch and the University of Sydney’s Tin Sheds, aspects of which were reprised in the recent Australian Centre ~~of~~for Contemporary Art show *Unfinished Business: Perspectives on Art and Feminism* (2017). Or, finally, there were versions of community arts, such as Vivienne Binns’ *Mothers’ Memories Others’ Memories* (1980), in which the artist embedded herself for several years in a local community, enabling women who had not previously made art to tell their life stories using commonplace materials like greeting cards, and teaching them such techniques as photographic silk-screen printing.

Here we do not take up such obviously iconic works of the 1970s, in which the medium of painting has been left far behind. Rather, ~~what~~ we are interested in ~~is~~ what happens to the medium of painting during the decade, and how it can be understood to move from a medium to a post-medium condition. In other words, we look at the place where the shift from medium to post-medium—and we claim therefore from the Australian to the UnAustralian—actually occurs. It is not as though, we admit, ~~that~~ this shift from medium to post-medium is a *precondition* for the kind of work mentioned above. The specific moments we look at occur throughout the decade, in several cases *after* those other works. But what we want to present is a series of case studies of painting becoming something else throughout the 1970s—turning into computer screens; multi-media collage; the painting of shops, schools and community buildings; batik design; theatre curtains; conceptual art; and, finally, an unopened can of paint. Each of these ended up in a different place, but each ~~of them~~ began at the same place, insofar as each of the practices we look at can be said to have begun with painting. However, ~~what~~ we no longer have ~~is not anymore~~ painting searching for an essence of painting in order to ‘exhibit its “rightness” of form’,¹⁷ but painting overcoming its

limits and going somewhere else, moving into the general territory of art and thereby breaking with its own national limits.

We begin with Frank Eidlitz, who arrived in Australia in 1955, having studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Budapest, the alma mater of such artists as Victor Vasarely, László Moholy-Nagy and György Kepes, the last of whom was to have a decisive influence on him. In October 1965, he exhibited what the writer and photographer Alfred Heintz called his 'intricate and hypnotic perceptual abstractions' at John and Sunday Reed's Museum of Modern Art and Design in Melbourne (but the same works also drew complaints from other commentators, who accused them of lacking emotion).¹⁸ Eidlitz believed with Jung that 'in the subconscious mind there is a vast reservoir of formal images and symbols that have universal meaning', and his early black-and-white paintings made in Australia are dominated by sharp, repetitious lines and pixelated backgrounds set in motion by their close spatial relationship with each other.¹⁹ He claimed that he wanted to make paintings 'based on new techniques and discoveries', and in 1965 he received a Churchill Fellowship to study with Kepes at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the suburbs of Boston.²⁰ Already influenced by Kepes' 1944 book *The Language of Vision* (an echo of Moholy-Nagy's epochal *The New Vision* of 1930 and anticipating his *Vision in Motion* of 1947), Eidlitz at MIT experimented with kinetic sculpture and experimental film-making, eventually making seven short abstract films, and at the end of his fellowship returned to Australia.

Upon his return, he continued to paint and work in graphic design, but became increasingly interested in forms of photography that produced, like his paintings, a surfeit of pattern, an over-abundance of lines and shapes apparently being either drawn towards or forced away from each other. Indeed, as Eidlitz's work moved into the 1970s, it became less concerned with the pulsating moiré effects of his so-called perceptual abstractions (*Reverse visual beat*, 1965; *Visual beat rhythm horizontal vertical*, 1965) (Fig. 2.6) and more focused on constructed, three-dimensional, quasi-sculptural surfaces, although for the most part these works have lain undisturbed in Australian art history.

As early as 19 March 1967, Eidlitz had shown his films alongside those of Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski and Ludwik Dutkiewicz as part of Ubu Films' underground movies program at the Union Theatre at the University of Sydney. Then,

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in May 1968, taking advantage of Harry Seidler's newly opened Australia Square, he used its foyer to screen his short film on the installation of Alexander Calder's *La grande voile* (1966) at Harvard's Carpenter Center. His 1971 exhibition at the South Yarra Gallery in Melbourne was called *Dimensional Painting*, and on the invitation Eidlitz stated that 'artists are art machines'.²¹ The following year he met programmer Doug Richardson, who had developed the first computer graphic system in Australia, at the University of Sydney, and he began a collaboration with him, leading to an exhibition of their combined work in *Computer Composers* at the 1974 Queensland Festival of Arts. In these collaborations, Eidlitz took the two-dimensional op surfaces of Vasarely and the perceptual experiments of the international Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV), which included Vasarely's son Yvaral, along with such artists as the French François Morellet, the Argentinian Julio le Parc and the Hungarian Vera Molnár, and turned two-dimensional computer art into animation, thus breaking finally with the illusion of movement within a bounded space and leading it into actual movement through an immaterial program. Together Eidlitz and Richardson presented the exhibition *A Computer Homage to Josef Albers* in 1975 at the Hogarth Galleries in Sydney; ~~and~~ in their work of the 1970s they produced, in the words of the historian of art and technology Stephen Jones, 'perhaps the most successful examples of computer art, which ultimately had its roots in the geometric abstractions of Eidlitz's op art explorations of the immediately preceding period'.²²

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The Polish-born Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski arrived in Australia in 1949, having already studied for four years at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. By the time he showed his films alongside those of Eidlitz at the University of Sydney in 1967, he ~~had~~ already had more than ~~15~~-fifteen years of geometric, abstract expressionist and op painting behind him. He presented his first 'chromasonic' piece in 1960; Australia's first electronically generated images at the Argus Gallery in Melbourne in 1964; and from at least 1965 he had begun to exhibit his op collages, made from the reflective material used for roadside signs. These are works he continued to make into the 19'80s, from the almost psychedelic moiré collage of *Bifocal* (1965) through the pulsating 'central core' imagery of *Vibra* (1967) and on to the rose-like expanding colour balls of *Astra* (1979) and *Kronos 4* (1983). Like Eidlitz, Ostoja-Kotkowski received a Churchill

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Fellowship in 1967; ~~and~~ in that year he saw an experiment with a laser beam at Stanford University in California, leading him to use it in his 1968 *‘Sound and Image’* presentation at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, ‘probably the first laser performance on stage in the world’.²³ Indeed, alongside his painting, his interest in technology and kinetics soon led him to computers and their possible use for graphic art and light projection, as well as to laser photography. In 1970 he built his more than 36-metre-high first chromasonic tower in Adelaide for the Festival of Arts (Fig. 2.7); then in 1972 he built a 30-metre chromasonic tower at the Australian National University in Canberra, in 1975 a 24-metre tower for the Australia ’75 Festival of Arts and Sciences in Canberra, and finally in 1978 another for the Royal Adelaide International Expo. The painter and critic James Gleeson called Ostoja-Kotkowski, who for years had sought the formation of a national electronic-painting studio, the ‘complete artist-scientist’ and an ‘op artist par excellence’,²⁴ while cultural commentator Sandra McGrath spoke of a ‘technological genius who uses lasers instead of paint and brushes’.²⁵ Nevertheless, his giant public towers now haunt their respective landscapes like the forgotten ghosts of a recent past.

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Working on another vision of the future and having shown in *The Field*, Sydney-born Vernon Treweeke was five years later painting the ~~hippie~~ counter-culture capital Nimbin every colour of the rainbow, on its shops, schools and communal buildings. His earlier, modular, psychedelic abstract paintings had already pointed to the old relationship between art and drugs, only in his case it was more likely to be cannabis than absinthe. In *The Field*, his ~~over more than~~ two-metre square multi-panelled *Ultrasopes 5* and *6* (1968)—said to be prepared by wearing special reality-altering glasses for up to two weeks beforehand—were hypnotic kaleidoscopes that opened up at the centre like a cohort of orchids. Treweeke had ~~earlier~~ studied at the National Art School in Sydney in the late 1950s, perhaps with Ralph Balson, and lived and studied in Europe from 1961 until 1966, returning via New York and San Francisco to Sydney that same year, where he began showing first at Central Street Gallery and soon after at Gallery A in Melbourne. As ~~Christopherina Dean, the~~ curator of a later Treweeke retrospective, ~~Christina Dean,~~ writes:

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Commented [BN76]: Please confirm.

‘A typical Treweweke exhibition during the Central Street years included silk-screen images on modular canvas panels coated in fluorescent paint, a sound component and then the whole space would be saturated in ultraviolet neon light’.²⁶

Treweweke had first arrived in Nimbin in 1970 and was instrumental three years later in organising the Aquarius Festival (Fig. 2.8), subsequently designated as Australia’s Woodstock. He exhibited as part of the artistic collective Starqueen during the festival, and *Star queen* would indeed become the name of a series of colour digital portraits he made of Dame Joan Sutherland in 2005. But by 1976 he had quit the hippie scene and moved to the Blue Mountains outside Sydney, after which he exhibited only infrequently.

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If Nimbin was counter-culture, then Papunya in early 1970 was the re-imagining of an existing culture. The shift from sand to doors and walls, and ultimately to canvas, encouraged by the newly arrived schoolteacher Geoff Bardon in February that year, uprooted Indigenous art from ethnography and placed it firmly in the Western category of art. From this time on it would be impossible to deny the contemporaneity of the art that subsequently flourished throughout the Western Desert. But, almost from the beginning, the foundational mural *Honey ant dreaming*, ~~completed from~~ made between June ~~to and~~ August 1971, was painted on the walls of the local school (Fig. 2.9). In Bardon’s words, ‘The mural was pre-eminently a statement of place as the Aboriginal mythology would have it, and an assertion of great power and social importance for the Western Desert peoples.’²⁷

Designer, please take in Fig. 2.9 near here.

A little over a decade later, school doors again became the support for a series of new paintings, this time at nearby Yuendumu following the arrival of ~~their-its~~ school’s new headmaster, Terry Davies. Here we ~~would want to~~ assert that ~~Indigenous artists’ the~~ moving beyond ~~of~~ the flat canvas ~~by Indigenous artists~~ corresponds to a particular synthesis of painting, architecture and group performance. As anthropologist Eric Michaels writes in his aptly titled ‘Western Desert ~~SandP~~painting and Post-Modernism’:

The Yuendumu Doors stand midway between canvases exported to European audiences and their sources which are in ceremonial ground painting oriented to specific geographical sites... This appears in contrast to the style cleverly exploited by the supply of raw linen and thinned paint to produce a stained canvas 'minimalist' look suitable for the 1970s when this school commenced.²⁸

Indeed, Michaels even goes on to connect the Yuendumu Doors' 'post-modernism' with the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard in their 'inauthenticity' and lack of originality.²⁹ But, in truth, we do not see such a difference here between Michaels' characterisation and Bardon's evocation of Miró, Klee and Kandinsky in connection with the murals ~~in~~ at Papunya.³⁰ The painting in both of these places, as in Treweeke's Nimbin, was a communal effort. It was anti-individualist in a manner predictive of the contemporary 'multitude'. It involved a shared image, a joint authorship, taking place not on the immobile white walls of an art gallery but on the opening and closing doors of a school.³¹

If Indigenous painting had moved from the ground or wall to doors and buildings, it equally moved in the late 19th70s onto cottons and silks, when in 1978 the Utopia women's batik group was formed in Central Australia. Its work was Bbased on ceremonial body painting, and its original members included (among~~st~~ others) Emily Kngwarreye, Lena Pwerle, and Gloria and Kathleen Petyarre, along with art coordinators Jenny Green and Julia Murray. In the late 19th80s this painting with its roots in the body moved onto canvas, not as masculine aerial dot painting but as feminine, embodied, linear and brushed, and these expressively gestural paintings inspired early critics to compare it early comparisons by critics to the New York School.

However, an American artist saw it differently. Conceptualist Sol LeWitt first saw Kngwarreye's work in 1998 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (~~AGNSW~~) when he was in Sydney showing at the Museum of Contemporary Art; he, started collecting it and soon after began making his own Kngwarreye-inspired works. Abandoning his own hitherto sharp conceptual line, he sought to replicate Kngwarreye's flowing hand and seemingly straightforward style of painting in a series of works on walls and canvas. But this linearity created figure~~—~~ground relations that went against Greenbergian strictures. In fact, Kngwarreye's all-inclusiveness—the

Commented [BN77]: Fixing dangling modifier.

Commented [BN78]: Batik is a form of wax-resist dyeing, not painting (although the wax can be applied to the cloth with a brush) – this use of 'painting' is confusing here I think.

'whole lot' of which she often spoke of with regard to her work—reminds us that her intent was cosmological, itself an echo of the ~~at~~ spirituality that had driven so much abstraction ~~from since~~ the mid-nineteenth century ~~on~~.

For his part, in response to Kngwarreye, LeWitt's ~~traded in~~ his previous rigid conceptual painting ~~by numbers~~ for an improvised and stroked line, with his imagery not grid-like but reminiscent of something like waves. For his 2014 solo show at the ~~AGNSW Art Gallery of New South Wales~~, *Your Mind Is Exactly At That Line*, presented alongside LeWitt's interpretations of Kngwarreye were a number of actual Kngwarreyes and Petyarres from his own collection (Fig. 2.10). But because LeWitt's wall works for that show were painted from instructions, it could be argued that they were still conceptual, or—put another way—collaborative. Which is also to say that Aboriginal art is conceptual. As the curator of LeWitt's show, Natasha Bullock, writes: 'LeWitt's late gouaches look loose and gestural, but the synthetic nature of their process remains.'³² And our point ~~would be is~~ that this applies to Kngwarreye as well.

~~Designer, please take in Fig. 2.10 near here.~~

When the Utopia women were introduced to batik, they were introduced to ~~an~~ already self-identified ~~feminine~~ modernist art practice that was already strongly identified with women. ~~Its was one whose roots ultimately~~ lay in the work of Sophie Tauber-Arp, Adya van Rees and ~~in the~~ *Weberei* (weaving workshop) of the Bauhaus, overseen by Gunta Stölzl and filled with women students. But as an extension of the hippiey movement, **weaving** was both a popular and a fine art consciously appropriated as 'feminist' by women in the 1970s, who sought to draw attention both to the absence of work by women in art history and the patriarchal dismissal of the traditionally female-dominated art and craft practices. Weaving ~~here in Australia~~ received a boost after ~~the World War II, when as~~ numerous exhibitions of French tapestry toured the country (*Contemporary French Tapestry*, 1956; *Aubusson Tapestries*, 1966; and ~~tapestry was included in French Painting Today, 1953, which included tapestry~~). It was a product of ~~the modern French artists'~~ post-~~W~~war return ~~of to~~ artisanal arts and crafts, by ~~which they sought modern French artists seeking~~ to re-establish lapsed techniques and traditions, accompanied by a certain revival of ~~l'~~*Art sacré* (Marie-Alain Couturier, Pie-Raymond Régamay).

Commented [BN79]: 'driven ... from' was ambiguous. Personally, I would prefer 'inspired' to 'driven', if that catches your meaning.

Commented [BN80]: Are we talking here about batik (wax-resist dyeing) or weaving? I find this confusing.

Commented [BN81]: I don't think an art practice can identify itself?

Also, feminine has various overtones that I don't think you intend. Do you mean perhaps:

a modernist art practice that was already strongly identified with women

?

Commented [BN82]: I don't think 'feminine' quite caught your intention – it is a laden term.

Commented [BN83]: Why is feminist in quotation marks?

We consider just one example of this occurring ~~here in Australia~~, with the Sydney-born and National Art School-trained Mona Hessing, who had made weaving her art practice since 1962 (Fig. 2.11). In 1967, she moved to India, where she was commissioned by Patwant Singh, the editor of *Indian Design*, to make a tapestry hanging that covered two doorways and a wall, and the techniques that she learned and adapted for this work informed her practice into the 1970s. It was decisive because it introduced her to the off-loom, non-two-dimensional possibilities of weaving. By the time of her 1971 show at Bonython Gallery in Sydney, the ceramicist Marea Gazzard, who had shown with Hessing, was able to write that ‘her work is better known abroad than it is in this country’.³³ Indeed, by this stage Hessing ~~she~~ had already ~~been shown~~ exhibited work in Switzerland, Germany, Ireland and New Zealand, and in the same year as Gazzard’s essay Hessing completed her major career commission: her giant 21-metre-long purple, orange and brown three-dimensional frieze-like hanging tapestry for the John Clancy Auditorium at the University of New South Wales. We can perhaps think of this work as a version of the mixed-media ‘eccentric abstraction’ ~~that~~ American art historian Lucy Lippard had theorised in her 1966 exhibition of that name.³⁴

~~Designer, please take in Fig. 2.11 near here.~~

Other women making art with fibre in the 1970s included: ~~the~~ Melbourne-born Deanna Conti; ~~the~~ German-born Jutta Feddersen; ~~the~~ German-born Marcella Hempel, who ~~was had been taught by a student of the Bauhausler~~ Margaret Leischner and ~~from 1974 until 1980~~ taught an influential course in ~~Woven-woven Textiles-textiles~~ at the Charles Sturt University in the Riverina ~~from 1974 until 1980~~; Mary ~~Beetson and her husband Larry Beetson~~, who ~~with her husband Larry Beetson~~ lived and worked in Newcastle for decades; and ~~the~~ Polish-born Eva Pachucka, who arrived in Australia in 1970, having already shown in the exhibition *Wallhanging* at ~~the New York’s~~ Museum of Modern Art in 1968, was part of the Daniel Thomas-curated *Recent Australian Art* in 1973, and would ~~go on to~~ represent Australia at the Indian Triennale in New Delhi the following year. Hessing ~~for her part~~ received a Churchill Fellowship in 1972, and the year after was part of the exhibition *Clay + Fibre* with Gazzard at the ~~National Gallery of Victoria~~ NGV. What both Hessing and Pachucka can be said to have done is to make three-dimensional weaving as opposed to two-dimensional painting. In 1987,

Commented [BN84]: he is not a woman – see opening of sentence.

Commented [BN85]: Please confirm.

Hessing was commissioned to make a large fibre work for Harry Seidler's Australian Embassy in Paris, and she continued to work into the 1990s, producing in 1995, for example, a woven tapestry of wool, silk, jute and synthetic fibre called *Songlines*.

In 1975 Lucy Lippard came to Australia to deliver the ~~8th~~ *Eighth* Power Lecture, on the topic of 'Art Outdoors: Painting and Sculpture in the Public Domain', and to tour her *West-East Bag*, a slide archive of women's art from around the world.³⁵ As a summary of her concerns at the time, she would offer the following to interviewers in New Zealand: 'Feminism has led me to abandon the idea of endless change in art. Medium and progress are misleading: the emphasis should be on how the work gets across, to what audience.'³⁶ Lippard was travelling on the back of her decisive *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973), a close-up chronological account, a 'cross-referenced book of information', detailing the artists, events and places at the origins of conceptual art.³⁷ And it is notable how many things Australian feature in Lippard's survey. The first to be included is Clement Meadmore's essay from *Arts* magazine in February 1969, 'Thoughts on Earthworks, Random Distribution, Softness, Horizontality and Gravity'. This is followed by Christo's book *Wrapped Coast: One Million Square Feet*, documenting his ~~and Jeanne-Claude's~~ 1969 wrapping of Little Bay in Sydney. Ian Burn and his collaborator Mel Ramsden's book *Notes on 'Analysis'* (1970) is mentioned, as is Robert Jacks' book ~~12~~ *Twelve Drawings* (1970) and the conceptualist *Art & Language* magazine, whose inaugural issue is dated February 1970. And this is, in fact, just a sample of the Australian entries in Lippard's account, prior to the night on which 'Conceptual art went spectacularly public', when the Ian Burn-curated *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* opened at the New York Cultural Center on ~~the 9th~~ April, 1970.³⁸

Burn had come a long way in just seven years. He had begun in 1963 with his Sidney Nolan-inspired *St Kildas* and *Idiot figures*, dominated by a palette of sky-blue and yellow, colours he identified as Australian, which he pursued for the next two years. This was followed by his *Re-ordered paintings* (1965) and his geometric abstract paintings, such as his Mondrian-indebted *Yellow constant* (1965), leading on to his Minimalist *Blue reflexes* (1966–67), by which time he had explicitly broken with Greenberg, with ~~these works'~~ shiny industrial surfaces and reflection of the spectator, a phenomenon that he then made the explicit subject of his *Mirror pieces* (1967),

exhibited in *The Field*. Indeed, Burn directly acknowledged the influence of minimalism on his work in the set of photos he ~~took entitled~~called *Photographic mirrors (Referential line: Sol LeWitt)* (1967–68), his series of photographs of a LeWitt latticed floor sculpture, taken from different angles as he walked a predetermined path around the gallery.

By the time he returned to Australia in 1977, Burn was a highly-regarded member of the international conceptual avant-garde, with his work shown at Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris and Milan in 1970 and '71, at *documenta 5* in Kassel in 1972, and at Gallery Paul Maenz in Cologne and Brussels in 1974. ~~and~~ He was one of the few Australians to be in both *The Field in 1968* and Daniel Thomas's *Recent Australian Art* at the AGNSW Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1973. However, soon after returning to Australia he gave up both his teaching and his art practice and began working for the trade union movement, taking on arguments about the commodification of art and (mistakenly) the provincialism of Australian art.³⁹

Around the time Burn was giving up art in Australia, Queenslander Robert MacPherson was helping drive the artist-run Q Space in Brisbane, together with John Nixon and Peter Cripps. In supposedly provincial Brisbane, MacPherson was making then-contemporary conceptual art. Having earlier dropped out of art school as a young man, MacPherson, ~~while in an off-season~~ visit ~~toing~~ the Queensland State Library ~~off-season while working employed~~ as a rural labourer came upon the November 1965 issue of *Art Magazine*, which featured on its front cover the Washington School painter Howard MHehring on its front cover. This, and it was a turning point, allowing him to return to art. MacPherson, like Burn, ~~can be seen to be was~~ systematically tracing a line from Greenbergian medium-specific Australian painting to non-medium-specific UnAustralian art. He first made a series of self-reflexive drawings by hammering a number of charcoal sticks into paper (*Hand rituals*, 1977) and a series of paintings based on how much paint a brush can carry and the reach of his arm across or down a canvas (*Scale from tool*, 1976–77). MacPherson had earlier painted container ships for a living, and was attuned to the efficiencies of covering large surfaces with paint. But this would soon lead—in an entirely logical way—to a series of works presenting these tools themselves as works of art in an apparently self-reflexive way (*Three paintings*, 1981), which ~~of course~~ shifts the work from modernist painting to Duchampian

Commented [BN86]: Please confirm.

readymade. And, finally, MacPherson made a work, *I see a can of paint as a painting unpainted* (1982), in which he declared in a text that accompanied an unopened can of paint that ~~that~~ the ‘painting’ was just the can itself:

‘The paint fills/covers the interior surface of the can, I can see the can of paint as a painting... I see the can unfilled as a painting. Who is the artist? The painting? The machinery [making the painting]? The operator [of the machinery]? The designer? The manufacturer? Or me seeing it?’⁴⁰

~~1982, of course, Nineteen eighty-two~~ is also the ~~date-year~~ of Paul Taylor’s exhibition *Popism*, which took as its subject the quotational technique of post-modernism, which had previously been explored in Douglas Crimp’s *Pictures* exhibition at New York’s Artist’s Space in 1977. But Taylor saw the practice of appropriating images from elsewhere as distinctively Australian, or at least as making possible a new practice of Australian painting. Drawing on critic Paul Foss’s 1981 essay ‘Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum’, Taylor sought to overcome the distance implicit in the well-known ‘provincialism problem’ by ironically playing it out, that is, suggesting that this distance *is* what is distinctive about Australian art.⁴¹ In other words, Taylor argues that with Australian art the copy comes before the original, which is also to say that we can now read the art of other nations through the lens of the Australian. As Foss writes in ‘Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum’, seemingly in support of this: ‘It is no longer we who act as the balance or sponge for the artefacts of a European civilisation. Everything is sucked into the void to be re-emitted back through the stratosphere to help map the territories of the rest of the globe.’⁴²

~~And In~~ this Taylor might be aligned with the logic of Smith’s ‘Antipodean Manifesto’, which similarly argues for an Australian exception based on a certain antipodal inversion. And in many ways Imants Tillers, a child of the Latvian diaspora, was the definitive instance of Taylor’s argument, with his encyclopaedic canvasboard paintings copying images from all around the world. We might think, for example, of his work in the *Popism* show, *Suppressed imagery* (1981), in which he reproduced figures from a Latvian children’s book, or such later work as *The nine shots* (1985), which put together German neo-expressionist George Baselitz and Papunya painter Michael Nelson Jagamarra. But in the ~~19~~70s Tillers was an acknowledged

Commented [BN87]: Too many sentences starting with ‘And’

Commented [BN88]: Or Tjakamarra

conceptualist, who had studied architecture at the University of Sydney and worked as an assistant to Christo and Jeanne-Claude in the wrapping of Little Bay. In 1974–75, in a conscious move beyond painting, he put post-card-~~sized~~-sized fragments of images of Duchamp's *Large glass* (1915–23) and Hans Heysen's post-impressionist *Summer* (1909) next to and on top of each other on music stands in his *Conversations with the bride*—because those two artists happened to ~~be~~-have been born on the same day.

However, we can see a shift in Tillers' practice occurring just a few years before *Popism*—from conceptual post-medium art back to Australian medium-specific painting. It takes place just at the time he moved from working with single canvasboards, which are still minimalist objects, to putting several canvasboards together to form a painting. And, indeed, there is all the difference in the world between the global instantaneity implied in *Conversations with the bride* and the linear modernist temporality (or its inversion, which is the same thing and in fact depends on this temporality staying in place) of *The nine shots*. Taylor's popist logic precisely accepts the truth of Australia's provincialism so that it can then seek to invert it, much as Bernard Smith did in his *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas*. That book, written just two years before it, is the perfect accompaniment to the modernist logic of *Australian Painting*, insofar as it merely narrates the same history backwards. Or, to take the other aspect of Tillers' argument, a work like *The nine shots* ~~entirely~~ depends entirely on the insuperable *distance between* European and Aboriginal art. It is this distance between them—and the fact that white Australian artists necessarily have to appropriate both—that is the basis for Tillers' proposition for an identifiable Australian art. But this is to overlook the long history ~~both~~ of European artists working *with* Aboriginal art and that of Aboriginal artists engaging *with* European art in this country. It was never a matter of an unbridgeable distance between them, in which we would find an emptied-out 'Australia', but of an 'UnAustralian' formed by their ~~ongoing~~-continuing mixture. To see a perfect riposte to the rhetoric of Tillers' paintings, we only have to recall that, immediately before ~~his~~-*The nine shots*, ~~the~~ German artist Sigmar Polke, whose imagery had been foregrounded by Tillers to point out the distance between Australia and Europe, was actually in the Northern Territory, painting and making films about Aboriginal culture.⁴³ Or again think of the fact that at this time too the German director Werner Herzog was filming the

Commented [BN89]: Worth adding the subtitle I think, in the context of your subject matter.

Commented [BN90]: Can we use something more precise than 'engaging with'? Not sure what you mean exactly. Appropriating? Studying? Observing? Creating? Working in the style of? Critiquing?

concluding scenes of his *Where the green ants dream* (1984), also in the Northern Territory. There is simply no 'Australian' distance between the European and the Indigenous.

But standing on top of the mountain of the Australian art world in the early 1980s, looking out perhaps past his own reproduction of Eugène von Guérard's *Guérard's Mt Kosciusko (Mount Analogue, 1985)*, Tillers would soon see another artist walking up towards him. ~~He~~ This other artist was doubtless the most unlikely of Australianists, but his last works too were grounded in numerous found images of the Australian landscape. However, ~~instead of rather than in belonging to~~ the pages of international art magazines, Ian Burn had tracked down his near-anonymous source material in the junk shops he stopped at while driving between Sydney and Melbourne on his Christmas holidays. He ~~then~~ overlaid these second-hand amateur landscapes with words, which in many ways followed the arguments of his art writing of the 1980s, in which he attempted to rethink the existing canon (Namatjira, Nolan, Williams, Brack), arguing against but also with Smith for the necessity of an Australian painting rooted in the 'localism' of the landscape.⁴⁴ But to do this he had to turn away from the globalism of his geometric abstracts and conceptual art. It was as though he wanted retrospectively to rematerialise and reterritorialise his work.

Tillers and Burn were arguably the two dominant painters of the 1980s and '90s, especially in their take-up by art historians, until a different history began to emerge in the early 2000s, no longer post-modern and Australian, but contemporary and UnAustralian. There was something of an inward-turning and, indeed, defensive aspect to both of their oeuvres, tragically cut short in Burn's case, but playing out over more than three decades in Tillers', until at some point ~~he~~ Tillers began to seem more like a latter-day Hans Heysen than anything else. A Heysen no longer on a music stand in conversation with Duchamp, but an omnipresent background figure hanging on the wall of an art gallery, speaking only to himself.

So what does it mean that these two influential artists turned away from their early work and moved towards the Australian? It is undoubtedly true that the high point of their careers corresponded with a new Australian art history: Tillers with Taylor's popism in

the 19^s80s, and Burn with its art-historical equivalent, revisionism, in the 19^s90s. The first would be the reading of the art of other countries in terms of Australia, the second the reading of the past of Australian art in terms of the present. But it is also absolutely true that both had participated—the one as the child of immigrants, the other as an expatriate—in a global UnAustralian art. It would be an art that pointed outside, and it was from this outside that they spoke. However, both again eventually renounced their earlier work and came, or came back, to the Australian. Did they simply misunderstand their own work? Or are we being too harsh on them, and it is only from the perspective of the contemporary that we can properly see the 19^s70s and the wrong turn that the 19^s80s represented?⁴⁵

In fact, it could be argued that from as early as 1984 Taylor's ideas were being challenged, and indeed from the very source they drew upon. For it was in that year that the influential French sociologist Jean Baudrillard came to Australia to deliver the first Mari Kuttna Memorial Lecture in Film,⁴⁶ the true realisation and fulfilment of Greenberg's fears concerning the post-modern (the post-modern in the proper sense) ~~of~~ expressed in his Greenberg's inaugural Power Lecture. Baudrillard's presence here created intense interest and controversy, ~~inciting~~ inspiring the first book anywhere on him, and with Australians already among ~~st~~ his first English-language translators. Here we might say, as opposed to Taylor, who used Baudrillard to argue for the unbridgeable distance *between* Australia and the rest of the world, that the organisers of the Kuttna Lecture actually brought Baudrillard *to* Australia, and it was largely from Australia that Baudrillard would be taken to the rest of the world. ~~And~~

While he was here Baudrillard would deliver another lecture, 'The Year 2000 Will Not Take Place', which in its upending of historical teleology, its argument for the simultaneity that makes possible the linear unwinding of time, absolutely prefigured the contemporary.⁴⁷ In 'The Year 2000', if read carefully, we can already find Terry Smith's 'multiple ways of being with, in and out of time, separately and at once',⁴⁸ and Peter Osborne's 'coming together of different but equally 'present' temporalities or “times”'.⁴⁹ In other words, as ~~soon~~ early as 1984, Taylor's version of post-modernism and his and Foss's reading of Baudrillard were already being challenged by Baudrillard himself. But the year 2000—or the end of modernist history—did not take place in Australia in 1984, because it had already taken place. It had already taken place in 1968.

¹ [Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting, 1788–1960*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1962.](#) [Australian Painting, 1788–1960](#),

² For the first of these criticisms, see Rex Butler and A. D. S. Donaldson, ‘Bernard Smith’s Real Choice: Surrealism or Abstraction 1930–1950’, *Eyeline*, vols 78/79, 2013, pp. 64–71; for the second, see Peter Beilharz, *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, [Visual Theory](#) and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 43, 52.

³ It is notable that throughout *Australian Painting* Smith [will aligns](#) art movements that contest the specificity of painting, for example, constructivism and *art informel*, either with artists arriving from overseas or expatriates returning to Australia. [\(Bernard Smith \(with Terry Smith and Christopher Heathcote\), *Australian Painting 1788–2000*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 211–12, 317–18, 354, 368\).](#) Smith [will ends](#) the second (2001) edition of *Australian Painting*; in echo of the first edition where he concludes by citing his ‘Antipodean Manifesto’, with a critique of Duchamp in the following terms: ‘One does not make a goat into a pig by looking at it as if it were a pig; and one does not, Duchamp notwithstanding, make an object, which may well be an art object, into a painting by looking at it as if it were a painting’ ([Australian Painting 1788–2000, Oxford University Press, 2001](#), p. 449). He then goes on to suggest that ‘Australian artists have constructed what is national and distinctive in their art in the face of the anti-art values of their society’ (p. 150), by which he means precisely that renominative power of the readymade that he has spoken of immediately above and that opens up the art of the 1960s and ¹⁹70s.

⁴ Clement Greenberg, ‘Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties’, *Studio International*, vol. 179, no. (2), April, 1970, pp. 142–5.

⁵ [Brian Finemore and John Stringer, *The Field*, ed. Brian Finemore and John Stringer, exhibition catalogue](#), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1968.

⁶ [Brian Finemore, *Object and Idea, 1973: New Work by Australian Artists*, ed. Brian Finemore, exhibition catalogue](#), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973.

⁷ Bernard Smith, ‘The Antipodean Manifesto’, in [Bernard Smith, *The Antipodean Manifesto: Essays in Art and History*](#), Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 165.

⁸ [Bernard Smith \(and Terry Smith\), *Australian Painting, 1788–1970*, Oxford University Press](#),

[Melbourne, 1971.](#)

⁹ See ~~on the~~ Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether ~~and~~ Ann Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation*, Power Institute, University of Sydney, 1988, pp. 104–6.

¹⁰ Graeme Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788–1975*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1978.

¹¹ Robert Hughes, *The Art of Australia: A Critical Survey*, Penguin, ~~Ringwood~~[Melbourne](#), 1966; William Moore, *The Story of Australian Art, From the Earliest Known Art of the Continent to the Art of To-Day*, Angus ~~and~~ [Robertson](#), Sydney, 1934.

¹² ~~Paul Taylor~~, *Popism*, [ed. Paul Taylor, exhibition catalogue](#), National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1982.

¹³ Indeed, it is telling that the show Taylor did after *Popism*, *Tall Poppies* at the University of Melbourne Art Gallery in 1983, was an exhibition precisely of ‘pictures’.

¹⁴ Patrick McCaughey, ‘Surviving the ‘Seventies’, in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia, 1970–1980*, Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984, p. 157.

¹⁵ Janine Burke, *Australian Women Artists: 1840–1940*, Greenhouse Books, Melbourne, 1980.

¹⁶ *Latvian Artists in Australia / Latviesu makslinieki Australija*, Society of Latvian Artists in Australia, Sydney, 1979.

¹⁷ [Greenberg](#), ‘Avant-Garde Attitudes’, p. 145.

¹⁸ Alfred Heintz, ‘Visual Communications:— The New Force in Art’, *Art & Australia*, March 1966, p. 300.

¹⁹ [Frank Eidlitz](#), cited in [ibid.](#) ‘Visual Communications’, p. 299.

²⁰ [Frank Eidlitz](#), cited in [‘Visual Communications’](#) [ibid.](#), p. 298.

²¹ [Frank Eidlitz](#), *Dimensional Painting*, [exhibition catalogue](#), South Yarra Gallery, Melbourne, 1971.

²² Stephen Jones, 'Frank Eidlitz: Design and the Origins of Computer Graphics in Australia', unpublished paper, May 2015.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277915831_Frank_Eidlitz_Design_and_the_Origins_of_Computer_Graphics_in_Australia)-DOI: 10.1080/14434318.2009.11432607.

²³ Adrian Rawlins, 'J.S. Ostoja-Kotkowski: Explorer in Light', *Art and Australia*, Autumn 1982, p. 331.

²⁴ James Gleeson, 'Stanislaw Ostoja-Kotkowski', in James Gleeson, *Modern Painters 1931-1970*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 123.

²⁵ James Gleeson, 'Stanislaw Ostoja-Kotkowski', in his *Modern Painters 1931-1970*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 123; Sandra McGrath, cited in Rawlins, 'J. S. Ostoja-Kotkowski', p. 326.

²⁶ Christopher Dean, 'Vernon Treweeke'.

(<http://www.penrithregionalgallery.org/archives/Archives2003/VernonTreweeke.html>). This link did not work for me. Can you please provide full citation?

²⁷ Geoffrey Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2009, p. 12.

²⁸ Eric Michaels, 'Western Desert Sandpainting and Postmodernism', in Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1994, p. 103.

²⁹ Eric Michaels, 'Bad Aboriginal Art', in Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art*, p. 101.

³⁰ Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story*, p. 24.

³¹ We note, however, the importance to this discussion of the remarkable murals painted by senior artists for the fantastical Yuendumu Museum, Yuendumu, which opened in 1971, just a matter of weeks only weeks after the Papunya school mural was completed. On the history of the Yuendumu Museum, whose name points to a certain institutionalisation before the Western Desert painting 'movement' had even begun, see Kieran Finane, 'On Their Own Terms: The Walpiri Moment of 1971', *Sturgeon*, no. 4, 2015, Sydney, pp. 52-57.

³² Natasha Bullock, quoted in Jeremy Eccles, 'Sol and Emily', *Aboriginal Art Directory*, 2014.

~~(<https://news.aboriginalartdirectory.com/2014/03/sol-and-emily.php>)~~
~~<https://news.aboriginalartdirectory.com/2014/03/sol-and-emily.php>~~.

³³ Marea Gazzard, 'Mona Hessing', *Art and Australia*, December 1971, p. 239.

³⁴ ~~Lucy Lippard, *Eccentric Abstraction*, ed. Lucy Lippard, exhibition catalogue, Fischbach Gallery, New York, September 1966.~~

³⁵ Lucy Lippard, 'Art Outdoors: Painting and Sculpture in the Public Domain', *Studio International*, vol. 193, no. 986, March–April 1977, pp. 83–90.

³⁶ Lucy Lippard, 'Notes on Seeing Some Recent American Art in New Zealand', *Auckland City Art Gallery Quarterly*, vol. 59, 1975, pp. 2–3.

³⁷ This description is taken from the full title of Lippard's book, as printed on the cover: *Six Years: The dematerialisation of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focussed on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard*, University of California Press, Oakland, 1973.

³⁸ Ann Stephen, *On Looking at Looking: The Art and Politics of Ian Burn*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2006, p. 133.

³⁹ Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, 'Provincialism', *Art Dialogue*, vol. 1, October 1973, pp. 3–11.

⁴⁰ Robert MacPherson, 'Artist Statement', January 1982, slightly amended. See On this aspect of MacPherson's work, see Trevor Smith, 'The World in My Paintbrush', in *Robert MacPherson*, ed. Trevor Smith and John O'Brian, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 2001, pp. 49–77, especially p. 57 on *I see a can of paint*.

⁴¹ For the classic formulation of the provincialism problem, see Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 1–XIII(1), September 1974, pp. 54–9.

⁴² Paul Foss 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum', in Peter Botsman, Chris Burns and Peter Hutchings (eds), *The Foreign Bodies Papers*, Local Consumption Publications, Sydney, 1981, pp. 15–38.

⁴³ *Sigmar Polke 1963–2010: Alibis, exhibition catalogue*, Ludwig Museum, Cologne, and Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2014. Indeed, Polke would later claim that his time in Australia had a profound effect upon his painting: 'I started thinking about colour and its treatment... how, for example, Hinduism explains and uses colour or how Australians use colour. Seeing how colours are made, out of what kind of earth. I couldn't resist them, but instead of earthy colours, I came up with purple. An entirely abstract affair that you only get in this part of the world'. Cited in 'Poison is Effective, Painting is Not: Bice Curiger in conversation with Sigmar Polke', *Parkett*, no. 26, 1990, p. 19. [Please confirm - earthy not earthly?](#)

⁴⁴ Ian Burn, 'Popular Melbourne Landscape Between the Wars', Bendigo Art Gallery, 1982; *National Life and Landscapes: Australian Painting, 1900–1940*, Bay Books, Sydney, 1990. [Not sure of this citation. Is the first part a chapter in the book?](#)

⁴⁵ Inversely, Taylor was a great critic of the 1970s: his concluding essay to the edited anthology *Anything Goes*, 'Australian New Wave and the "Second Degree"', pp. 158–67, is meant to be a summary and critique of everything that comes before. See also his untitled essay in Nancy Underhill, *Eureka! Artists from Australia*, ed. Nancy Underhill, exhibition catalogue, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1982, pp. 61–6. [WorldCat has Nick Waterlow, not Nancy Underhill?](#)

⁴⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney, 1987.

⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, 'The Year 2000 Will Not Take Place', in E. A. Grosz, Terry Threadgold, David Kelly, Alan Cholodenko and Edward Colless (eds), *Futur*Fall: Excursions into Postmodernity*, University of Sydney Press, 1986.

⁴⁸ See Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 6; and

⁴⁹ See Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 6; and Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 17.

3

Ger van Elk, Daan van Golden and the blank canvas

Carel Blotkamp

In popular books on the subject, the history of modern art, ~~its history~~ is often simply presented as a succession of styles and movements: realism, impressionism, symbolism, and so on and so forth. However, in the course of the twentieth century these -isms seem to have multiplied like rabbits, and the idea of a neat, linear evolution has been sorely tested. During the 1960s, ~~kaleidoscopic as it was,~~ the whole system, kaleidoscopic as it was, imploded. Since then, it has become customary to structure art by decades rather than by movements, and to distinguish each decade by certain characteristics, for better or worse.¹

The 1960s, then, stand out as a turning point: a period ~~which that not only~~ witnessed major changes, ~~in not only in~~ art itself but also in its institutions (museums, ~~commercial~~ galleries and auction houses, ~~art schools,~~ art criticism). On the one hand, the canon of modern art became firmly established and widely accepted; even the most radically modernist art found a warm welcome in private collections and museums, supported by governments wishing to show off their liberal cultural politics at international biennales and other venues. On the other hand, artists during the 1960s became more and more critical of museums and other institutions, viewing them as powers that ultimately ~~only~~-wanted only to maintain the status quo.

The ~~artists'~~ critique often went hand-in-hand with pessimism about art as such: about its possibilities to develop any further, and in a wider sense, about its role in society. Although notions such as 'the crisis in art' or 'the end of art' were present, as a kind of *basso continuo*, in most avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, in the 1960s they seemed to have become more compelling. ~~Quite~~ Particularly telling is a manifesto entitled *End*, which was published in 1961 by the artists of the Dutch Nul (Zero) Group and such supporters abroad as Piero Manzoni and the German art theoretician Bazon Brock. They announced their intention to terminate the production of art and to

Commented [BN91]: I thought this opening sentence was slightly clunky – hope this is okay. Rest of the essay very finely written; I didn't need to change much.

Commented [BN92]: Quite is ambiguous – can have two contradictory meanings. I think you mean this was particularly telling, rather than only vaguely telling?

~~to~~ promote the liquidation of all institutions which enrich themselves through art- ... In the future the undersigned will dedicate themselves to the dissolution of art associations and the closing of exhibition halls, which will then finally be made available for more worthwhile activities.²²

Was this bravado meant seriously, or was it merely ironic? In any case, the artists involved, with endearing inconsistency, just went on with their routine.

In this essay, I want to concentrate on painting, which during the 1960s and early 1970s seemed more than any other art discipline to be in a state of serious crisis. Many people in the art world felt that it had lost its relevance; for some, painting had definitely come to an end. My main focus will be on Dutch artists and the Dutch art scene, which was at the time very lively, and internationally oriented.

A defining characteristic of the new tendencies arising in the 1960s and early 1970s was the artists' openness to the everyday world. They took their imagery and their materials from it with an unprecedented enthusiasm. Reality, the real world, the real thing, the object: ~~these these were are~~ the battle cries we find in ~~countless numerous~~ texts of the period, both from artists and critics.

There had been much leading up to this 'realistic turn', ~~of course~~, notably during the first decades of the twentieth century. The cubists, dadaists and surrealists had already used all kinds of materials and small objects in their collages and assemblages. And, more importantly, Duchamp had 'invented' the readymade: turning ordinary objects into works of art by taking them from their original, functional context and presenting them in an artistic context instead. For Duchamp, however, this artistic context was a mental space, rather than a concrete space. Initially, his readymades were not exhibited on a pedestal in a museum or a gallery at all, as is often thought; they functioned first and foremost in his own studio, as objects of contemplation and delight. Sometimes, the act of defunctionalising the object ~~just~~ consisted of merely dangling it on a string from the ceiling—which he did with the famous urinal, as is shown in old studio photographs.³ Also important for Duchamp (an aspect ~~which that~~ is often overlooked) was the addition of an enigmatic inscription or title to the object. But such

Commented [BN93]: 'countless' is hyperbole. Unless talking about stars in the sky or grains of sand on the beach, I avoid it.

uses of real objects were ~~quite~~ exceptional in the art of the first half of the twentieth century.

The importance of Duchamp's oeuvre was only fully recognised by the end of the 1950s, leading to an avalanche of works in which artists took possession of the real world, no longer by representing it but by raising objects and situations of any kind to the status of art. Dutch artists, too, got in on the action. In 1960, Stanley Broun declared all shoe shops in Amsterdam to be works of art and sent out invitations to go and visit them. Marinus Boezem did the same with a Dutch polder (~~a tract of low-lying land reclaimed from the sea~~). Jan Henderikse appropriated the Oberkasseler ~~Brücke~~ Bridge in Düsseldorf by adorning it with his signature in 1961. A year later, at a Zero exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, he arranged dozens of cases of Amstel beer into a wall. In 1961, in an annex of the Stedelijk Museum, a young Wim Schippers covered the floor of a large room with shattered glass, and another room with a thick layer of salt.⁴

At the end of the same decade, in 1970, the Stedelijk Museum organised the exhibition Binnen en Buiten het Kader (Inside and Outside the Framework). Among the participants, alongside well-known artists like Ben d'Armagnac and Gerrit Dekker, were some young artists living in the remote village of Finsterwolde, in the north of the country, who had united in the Instituut voor Creatief Werk (Institute for Creative Work). For ~~over~~ more than five weeks they lived in a wooden structure built on the pavement on one side of the museum, a space ~~which that~~ could only be entered from the museum via a staircase through a window. Their temporary dwellings contained some artistic interventions, like a grass carpet in one of the rooms, but what the group members were actually showing was their hippie lifestyle—contrasted in the catalogue with a humorous photo portrait of the members of the group posing in identical dark suits with dark ties.⁵

Everything is art, appeared to be the message. Or rather, everything can be art or become art if the artist says so. This cult of the real world, the real thing, meant hard times for the art of painting, which by its very nature can ~~only~~ offer only some semblance of the real world. Painting had indisputably been the prevailing medium

Commented [BN94]: I avoid 'quite' because it is ambiguous, having two almost opposite meanings – it can mean 'very', or it can mean 'a bit / rather / sort of'. 'Exceptional' by its nature needs no qualification.

Commented [BN95]: Prof. Blotkamp, there must be many polders in the Netherlands, but I suspect many Australian readers won't know what they are (I didn't before, but now I do!) 😊

Commented [BN96]: Dear Professor Blotkamp, in this book we are fully capitalising the titles of exhibitions (this would become *Binnen en Buiten het Kader*). But would it be incorrect to do this in Dutch? If so please revert. (Not capitalising the English translation). Thanks, Belinda (copy editor).

during the second half of the nineteenth and ~~the~~ first half of the twentieth century. Virtually all of the important avant-garde movements were initiated and dominated by painters. For every prominent sculptor there were at least five or ten painters of equal stature. After about 1960, however, painting seemed to lose its unassailable status. Minimalist Donald Judd, originally a painter ~~himself~~ who made the transition to sculpture through his relief works, pointed out in 1965 that the most interesting recent art was focused on the creation of 'specific objects': concrete and three-dimensional.⁶

Judd's opinion typified those of many American artists of his generation (including various other representatives of minimal art), as well as such European colleagues as the French *nouveaux réalistes*. In Holland, Ad Dekkers provided similar reasons for his choice of relief and sculpture. Of the Italians who constituted the *Arte Povera* movement, Mario Merz, Jannis Kounellis and ~~a number of several~~ others had originally been painters. The objects and installations of fragile but obdurately literal materials that they began to create during the 1960s bore an implicit criticism of painting.

During these years of social and artistic upheaval, old arguments were resurrected by the opponents of painting and new ones were added to their arsenal. Painting was an art form that willingly lent itself to the production of easily marketed wares, and one ~~which that~~ had allowed itself to become sheathed in the taste of the establishment. The perceived boundaries and limitations of painting had made it a complacent world of visual illusion ~~which that~~ failed to confront the reality of human and object. Such a world was static and out of step with the dynamism and changeability characteristic of modern life. From being the medium of choice for the expression of avant-garde ideas that it had been before World War -II, painting had become, to the minds of many, an antiquated, reactionary art form.

Many artists of the older generation, such as the remaining members of the New York School and their European counterparts, stoically accepted the state of painting. And perhaps the same can be said of the artists who during the ~~sixties~~ 1960s were labelled post-painterly abstractionists by critic Clement Greenberg and his disciples, who confidently continued to explore new forms of abstract painting. But ~~in~~ other circles, ~~however~~, for instance in pop art, painters were certainly affected by the critique

of their *metier*—witness the fact that quite suddenly they started paraphrasing certain icons of painting, by old as well as modern masters, in a decidedly ironic way.⁷

Typically, these pop painters did not take original paintings themselves as a point of departure, but cheap reproductions from magazines and newspapers—sources, in other words, ~~which that~~ were in themselves already popularisations or vulgarisations of painting, deflations of the idea of painting as a sublime art. In 1963, Andy Warhol treated Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* with the same irreverence as a magazine picture of Marilyn Monroe. Around the same time, Roy Lichtenstein produced a number of paintings after reproductions of works by great predecessors such as Monet and Cézanne, Picasso and Mondrian, while his series of enlarged, 'spontaneous' brushstrokes seemed to summarise abstract expressionism as a whole. His Ben-Day dot technique lowered priceless masterpieces to the level of pictures from comic books. European pop artists like Peter Blake, Patrick Caulfield and Richard Hamilton sometimes did the same. Sigmar Polke paraphrased images ~~of-made by~~ Germany's national hero Albrecht Dürer. We are confronted here with the paradoxical situation that artists were using the means of painting to challenge the great tradition of painting—or at least to dispense with the traditional reverence it was afforded.

The second half of the 1960s saw the rise of various new trends that were originally labelled with such terms as process art and idea art in the USA, and *Arte Povera* in Italy and other European countries, but ended up under the general rubric of 'conceptual art'. One feature that links conceptual art to pop art is precisely the irreverence of artists towards the history of painting—although conceptualists usually visualise this not through painting but through photography, which gives their art a decidedly more detached character.

A telling example of conceptualism's photographic critique of painting is encountered in the work of Bas Jan Ader (1942–1975). Ader was born in the Netherlands and first went to art school in Amsterdam, where he counted Wim Schippers and Ger van Elk among his fellow students. In 1963 he moved to Los Angeles, where he finished his art education. Until his untimely death in 1975, Ader lived in California, but also spent long periods in the Netherlands and elsewhere in

Europe. During his years at art school he produced drawings and paintings that were close to pop art—the English variety, ~~more rather so than~~ ~~the~~ American ~~pop art~~. In later years he became part of the Californian art scene, though he never completely disavowed his roots. This is exemplified by a series of works that refer to De Stijl, ‘the Dutch contribution to modern art’, as the movement was described in the title of H. L. C. Jaffé’s pioneering study of 1955.⁸ In 1974 for instance, Ader made a piece consisting of twenty-one photographs showing the artist arranging red, yellow and blue flowers in a vase. For each photograph, Ader added flowers of one colour and took out flowers of the other two colours, so that in three of the resulting images the vase ~~only~~ contains flowers in only one of the primary colours.⁹

There is another photo piece where the primary colours of De Stijl play a major part in Ader’s work, namely, *Pitfall on the way to a new neo-plasticism, Westkapelle, Holland* (1971) (Fig. 3.1), which refers specifically to the work of Piet Mondrian.¹⁰ This work fits ~~within into the Ader’s~~ extended series of works ~~that (employing various techniques and materials) that Ader did~~ on the theme of falling. The photo shows a country road lined by shrubs and leading in a straight line towards the lighthouse of Westkapelle, a village on the coast of Zeeland in the south-west corner of the Netherlands. Between 1908 and 1914 Mondrian spent almost every summer at the nearby coastal resort of Domburg and he made several paintings of the Westkapelle lighthouse, which had formerly been a church tower. In the photograph, Ader plays the role of the famous Dutch painter in modern guise. Dressed in a black suit like the one Mondrian is always wearing in portrait photos, Ader lies face ~~first down~~ on the pavement—the photograph actually captures the fall itself, as evidenced by the blurred figure. He is surrounded by several objects, which he must have dropped while falling: a blue blanket, a yellow jerrycan and a warning triangle in its red plastic cover. Like the entire series of falling pieces, this work has human failure as its subject, but here it is ironically projected ~~onto~~ Mondrian and his neo-plasticist gospel.

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.1 near here.

Pitfall is not Bas Jan Ader’s best work, in my opinion: it is ~~itself~~ a bit trite in its allusions to the clichéd images of Mondrian and De Stijl, a bit too droll in its reference to the high priest of abstract painting. I ~~actually~~ prefer a work by Ader’s old schoolmate Ger van Elk (1941–2014), entitled *Paul Klee—Um den fisch, 1926* (~~Paul Klee—around~~

Commented [BN97]: I understand Dutch common nouns are not capitalised (in this regard Dutch is like English, not like German)? This publisher’s style guide uses sentence case for the names of artworks (capitalise only the first word and any proper nouns). I’ve left ‘Um’ upper case because it is the start of the title of the Paul Klee painting.

Please confirm translation of title.

Also we are using an em-rule (long) for the dash.

[the fish, 1926](#); see Fig. 3.2), made in 1970.¹¹ It is funny too, but weirder: it has an edge to it. Van Elk took his inspiration from the painting *Um den fisch* of 1926, which has been part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York since 1939 and is one of Paul Klee's most popular and most [frequently](#) reproduced works. Klee's work features a colourful still life set against a black background, with two fish on a plate surrounded by several elements that can be read both as abstract, mostly geometric, shapes, and as objects.

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.2 near here.

Van Elk reconstructed Klee's still life using real objects, ~~except-but~~ [arranged](#)ing them (in contrast to the painting) on a white tablecloth. It is ~~quite~~ striking to see how inventive van Elk is in interpreting some of the more hard-to-reproduce elements. For instance, ~~the Klee's~~ yellow circle and crescent at the top of the painting are represented by a lemon and a lemon slice respectively; the cylinder in the ~~left-lower-left~~ corner, with its intricate pattern at the centre, has become a cucumber cut in half. In the vase on the left side of the painting sits a strange flower ~~that-which~~ clearly resembles a human head; for this detail, van Elk has chosen a Venus Slipper, indeed an orchid with a somewhat anthropomorphic look. After he had arranged the still life, van Elk sat down at the table and ate the two fishes. The action was recorded by an assistant in a series of slides, taken from above, and showing only the hands of the artist while ~~he-was~~ eating.

In its final form, *Paul Klee—Um den fisch, 1926* consists of a small wooden folding table with a slanted top, covered by a white tablecloth, which serves as a screen on which a series of eight slides ~~are-is~~ cast from a slide projector. Nowadays, it all looks a bit primitive and old-fashioned, which possibly adds to its peculiar charm. Unlike the films that van Elk made around the same time, the action here is not shown in smooth motion but in fits and starts, in a succession of stills, like episodes of a comic strip. The last slide shows the fish bones on the plate, knife and fork neatly placed on the edge: dinner done, painting done with. It is a ~~quite-personal~~ settling of scores with Klee, whose work van Elk ~~didn't~~ [did not](#) like very much. ~~He-e~~ [Considering](#)ed it a kind of visual music for the millions; easily accessible, risk-free modern art. (One may agree with him or not about Klee, that is not the issue here.)

About 1970, van Elk made a few other photo pieces ~~which-that~~ refer directly to specific paintings by artists such as Pierre Bonnard and Giorgio Morandi.¹² One gets the

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impression that his opinion of these masters was more favourable than of Klee. In addition, however, he also made works about painting in general, as a technical category. ~~Quite Especially~~ remarkable is a short film ~~which that~~ he produced in 1970 for a program to be broadcast on Dutch television, about artists who used film or video—a hot topic at the time.¹³ The title of van Elk's contribution, *Some natural aspects of painting and sculpture* (Fig. 3.3), sounds a bit academic and didactic. Undoubtedly that was his intention, but the work itself is hilarious, partly because van Elk demonstrates these 'aspects' in person and through his own body, sitting at a table in front of the camera, not saying a word, and motionless—as if ~~he is~~ posing for a portrait. The sculpture section of the film is about texture, and comes in two parts: first, the camera zooms in slowly on van Elk's torso and shows the goose pimples on his skin and an occasional shiver, caused by the cold to which his body had been exposed just before the take. Then the same camera movement is repeated to show his body sweating heavily after spending some time in sauna-like conditions. The painting section focuses on colour. Sitting at the same table but now formally dressed, van Elk poses for the camera, first with an ashen face and then red-faced, as if he is blushing or has ~~a~~ sunburn. (Actually, the effect was achieved through the consumption of spicy food.)

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.3 near here.

All through his career as an artist, Ger van Elk demonstrated his love-hate relationship ~~to with~~ painting. He often confronted photography and painting as if they were ~~engaged~~ ~~in~~fighting a duel, the ~~outcome result~~ of which was still uncertain. In many of his subsequent works, photographs (usually staged, with the artist himself in the main role) are combined with painted elements ~~which that~~ sometimes support but often disturb the illusionism of the photographic image. Examples of the supportive function of painting can be found in the series *Flower pieces* of 1982.¹⁴ Using exuberant items from his collection of vases, he arranged various bouquets of real flowers and complemented them by fancy artificial flowers of his own design, before having the result photographed. The enlarged prints were then lavishly worked upon with enamel in matching colours, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Pollock's paintings. However, to a certain degree van Elk's drippings have an illusionistic effect: stains may

themselves look a bit like flowers, and dripped lines like flower stalks or filaments. The whole series of works has the studied artificiality of seventeenth-century Dutch flower still-lives, which were van Elk's source of inspiration.

Painting as a disturbing factor occurs in a work like *Untitled I* of 1981.¹⁵ Its basis is formed by a large, square, black-and-white photograph of the artist, in a standing position and in profile. The right half of the body, including his face, has been covered with black paint; the loose brushwork is still visible, especially at the edges of the painted area. It is as though van Elk sticks his head in a wall of paint, or as if the paint blocks him out. The work may be read as a statement about painting, but a more personal, emotional meaning seems to be involved as well. The way van Elk has portrayed himself in *Untitled I* suggests ~~that there is~~ a connection to the bouts of depression ~~that~~ he occasionally endured.

Perhaps van Elk's most pessimistic work about the fate of painting as an art form is a series of four photo pieces entitled *The adieu* (~~of~~ 1974).¹⁶ Each piece shows, against the background of a curtain, a small painting of a landscape, the canvas resting on an easel. On a path in the landscape stands a small, solitary figure (van Elk himself) who waves goodbye. The canvases have been photographed at an angle; their trapezoid shape is mirrored in the frame of each work. The photographs have been retouched in a way that was common in commercial photography at the time, most noticeably in the dark-blue curtains ~~which that~~ feature prominently. It is as though the small paintings—with van Elk waving—are about to disappear between the curtains, symbolising the end of painting. In 1975, as a sort of postscript to the series, van Elk made another photo piece, entitled *The last adieu*. This time he used a rectangular format. Touching the diagonal from top-left to ~~bottom-right-bottom~~, a triangular-shaped photograph shows three blank canvases leaning against a wall; only the space around them has been painted, with an occasional slip of the brush as if the paint is a kind of parasite attacking the pristine surface.

Early in his career, during the second half of the 1960s, van Elk had been part of an artistic triumvirate with two fellow artists, Marinus Boezem and Jan Dibbets. Van Elk, Boezem and Dibbets exhibited together in galleries and other art spaces, and the trio also participated in several influential survey shows of new stylistic trends, such as *Op Losse Schroeven* (Square Pegs in Round Holes) at the Stedelijk Museum in

Commented [BN101]: See previous comment about capitalising names of exhibitions.

Amsterdam and *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Bern Kunsthalle and the ICA in London, both in 1969. There was a certain affinity between the ~~three artists~~, and friendship, but also rivalry. In later years they acted more individually. From time to time, however, there are still interesting cross-references in their work. Van Elk's *The last adieu*, for instance, is reminiscent of a few older works ~~which that~~ Jan Dibbets made before he studied at St Martin's School of Art in London and started his well-known conceptual projects in nature and perspective corrections. In the mid-1960s Dibbets was still making paintings in various styles, among them a series of composites of monochrome canvases. He concluded this series in 1967 with some works he called *Stapelschilderij* (Stacked painting): six or eight canvases of equal size, each painted in a different colour, stacked on the floor in a box-like shape, or leaning against the wall, one in front of the other.¹⁷ If anything, the message conveyed by these paintings made into objects was that, for Dibbets, painting was over and done with. Compared to these rather prosaic works, van Elk's *The last adieu* is decidedly more poetic and mysterious, emblematic of his oeuvre in its entirety.

~~On~~ In paintings from centuries past depicting of artist-s' studios from centuries past, a blank canvas on an easel is occasionally part of the scenery. It signals a promise of sorts, the beginning of something beautiful. In modern art, the notion of the blank canvas (which may be extended to the monochrome, a canvas painted in a single colour) is much more ambiguous. ~~Quite~~ Often it has a satirical or critical connotation. In 1882–1884 for instance, a group of artists and writers in Paris organised the *Salon des Arts Incohérents* (Salon of the Incoherent Arts), showing monochrome paintings in black or white, with titles like *Negroes fight in a tunnel* or *First Communion of anaemic young girls in the snow*.¹⁸ Silly perhaps from our perspective, but quite extraordinary at the time. About Mondrian's abstract paintings of the 1920s and 1930s, several critics remarked that he would end up with a blank canvas.¹⁹ In the course of the 1950s, when one artist after ~~the~~ another started to produce monochrome paintings, many people thought that this signalled the end of painting. Some painters thought so too. ~~W~~itness Ad Reinhardt's unequivocal statement that his compositions in black were 'simply the last paintings that anyone can make'.²⁰

Commented [BN102]: I hope I have read this correctly. It was a bit obscure originally, I thought.

The Dutch painter Daan van Golden (1936–2017) was not the type of person to use this kind of existential rhetoric, but he was certainly concerned with the precarious position of painting, and he found fascinating ways to deal with it in his work.²¹ In the early 1960s he made black-and-white paintings in the abstract expressionist mode that was then common almost everywhere. ~~But~~ During an extended stay in Tokyo ~~however,~~ from the beginning of 1963 to the end of 1964, van Golden incorporated aspects of Japanese visual culture into his work, and started to copy patterns ~~of from~~ household textiles and wrapping paper, ~~that were~~ meticulously executing ~~these~~ in gloss paint on canvas, glued onto beautifully crafted panels. For van Golden, the act of painting changed from a gestural into a meditative exercise; the resulting paintings became veritable objects of contemplation. Although the imagery comes from mass culture, just as in American pop art, the ~~paintings~~ have the refinement characteristic of traditional Japanese design.

While living in Japan, van Golden had a solo exhibition entitled *Patterns* in a gallery in Tokyo, ~~where in which~~ the paintings were hung close together, alongside and above each other, their arrangement suggesting yet another pattern. Reproductions were composed similarly on the folded-up sheet ~~which that~~ accompanied the exhibition.²² More complex in references and richer in meaning was a series of three solo exhibitions held simultaneously at three different venues in the Netherlands, in September and October of 1966. Each one was advertised separately using a ‘brand name’ and the year, as if it were a presentation of a new car model or the new collection of a famous fashion designer. The Stedelijk Museum in Schiedam exhibited a selection of his Japanese paintings under the title *Van Golden 1964*, the printing firm De Jong & Co. in Hilversum put on *Van Golden Negentien Vijfenzestig* (Van Golden Nineteen Sixty-Five) (Fig. 3.4) and the Galerie Delta in Rotterdam was the site of *Van Golden White Painting*, consisting of the works produced in 1966.

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.4 near here.

By all accounts the Hilversum exhibit was the most unusual of the three, as it was here that van Golden emphasised the relation of his paintings to the clean, luminous architecture of the exhibition space. For example, he exhibited a two-part work consisting of a monochrome yellow canvas hung on the wall and a canvas with a pattern of tiny flowers leaning against it. Where the two parts overlapped, he painted onto the

Commented [BN103]: See previous note on exhibition titles.

yellow canvas a highly convincing shadow, while the yellow had been extended to cover a portion of the floral canvas. The latter was actually a painting done during his stay in Japan in 1964, a form of recycling ~~which-that~~ also suggested a link with the exhibition in Schiedam. This illusionistic play with shadows was carried a step further in the 1966 paintings shown in Rotterdam, ~~all-every one~~ of which bore the title *White painting*. Each work consisted of a perspectival projection of a flat, rectangular, white object that appeared to float, casting a shadow on the blue background surface.²³

In this series of paintings, through the central motif of the white object, ~~it is clear that van Golden~~ ~~clearly~~ wanted to make the blank canvas the subject. In some of these works, the white rectangular object even seems to float away, cut off by the edge of the painting. To a certain extent, these paintings are comparable to the *Stacked paintings* by Jan Dibbets and the *Adieu* series by Ger van Elk. In all these works, the blank or monochrome canvas more or less symbolises the end of painting as a discipline. Dibbets' works seem to announce painting's demise with a touch of irony, while van Elk's is comparatively rich in the same substance. Not so with van Golden. In his series of immaculate *White paintings*, painting symbolically dies in beauty. However, it might ~~be resurrected~~. With his tabula rasa, van Golden creates new possibilities for painting.

Compared to the Japanese paintings of 1964, with their colourful decorative patterns drawn from everyday life, the *White paintings* of 1966 have a decidedly more formal character. In the next few years, van Golden tried to counter this in exhibitions ~~whichthat~~—even more than before—were in the nature of installations, creations in themselves. In the one-man show held in October 1968 at Galerie 20 in Amsterdam (Fig. 3.5), van Golden combined old and new work, the most recent being a monochrome yellow painting and a work ~~which-that~~ consisted of nothing more than a wooden panel. Both were framed behind glass, turning every reflection into an ephemeral image. The gallery surroundings were drawn into the installation as well. The sole window, overlooking a canal, was covered in white paint and a length of colourful, flowered fabric. This filtered the light entering the room and gave it a warmth of tone, an effect ~~which was~~ further enhanced by the light from several coloured lamps. ~~There were~~ Only a few works ~~were~~ hanging on the wall, the traditional place for paintings. Most were leaning against the wall at an angle, often two or three deep, or were laid out

horizontally on a low wooden block in various combinations, which were changed from time to time by gallery personnel, or even by visitors. The one *White painting* present in the exhibition was again embedded in a painterly context.²⁴

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.5 near here.

Without doubt the most exceptional presentation of van Golden's work in those early years was his entry for *documenta 4*, held in the summer of 1968 in Kassel (Fig. 3.6). The catalogue contains a tidy chronological list of three works from the 1964–1966 period (two of which are illustrated: a Japanese painting and a *White painting*), and three more recent works: two large screen-prints after portrait photographs, and a multiple-panel photo work. However, some of these works were missing from the exhibition, while other works had been added.²⁵ Van Golden had to share exhibition space with a few other artists, but he succeeded in transforming the wall he was allocated into a personal domain, with an atmosphere all of its own. Of the various *documenta* installations (or, in the terminology of the day, environments), his was the only one which that was rooted in a typically painterly conception. The works however were not hung in the traditional manner, at eye level and generously spaced, but willy-nilly. The silk-screened photo portraits were positioned high on the wall, and small objects were spaced far apart, while a number of large paintings were placed close together, just above floor level. Several works were adorned with an ad hoc 'frame' painted onto the wall, while others were mounted a few centimetres away from the wall, so that in the bright lamplight they cast a sharp shadow.

Designer, please take in Fig. 3.6 near here.

Most striking of all was the transformation undergone by *White painting*. In the upper-left-hand corner of the work a large stain of blood-red gloss paint marred the previously immaculate surface, with drops of red coursing over the floating white plane and its shadow, all the way down to the lower edge of the painting. Visitors must have wondered if this was the result of an accident, the deed of a deranged fellow visitor, or a deliberate alteration carried out by the artist himself. Three possibilities, although the third explanation was clearly the most plausible, since it suited the spirit of the installation as a whole. The red stain fundamentally undermines the illusionistic representation of a painting-within-a-painting, but paradoxically also reinforces the

Commented [BN104]: Have moved this citation to be part of the caption for Fig. 3.5.

Commented [BN105]: Have moved the second part of this endnote, which refers to the installation view, to become part of the caption for Fig. 3.6.

reference to the art of painting. In its ‘damaged’ state, the work effectively demonstrates the power of painting to create illusions, and to ~~or~~ destroy them.

The uncertain position that painting seemed to occupy at this historical moment affected van Golden both personally and professionally. In 1968, during one of our first meetings, he told me: ‘It is not easy to be a painter today.’ The modest but steady production of paintings he had created up to that point came to an end, and he all but gave up exhibiting or publishing his work. It would be almost ten years before he had his next one-~~man~~ person exhibition, in 1977 at the Stedelijk Museum in his home town of Schiedam. In the meantime he travelled the world and made photographs —, another passion. He did not ~~entirely~~ give up painting entirely, but new works were few and far between and it took him a long time to finish them. There were extended droughts, sometimes lasting for years. Only in the 1990s did his production of paintings regain momentum. While ~~Though~~ he always acknowledged its precarious position, van Golden continued to believe in the art of painting.

Commented [BN106]: I think you are setting up an apparent contradiction here, in which case ‘though’ is clearer, I think, whereas ‘while’ could be interpreted simply as two things happening at the same time.

¹ An early example of the presentation of modern art as a quick succession of avant-garde movements is Hans Arp and El Lissitzky (eds), *Die Kunstisten 1914–1924*, Eugen Rentsch-Verlag, Zürich, 1925. Tony Richardson and Nikos Stangos (eds), *Concepts of Modern Art*, Penguin Books, HarmondsworthUK, 1974, summarises and marks the end of this type of survey. The influential publication by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Thames ~~and~~ & Hudson, London, 2004, classifies modern art not by movements but by decades, ~~—~~ also, in retrospect, the art of the first half of the twentieth century.

² The manifesto is reprinted in Frank Gribling, ‘De informele kunst in Nederland: Tussen Cobra en Nul’, in *Informeel kunst in België en Nederland 1955–1960: Parallellen in de Nederlandstalige literatuur*, ed. Henk Peeters, exhibition catalogue, Haags Gemeentemuseum and Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, The Hague and Antwerp, 1984, p. 40.

³ See the studio installation photograph reproduced in Thierry de Duve (ed.), *The Definitively Unfinished*

Marcel Duchamp, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991, p. 138.

⁴ Carel Blotkamp, 'Alles is kunst', in [Aat van Yperen, Frank Eerhart and Truus Gubbels \(eds\), *Onmetelijk optimisme: Kunstenaren en hun bemiddelaars in de jaren 1945–1970*](#), eds [Aat van Yperen, Frank Eerhart and Truus Gubbels](#), Waanders Uitgevers, Zwolle, 2006, p. 219.

⁵ [Coosje Kapteyn and Gijs van Tuijl \(eds\), *Binnen en buiten het kader: Environments en situaties van jonge Nederlanders*](#), ed. [Coosje Kapteyn and Gijs van Tuijl](#), exhibition catalogue, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1970, n.p.

⁶ Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', *Arts Yearbook*, vol. 8, (1965), pp. 74–82.

⁷ This aspect of pop art was already highlighted in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1969.

⁸ [Please add full citation for Jaffé on De Stijl here.](#)

⁹ [Rein Wolfs \(ed.\), *Bas Jan Ader: Please Don't Leave Me*](#), ed. [Rein Wolfs](#), exhibition catalogue, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2006, pp. 72–73.

¹⁰ [Idem](#), pp. 44–45.

¹¹ [Marente Bloemheuvel and Zsa-Zsa Eyck \(eds\), *Ger van Elk*](#), ed. [Marente Bloemheuvel and Zsa-Zsa Eyck](#), exhibition catalogue, Thieme Art, Deventer, 2009, pp. 16–17.

¹² [Idem](#), pp. 168–169.

¹³ [Idem](#), pp. 178–179.

¹⁴ [Idem](#), pp. 228–231. Also see Carel Blotkamp, 'Modern Flowers of 1982', in *Ger van Elk: Modern Flowers of 1982; David Roëll-prijs*, exhibition catalogue, Prins Bernhard Fonds, Amsterdam, 1983, pp. 5–21.

¹⁵ [Idem](#) *Ger van Elk* (note 10), p. 88.

¹⁶ [Idem](#), pp. 198–201, 268–269.

¹⁷ An early installation photograph of these pieces was reproduced in [Piet Hoenderdos and Jop Spiekerman \(eds\), 248 objekten, ed. Piet Hoenderdos and Jop Spiekerman](#), exhibition catalogue, Leids Academisch Kunstcentrum, Leiden, 1968, p. 59.

¹⁸ Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, [London](#): Reaktion Books, [London](#), 2002, p. 158.

¹⁹ This view was to my knowledge first expressed in reviews of Mondrian's retrospective exhibition, as part of the yearly exhibition of the Hollandsche Kunstenaarskring at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1922. The critic Albert Plasschaert wrote: 'The artist will have to revise himself and take a different direction, or he will end up leaving the canvas blank, and worship this blankness.' [Albert Plasschaert](#), 'Hollandsche Kunstenaarskring', *De Amsterdamer*, [1922](#), no. 2339, [1922](#), p. ???.

²⁰ [Ad Reinhardt](#), quoted in *Ad Reinhardt: Paintings*, exhibition catalogue, Jewish Museum, New York, 1966, p. 10.

²¹ *Daan van Golden: Apperception*, exhibition catalogue, Wiels Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, 2012, pp. 133, 138.

²² [Idem](#)[Ibid.](#), pp. 133, 138.

²³ An installation photograph of the Rotterdam exhibition was published in *Junge Kunst aus Holland*, exhibition catalogue, Kunsthalle Bern, [Bern](#), 1968, n.p.

²⁴ [Installation photograph in Daan van Golden: Apperception](#)[idem \(note 20\)](#), p. 134.

²⁵ *Documenta 4 (Katalog 1)*, exhibition catalogue, Kassel, [Germany](#), 1968, pp. 98–99; [installation photograph in idem \(note 20\)](#), p. 149.

4

Pistoletto's object theatre

Claire Gilman

Scholars of postwar Italian art typically observe a fundamental shift in Michelangelo Pistoletto's work following his move beyond painting in 1965. First came the *Oggetti in meno* (Minus objects), whose makeshift appearance and random accumulation contradicted the studied investigation ~~into~~ of the nature of pictorial representation that had characterised the artist's mirrors, with their painted figures collaged ~~on~~to stainless steel grounds. Then in 1967 the artist created the first of his rag sculptures, which seemed to mark a full-scale transition away from his preoccupation with illusionistic representation and towards an *Arte Povera* aesthetic rooted in the pursuit of unmanipulated form and anti-rhetorical immediacy. As defined by Germano Celant, the Genoese critic and curator who coined the term in 1967 and organised the group's first exhibitions, *Arte Povera* was resolutely anti-representational, and responded to the new consumer landscape by eliminating artifice and embracing natural elements and unprogrammed behaviour. The rag sculptures were the quintessential 'poor art', incarnating *Arte Povera*'s agenda in their very choice of material.

It is less often mentioned that the rags made their first public appearance in theatrical experiments that Pistoletto undertook as part of *Lo Zoo*, a group he founded and collaborated with from 1968 to 1970. (*Lo Zoo*'s first performance took place in May 1968, ~~their~~its last in October 1970.) Always present in Pistoletto's studio, where they were used to polish the mirror paintings, the rags served in *Lo Zoo*'s earliest productions as costumes, set decorations, and props intended to illustrate the narratives being enacted and to provide visual focus. Although *Arte Povera* repudiated artifice, it did not reject theatre *per se*. On the contrary, on the occasion of the three-day event *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere* in October 1968 at the Arsenali in Amalfi, where *Lo Zoo* performed, Celant lauded the anarchic spirit of the new theatre, and called for the abolition of objects in favour of unrestricted action ~~and~~.² But this appeal to the spontaneous is entirely distinct from *Lo Zoo*'s incorporation of fantasy, narrative, and role-playing. Moreover, Pistoletto has asserted that, in trying his hand at sculpture, and

Commented [BN107]: Professor Gilman, are the translations yours? If so I think this should be mentioned in one of the first endnotes.

later theatre, he did not aim to eliminate pictorial illusionism but rather to extend its requirements into wider space. Indeed, although painting took a back seat during his three years with Lo Zoo, Pistoletto made mirror paintings throughout this period, and continues ~~to do so, up i~~nto the present day.

Taking into account the artist's own statements, I contend that the conventional view of Pistoletto's work from this period is fundamentally misleading. Not only is the sculpture he produced in and around 1968 deeply intertwined with his theatrical activities and vice versa, but also, rather than representing a sharp break with his painting, this work is consistent with the concerns that have motivated the artist's production from the beginning. Indeed, the imbrication of material form, pictorial space, and theatrical gesture in Pistoletto's work can be understood as providing a conscious alternative to Arte Povera's more typically neo-avant-garde conflation of art and life—a position, we will see, that had its sceptics ~~within-among~~ Italy's leftist ~~intellectual~~ ~~community~~. Ultimately, I believe that Pistoletto's work assumes an unorthodox political imperative, one in which spontaneous action is always tempered by moments of arrest, and in which the acknowledgment of physical limitations and representational distance is a precondition for commitment—artistic, political, or otherwise.

Pistoletto has recounted that Lo Zoo emerged in 1968 as an alternative to the Teatro Stabile, Turin's municipal theatre, renowned for its innovative productions of both contemporary and classical European theatre, whose offers to collaborate he had rejected in 1967 because of creative differences.³ More specifically, Lo Zoo came together after a month-long series of events in December 1967, in which Pistoletto opened his Turin studio to artists of all disciplines: ~~—~~poets, filmmakers, musicians, actors, directors, and visual artists. Frequent visitors included the poet Gianni Milano and the actor Carlo Colnaghi, both of whom would feature prominently in Lo Zoo's early productions. In fact, Lo Zoo never evolved into a conventional theatre company. Instead, it styled itself as a band of players with fluctuating membership, a travelling troupe modelled on traditional Italian street theatre that performed its scenarios in village streets, city squares, and, less commonly, mainstream theatres both ~~within-in~~ and outside Italy.⁴ Although Lo Zoo's performances in art spaces and theatres drew an art-savvy audience, many of the group's street productions occurred spontaneously before an audience of local passers-by. The constants throughout Lo Zoo's roughly two-and-

Commented [BN108]: I avoid 'within'—in most instances, 'in', 'inside' or 'among' is more correct.

Commented [BN109]: I do think 'community' is over-used these days, and is usually unnecessary. Did they really consider themselves a community? I suspect they were a fractured lot! ☺

one-half-year lifespan ~~was~~ ~~were~~ Pistoletto himself, ~~who served as artistic director, guiding the group's overall vision—if not always its specific narratives—and along with his wife, Maria Pioppi, who with Pistoletto participated in all of Lo Zoo's performances and served as artistic director, guiding the group's overall vision—if not always its specific narratives.~~

Commented [BN110]: Please confirm – only Pistoletto was the artistic director, but both he and Pioppi were in the performances?

Typical of Lo Zoo's approach was *L'Uomo ammaestrato* (The Trained Man), a performance initially staged in the north-western Italian fishing village of Vernazza, where Pistoletto was staying with friends during the summer of 1968. The group arrived at the story somewhat spontaneously, developing a loose narrative about a man, abandoned in the forest as a baby and found years later by travelling minstrels, who was only now encountering the wider world and discovering how to operate ~~within-in~~ it: beginning to speak, ~~recognizing-recognising~~ colours, learning to play the trumpet.⁵ The performance began with the actors singing, dancing, and calling out for an audience as they walked down to the village from the cottage where they were staying. On reaching the piazza, they ~~indicated-delineated~~ the performance space with white chalk, and set up a colourful gridded storyboard. Pistoletto followed the action on the storyboard as it unfolded, serving as the audience's visual guide, while Colnaghi narrated, presenting to the public Gianni Milano—the newly civilised protagonist—in a comedic pas de deux. Meanwhile, Pioppi sat at centre stage, swathed in a Persian robe held together by rags and holding a kitten. Throughout the performance, Pistoletto ~~engaged in performed~~ a series of mini actions, such as dipping a newspaper into water and reading it wet (Fig. 4.1); making noises on a bird caller; tying rags to tiny flashlights and throwing them around the 'stage'; lighting fires with matches; and constructing makeshift 'sculptures', including a wooden pallet surrounded by rags against which Pioppi reclined, and a little tower of bricks topped by an old shoe. At the end of the performance, the troupe collected money in a hat.

Commented [BN111]: 'indicated' suggests an arrow or similar, whereas I think you mean they actually marked the perimeter on the ground?

Commented [BN112]: I avoid 'engaged' because it is so over-used and so vague. I try for something more specific.

Designer, please take in Fig 4.1 near here.

From the beginning, Lo Zoo's loose, spontaneous approach prompted association with the anti-illusionistic direction in 1960s theatre. Exemplifying the trend were Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty; Polish director Jerzy Grotowski's 'poor theatre', which directly inspired Arte Povera's own name; and the Living Theatre, an American company whose co-founders, the actor Judith Malina and the painter and poet

Julian Beck, were frequent presences in Rome and Turin at the time.⁶ In their own way, each of the aforementioned strove to overcome artifice in favour of a communal, ritualistic aesthetic that aimed to shatter hierarchical systems and conventional forms of representation. Energetic movement, raw physical gesture, and intense vocalisation were employed as means of attaining an anti-ideological fusion of self and world.

This kind of work had already been embraced by key-important members of the international avant-garde, and contemporary commentators saw in Pistoletto's troupe yet another variant on an increasingly familiar theme. In 1966, Martin Friedman, then director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, likened the experience of being in front of Pistoletto's mirror paintings to participating in Allan Kaprow's and Jim Dine's Happenings, in which disconnected actions and chance disruptions incorporated audience members as integral players.⁷ Three years later, the Italian artist and theoretician Gillo Dorfles declared that the penchant for 'the absurd, the incomprehensible, the playful and the occult' that defined the Japanese Gutai movement, as well as Jack Kerouac's writings and the Living Theatre, had found its Italian expression in Pistoletto's "poor" theatrical creations.⁸

Celant was equally intent on characterizing-characterising Lo Zoo as radically anti-theatrical, maintaining-saying of the artist's work: 'Pistoletto does not play at being someone ... He is not concerned with representing, either. He does not want to go on acting.'⁹ By contrast with traditional theatre, Celant asserted, performance in the manner of Lo Zoo refused representational distance. Instead of engaging-in-role playing a role, Lo Zoo's actions sought to access-reach the actor's 'perceptual self-realisation', so that every task 'would be the contingent and liberatory satisfaction of the group's psycho-physical needs'. As Celant described it, Lo Zoo incorporated 'music, dialogue, action, singing, and dancing', but not as illusionistic devices. Rather, the performances overcame narrative, so that the actors became 'a happy and unalienated mirror of the public that perceives and experiences it ... in a continuous co-fusion of the group with the environment and the environment with the group'.¹⁰ Like his peers, in other words, Celant celebrated Lo Zoo for liberating theatrical performance from obstacles and directives. This new theatre, Celant proclaimed, 'has the goal of creating a new class in which linguistic and gnoseological nomadism will accompany the nomadism of action'. 'At last', he concluded, 'there will be no more objects.'¹¹

Commented [BN113]: I also avoid 'key' – again, over-used but with little specific meaning. Could also use 'leading', 'principal', 'significant', 'dominant'.

Commented [BN114]: I also avoid 'access' in this very broad sense – I try to go for something more specific.

For the members of Lo Zoo, however, such pronouncements missed the mark. In an early interview, Pistoletto disputed the notion that such a thing as unalienated production exists, asserting: 'Even American Happenings, while giving the illusion of seeing everything and participating in everything, are in reality nothing other than a work of distraction with respect to ... the technical and political means that they incorporate.'¹² The artist was equally critical of Grotowski's ritualistic, mass-oriented aesthetic, which he faulted for obscuring its elitist foundations.¹³ Lo Zoo, by contrast, chose to emphasise rather than deny the constructed nature of theatrical experience. As one of the original participants, Henry Martin, explained:

It is important to think of the spectacles realised by the Zoo not as a natural terrain for the transubstantiation of conflict in creativity, but rather as a stage created artificially in which is constructed an area of halting/stopping/respice that did not exist before. It must be thought of as a 'work' or a 'representation'.¹⁴

Similarly, Lo Zoo's 'manifesto' directly contradicts Celant's model of happy, liberated coexistence:

When you see, hear, and smell a piece performed by the Zoo, what you think you understand is only the exterior covering, the wrapping. You will never really know that happened until you, too, become actors and audience on this side of the bars.¹⁵

In other words, unlike the Happenings, which aimed to eradicate distance—'the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible', Kaprow observed¹⁶—Lo Zoo retained a separation between audience and actor, while encouraging conversation. Indeed, the idea of division is implicit in the group's title. 'The goal was not to break down the barrier', Pistoletto has explained, 'but to recognise it.'¹⁷ Again and again, Lo Zoo's performances relied on scenic devices such as chalk circles, bed sheets, curtains, ladders, and baskets to reinforce the separation between actors and spectators. In Lo Zoo's first production, *Cocapicco e vestitorito*,¹⁸ presented in May 1968 at the Piper Pluriclub, a Turin nightclub that hosted art performances, Pioppi was situated above the audience and the other actors on a tall ladder, wrapped in

a voluminous cellophane cloak. Similarly, in *Il tè di Alice* (Alice's Tea, first staged in March 1969 at Naples's Galleria *Il Centro*), a creative interpretation of *Alice in Wonderland*, a huge table positioned under a translucent canopy—with a small child's table and chairs beneath—separated the actors from the audience. The actors performed on top of and under the table and on a large ladder alongside it, while the audience looked on through the canopy curtains, which the actors opened and closed at various moments throughout the performance. Even in an unscripted action such as *Teatro baldacchino* (Canopy Theater, 1968), in which Pistoletto and some friends wandered through the streets of Turin playing music and making up stories, the group was distinguished from passers-by via fanciful costumes, props, and a hand-held canopy (Fig. 4.2).

~~(fig. 2) Designer, please take in Fig. 4.2 near here.~~

These devices are neither trivial efforts meant to entertain, nor signifiers of carnivalesque celebration. Rather, they reflect a carefully constructed approach to the world, one in which narrative, or representation more generally, mediates social encounters. This is not to say that Lo Zoo's plots were linear or traditionally cohesive.

~~On the contrary. In fact,~~ side actions frequently interrupted the central narrative, while the dialogue cited sources as diverse as Sophocles, William Shakespeare, Carlo Goldoni, Lewis Carroll, Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, and Albert Camus, often ~~within in~~ the same performance. Like the scenarios of the sixteenth-century *commedia dell'arte*, which employed set types in diverse roles and circumstances, Lo Zoo actors assumed identifiable roles—Pioppi as the Persian gypsy, Pistoletto as the eccentric leader—which they modified according to the specific production. As Martin remembers it, Pistoletto, serving as master of ceremonies, directed the action from the orchestra pit, encouraging the actors to repeat phrases in a variety of styles.

A lamentation, an operatic aria, or a Shakespearean aside together presented 'x points of view with x different ways of seeing things'.¹⁹ A similar motivation guided the staging and costuming. Describing the cellophane cloak ~~that~~ Pioppi wore in *Cocapicco e vestitorito* as a 'transparent mantle' that framed two 'scenes'—the pristine Pioppi above versus the writhing mass below—Pistoletto explained that what was most important was

Commented [BN115]: There were a few too many instances of 'on the contrary' in this chapter.

to create an ‘image’.²⁰ The goal, he said, was to concentrate the action, in order to enable the audience to ‘see’ and, by extension, to ‘react’.²¹

This emphasis on the production of *things* and an awareness that such production takes place *within* a social context were fundamental to the group’s aesthetic. Consider *L’Uomo ammaestrato*. The play’s overt theme is undoubtedly the brutality of the ‘civilizing’ process. And yet the ultimate message is not that we should protect the trained man’s innocence by isolating him in his native forest, out of public view. On the contrary, the lessons that the man masters through the course of the play, such as playing a *musical* instrument and identifying sign systems, are valuable. These learned skills are rooted in convention, and as such they allow one to function in the world. Moreover, the self-motivated creativity that the protagonist employs in mastering them contrasts positively with Colnaghi’s vulgar disciplinary method, in which he alternately orders, berates, and praises his charge.

It is here that the side actions that occupy Pistoletto throughout *L’Uomo ammaestrato*—what he has described as ‘little exhibitions’ or loci of narrative ‘punctuation’ outside the main storyline—assume relevance.²² If, for someone like Celant, the goal was to overcome fixed parameters by leaving things to develop as they may, Pistoletto, in piling up rags or creating small sculptures out of rusty bricks and old shoes, demonstrates a rather different lesson: the necessity of communicating with available means. Pistoletto’s materials may be rough, but they are not unmanipulated. Rather, they are all the more worked over for having started out so unrefined. It is instructive that Pistoletto refers to his objects in narrative terms, by which he does not mean to say that they convey a certain message. ~~On the contrary~~ Quite the opposite; the objects he manipulated in the performance at Vernazza were intentionally obscure, and he no longer recalls their specific inspiration. The point is that they were subject to a guiding consciousness and, once completed and set aside, they created a visual stopping point. Like the storyboard that divided the overall narrative into separate scenes, the mini actions and their resultant objects disrupted the narrative flow and served as visual reminders of what had taken place, even as the story moved forward. Pistoletto’s assemblages were crucial to the theatrical experience precisely *because* their creation halted the action, requiring the audience to reflect for a moment on the constructed nature of the whole.

Equally important is that Pistoletto's actions, in their very opacity, shifted the focus from a specific story about a man encountering the world to the process by which meaning is acquired, with his whimsical gestures and assemblages taking their place alongside the main action as an equivalent form of communication. It was not necessary that the audience understand what Pistoletto was doing, only that he was doing; indeed, his relationship with his objects remained opaque, but his investment in them was necessarily familiar. The spectator was initiated into Lo Zoo's performances not by being invited up on stage as part of some 'happy and unalienated' company, as Celant described, but rather because Pistoletto was revealed to be a bit like them, alternately ~~engaging with~~ participating and stepping back to observe the main action. This kind of autonomous coexistence was built into all of Lo Zoo's productions, as the various members broke off from the central storyline to sing songs, play instruments, make objects, recite lines, and stop and look at what was going on around them, all of them united in their concentration rather than in their specific ???????????

Commented [BN116]: Is a word missing here?

Lo Zoo re-staged *L'Uomo ammaestrato* five times ~~over a in~~ two-year ~~period~~, with different actors performing the role of the trained man. The most ambitious staging took place on the second day of the aforementioned *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere* event in Amalfi, for which Pistoletto also produced a group of site-specific sculptures (Fig. 4.3). This was his public introduction of the 'rag sculptures', and his description of the experience is worth recounting at length:

We arrived in Amalfi late, when everybody had already chosen their space in the designated exhibition area ... I hadn't brought objects, only some bricks, some candles, and a ball made of papier-mâché—about one meter in diameter—that we had used before in a performance in the streets of Turin and that had passed through the hands of children who had played with it. Since it had already made its journey, the mobile sculpture couldn't be used as before. So I built a circular cage around it that allowed it to roll, but only minimally ... But coming back to the beginning of the story, when I arrived in Amalfi I had this bundle of rags, and I thought I could make something with them but I didn't know exactly what ... All the space was occupied already except one small area, which, to the misfortune of all the other artists, contained the remains of Roman ruins ... The ruins were in a square

and were about a half-meter high, and to the side was a Roman sarcophagus. If I had arrived with my proper objects, I wouldn't have known where to put them, but with my rags I could decorate the Roman objects, hang them on the inside, and in this way create my own little set design. I had arranged my own little theatre; the Roman ruins became just like the rags I had arranged all around them, and in this way what should have been an obstacle became an aid.²⁴

Designer, please take in Fig. 4.3 near here.

In the end, Pistoletto created six objects for the space, only one of which, *Sfera di giornali* (Newspaper ball, 1966), had been selected ahead of time.²⁵ The other sculptures included *Tenda di lampadine* (Light-bulb curtain), which the artist suspended outside the entrance to the Arsenali; *Candele* (Candles), a piece of mylar lined with candles that were lit on opening night; *Sarcofago e stracci* (Sarcophagus and rags) and *Capitello e stracci* (Capital and rags), a found sarcophagus and a broken column capital, each of which Pistoletto adorned with rags (see Fig. 4.3); and, finally, *Monumentino* (Little monument), a version of the shoe column from *L'Uomo ammaestrato* to which Pistoletto added a humidifier and, around the column's base, a line of insect powder (DDT) to 'protect' it from the other exhibiting artists (Fig. 4.4). The day after the opening, Pistoletto and his troupe marched from the Arsenali to the village piazza, where they performed their play (Fig. 4.5). En route, Pioppi sang the 'Papaciani', a Persian revolutionary song (so called by Pistoletto) that she had learned while living in Iran from 1962 to 1964, and that she reprised in numerous Zoo productions. As usual, Pistoletto marked off the stage from the audience, this time with protective DDT powder, before the performance ~~commenced~~ began.

Designer, please take in Fig. 4.4 and Fig. 4.5 near here.

Pistoletto's performance and sculptures represented distinct contributions to the Amalfi exhibition, but his anecdote indicates that he saw them as aligned. His perception of an interrelationship is as instructive for his sculptural aesthetic as it is for his theatrical endeavours. Whereas in the plays the objects interrupt the action, providing a necessary locus for reflection, it ~~would seem~~s that in the sculptures the dynamic is reversed, with Pistoletto activating his sculptural displays via theatrical terminology. Ultimately, however, the effect is the same: in each case, there is a

deliberate balance between freedom and control, action and stasis, formlessness checked by the ~~organizing-organising~~ power of form. In his comments regarding his sculptural display in Amalfi, Pistoletto emphasises his creative spontaneity when he describes arriving at the Arsenali with his bag of odds and ends and proceeding to enliven the found Roman objects. At the same time, however, this very gesture served to re-aestheticise the space, making of it, in Pistoletto's words, 'my own little set design ... my own little theatre'. Formless in themselves, the rags functioned like Lo Zoo's objects: they activated their surroundings while simultaneously illuminating the forming process; they served as adornments, focusing vision and drawing attention to the Arsenali as a space. When Pistoletto refers to the decorative quality of the rags, he does not mean it pejoratively. Rather, he is celebrating the presentational aspect of life wherein things are not simply found but are given intention—reconstructed in and through the act of perception.²⁶

Pistoletto's role ~~vis-à-vis~~ the other exhibiting artists was equally complex. In his account, he presents himself as a free spirit who takes up residence in an area rejected by the other participants, who have brought conventionally finished works. At the same time, however, he is intent on safeguarding his haphazard display. The DDT powder is a humorous touch, of course, but it is also a serious gesture. Pistoletto has described how the other artists began to play ball in and around the sculptures in the Arsenali and how, when they got to his *Monumentino*, they moved it aside. The members of Lo Zoo were furious at their thoughtlessness, but Pistoletto remained calm, simply moving the sculpture back into place.²⁷ In other words, he neither overreacted nor chose to join in the free-spirited antics, but instead studiously protected and maintained the boundaries he had established and his rights as an artist. 'There was a lot of freedom inside both exhibition spaces', he observed, 'but it was a guarded freedom.'²⁸

This dialogue between freedom and control also guides Pistoletto's mature rag sculptures, such as *Orchestra di stracci* (Orchestra of rags, 1968; ~~plate-tee~~), which made its first public appearance in Lo Zoo's four-hour improvisational collaboration with the Rome-based collective Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), held at Turin's Deposito d'arte presente (Warehouse of Present Art) in December 1968. The artist claims that the sculpture, made of steaming tea-kettles placed amid rags and topped by a

Commented [BN117]: As per publisher's style guide.

piece of glass, was directly inspired by his experiences in Amalfi. In his words, the work provided ‘a good example of what the performances in Amalfi were like on a small scale’.²⁹ In part, this statement indicates the interactive nature of the sculpture, with its whistling tea-kettles and musty olfactory sensations. But the crucial point is that the performance is contained, much as it is in Pistoletto’s theatrical arenas. *Orchestra di stracci*’s action is nearly explosive, as the steam pushes up against the tea-kettles and is in turn absorbed by the rags beneath, but total release never happens. Rather, the action takes place in the here and now, in the space demarcated by the glass square and within the sculpture’s form.

This condition recalls the fate assigned to the artist’s ball of newspapers, which, set free during its 1967 tour through the streets of Turin, reappeared in Amalfi restrained in a steel cage. Significantly, the sculpture’s various titles reflect its altered states. Called *Sfera di giornali* when it was first shown, the work was renamed *Scultura do passeggio* (Walking sculpture) during its tour through the Turin streets, and finally, in Amalfi, *‘Il mondo d’oro, la palla che prima andava in giro per strada è entrata nella gabbia’* (Golden world, the ball that first toured the streets has entered a cage).³⁰ The final whimsical but cumbersome moniker deliberately challenges the notion of a perpetual present and instead gives the object a narrative and subjects it to specific temporal conditions.

Other rag sculptures include *Monumenti4no* (Little monument, 1968)—yet another version of the shoe column from *L’Uomo ammaestrato*—made in this case of rag-covered bricks topped with an old boot; and *Muretto di stracci* (Small wall of rags, 1968), a wall of cloth-covered bricks reminiscent of Pioppi’s wooden pallet or of *Sarcofago e stracci* and *Capitello e stracci* from Amalfi. In these works, the material is physically controlled, moulded into rigid columns or placed up against rag-covered walls, conveying the sense that both forms are valid—the amorphous rags and the structures that have been built out of them—and signalling a continuing process of making and unmaking that is ongoing. And then there is *Venere degli stracci* (Venus of the rags, 1967), Pistoletto’s famous sculpture of a found replica of a classical Greek nude turned towards the wall, her face buried in a heap of rags that she seems to struggle to keep in position. Like *Muretto di stracci*, *Venere degli stracci* foregrounds the mutual dependence of materials—as statue and rags appear to support each other—

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rather than their polar opposition. At the same time, the tattered rags, pressing up against the canonical Greek sculpture, are brought ~~within-into~~ the orbit of a history of representation. In this way, and for all their practical use, the rags enter Pistoletto's sculpture as an aesthetic form removed from the flux of life.

None of this is to say that Pistoletto's work is unresponsive to its immediate social and political context. ~~On the contrary~~~~In fact,~~ his work from this period consistently references the charged environment in which he was living and working. His rags, bricks, and walls inevitably recall the student radicals of the late 1960s, for whom bricks and barricades served as makeshift tools of political dissent. Indeed, Pistoletto has spoken of the ~~multiple-numerous~~ political associations of the wall motif, and has confirmed that a barricade ~~of cement-filled sacks comprised that he constructed of cement-filled sacks that he constructed~~ for a group exhibition at Rome's Galleria Arco ~~d~~' Alibert in 1968 was a response to the current protests.³¹

In the same vein, Lo Zoo's theatrical scenarios repeatedly evoked revolutionary struggles of both past and present. Take, for example, ~~Il~~ *principe pazzo* (The Crazy Prince), first staged at Naples's Galleria ~~Il~~ Centro in February 1969, which told the story of a prince who turns his throne over to the general populace. Or consider Lo Zoo's experiment *La ricerca dell'Uomo nero* (The Research of the Minus Man),³² which took place in a piazza in Corniglia from May through October 1969. In this daily 'performance', which was more of a collective experiment than a presentation intended for an audience, each participant assumed the role of the *Uomo nero*, a temporary leader who guided the others in a self-invented game before being overcome and replaced at the end of each day. Pistoletto has described this series of actions as simulating the cyclical conditions of government, in which rules and regimes are established, observed, and eventually undone. There were also smaller instances of protest in Lo Zoo's productions, as when Pioppi sang her Persian revolutionary song—~~2~~—'A flower at the side of the field is about to blossom; I will sacrifice everything for my love, except my rifle, because it serves me to kill the soldier of the government'³³—when the characters ~~engaged-took part~~ in fake battles and subsequent peace-making, something that happened in Lo Zoo's last three productions, which followed a looser narrative than the earlier scenarios (Fig. 4.6).³⁴

Designer, please take in Fig. 4.6 near here.

Commented [BN119]: 'Multiple' implies many copies of the same or a similar thing (such as in an edition of prints), which I don't think is the meaning here. It is used a lot these days, rather inaccurately, when the intended meaning is of many different things. Could also use 'many', 'several', 'various'.

Accepting these references at face value, one can see why contemporary critics described Lo Zoo as incarnating the kind of non-hierarchical ‘being-togetherness’ typical of the student movements and other radical groups active at the time. Lo Zoo’s own manifesto embraced the anti-establishment zeitgeist when it proclaimed that artists are equally capable of doing the job of ‘architects, designers, technicians, and politicians’, who typically ‘have been the ones who know how to do things’.³⁵ And yet even here there is an acceptance of working ~~within~~ inside the system, ~~that which~~ belies an emphatically outsider stance. The manifesto does not advocate overthrowing traditional disciplines so much as promoting art’s equivalent capacity. Similarly, it describes Lo Zoo’s participants as both ‘actors and audience’ and ‘producers and consumers’—that is, as intrinsically part of, rather than outside, social life.³⁶

Indeed, Lo Zoo’s actual encounter with Europe’s rebellious youth indicates a less typical avant-garde position. Lo Zoo’s principal audience consisted of local communities familiar with street theatre or, at the opposite extreme, art-world cognoscenti. But in May 1969 the group’s members found themselves in unfamiliar territory while performing *I ratti baratti* (The Bartering Rats) in Heidelberg, Germany. As Pistoletto tells it, they arrived ~~in~~ at the gymnasium where they were to perform, only to discover a large group of students gathered there—talking and ~~engaging~~ participating in political agitation. It was, Pistoletto recalls, complete chaos. Not sure what to do, but certain that they needed to ‘find some sort of organization’,³⁷ the actors began to unfold a large white sheet, square by square. Slowly, the mass of students moved back to make way for the cloth, until it was completely spread out. No one stepped on the sheet, the room fell silent, and Lo Zoo proceeded to perform in the designated arena. One by one the performers made their way onto the ‘stage’. Though tentative at first, the action grew more and more intense as the actors constructed little objects out of tinfoil, rags, and lighted matches and then threw the objects up in the air, allowing them to fall about the sheet, adorning the performance space. At one point the group gathered under the sheet, playing musical instruments and posing to create a kind of mobile sculpture beneath it. All the while, the audience remained respectful and attentive.

Decades later, when ~~D~~discussing his reaction to the Heidelberg students, Pistoletto clarified that he sympathised with their desire for change, but was dismayed by the form—or lack of form—~~that~~ their actions assumed.

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‘In ’68 there was no meaning, no ~~organizing~~~~organising~~, no culture in the freedom. What was needed was something productive and organised. The goal was to become free but also to become conscious; to protect one’s space or place; to make a society, something real.’³⁸

In his ambivalence towards ~~the~~-1960s radicalism, Pistoletto was not alone. Many left-leaning Italian intellectuals expressed ~~skepticism~~~~scepticism~~ about the irrational, cult-like nature of the 1960s counter_culture, which they saw as disturbingly akin to fascism’s imposed consensus and quest for absolutes.³⁹ For the heretical Marxist filmmaker and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini, fascist authoritarianism, avant-garde progressivism, and consumer mystification were aligned in their parallel refusal to accept Marxism’s core faith in otherness. In formulating a response, Pasolini adopted a highly artificial aesthetic that aimed to expose the ideological basis of all modes of cultural production, past and present. Similarly, writers such as Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco promoted a ‘rational and discriminating consciousness’ that would accept the inevitability of social roles and norms while also working to change them.⁴⁰

Like many of Lo Zoo’s performances, *I ratti baratti* staged just such an acceptance of social parameters, the spread-out cloth designating an organised space whose limits and conditions the audience had to respect, however temporarily. On the other hand, the actors’ formation under the sheet has been described as a kind of ‘~~ante~~diluvian monster ... that is above all anonymous, undifferentiated’, and lacking a ‘social role’.⁴¹ The actors attempted to forge this role as they struck their poses beneath the cloth and, like the ‘trained man’, began to create and communicate via simple materials and gestures. The fact that Lo Zoo observed pre_set scenarios, however loosely configured, and that the experiments in Corniglia took the form of a game, is not incidental. Like games or politics, Lo Zoo’s theatrical experiments were intentionally and emphatically non-natural. There ~~was~~~~were~~ spontaneity and chaos in the productions, but it was a directed chaos, as in Pistoletto’s sculptures. The action was clearly formulated as happening in the here and now, in the context of an event enacted in a particular space at a particular time by particular people—conditions that were reinforced by Lo Zoo’s practice of modifying its scenarios according to where the group was performing and who was participating.⁴²

These observations bring us full circle, to an aspect of Pistoletto's production referred to at the beginning of this essay: his sustained dialogue with painting. For here Lo Zoo's theatre manifests what is fundamental to painting as well—that it is a delimited field in which something takes place. Pistoletto has explained that in moving beyond painting, he was not rejecting the canvas but rather was seeking 'a space in which this persona of mine would be able to move', and that he tried his hand at sculpture because he wanted to find a way of doing things 'in a public space'.⁴³ The entire trajectory of Pistoletto's early career reveals itself as a progressive testing of presentational space, from his early painted canvases in which solitary figures register against polished grounds (see plates 4–9), to the mirror paintings that situate viewers as witnesses to themselves looking, to the transparent Plexiglas panels that expose the wall itself as subject, or as a medium upon which images are suspended.

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In writing about the mirror paintings, critics have tended to emphasise the element of live reflection, downplaying the dialogue between painting, photography, and the reflecting surface. In so doing, they have overlooked the peculiar tension between the viewer's mobile image and the static photo-based silhouettes suspended on the mirroring surface. Whether an effect of the semi-turned-away poses of the individuals depicted, or of the stillness produced by their abrupt isolation against active grounds, the cut-out figures manifest a kind of self-conscious posturing that in turn compels the viewer to reflect on his or her own. Despite the common view that the mirror paintings activate free, mobile perception, they are in fact very much about convention, about the way in which people move, gesture, and take up positions within in public space. They highlight, once again, life's presentational aspect.⁴⁴

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Pistoletto explicitly aligned painting and theatre in an exhibition that took place at Rome's Galleria L'Attico in February 1968, just before he began working with Lo Zoo. The show featured four mirror paintings, hung within-in a fantastical landscape complete with costumes, cardboard rocks, and Roman columns culled from Cinecittà, Rome's legendary film studio. Three cine-cameramen circulated among the crowd (which included Julian Beck and Judith Malina of the Living Theatre), assisting Pistoletto throughout the exhibition's one-month run in making films that were screened on closing night. Suspended amid the action, the mirrors represented focal points of sorts, the isolated figures providing individual, stilled moments in which theatrical flux

was revealed as purposeful gesture. Pistoletto has observed: ‘To be at the same time spectators and actors, producers and consumers, is the spectacle I propose on the stage of my mirror paintings.’⁴⁵ Understood in this context, the mirror paintings might better be said to envision a world governed not by ‘free’, but by dialogue and encounter with one’s own and other people’s images.

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Pistoletto’s rag columns and walls provide a similar kind of structure, in that they offset and contain the rag bundles piled up against them, while works such as *Tenda di lampadine* (Lightbulb curtain) and *Candele* (Candles) literally illuminate the limits and conditions of architectural space, exposing another kind of frame. To quote the last line from Lo Zoo’s final performance, *Bello e basta* (Beautiful and enough): ‘There is no light without something for it to fall on.’⁴⁶ For Pistoletto, Lo Zoo was a way to enact this vision of commitment on a larger scale. It provided an opportunity to widen the arena.

Lo Zoo disbanded in 1970, and its members went their separate ways. But it is suggestive that in recent years, with his creation of Cittadellarte—a foundation featuring offices in such eclectic disciplines as art, ecology, economics, education, fashion, nutrition, and politics—Pistoletto has returned to a collective model-way of working. Cittadellarte occupies a picturesque building complex in Biella, near Pistoletto’s native Turin, which also houses his living quarters and a residency program. It is an idyllic place, but one that the artist has declared is profoundly non-utopian.

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Indeed, he has asserted that whereas *utopia* (from the Greek *ou* and *topos*) literally means ‘no place’, the foundation is emphatically geared towards practical goals.⁴⁷ The name Cittadellarte was carefully selected for its double meaning. Signifying ‘city of art’, or a place of creativity and limitless possibility, it also referenees-alludes to a fortress or citadel. The foundation holds discussions (it recently hosted ten leaders of European banking for a forum on the current economic crisis) and fosters community art activities, but it is careful to respect areas of expertise, encouraging leaders of different fields to come to their own workable solutions.

The foundation also pays close attention to display, through typeface, logos, design, and the production of art, fashion, and decorative objects, seeing in these visual forms parallel models of commitment. According to Pistoletto, creating a uniform look is important (the foundation emphasises sustainable production and natural, recyclable

materials) because, apart from function, physical appearance projects anticipated goals. Cittadellarte defines itself on its web-site as ‘a great *laboratory*, a generator of creative energy’, and ‘a place for the convergence of creative ideas and projects ... An organism aimed at *producing* culture activating a responsible social transformation that is necessary and urgent at a local and global level’.⁴⁸ It is useful here to recall Lo Zoo’s definition of art as ‘knowing how to do things’.⁴⁹ Beyond its actual achievements, in other words, Cittadellarte is relevant for the way in which it aligns art and politics as systems of production. The same may be said of all Pistoletto’s work, from the mirror paintings to his sculptural and theatrical work. Whatever the medium, the primary goal is equivalent: to create and re-create under proscribed conditions, to take a stand, and to make do with the materials at hand.

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¹ See, for example, Jean-François Chevrier’s comments in Benjamin Buchloh, Catherine David, and Jean-François Chevrier, ‘The Political Potential of Art, Part 2: Interview’, in *Politics-Poetics: Documenta X: —The Book*, Hatje Cantz-Verlag, Ostfildern-RuitStuttgart, 1997, p. 628. See also the section entitled ‘Gli stracci e l’arte povera’, in Bruno Corà, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Lo spazio della riflessione nell’arte*, Agenzia Editoriale Essegi, Ravenna, 1986, pp. 114–19. Here, Corà argues that, like the mirror paintings before them, the rags became the medium of a ‘new language, and it is more than understandable that an entire climate, that of Arte Povera, was associated with them’ (p. 117). He then goes on to explain their wide-ranging influence, citing a sculpture by Robert Wilson made entirely of rags and included in the 1973 group exhibition *Contemporanea* in Rome ‘as a counterbalance to the rigidity of minimalism’ (my translations).

² See Germano Celant, ‘Azione povera’, in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera / Art Povera: Storie e protagonisti / Histories and Protagonists*, Electa, Milan, 1985, p. 89; originally published in *Arte Povera*, ed. Germano Celant, exhibition catalogue, Galleria de’ Foscherari, Bologna, 1968.

³ See Corà, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Lo spazio della riflessione*, p. 106. More specifically, Pistoletto maintains that, since he was a painter first and foremost, he could not join an ‘official’ theatre company.

This is yet another indication that he did not see painting as irreconcilable with Lo Zoo's brand of theatre.

⁴ For detailed documentation of all of Lo Zoo's productions and of Pistoletto's theatre work in general, see [Marco Farano, Cristina Mundici and Maria Teresa Roberts \(eds\), *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Il varco dello specchio; Azioni e collaborazioni, 1967–2004*, ed. Marco Farano, Cristina Mundici and Maria Teresa Roberts, exhibition catalogue](#), Fondazione Torino Musei, Turin, 2005.

⁵ For my discussion of what took place during this and other performances, I am indebted to Marco Farano and Michelangelo Pistoletto, the latter of whom went through the details of his performance work with me in a conversation in June 2009.

⁶ After the Living Theatre's performance of *Mysteries ... and Smaller Pieces* at the Piper Pluriclub in March 1967, Pistoletto got to know the members of the troupe, and they stayed with him in his studio on ~~a number of several~~ occasions in the following months, while in Turin for various performances.

⁷ [Martin Friedman, *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Reflected World*, ed. Martin L. Friedman, exhibition catalogue](#), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1966, n.p.

⁸ Gillo Dorfles, 'The Meetings in Amalfi', in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Azioni materiali*, ed. [Silvia Eiblmayr, exhibition catalogue](#), Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne, 1999, p. 73.

⁹ Celant, 'Arte Povera', in Celant, *Arte Povera / Art Povera*, p. 53.

¹⁰ Celant, 'Zoo', *Sipario [Milan]*, no. 291, Milan, July 1970, p. 19 (my translation).

¹¹ Celant, 'Azione Povera', in Celant, *Arte Povera / Art Povera*, p. 89. Note also the similar sentiment expressed by Giuseppe [Bertolucci-Bartolucci](#) in his article in the same [catalogue volume](#), in which he associates the need for 'poorness' with a 'moving further and further away from the object, returning toward, and coming forth again in action'. He continues: 'Thus it is necessary to shatter the product and bring it toward life, just as it is necessary to undermine life itself and direct it toward action.' See Bartolucci, 'Poor Action in a Poor Theater', in Celant, *Arte Povera / Art Povera*, pp. 83, 81; originally published as 'Azioni povere su un teatro povero', in [Germano Celant \(ed.\), *Arte povera più azioni povere*](#), pp. 57–62. One might say that Celant and Bartolucci [subscribe to the model of see](#) theatre as a 'choreographic community', wherein, as defined by the philosopher Jacques Rancière, theatre is understood to be an exemplary community form, and community is held to be dependent on the

elimination of distance between subjects. And yet, as Rancière has clarified: ‘Distance is not an evil to be abolished, but the normal condition of any communication. Human animals are distant animals who communicate through the forest of signs.’ For Rancière, true emancipation ‘begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting’, when we understand our commonality to reside not in the group in fusion, but in our unique and equivalent intellectual capacity, a capacity that is stimulated through ‘a performer deploying her skills and a spectator observing what these skills might produce in a new context among other spectators’. See Jacques Rancière, ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, in [Jacques Rancière, *his The Emancipated Spectator*](#), Gregory Elliott (transl.), Verso, London, 2009, pp. [10](#), 13, 22 (originally published as [Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé*](#), La Fabrique-éditions, Paris, 2008). I believe that Pistoletto’s theatre encourages just such an awareness of the relationship between subjects and objects.

¹² Michelangelo Pistoletto, ‘Note di lavoro’, in [Pistoletto, *exhibition catalogue*](#), Palazzo Grassi, [Venezia/Venice](#), 1976, p. 45 (my translation).

¹³ After explaining that there is no such thing as complete parity, and that the division between audience and actor is an acknowledgment of this disharmony, Pistoletto concludes: ‘Grotowski, who seems to want a direct relationship between man and man, in reality limits this direct relationship in his theatre to a very restricted group of people ... while the true spectators of Grotowski are those of us who could never have assisted in his productions because we are in the audience. He communicates his myth to us masses by means of the press and other methods of communication and consumption. Moreover, his message is irrelevant when compared with the means used to disseminate it.’ See Michelangelo Pistoletto, ‘Risposta a “È il momento della negazione?”’, inchiesta sulla situazione del teatro di prosa in Italia oggi’, [Sipario \[Milan\]](#), nos 268/26–69, [Milan](#), August–September 1968, pp. 16–17 (my translation).

¹⁴ Henry Martin, ‘Uno Zoo non é una badia’, [Data \[Milan\]](#), vol. 1, no.1, [Milan](#), September 1971, p. 61 (my translation).

¹⁵ Lo Zoo, ‘Turin, Late Twentieth Century (Preparing for the Age of Aquarius)’, in Celant, [Arte Povera](#), [Art Povera](#), p. 127.

¹⁶ Allan Kaprow, ‘Environments, Assemblages, Happenings’ (1965), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), [Art in Theory, 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas](#), Blackwell, [Cambridge/Malden, Mass/MA](#), 1992, p. 706.

¹⁷ Pistoletto, interview with the author, February 1999.

¹⁸ The title *Cocapicco e vestitorito* is a made-up one. The first word combines coco, from *Coca-Cola*, and *picco*, from *colare a picco*, meaning ‘to sink’ (in the nautical sense). The second word comes from *vestito*, meaning ‘dress’, and *rito*, meaning ‘rite’—rite of the dress. In the action, Maria sat at the top of a staircase, wearing an extremely long plastic dress, which Pistoletto and his daughter Cristina sewed throughout the action. At the bottom of the stairs a group of participants in a plastic swimming pool poured out Coca-Cola and talcum powder while falling on the floor.

¹⁹ Martin, ‘Uno Zoo non é una badia’, p. 60.

²⁰ The full statement, accompanying the first performance of *Cocapicco e vestitorito* in May 1968, reads as follows: ‘A play in two contemporaneous parts, with slow, magic and contemplative action on a double staircase on one hand; and violent, paranoiac and provocative action on the other. The two scenes come together beneath a transparent mantle, creating a city.’ Reprinted and translated in Celant, *Arte Povera/Art Povera*, p. 47.

²¹ [Michelangelo](#) Pistoletto, interview with the author, February 1999.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Again, we are reminded of Rancière, who writes: ‘The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other. This shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures, in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path. What our performances—be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it—verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations.’ See Rancière, ‘The Emancipated Spectator’, pp. 16–17.

²⁴ Pistoletto, in conversation with Germano Celant (Genoa, 1971), in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Azioni*

materiali, p. 28 (my translation).

²⁵ According to Pistoletto (in conversation with the author, June 2009), Marcello Rumma, one of the show's curators, had asked him to show *Sfera di giornali*, but he ended up altering it by placing it in a steel cage.

²⁶ Interestingly, Pistoletto has also referred to the use of the rags (and other scenic objects) in Lo Zoo's productions as a way of clothing the actors. Once again, the idea would seem to be that the rags served as an embellishment, or as a means of enabling something (or someone) to become visible in a public space.

²⁷ For a more complete description of this incident, see Pistoletto's 'The Gold Monument', in his *Michelangelo Pistoletto: A Minus Artist*, Hopefulmonster, Turin, 1988, p. 25; this was written on the occasion of *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere* in Amalfi under the title 'Il monumentino d'oro'. Is Turin correct? WorldCat has Florence.

²⁸ Pistoletto, in conversation with the author, June 2009.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ For the latter title, see Maria Teresa Roberto, 'Davanti allo specchio, al di qua delle sbarre: Lo Zoo dagli antefatti a L'Uomo nero, 1966/1970', in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Il varco dello specchio*, p. 22.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² 'Minus Man' is Pistoletto's preferred translation of *Uomo nero* as it relates to his work.

³³ As quoted in Farano et al., *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Il varco dello specchio*, p. 86 (my translation).

³⁴ Lo Zoo's last three productions were *L'ratti baratti* (The Bartering Rats), first performed in Rotterdam in May 1969; *Chi sei tu?* (Who Are You?), first performed in Belgrade in September 1970; and *Bello e basta* (Beautiful and Enough), first performed in Milan in October 1970.

³⁵ Lo Zoo, 'Turin, Late Twentieth Century', p. 127. Please put full citation. The full quotation reads: 'Art means knowing how to do things. For a while now architects, designers, technicians, and politicians have been the ones who know how to do things.' The manifesto then goes on to advocate replacing the word *art* with 'quack-quack', precisely in order to avoid stereotypical ideas about art—principal among them,

that art is dead or no longer necessary. For Lo Zoo, art is a system of making like any other system of production.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Pistoletto, in conversation with the author, June 2009.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For an elaboration of this, see [my thesis Claire Gilman](#), 'Arte Povera's Theater: Artifice and Anti-Modernism in Italian Art of the 1960s', Ph.D. ~~dis~~thesis, Columbia University, [New York](#), 2006, especially Chapter 3, and *Arte Povera: Selections from the Sonnabend Collection*, ed. [Claire Gilman](#), [exhibition catalogue](#), Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery and Columbia University, New York, 2001.

⁴⁰ This quotation comes from a longer analysis of the work of the fiction writer Carlo Gadda, in which Calvino continues: 'From this foundering of the author of letters in the fermentation of the narrated material, a sense of dismay is born. And this sense of dismay is the point of departure of a judgment, so that the reader can ... make a step forward, reacquire historical distance, declare himself to be different, distinct from the boiling material.' See Italo Calvino, 'Il mare dell'oggettività', in [Italo Calvino](#), *Una pietra sopra: Discorsi di letteratura e società*, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milan, 1995, p. 50 (my translation); originally published in *Il menabò di letteratura* [[Turin](#)], no. 2, [Turin](#), 1960.

⁴¹ This description actually ~~refererere~~ ~~to~~ ~~nees~~ a similar sheet used in Lo Zoo's final production, *Bello e basta* (Beautiful and Enough). See Francesco Leonetti, 'Teatro d'arte: Foglio-recensione di uno spettacolo del Lo Zoo con Pistoletto capocomico', in *Michelangelo Pistoletto: Il varco dello specchio*, p. 128 (my translation); originally published in *Che fare: Bollettino di critica e azione d'avanguardia* [[Milan](#)], no. 8/9-9, [Milan](#), Spring 1971, pp. ??-??.

⁴² The contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou has observed that 'the truths lavished by the labor of theatre are essentially political in that they crystallise the dialectics of existence and aim to elucidate our temporal site'. In other words, for Badiou, true theatre—that is, theatre like Lo Zoo's, which reinforces the play element through staging, costumes, and direction—is inherently political because, far from eradicating boundaries, it precisely *localises* us. Put another way, both politics and theatre, in Badiou's sense, defy permanence, requiring participation instead in specific, temporary situations and structures. See Badiou, 'Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Treatise', *Theatre Survey*,

[Pittsburgh], vol. 49, no. 2, Pittsburgh, November 2008, p. 200.

⁴³ Barry Schwabsky, 'Pistoletto Through the Looking Glass: A Conversation on the Art of Subtraction', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 63, no. 4, December 1988, pp. 37, 39.

⁴⁴ For more on Pistoletto's mirror paintings and their dialogue with theatre, see Claire Gilman, 'Pistoletto's Staged Subjects', *October*, novel, 124, Spring 2008, pp. 53–74.

⁴⁵ Pistoletto, interview with F. Prestipino, in Germano Celant (ed.), *Pistoletto*, ed. Germano Celant, exhibition catalogue, Forte Belvedere, Florence, 1984, p. 97 (my translation; I thank Roberta Nuzzaci for her help with this); originally published in *Le arte*, [Milan], no. 4, April 1976, pp. ??–??.

⁴⁶ This line in turn constitutes part of the first line of Pistoletto's book *L'Uomo nero: Il lato insopportabile*, Rumma, Salerno, 1970; see the translation in Pistoletto, *The Minus Man*, pp. 531.

⁴⁷ Pistoletto, in conversation with the author, June 2009.

⁴⁸ My italics. See Fondazione Pistoletto, *Cittadellarte, Biella: Info e orari*, www.cittadellarte.it/info.php, and www.cittadellarte.it/info.php?inf=2 (my italics). The links did not work for me. I think the first one is for the homepage, but not sure about the second one.

⁴⁹ See Lo Zoo, 'Turin, Late Twentieth Century', p. 127 note 35 above.

5

Social experiments with modernism

Darby English

Two photographs document an intriguing episode in late modernism that, late in the summer of 1971, moved quickly from conception to execution to the deepest reserves of historical memory. The photographs were taken on ~~21~~ August ~~21~~, 1971, in Houston, ~~Texas~~. The first shows the critic Clement Greenberg standing between Helen Winkler, then a curatorial assistant to ~~the~~ art patrons Dominique and John de Menil, and the painter Peter Bradley (Fig. 5.1). In the second, Greenberg is pictured with Winkler, Bradley, and Kenneth Noland (Fig. 5.2). Residents of Manhattan at the time, Bradley, Greenberg, and Noland were in Houston to install *The DeLuxe Show*, which Bradley curated at John de Menil's invitation. *The DeLuxe Show* presented a group of modernist paintings and sculptures in a converted movie theatre located in what people sometimes call the black part of town. The first racially integrated exhibition of modern art in the United States of its scale, the exhibition was, above all else, a social experiment undertaken in the belief that the best colour painting of the moment had important work to do in a southern black ghetto.

Designer, please take in Fig. 5.1 and Fig. 5.2 near here.

Colour painting is a loosely arranged formalism that accommodated many painters' fervent exploration of hue, depth, density, texture, shape, and the capacity of colour relations to mutually inform pictorial structure. Greenberg was a cautious commentator. However, the grinning figure in the cowboy hat at the centre of the first photograph suggests that he really got into the spirit of things.¹ The hat brings a welcome displacement of the old familiar Greenberg. It locates him in a foreign situation: somehow we know this ~~isn't~~ ~~is not~~ New York. One *wonders* what Greenberg is up to. The West that the Stetson evokes is more literal, differently mythical than the one Greenberg's criticism annexed as a stage for modernist triumphs. In a way it echoes a sentiment buried deep ~~within in~~ Greenberg's singular criticism: his tremendous capacity for surprises.

Commented [BN126]: 'Within' is often used incorrectly these days; in most instances 'in' or 'inside' is correct.

Reflecting on this image of Greenberg triggered in me a reluctant acknowledgment that I belonged to a near-systemic culture of what Eve Sedgwick called paranoid reading and characterised as ‘a distinctly rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise.’² The reader will recognise in paranoid reading a common disciplinary attitude towards Greenberg, one that places the critic off limits and often disparages modernism as a whole. But without renouncing this knowingness, one is powerless to understand the enterprise that these photographs record. Surprise also triggered my intransigent fascination with that hat, and especially the event of its exchange.

The second photo finds the Stetson on the head of Peter Bradley, a Yale-trained colour painter who from 1965 to 1971, following Jules Olitski’s lead, worked almost exclusively with a spray gun from 1965 to 1971. Greenberg and Bradley were familiar with each other through Perls Galleries, where the painter worked as associate director. Bradley enjoyed none of the commercial success of the artists popularly identified with Greenberg at the time, artists such as his friend and neighbour Kenneth Noland, or Olitski. Bradley was in it for the love of painting, an ambition Greenberg supported in him and in many other artists scantily represented in the literature on modernist practices.³ Lively advocacy was crucial for tastemakers and career artists alike: modernism was embattled, and its cultural project remained unfulfilled. However confident they were in their idiom’s rightness and power, those with modernist proclivities were quickly becoming (art) history. They were united in being marginalised, and this amidst widespread interest in conceptual art, which then had little need for painting, sculpture, or galleries designed to flatter it. Indeed, a new generation of artists increasingly saw these as fetishes at best, and obstructions at worst.⁴

On some level, *The DeLuxe Show* must have looked to Greenberg like a way to stay in the game. But there was a great deal more to the project —, for everyone involved. The surviving principal figures recall neither who gave the hat to whom nor any particulars about its exchange, but its movement captures the animating spirit of the exhibition project: a casual statement of affinity between the races, expressed through a shared commitment to the ongoing continuing relevance of abstract art, cheerfully staged in a site (the black urban ghetto) that we might otherwise write off as encapsulating the pitched racial crisis in which ‘post-civil rights America’ then found

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itself. Circumstances made modernism available to cultural politics in ways it had not been in a long while.

But perhaps we ought not to be so surprised.

Together, the photographs—specifically, the warmly experimental scene they document—remind us that two main endorsements of the more notorious elements of Greenberg’s practice were a protracted empathy with certain efforts to *do things with abstract art*, and an unfathomably deep concern for the conditions that permit modernism to thrive or to fail. For Greenberg, criticism was a forum not merely for the display of analytic acumen and erudition, but for the public exercise of thought about the conditions of art’s necessity.⁵ His broad project teaches us to consider what things are in themselves: where they come from,⁶ how they help us to construe the discrete ambitions they subtly realise, and how our experience of them might first frustrate but then expand our conceptions of the possible.⁷ A rarely noted dialectical relationship between artistic practice and critical judgement discloses the empathic core of Greenberg’s criticism: a work is literally unimaginable apart from efforts to understand it. Criticism at once sheltered and projected one of modernism’s determining fantasies: that through a dedicated practice, the principal parties to art—the maker, the made thing, and its viewer—briefly attained a clarity and intensity that no other kind of experience could offer.

On this Texan horizon, a modernist formation took shape that will be at least as unfamiliar to us as the image of Greenberg in a Stetson. It revealed a politics long buried within the modernism we have come to know largely through counter-modernist art histories. For the first time since the postwar advent of the ‘great age’ of American art, modernists, now on the defensive, were forced to work against the grain.⁸ Their forms had to be explosive, and they even got a little queer.

The many caricatures of ‘high modernism’ thrust upon generations of students by its most ardent critics permit us to think of it only as a self-indulgent elitism epitomised by Greenberg, his followers (few of whom followed him very far), and their famously closed canons.⁹

In 1971, though, one saw fleetingly resuscitated that dimension of modernism that had always been primarily a social experiment. In two exhibition projects, advocates of modernist art directly engaged-took part in the politics of representation—

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the same politics credited in later histories with displacing modernist strategies at the end of the 1960s.

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In these two 1971 exhibitions, modernism briefly took up residence at the burning heart of black cultural politics. *The DeLuxe Show* is one (Figs 5.3 and 5.4). The other (whose run fell four months prior), *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, was staged in New York, at the Whitney Museum.

The impresarios of the shows projected a palpable optimism about the black modernist's political capacity: Robert M. Doty at the Whitney Museum thematised it in *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, and Peter Bradley set up *DeLuxe* in a black ghetto, certain that the colour work in the art would leave its mark on the local children to whom he offered the show.

Contemporary Black Artists in America was a reply to vociferous demands for art-world recognition of black Americans' dense culture. In the midst of widespread institutional critique, black activists sought to overhaul the museum in ways that reflected the black cultural revolution sweeping the nation: it was thought that a show shot through with legible signs of difference, thereby reflecting change, would make the Whitney a truly representative museum of American art.

But instead the Whitney's curator, Robert M. 'Mac' Doty, created an exhibition that prioritised abstraction.¹⁰ Here modernism was a language of equality—a way partly to get the conversation back to the subject of art, but also to make the point that painting itself cannot practise **racial** discrimination. The Whitney's exhibition should have sparked debate about what successful activism would mean. Instead it prompted vigorous invective against both abstraction and the larger issue of robust interracial sociality, which the au courant language of Black Power vigorously opposed but *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exemplified.

Doty understood that a widening corps of black artists **committed-dedicated** to abstraction were demanding to be evaluated on aesthetic terms that **typically fell outside** narrow debates about representation **typically did not engage**. These individuals—among them Alvin Loving, whose massive geometric construction *WYN ... time trip-I* (1971) adorned the exhibition's title wall (Fig. 5.5), and Raymond Saunders, a painter whose cheerful, enigmatic *Marie's bill* (1970) introduces Doty's catalogue essay—

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complicated the picture of black politics in ways that leading artists and critics (both black and non-black) rarely hesitated to condemn. A commitment to modernism did more than simply escape the representationalist, collectivist black-ideological norm. Through their modernist work on canvas, in plastic, and on the cultural field more generally, these artists opened a field of differentiation *within* a cultural territory otherwise captured by the political formalisms of 'blackness'. About racialist issues, however, these particular artists had remarkably little to say; by any conventional political standard their verbal statements are slim, literally and rhetorically. Working largely without polemic against a relentlessly expressive formation,¹¹ they occupied a paradoxical situation.

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What distinguished Bradley and Doty from other modernists of the time were their insights that *exhibition* could serve as a platform from which to denounce the vogue for segregated art exhibitions and other isolationist cultural forms. They shared with a number of artists a conviction that modernism brought its serious practitioners a broader cultural base and a sympathetic community comprising blacks and non-blacks alike. These artists did not withdraw from racially mixed relations, despite their difficulty. Nor did they allow the all-encompassing grasp of racialist rhetoric to drive them from public discourse. Instead these agents chose to point their language away from that which conventional politics would present. Interrupting the circulation of replicable meaning, they reconfigured race's discursive public in the process. We can think of their art-related statements and topics of conversation as alternative practices of dissent, which accompanied and maybe stemmed from abstract art practices.

Action against racism has never taken only one form. Arguments about redress constitute a politics *in* themselves, and in 1971 one such argument had abstract art as its primary vehicle. To appreciate the politicality of colour painting at the time, one must first recognise that the dominant criterion of political art—explicit coding—diminishes object-sense in favour of reading *for* 'relevance', as though objects ~~can't~~ ~~cannot~~ be relevant to anything that really matters. For within the contemporary constrictions of black art ~~shows exhibitions~~, the presence of a colour painter would be seen to mitigate any curatorial ambition to exhibit blackness.

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But there is a way to think of Black Art as something greater than a set of attitudes and motifs thrust by pervasive structures of racism into the disciplinary isolation it shares with its master discourse, African American art history. First, let us recognise that this isolation was elected and cultivated. While certainly a historical effect of exclusion from disciplinary mainstreams added by prejudice and apathy, the edifice that Black Art and African American art history co-constitute was elaborated through cultural practices: theory and ideology combined with real apparatuses of authority and power. A frank perspective shows how little yet another history of Black Art can relate about these social experiments with modernism around 1971. Abstraction's role (or lack of one) in African American art history tells how thoroughly the subdiscipline constitutes an ideology of representation.

Discourses such as African American art history need to be examined historically in at least two ways: genealogically, in order to demonstrate their provenance, kinship, and affiliation with other ideas and with social and political institutions; and as practical systems for accumulation (of power, of ideological legitimacy) and displacement (of other ideas and other legitimacies).¹² This isn't is not an easy task: Black Art—and specifically the ideology of representation that underwrites it—enjoys an unchallenged hegemony in the liberal academy, even though its elaboration has often been destructive of the very individuals it would represent to history. What particularly needs to be understood are the costs that African American art history has exacted from non-conforming elements, and its strikingly effectual discriminations between relevant and irrelevant black people. Recent years have seen a number of efforts to restore attention to numerous black modernists.¹³ Yet none of these efforts actually historicise the intervening forty-year silence around these artists, or the fact that that silence is the result of a specific force and specific strategies, many of which still operate through the methods of the recovery agents themselves.

Bringing out the history of these artists and their early advocates, as I do in my book *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*,¹⁴ is part of a larger effort to resist the techniques of exclusion that continue to structure historical studies of difference. *DeLuxe* and *Contemporary Black Artists in America* demonstrate that, in the context of 'black art', modernism responded to the travail and expense of separation imposed by the essentialist vogue and carried forward in subsequent historical, critical, curatorial, and

institutional practice. For these artists, taking up a position ~~with~~in modernism also meant taking some distance from the black community that articulated itself by insistently representational means. As it was framed publicly (and one sees this framing reflected throughout the literature), the resulting schism set the pleading, ‘relevant’ images of a Benny Andrews, say (Fig. 5.6), over and against the deductive structures of Frederick Eversley or Alma Thomas. Modernist affiliations were dangerous: they signified that a so-called art front was, in fact, fragmented and that the black art world was anything but unified. Modernism was a connective space: it answered the need to nurture interracial relations in a situation marked by the forcible separation of things *for the sake of separation itself*. Abstraction answered an existential need for modes of knowledge, coexistence, and culture not separated out from the actuality of mixing, of stepping beyond boundaries—all decidedly more creative activities than drawing boundaries and calling this cultural production. ~~With The~~ results ~~were~~ far more culturally complex than the label *black abstraction* can even begin to suggest.

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That modernism had an integrationist appeal seems to have originated in a peculiar idea of community specific to late-modernist art and its criticism (rather than in some ‘lost’ politics). Bradley and his fellow black modernists belonged to a moment when modernist criticism first took pains to conceptualise artistic consciousness and practice in terms of an artist’s field of references, which it always regarded as *a relational set*. Michael Fried’s critical representation of Morris Louis in 1970 serves as a paradigmatic case:-

Louis’s paintings do more than underline or point to aspects of Pollock’s canvases which otherwise one might not have noticed; there is an important sense in which Louis’s paintings create the aspects in question ... At the same time, the fact that Pollock’s paintings, and not those of some other painter, are the ones which Louis’s paintings invest with meaning in this way testifies to the fecundating power of Pollock’s achievement and makes that investment seem, or be, a revelation of what was, in some sense, already there. The paintings of Noland and Olitski stand in an analogous relation to Louis’s work; and in general the unprecedented depth of relationships of this kind is one of the characteristic, even defining, features of modernist painting.¹⁵

Fried's text ~~doesn't~~ does not merely bring some 'canvases' into a categorical affinity. It discloses a whole field of 'relationships' that bearing a special charge for the modernist. Such relationships may be writable (that is, explicable through critique) only when they occur between paintings. But undeniably they also provide the fixative that binds modernist practitioners themselves in community. *On this scene, painting engenders relations*. Modernism now established its cultural density by bringing individuals together across notable spans of time and historical experience. And for certain black modernists and their advocates, it was precisely this easy relationality that made art an unfussy way of doing integration: working as an artist by definition involved cross-cultural exchange. One of the most compelling things about looking this way at late-modernist activity is that it allows us to see integration—or better, interracialisation—as a central cultural practice in black American life, rather than as a discrete political process that ground to a halt at the ~~sixties'~~ end of the 1960s.

If being-in-modernism brought one into sympathetic company, it was absolutely beside the point to celebrate this fact. Though remarkable by today's standards, the salutary political content of the interracial contact that modernist activity facilitated was irrelevant to the artists and curators involved; it had too little to do with making art (or was seen as such). For them, contact was simply part of getting on with one's work. What mattered was inhabiting a small and changing group of practitioners to whose activities one's own responded and from whom one awaited a response. The fragile continuity that modernism bestowed on the artists came with a welcome foregrounding of *work* and, crucially, a salutary devalourisation of difference.¹⁶

Artists such as Bradley and Thomas did not use doctrine or physical actions to exploit their intimacy with non-black modernists. But they enacted and advanced integration by working rigorously within the modernist paradigm, which they found capacious.¹⁷ This ~~isn't~~ is not a form of Johnny-come-lately-ism; rather, these practitioners worked in an ardently optimistic way, one all the more compelling because they did not need to pat themselves on the back for the radicalism of their gestures. What distinguishes them is their cultural deviance. What makes them important is the opening in historical thought this deviance invites us to enter.

For example, to say that Bradley's art is crucially *about* what Jules Olitski made possible for him is simply to indicate that Bradley's project is unthinkable apart from

that relation. And to point up the historical value that can be gained from inventorying such relations, like recognizing the difference between Louis and Pollock's relation and Bradley and Olitski's—the difference being that for a black modernist the possibility of recognition inside the realm of art was far greater than it was in the general culture. It is also partly a response to a normative reluctance to give such relations their due in our accounts of black modernists and US culture formation more generally. Even as it lost its mainstream allure, modernism was a disjunctive event in this setting. For the first time, a critical mass of black artists arose to challenge the laws of fidelity governing their lot, and the art-historical effects of this reckoning are potentially transformative.

The depth of Olitski's meaning for Bradley, which I explore in depth elsewhere,¹⁸ is but a singular case of a problem that ~~just has no~~ yet been thought through adequately. It ~~hasn't has not~~ been thought through precisely because the conclusions to be drawn from that depth, the conceptual places to which that relationship delivers the investigator, terrifically complicate one's project, intensify one's work, and muddle one's itinerary. Right there on the scene of analysis, we confront a disagreeable part of our own nature on ~~realizing-realising~~ that the political affiliations we signal and solidify through our work depend on closures that interpretation only reinforces—and that these closures unmask some of our most destructive impulses. But one is also positioned to appreciate how, for people like Bradley, modernism served as a broadly multicultural formation, a fragile community of equals where lines of affiliation differed significantly from public life. In modernist cultural space, it is as if 'things are not so clear as they once seemed, but the complexity is splendid; perhaps that is freedom, too,' as James Farmer wrote in a related context in 1965.¹⁹

But few find the complexity so splendid. Art-historical texts that ~~address-discuss~~ black modernists tend ~~toward-to have~~ a singular determination to reconcile them with the very ideology ~~that~~ their practices escaped.²⁰ These texts proceed as though the black modernist's² basic asymmetry with dominant models of black political subjectivity was either a problem inviting a solution or a portal to a whole class of questions one is told it is not in one's interest to pursue.²¹

In the history of African American art history, for example, representation has been so imposing that nothing can displace it,²² least of all one person making sculptures

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or paintings. The priority given to representation and never substantially questioned practically demotes any experience that finds expression in non-representational form. According to the prevailing cultural logic, the black modernist perverts black nature. She effectively enlists *herself* in the well-circulated ledger of object lessons about how to get one's blackness wrong. One ~~doesn't~~ does not ask: What in our collective experience made the privileging of representation necessary? How do changes to that experience affect the terms of cultural production? What kind of agency desires this other kind of idiom: non-objective or abstract? As if it were natural to dismiss such questions. Proving the contrary in 1971, Frank Bowling aptly named the object of renunciation: 'curiosity,²³ plain and simple.²³ Bowling's formulation evokes the peripatetic cultural itineraries adopted by the likes of him or Alma Thomas, who also denounced anyone who would presume to tell an artist where to find her sources or how to use them.

The discourse that annexes black modernists to the project of representation epitomises the *sacrifice* of individual subjectivity. This was needed to establish the impressive coherence and transdisciplinary authority of unanimist black studies. The reign of its imperatives has~~ve~~ long caused crucial exceptions—such as ruggedly individualist art statements—to vanish from view.

The conceptual coherency secured for Black Art during the later 1960s and into the 1970s depended to a large degree on a parallel effort to banish black modernists from the cultural landscape. The period is often identified with the dematerialisation of art—meaning, among other things, the polemical reconceptualisation of art-making as cultural production, that ostensibly more engaged type of practice that 'politicised' the art world at this time. As Charles Harrison has written, 'The prospect of intellectual progress seemed around 1970 to depend not upon the *continuation* of Modernist self-criticism, but rather upon the critique of modernism itself.'²⁴ With the art world thus annexed to the larger scene of social protest, black cultural workers (visual artists, playwrights, poets, critics, and variously credentialled delegate-spokespeople) enjoyed unprecedented leverage in their dealings with mainstream cultural institutions. The story is well known: through black initiatives centered on securing institutional representation, from around 1968 to 1972 black cultural workers ~~they~~ largely succeeded in intervening in the operations, makeup, and missions of cultural centres and museums.

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Without their efforts it would be considerably more difficult today to appreciate the impressive social, political, and cultural attainments of women and black Americans. Of primary interest to me here is how the stresses adopted in this activism also ensured that further experiments with modernism would not count among them.

That the character of art changed in the early 1970s was highly congenial to racialists' aims. Devaluing the individual creative agent provided an ambience that powered the backlash against rogue abstractionists in the black community. One also saw galleries and museums deploying non-traditional media such as film and video, television, and dance. As new artistic priorities surfaced, modernist priorities diminished: it quickly became an article of faith that abstraction emblematised the toxic amalgamation of state and cultural power.²⁵ This bolstered racialists' already incessant claims that black modernists were at best dangerously backward, and at worst quislings. But it was specifically against such foreclosures that Bradley and Doty managed to direct whatever disruptive force remained to modernist art in 1971. If we neglect their experiments, we are left with a bland narrative of stubborn apoliticality and progressive decline—the narrative that dominates our received view of the trajectory of modernism today.²⁶ Perpetuating a simplistic picture of modernist culture as a backwater persisting in happy alienation from the work of intensive counter-cultural action, this narrative also reinforces an easy triumphalism about certain aftermaths of modernism's aftermaths. But a history that fails to include such attempts as Doty's and Bradley's to put modernism to use—that fails to wonder what kinds of fantasies these experiments involved—is a partial one indeed.

In the context of the period's black liberation struggles, modernism makes a difference that troubles difference: it helpfully weakens the strongest politics of difference, slows its formations, and reveals one way in which such a politics has to overcome individuals, and with them art—their attempts to create—in order to achieve itself as ideology.

In fact, modernism opens an interval of reflection that disrupts and expands our purview of 'black culture' precisely by breaking it up, making it harder to survey in general terms.²⁷ The difference that abstraction introduces is fundamentally one of mood. It is not only that the expressive intensity of black modernists lacks the familiar timbres of militancy. Their statements are mainly unpolemical, and their projects

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impossible to reconcile with an antagonistic view of social relations. These artists viewed their situation with a notable optimism. It was as artists first that black modernists sought the public's regard and risked its opprobrium. (Tom Lloyd represents a notable and instructive exception.) Quite unlike, say, Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, and Robert Morris, the artists included in *The DeLuxe Show* and *Contemporary Black Artists in America* exhibited little of the 'anxiety about elitism' shared by many artists on the Left.²⁸ They rarely bothered to assign discrete social value to their work or inscribe it within the fermenting cultural struggle. The proof of their commitment was in the work, but their output bore no superficial indicators of its relevance to the cause of racial advancement. Probably it was struggle enough to be black and do modernism. The deviance of these individuals originates in their enthusiastic avowals of a (seemingly) 'raceless' idiom, with no particular point other than to satisfy the urge for abstraction, alongside extraordinarily forceful, coordinated, and effective attempts to instantiate blackness as a homogenous public space. Bowling, writing in 1971, was thinking about racialists' suppression of modernism when he cited 'the pressured and sustained denial of the natural curiosity of blacks born in the new world. Since time immemorial, blacks have had to content themselves with the "sneaky" approach.'²⁹ But one might suggest that modernism itself had already primed artists like Bradley for failure. Stanley Cavell described the modernists' aesthetic claim as 'a compulsion to share a pleasure' that is inseparable from the anxiety that the claim stands to be rebuked.³⁰ In these very different formulations by Bowling and Cavell, the stress falls on compulsion rather than on fear of rejection. For artists like Bradley, continuing to do the work of art mattered more than verbally articulating the claims that art might bolster. Yet that work can still be seen as a repository of its maker's *hope* that her output will be apprehended, kept in close company for a time—that the pleasure indeed will be shared. On this scene, optimism moved too fast-quickly to accommodate the painstaking operations of racial discrimination.

Neither abstraction nor high modernism allows us to understand what happened when these artists and curators literally made a show of modernism, suspending abstraction in the midst of black political culture. Here one cannot think of abstraction apart-separately from the aggressive efforts to proscribe it. Bradley, Doty, et al. took the reality that the dominant cultural politics wanted to establish, and opened it to the

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dimension of the individual, her cultural peripateticism, and the mobile interest it signalled. Taking its stand against the unanimist position, mobile interest calls attention to cultural activity taking place at the level of the agent, through her specific and *always possibly non-conforming* efforts to establish social relations.

This setting compelled Peter Bradley during *The DeLuxe Show* to speak of a thoroughly abstract art in terms of realism: ‘The artists in this exhibition depict in their works the urge for complete exploration- ... This art should be like the new world we’re all striving toward, free of obstructions.’³¹ For all these artists, the conceptual and cultural mobility of which art spoke—and only the more eloquently when it *failed* to ‘represent’—was utterly crucial for the race’s advancement: ‘You can be a very fine artist and I think you’ll be contributing.’

The complex multivalence of colour in this setting forbids our resolving in advance the impasse between colour’s uses—on the one side its deployment by racialists determined to shore up the impasse, and on the other by artists who could ~~not~~ stop breaking it down. The important thing is to think this complex simultaneity through carefully. If modernism operated in the black scene as a deterrent to cultural closure, its involvement with colour offers a touchstone for understanding how the materiality of abstract art perhaps ~~enhanced-strengthened~~ these effects.

Like the ‘black’ in *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, the location of *The DeLuxe Show* intensified the resistant force of colour painting by localizing it. Its Fifth Ward siting gave the art unexpected significance. In fact, were it not for the frames around these exhibitions (uplifting, figure-driven projects and the clamour for ‘representation’ at the Whitney; the black ghetto in Houston), it might not even be possible to think of their ~~impacts-repercussions~~ the same way. But these shows took the practitioners’ formal ambition to transgress the structuring limits of colour, and projected it to a public scale. To borrow T. J. Clark’s phrase, modernism had something precise and extended to do:³² here it showed that colour could be pushed beyond the limits of both its formalist functions and the rhetoric of emergent cultural formations, and could re-examine a defining problem of American life—colour and colour relations—in an exhilaratingly open-ended way. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ed Clark, Frederick Eversley, Alma Thomas, and Peter Bradley: these individuals shared a passion for the opening articulations of colour. And why not, given its proven capacity

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Commented [BN142]: ‘impacts’ is another word I avoid, except when used literally. Again, so over-used that it has almost no specific meaning.

for what Greenberg called ‘permanent surprise’? Colour, in this mode, was a consummately accommodating habitat for change.

In his brief but sweeping catalogue essay introducing the Whitney exhibition, as well as in the design of the show, Doty—who saw the black modernist in the fullness of her context—articulated the social-historical shift to which that figure alerts us like a foghorn. The customs and usages that had generally been accepted in Negro American life had lost their immediate authority.³³ The spectacular backlash against Doty’s exhibition only confirms the force of his insight. In *Contemporary Black Artists in America* black modernists proved to be an unwitting index of intractable new conflicts among black Americans. Even today, the fragmentary quality of the exhibition’s picture of ‘contemporary black America’ induces the kind of conceptual strain that tends, regrettably, to culminate in platitudes. For example, in Ann Gibson’s comments on Alma Thomas, an artist whose work was exhibited in *Contemporary Black Artists in America*, the show is summarily dismissed as proof that ‘the failure to recognise African-American abstractionists was directly linked to White America’s racism.’³⁴ Writings about black modernists continue to ensure that these individuals only bear out the (ideologically crucial) myth that ‘the dimensions and conduct of individuals in [the] black world have been determined by those living in the white world.’³⁵ So often, neither the dialectical relation between these racially polarised worlds nor the rich and specific sociality they co-produce applies.

But by surfacing abstraction in black representational space, *Contemporary Black Artists in America* went beyond exploring the black–white relation. It expressed, structurally through its layout and conceptually through its arguments, a tension between those in black America who would deny an outside and those who ardently engaged it. Doty engineered his installation so that the social totality (represented by either figurative art or ~~figurativizing-figurativising~~ rhetoric) never gained priority over the particular and individual.³⁶

What Doty did for black modernist sensibility, *DeLuxe* did for autonomous personhood. If *Contemporary Black Artists in America* made room for a different kind of idiom from that of representation, *The DeLuxe Show* sought to cultivate that agency. It was abstract work’s ‘openness’ and ‘freedom’ that Bradley chose to showcase. *DeLuxe* challenged one of the strongest conventions of black cultural discourse, which

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held that blacks ~~aren't~~ are not capable of abstraction—though we are supremely capable of disavowing it as ‘the white man’s art.’³⁷ But to speak of abstraction in this way is to forgo the question of art. Instead it makes the art situation disclose for the umpteenth time that subtle forms of white entrapment are everywhere, and that representation is the paradigmatic site for affirming blackness (even in its absence). In averring that children were the ideal audience for *The DeLuxe Show*, Bradley was proposing that they lacked the mechanisms of disavowal that would conjure whiteness from abstraction. Exposing children to modernist work would, he fantasised, prevent their consciousness from being colonised by nationalist pedagogy and its ‘localisms of the mind.’ Black children were capable of abstraction. ‘They haven’t been indoctrinated by ethnic art,’ he said. Specifically, this art’s emphatic openness and the resonance of colour with countless features of daily life would show that the condition of being in the ghetto and experience do not necessarily correlate. The art in the show availed a mode of subjectivity not synchronised with the objective world. To confront abstract art is to confront the world as it exists for another person, as it is refracted by subjectivity itself. Between viewer and viewed there arises an orientation to the other that brings out one’s own contingency.

Designer, please take in Fig. 5.7 near here

Shows like these are funny historical objects. Irrecoverable, they rhyme formally with that world of hopes, affects, and intentions that modernism made available to this coterie of artists. The exhibitions experimented with black cultural politics and with modernist art in ways that skewed both. In a crucial sense they were *creations*, but as specifically public events they also gave relevance to other, related attempts at creation: by breaking with the given state of affairs, they lent form to the hope that modernism appeared to offer, and suggested other shapes that optimism could take. They invited the possibility that abstract painting and sculpture ~~were not~~ were not the only ways to actualise black cultural work without resorting to racial positivism, which is just colour insistence by another name.

By compelling this lost world, which only *might have been*, to function as an object, I want to suggest another direction that black cultural history might have taken or might still take: a way oriented not to restitutions for damage incurred by exclusion and difference but towards specific, even failed, reparative strategies emphasizing

emphasising liveable, creative potentials. What would it mean to historicise interracial sociality apart from violence, pathology, or escapism? I think it will leave us in a vastly better position to do justice to a wealth of cultural practices that become invisible under an optic exclusively trained on suffering and its resistance.³⁸ Considering what ~~didn't~~ did not happen but might have—say, a future for modernism or black cultural politics that looked more like *Contemporary Black Artists in America* and *The DeLuxe Show* than the present does—is already a way to radically adjust one's outlook. In different ways these exhibitions affirm the discomfiting realisation that the normative order opposed by black modernists was not white but black. They support a larger claim that the mutual inscription of black thought with the topic of racism may be less necessary than its practitioners usually assume.³⁹ The exhibitions anticipated a cultural politics that remains to be elaborated.

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¹ Someone in the cohort picked up the hat at Stelzig's, a (now-defunct) western apparel store in Houston to which Helen Winkler frequently took guests of her employers, the de Menils. Helen Fosdick, conversation with the author, June 2011.

² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You', in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, her *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity, Pedagogy*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2003, p. 146.

³ Greenberg's meticulous personal schedule records an acquaintance with Bradley dating from April 1968, when Bradley wrote to the critic to thank him for attending an exhibition of Bradley's work at André Emmerich's gallery, and continuing to at least January 1974, when Greenberg expected to help the painter hang another show, now of Bradley's own pictures. The two appear to have seen each other regularly during the intervening period, either in Greenberg's apartment or in Bradley's studio. Clement Greenberg Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Was a bit unsure here – the first show was of

Bradley's work, so why 'now' for the second show?

⁴ Greenberg had, just months before, given the Bennington Seminars, nine marathon sessions held between ~~6 and 22~~ April ~~6 and April 22~~ and made up of talks and extended question-answer periods with faculty and students of Bennington College and observers. As Charles Harrison points out, these furnished a kind of public apogee to Greenberg's long and influential career as an observer of modern art, and as such they coincided with the widespread interest in the conceptual art movement, perhaps the first global manifestation of an artistic post-modernism, or a consolidation in artistic practice of the increasingly vehement backlash against the felt limitations of modernist institutions. Charles Harrison, 'Introduction: The Judgment of Art', in Clement Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p. xviii.

⁵ In this sense, he presumed to offer up his modernism as a safeguard for the health not just of the cultural but also of the psychological ecologies needed for art to thrive on its own terms, which was to say not as an instrument of the general society.

⁶ In Greenberg's 1971 view, for instance, the tastes of artists themselves [have] kept high art going. Clement Greenberg, 'Night Six, April 15, 1971', in Greenberg, *Homemade Esthetics*, p. 145.

⁷ The lone entry in Greenberg's datebook for ~~3 June~~ 1963, reads: 'Major ingredient of successful art: *permanent surprise*' (emphasis in original). Clement Greenberg Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, emphasis in original.

⁸ I am deeply grateful to Julian Myers for his suggestion, at an early stage of my research, that I conceptualise 1971 as a moment of possibility, rather than failure, for a late-modernist imagination thrown into the shadow of advanced practices that now took a certain theatricality, or inclination toward performance, as a salutary starting point rather than as a condition to be avoided.

⁹ Reflecting on this trend in his sensitive introduction to a posthumous collection of Greenberg's writings, Charles Harrison writes: 'In the journalism of the art world, Greenberg often appears as one who enforced a form of critical doctrine through his power as a maker and breaker of movements and reputations, and through his influence upon acolytes and upon the market. Prevalent as though this image has become, it is difficult to reconcile with the actual published writings, or to support with any but the most selective quotations from them.' Harrison, 'Introduction: The Judgment of Art', in Greenberg,

Homemade Esthetics, p. xiv.

¹⁰ The Whitney employed Doty from 1966 to 1974. Already in December 1969, the black artists he championed most assiduously were a predominantly abstract bunch, including Frank Bowling, Sam Gilliam, Vivian Browne, Mel Edwards, Peter Bradley, Malcolm Bailey, Alvin Loving, William T. Williams, Richard Mayhew, Romare Bearden, Marvin Brown, Richard Hunt, Tom Lloyd, Reginald Gammon, Jack Whitten, and Roland Ayers. This is according to Doty's response to an inquiry by George Nocito (of the University of Delaware's art department) for the names of black artists. Letter, Doty to George Nocito, 1 December 1969, WMAA. [Please spell out – What is WMAA?](#)

¹¹ The chief exceptions here are Frank Bowling, an abstract painter and a subtle and prolific commentator on modernist art, and the painter Raymond Saunders, whose manifesto *Black Is a Colour*, which appeared as a self-published pamphlet in 1967, is a rare and important early tract defending artistic enterprise against the separatism fomenting at the time.

¹² In this characterisation I follow the lead that Edward Said established in 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims', *Social Text*, no. 1, Winter 1979, pp. 7–58.

¹³ Including the likes of Peter Bradley, Frank Bowling, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Ed Clark, Melvin Edwards, Frederick Eversley, Sam Gilliam, Marvin Harden, Felrath Hines, Sue Irons, Senga Nengudi, Tom Lloyd, Alvin Loving, Joe Overstreet, Raymond Saunders, Alvin Smith, Alma Thomas, Stanley Whitney, Jack Whitten, and William T. Williams.

¹⁴ Darby English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

¹⁵ Michael Fried, *Morris Louis*, Abrams, New York, 1970, pp. 213–14, n. 7.

¹⁶ We are obligated, in other words, to regard as a serious historical event the coincidence of the abandonment of integration with the emergence within black representational span of vigorous modernist activities that were met almost immediately with an equally vigorous suppression. Here I adapt Leo Bersani's apt phrase. In *Homos*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995, Bersani writes: 'New reflection on homo-ness could lead us to a salutary devalorizing of difference [emphasis added]—or, more exactly, to a notion of difference not as a trauma to be overcome (a view that, among other things, nourishes antagonistic relations between the sexes), but rather as a nonthreatening supplement to

sameness' (Prologue, in *Homos*, p. 7).—Emphasis added.

¹⁷ For an important account of another set of historical situations where modernism provided a home and individualised nourishment for artists who were also minority subjects—rather than scripting their participation according to prevailing manners—see Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, especially 'Making a Difference to Modernism: An Epilogue', pp. 283–89.

¹⁸ ~~Darby~~ English, *1971: A Year in the Life of Color*, University of Chicago Press, 2016.

¹⁹ James Farmer, *Freedom—When?*, Random House, New York, 1965, p. 197. These words appear near the close of the memoir recounting ~~his~~ Farmer's experience as a co-founder and director of the Congress on Racial Equity (CORE).

²⁰ See especially ~~Thomas McEvelley and Joe Overstreet with Thomas E. Picheioe~~ *Joe Overstreet: (Re)Call and Response*, ed. Thomas McEvelley and Joe Overstreet with Thomas E. Piché, exhibition catalogue, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, 1996; Ann Gibson, 'Strange Fruit: Texture and Text in the Work of Joe Overstreet', *International Review of African-American Art*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1996, pp. 24–31; Geoffrey Jacques, 'Quiet as It's Kept', in ~~David Hammons~~, *Quiet as It's Kept*, ed. David Hammons, exhibition catalogue, Galerie Christine König, Vienna, 2002, pp. ??–??; Dawoud Bey, 'The Ironies of Diversity, or The Disappearing Black Artist', *Artnet*, 8 April 2004, <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/bey/bey4-8-04.asp>; <http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/bey/bey4-8-04.asp>, accessed April 9, 2004; and Kellie Jones, *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980*, ed. Kellie Jones, exhibition catalogue, Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, 2006.

²¹ See Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* ([1963]), Thomas Schroder (ed.), Rodney Livingstone (transl.), Polity, Cambridge, 2000, p. 68. Hereafter *PMP*.

²² For the present purposes, I define representation as the presentation of black-coded themes and imagery, as well as of arguments that would reflexively align such imagery with racial subjects.

²³ Frank Bowling, 'It's Not Enough to Say "Black Is Beautiful"', *ARTnews*, 1 April 1971, p. 83.

²⁴ Harrison, 'Introduction: The Judgment of Art', in *Greenberg, Homemade Aesthetics*, p. xviii. Emphasis

added.

²⁵ In 1971, no less brassy a modernist than Stanley Cavell was shrewd enough to bury his musings about the darlings of post-painterly abstraction—Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Larry Poons—in an ‘Excursus [on] Modernist Painting’ appended to the arguments of his little book on cinema and moviegoing: *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Viking Press, New York, 1971.

²⁶ And it may well deserve some credit for the tendency among many young art historians towards an enthusiastic yet sometimes unreflective avowal of the contemporary as specifically *against* the modern.

²⁷ The phrase ‘interval of reflection’ is Simone Weil’s, but the usage I intend appears in Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance*, Verso, London, 2007, a remarkable study of the ways in which some dissident literatures propose radical alternatives to the dominant pathways of a culture: ‘The man who is the possessor of force,’ Weil writes in her essay on the *Iliad*, ‘seems to walk through a non-resistant element; in the human substance that surrounds him nothing has the power to interpose, between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection.’

²⁸ With Lucy Lippard, these are the principals in ~~Bryan Wilson’s book~~. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2011 (see p. 62).

²⁹ ~~Bowling, ‘It’s Not Enough to Say “Black Is Beautiful”’, *Bowling, It’s Not Enough to Say “Black Is Beautiful”*, p. 83.~~

³⁰ Stanley Cavell, ‘Something Out of the Ordinary’, in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 71, no. 2, (November 1997), pp. 30–31.

³¹ Peter Bradley, quoted in ‘The Deluxe Show: Art Goes to the People’, in *Southwest Art Gallery Magazine*, September 1971, p. 14. The bulk of this article’s text reproduces press releases used to promote the exhibition to local, regional, and national media. DeLuxe Show archive, Menil Archives, Menil Collection, Houston.

³² See T. J. Clark, ‘Clement Greenberg’s Theory of Art’, in Francis Frascina (ed.), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, Francis Frascina (ed.), Routledge, New York, 1985, p. 83.

³³ An emergent and embattled modernist element among black cultural workers demonstrated that the moral norms concretised in the ideology of Negro, and later Black, Art were no longer self-evident and unquestioned in the life of the community. See Adorno, *PMP*, p. 16.

³⁴ Ann Gibson, quoted in Jonathan P. Binstock, 'Apolitical Art in a Political World: Alma Thomas in the Late 60s and Early 70s', in *Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, ed. Sachi Yanari, exhibition catalogue, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana, Pomegranate, San Francisco, 1998, p. 65.

³⁵ George A. Davis and O. Fred Donaldson, *Blacks in the United States: A Geographic Perspective*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1975, p. 6.

³⁶ In this way Doty's show was conceptually complementary to Henri Ghent's *Eight Afro-American Artists*, an exhibition presented by its black organiser as a kind of corrective to Doty's exposition. Ghent's exhibition ran from 12 June to 5 September, 1971, and presented works of Romare Bearden, Frederick Eversley, Marvin Harden, Wilbur Haynie, Sue Irons, Alvin Smith, Bob Thompson, and Ruth Tunstall. At the time of the exhibition Ghent held the position of director of the Community Gallery of the Brooklyn Museum, but Doty also knew him both as an associate of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, at whose demand the Whitney's exhibition was initially planned, and as a former consultant to Doty's own office at the Whitney, as well as that of John I. H. Baur, then the museum's director.

³⁷ Vivian Ayers, quoted in D. J. Hobdy, 'DeLuxe Art Show in Ghetto Met with Mixture of Reactions', *Houston Chronicle*, 1 October, 1971, unpaginated p.

³⁸ See Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading', p. 147.

³⁹ Part of this sentence interpolates *ibid.*, p. 146.

6

Gerhard Richter: Abstraction after Titian, circa 1973

Graham Bader

In 1973, shortly after his presentation of the monumental *48-portraits* in the German Pavilion of the 1972 Venice Biennale, Gerhard Richter began to concentrate on abstract painting. Though he had haltingly explored abstract motifs for years, 1973 was the first year in which abstraction dominated—indeed, almost entirely ~~dominated~~~~constituted~~—his practice. As his catalogue raisonné tells it, Richter made the following paintings that year: five colour-chart abstractions; forty-two grey monochromes; 117 quasi-gestural *Red-blue-yellow* canvases; three large panels—*Red*, *Yellow*, and *Blue*—made under commission for the new BMW headquarters in Munich; two soon-destroyed *Fictions* (which, given the lack of extant reproductions, we can assume resemble the atmospheric abstractions made under the same name just a few years later); and—to round out a prolific year—five variations on the *Annunciation after Titian*.¹

One of these projects is not like the others, and it is easy enough to spot which one. Richter's five *Annunciation* canvases (Figs. 6.1 a–e), based on a 1535 composition by Titian that he had encountered in Venice while preparing his Biennale show, were not only his sole figurative paintings of 1973—at five out of 174 works, not even 3 per cent% of his total painterly production that year—but comprise, still today, five of the only seven canvases he has ever made directly after a specific work of art, and his only works to feature explicitly religious iconography.² Far from marking the series as an incongruous outlier, however, these numbers betray the singular role that Richter's Titian variations played in both his early-1970s production and the overall trajectory of his career—for which, this essay will argue, the five-panel sequence functioned as a crucial hinge.

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Most essentially, the 1973 series opened new channels for Richter to pursue his long-standing interrogation of contemporary painting's potential, and seeming

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incapacity, as a vehicle of belief. For if the artist understood Titian's work to present a fundamentally inaccessible model of painting's relationship to contemporary structures of cultural and spiritual meaning, the 1535 canvas sparked Richter's realisation that his most effectual means to confront this incapacity was, precisely, to embrace it: ~~to mine~~ ~~use~~ the terms and stakes of the gulf that stood between him and the Venetian master as a primary ~~engine-of-source~~ for his work. It was just this project that Richter came to pursue over the course of 1973 and the immediately subsequent years. In response to Titian's richly handled and culturally resonant depiction of the Annunciation's monumental scene, Richter turned almost immediately to an exploration of radically reductive and adamantly non-monumental abstraction, above all the dialectically entwined non-compositional programs of the *Greys*, ~~the~~ *Red-blue-yellow* canvases, and ~~the~~ *Colour charts*. This process resulted in his development of a newly formulated abstract mode that would, by mid-decade, become a primary, and sustained, engine of his practice. ~~In T~~ the following ~~pages I pages seek to~~ examine this sequence of moves, and ~~probe the~~ stakes and terms that drove it—and in ~~so doing-se~~, ~~seek~~ to better understand Richter's pursuit of abstraction after Titian, circa 1973.

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Commented [BN147]: 'probe the stake' is a mixed metaphor. 'Examine' can cover both clauses, I think.

↳Owning Titian

The story of how Richter came to paint the *Annunciations* is a familiar one. While in Venice to prepare his installation for the 1972 Biennale—where his *48 portraits* held pride of place in the main hall of the German Pavilion—he stopped by the Scuola ~~Grande di~~ San Rocco, the ~~16th~~ ~~sixteenth~~-century confraternity known for its monumental Tintoretto painting cycles, to take a look.³ It was not the Tintoretts, however, that remained with Richter, but the Scuola's far smaller *Annunciation* by Titian (Fig. 6.2), which was displayed at the confraternity in the building's secondary ~~Sala~~ ~~albergo~~ ~~dell'~~ *Albergo*. Indeed, Titian's composition remained with the artist ~~quite~~ literally: Richter—filled with a desire, he later noted, 'to own such a beautiful Titian'—bought a gift-shop postcard of the Renaissance master's 1535 canvas to take ~~back~~ home with him, with the express purpose of making his own set of canvases after the Venetian's earlier scene.⁴

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But ~~of course~~, as Richter's interviewer Gisliind Nabakowski promptly noted in their 1974 conversation about the episode, Richter was thus making a series of works not after Titian but after a cheap reproduction of the earlier master's work. Not to worry, the artist responded. 'It is indeed possible,' he commented to Nabakowski with characteristic dryness, 'to reproduce a painting from a postcard that is almost as beautiful as the original. Those few little details that would have been different really don't matter—but that's another issue.'⁵ This response is Richter at his most slyly disingenuous. For the 'other issue' he notes is, of course, the *whole* issue: the fact that Richter's possibility of 'owning' Titian—which is to say, if we read his words with their full resonance, of being able to possess something of the earlier master's motivations and means, his rootedness in a grand painterly tradition in which aesthetic form and spiritual and cultural meaning appeared to be seamlessly fused—was reduced to emulating the mass-produced forms of a tawdry postcard.

Richter's subsequent mimicking of Titian's image in his 1973 series took the form of copying a copy, and hence of transmuting the absolute singularity of the Annunciation, and of Titian's representation of it, into a mere second-degree reproduction. Richter was well aware of these facts in discussing his *Annunciations* with NababowskiNabakowski. And he also fully recognised that his desired 'possession' of the Venetian's work was in fact part of an effort reaching far beyond his single series' emulative program. For Richter's preceding body of work—from his early GDR murals and explorations of 1960's West German mass culture to his romantically tinged late-19-60s landscapes and haltingly formed abstractions—comprised an extended probing of images and their motivating belief structures, from communist ideology to capitalist propaganda, utopian romanticism to prosaic materialism.⁶ And in all cases, as will be examined below, this probing was dialectically shot through with both deep desire and resolute scepticism *vis-à-vis* the structures and habits thus explored.

Richter's recognition of this dialectic is key to the *Annunciations*' significance ~~with~~in his oeuvre. The series' entwining of grandeur and tawdriness—its attempt to duplicate an undisputed masterpiece that encapsulates the belief system of an era, but only through the mediating form of a postcard reproduction—crystallises a primary through-line in his practice to that point, and betrays Richter's understanding that his only means to even feign such 'possession' of Titian's image, and of the model of art it

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encapsulated, was to dialectically negate it: to transform the work ~~;~~ (to borrow a formulation from Theodor W. Adorno ~~;~~ into a demonstration of art's 'inner-aesthetic capitulation...to that which stands heterogeneously opposed to it'.⁷ That is to say: to emulate Titian, Richter had to make the actual chasm that separated their two practices, just like that which distinguished a grand masterpiece from its postcard reproduction, into the essential substance of his art. This chasm is precisely the 'other issue' that the artist skirts in his conversation with Naba ~~k~~bowski cited above.

In 1973—fresh from his Biennale appearance, having been appointed to the Düsseldorf Academy and recognised with his first museum retrospective just two years ~~prior~~earlier, and having recently received his commission for the massive corporate undertaking of the BMW panels—Richter's thinking about the aesthetic and spiritual efficacy of painting must have been particularly acute. What, he would have been drawn to ask, ~~was~~were the task and possibility of painting beyond such professional triumph, nationalist display, and corporate celebration? As he wrote in a much-cited note of that same year:

“One must believe in what one is doing, be deeply personally engaged, to make paintings. Once so obsessed, the painter goes so far as to believe he can change humanity through painting. But if this passion is lost, there's nothing left to do ... for in the end, painting is complete idiocy.”⁸

Richter, by the time of this statement, had spent nearly half a decade investigating his own beliefs and obsessions through a radically diverse set of painterly projects. As Armin Zweite summarises ~~;~~:

*“from 1969 to 1971/72 everything is simultaneously possible: paintings after photos, streaks in colour and grey, in-paintings [*Vermalungen*], grey pictures, Mediterranean landscapes, window and shadow pictures, *Jungle* pictures, city- and seascapes, cloud studies, the *Details*, and finally the *48-Portraits* of 1971/72.”⁹*

Within Among this diversity, essential strands are evident. Richter's figurative compositions from these years, with only a few exceptions, work to probe the terms of painting's deepest history and aims: the medium's age-old rootedness in the structural

models of the window and the shadow (the aptly named *Windows* and *Shadows*); its potential as a vehicle of redemptive beauty (the sea- and landscapes and cloud studies); and its ability to represent, or even make monumental, canons of cultural authority and accomplishment (the *48 portraits*).¹⁰ These figurative efforts were entwined with, and occasionally provided the material ground for, the artist's concomitant exploration of ambivalently mundane but historically suggestive abstract strategies: on the one hand, his probing of the legacy of geometric abstraction through emulated industrial colour charts and stylised representations of corrugated iron and tubes; on the other, his mimicking of abstract gesture in the *Details*—images built from petrified, photographically based renderings of details from other works—and in the tangled webs of meandering, seemingly aimless line that comprise his *Vermalungen*, or 'In-paintings'. These last works most closely resemble kindergarten finger-painting, an observation supported by Richter's later connection of them to childhood memories of playfully smearing the greasy residue on his empty dinner plate.

Such finger play, however aimless its form, remained loaded with imaginative aspiration. As Richter noted of his childhood plates, they came to be filled with 'slopes and curves that would constantly cut over each other to create fantastic volumetric formations, changing with the light and open to endless further manipulation'.¹¹ And so too the *In-paintings* of 1971–72: made over a series of early studies from the *48-portraits*, or with materials remaining from his concomitant landscapes, or on fresh canvases ~~utilizing~~ using the simple but all-encompassing chromatic trio of red-blue-yellow (whose utopian-minded connotations across the history of modernist abstraction were surely not far from Richter's mind), these paintings are at once utterly prosaic, adamantly authorless and pointless, and redolent with both the suppressed ambition of their associated works and traditions and the spatial, chromatic, and material indeterminacy that had so captivated the artist, decades before, at his childhood dinner table.

Richter's largest 1972 *In-paintings* were made by working the already-laid marks of his *48 portraits* studies, thus positioning them ~~with~~ in his wide-ranging late-19⁵⁰s/early-19⁷⁰s exploration of the grey monochrome. No other abstract format so consumed the artist across these years: following a handful of two- and three-element grey colour-chart paintings in 1966, Richter ~~followed~~ ~~with~~ made around a dozen

diversely worked and occasionally quasi-figurative monochromes ~~between-in~~ 1967–1969 before, in 1970, embracing the colour in itself as a primary focus of his practice.¹² ~~Fully One~~ a quarter of Richter's 1970 canvases are *Greys*, while another third, portraying the chromatically varied luminescence of rainbows and sunsets, appear to probe such material as a means to explore only more intensely the *absence* of colour in his other images. If the grey monochrome then waned in his pictorial output over 1971 and 1972, it returned with unprecedented force in 1973. That year he made—along with his Titian variations—nearly four dozen *Greys*, all newly adamant in their non-compositional drive, and ~~he~~ continued to produce between twelve and twenty-five such paintings annually through ~~to~~ 1976.

This intensified and expanded commitment to the *Greys* was significant. The paintings became a primary engine of Richter's work in 1973 in a fundamentally new way, fuelled by not just a deepening of interest but a categorical re-evaluation. Not only did he produce far more *Greys* (forty-two, or nearly a quarter of his production, a dramatic increase from any previous year) and do so in a fundamentally more abstemious fashion (his post-1973 paintings, as will be discussed below, push the format's reductive austerity to its limit), but he subsequently worked out from these works to initiate a multi-pronged pursuit of non-compositional abstraction as itself the *sole focus* of his production. Crucial for this shift, in 1973, was the one exception to it: his series of variations after Titian.¹³ Let us now consider the terms of this series and of the story of the Annunciation it portrays, with the goal of demonstrating their specific import for Richter's thinking about both the *Greys* and the broader field of abstract work ~~that~~ his *Variations* helped renew.

~~#~~ Figuring a miracle

What, precisely, *is* the Annunciation? In simple terms, it is the tale of the Angel Gabriel's visit to the Virgin Mary, in Nazareth, to announce that she will conceive the son of God, named Jesus. The Virgin consents and the angel departs, and so the story ends. But really, so the tale only gets going: for Gabriel's exchange with Mary marks (effects? coincides with? constitutes?—the appropriate verb is wholly unclear) Christ's incarnation, and thus contains ~~within itself~~ the seeds of the world's redemption. 'The *story* of the Annunciation,' as Georges Didi-Huberman eloquently writes:

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is therefore not its *real*: what is really occurring, what turns everything upside down—laws of nature, the course of time, the salvation of human beings—only obliquely passes through the narrative, the exchange of words, like a light of absolute otherness. In an instant, the instant of a word, the Word of God is made flesh, the body of Christ is formed entirely and takes on life, is already sanctified, endowed with free will, merit, and the blessed vision.²¹⁴

The substance of the Annunciation, as Didi-Huberman suggests, thus exceeds any attempt to narrativise it. It is, fundamentally, a *mystery*. Note, in this respect, the specific choices Richter made in formulating his own series of works on the theme. First, he chose as his basis not the much larger Annunciation by Tintoretto in the Scuola Grande di San Rocca's Sala Capitolare—which reaches to nearly ~~twenty-feet~~six metres on a side—but Titian's far smaller canvas, presented on an easel in the Scuola's upstairs Sala dell'Albergo, where it stands overwhelmed by Tintoretto's surrounding compositions. Second, he decided to move from Titian's single image to a five-canvas series, ~~utilizing~~using two distinct canvas sizes. And third, he chose to structure his series as a push-and-pull transformation of Titian's symbolically laden representation into a gesturally rendered abstract scene. Indeed, abstraction itself, in relation to both the specific figurative program of the Annunciation and the history of figurative painting more generally, appears to have been at the centre of Richter's thinking as he made his series—as a form of answer to the question of how meaning, in particular the kind of world-defining meaning encapsulated in Mary's encounter with Gabriel and as represented by Titian in 1535, could be realised ~~within~~through the practice of painting circa 1973. As the artist commented to Nabakowski on the appeal of Titian's earlier scene:

there's something about this painting that actively affects people, something in its essence. A dimension that, of course, lies beyond the mere choice of forms and colours, something that pertains to every detail ... Perhaps I wanted to solve this riddle by painting, or by copying through painting.²¹⁵

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Such questioning must have been particularly pressing for Richter, given the context of his encounter with Titian's image. Visiting the Scuola *Grande di San Rocco* while in the process of installing his own monumental cycle of *48-portraits* at the 1972 Biennale, Richter would have recognised the latter project as a pale shadow of the Scuola's elaborately staged melding of painting and architecture, its concretisation of broad religious significance in the most specific of aesthetic forms. As Benjamin Buchloh has cogently argued, Richter's Venice installation—installed in the fraught German Pavilion on Venice's Biennale grounds—functioned to concretise precisely the *failure* of any modern equivalent to such goals:

barely established ... in a complicated process of contradictory operations, Richter's pantheon of historical subjects is—at the very moment of its constitution—always already depicted as a precarious enterprise, if not derided as a fraudulent promise to reestablish conditions that are irretrievably lost.¹⁶

Richter's *Annunciations* comprise a recognition of, and response to, this fraudulence. The series intensifies the self-negating restorative impulse of the *48 portraits* by simultaneously mimicking *and* dissolving Titian's original image. It declares both desire and defeat at once.

The five works in which Richter carried out this task function sequentially: they move from a *modernizing-modernising* update of Titian's 1535 canvas, to a near-monochromatic scene of abstract atmospherics, to a trio of explicitly hand-made canvases that explore the gestural manipulation of colour. Richter appears to move from figuration to its declared opposite—the figuration of anti-figuration, as it were—in the series' opening pair, before settling on something that straddles the two in his final image trio. The three canvases that close out the series hover between depicted figure and constructed stroke, simultaneously maintaining the essential narrative elements of the Annunciation (angel, Mary, and Word-as-light are all suggestively present) while increasingly dissolving such iconographic detail *within* the declaratively material facts of painterly touch and colouristic interaction. Richter's series moves, we could say, from figuring the story of the Annunciation (Canvas 1, Fig. 6.1a) to figuring its essential mystery (Canvas 2, Fig. 6.1b) to, finally, figuring the idea of *figurability* (Canvases 3–

5, Figs 6.1c–e) as that which opens figurative representation to the impossible paradoxes active within it—and which is thus encapsulated, for Didi-Huberman and I believe Richter, in the expansive miracle of the Annunciation itself.

Richters' series increasingly renders, and reveals, the essential narrative elements of Mary's encounter with Gabriel as symbolically inadequate to the miracle with which they are associated. This process structures the series' final trio of images in particular, which are set apart from its opening pair through a shift in scale (the final three canvases becoming about ~~ten inches~~ 25 centimetres ~~larger~~ higher and 50 cm wider on a side). In the first of these images (Fig. 6.1c), the ray of light that marks the Word of God resembles an electric shock ~~that~~ whose charge has infused both Mary's body and the frenetic brushwork of Richter's canvas ~~with its charge~~; in the next image (Fig. 6.1d), any distinction between painterly and divine action has been all but eliminated, as the scene's narrative pointers are reduced to a single abbreviated diagonal at upper centre and the nascent fused forms that straddle it below; and in the series' final painting (Fig. 6.1e), colouristic and symbolic de-differentiation position Richter's forms at precisely the pivot between figuration and abstraction, with neither term privileged over the other. (Without a title, could anyone discern a clear figurative scene here?)—Richter thus moves from the *story* of the Annunciation in the series' very first image to, in its fifth, the point at which narrative disappears—just—from view.

Consider the dynamic of Richter's *Annunciations* as traced above next to Didi-Huberman's description of Fra Angelico's approach, five centuries earlier, to the task of representing Mary's miraculous encounter. 'To figure,' Didi-Huberman writes of the early Renaissance master, 'did not mean to present the story's aspect, but rather to apprehend the mystery pictorially by practicing the diffraction of meaning, its perpetual displacement'—and thus creating a painting that did not portray but rather *implied* the mystery of the Annunciation.¹⁷ Most pointedly, this involved shifting the locus of the Annunciation's meaning from that of story-telling, of representation as traditionally understood, to that of humbly attempting to make manifest—in the 'indexes, detours, [and] traces'¹⁸ (p. 227)—of which painting itself is comprised—something of the miraculous event's essential non-figurability. This culminated in the empty patch of white at the centre of the ca.-1440–45 *Annunciation* painted by Fra Angelico within-in his cell at the Convent of San Marco in Florence (Fig. 6.3). Mirroring, in its empty

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expanse and horizontal floor juncture, the pages of the book held by Mary in the same scene, this wall does not symbolise or represent the mystery of the Incarnation, but rather declaratively presents—here and now, in the obdurate blankness of the wall before us—something of its unrepresentable mystery.¹⁹

Designer, please take in Fig. 6.3 near here.

Didi-Huberman's account of Fra Angelico could be used to describe Richter's own sequence of *Annunciations*, which enact just such a movement towards declarative presentation and representational abnegation.²⁰ But there is, of course, one crucial distinction: the miracle that motivates Richter's series is not that of the Annunciation itself, but of Titian's *painting* of the event. The mystery he seeks to figure is not that of ~~Saint the Angel~~ Gabriel's announcement to Mary, but that of Titian's ability to represent—and believe in his representation of—just this. If the Annunciation tells of the Word of God made flesh, so did the Venetian master seek—and thematise in his own 1535 composition—the possibility of painting itself as a means of 'making fleshly,' of both celebrating and echoing the holy miracle of Christ's genesis from the spoken word.²¹ Indeed, it was through the privileged subject of the Annunciation, as Gerhard Wolf has noted, that the unified picture surface of narrative painting was itself established in mid-fifteenth-century Europe.²² Precisely this process, that of painting's emergence as a culturally resonant medium of representation and belief, became the 'unrepresentable mystery' at the root of Richter's own ~~ongoing continuing~~ activity as an artist: how could the medium—shadowed, as Richter noted, by the spectre of 'complete idiocy'—ever aspire to such significance as it had come to possess by 1535, and what form could this aspiration take?

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Just as that of the Annunciation, this mystery has no explanation, no answer to clear the air. The German's Titian variations, accordingly, are rich with painterly touch and supple colour (ending with the deep—dare we say fleshly?—reds of its final image), but in the service of working through, at a double remove, the impossibility of ever renewing the culture of aesthetic belief that had guided the Venetian's earlier practice. The *Annunciations*, Richter told Jonas Storsve in 1991, were only an attempt to copy, and even in this they failed. The only charge left, accordingly, was 'to dissolve everything,' to put on display his own incapacity in the face of Titian's model.²³ In a

similar vein, when Richter was asked by Nabokow about what one could say of his series' final canvas, the artist simply answered: 'Nothing. The colours are gone, as are the forms.'²⁴

III—Painting without saying: *Red-blue-yellow* and the *Greys*

It is crucial to remember that in 1973, apart from his Titian variations, *every single work* Richter made was abstract. This was a first in his career—and was rooted, I am claiming, in his thinking about and production of the *Annunciations* themselves. For if that series demonstrated his only remaining option in the desire to match Titian's accomplishment as that of 'dissolving everything,' this is precisely what he set out to achieve in his concomitant and immediately subsequent abstractions. This program intensified in the series' wake in 1974, during which his entire painterly production consisted of the declaratively non-compositional *Greys* and *Colour charts*—whose representational abstention, the artist's comments indicate, is directly rooted in the culminating nothingness of his emulative 1973 series.

It is consistent with these developments that when Richter returned to the *Greys* in 1973, the year of his *Annunciations*, he departed from his earlier monochromes by radically reducing—indeed, very nearly eliminating—any trace of his hand from their surfaces. The clear differences between his pre- and post-1973 *Greys* are evident from even the quickest scan of the relevant illustrations in his catalogue raisonné; compare, as an exemplary set of images, the lushly evocative brushwork of a *Grey* from 1972 (Fig. 6.4, CR 334-3) to the dour workmanship, most closely resembling spray-on stucco, of a painting from the following year (Fig. 6.5, CR 348-1). These examples are typical, and demonstrate the newly intensified abstention of Richter's grey monochromes beginning in 1973. His goal in such work, made with a diverse array of tools ranging from brush to rag to roller, was to eradicate ~~from his canvases any~~ figurative suggestion, even that of the painter's own presence, ~~from his canvases~~; as Richter commented on the colour grey a few years later, 'I can't imagine a colour that says less.'²⁵ The artist's desire to realise such a 'saying less' was fundamentally different—fundamentally more intense—in 1973 than just a single year ~~prior~~ earlier.

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Richter's concomitant series of *Red-blue-yellow* paintings ~~are~~ is part of this shift. Continuing a direction begun in 1972 and seemingly cataloguing all that remained absent from his newly produced *Greys*—chromatic play, painterly touch, evocative spatial construction—the series culminated in 1973 in two distinct projects: on the one hand, the 100-part ~~piece~~ *Red-blue-yellow* (Fig. ~~6.6, CR 338 1–100~~), which measures ~~over more than seventeen feet~~ 5 metres across and whose ~~one hundred~~ 100 component canvases were promptly dispersed, just months after their initial integrated presentation, to dozens of individual buyers; and on the other, the three panels of the massive BMW triptych (Fig. ~~6.7, CR 345 2~~), which enlarges photographic details of painted strokes in its titular colours to a full ~~twenty feet~~ 6 metres across and, upon its completion, found an immediate home at BMW's Munich headquarters.²⁶ Where the *Greys* demonstratively enact painterly abnegation, these two series together celebrate painting's evocative force—the possibilities of its chromatic and gestural variability—only to programmatically undercut this, from opposite ends, by subsuming it within the medium's alternately sustaining frameworks of private and corporate patronage.

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In the case of Richter's 100-canvas *Red-blue-yellow*, a single composition—displayed as such in Munich's Lenbachhaus in May 1973, two months before its first and only commercial presentation—was almost immediately split apart to satisfy the whims of individual buyers. (Notably, the gallery exhibition at which this splitting-apart-through-purchase was effected was Richter's very first exhibition of solely abstract works.) In the case of the BMW triptych, Richter's work was conceived for, and promptly encased within, a triumphant site of corporate power. (Richter even occupied a new studio, paid for by the auto concern, to accommodate his production of such a large-scale work.)²⁷ The means of construction of both series intensifies these connections. While the meandering strokes of the former appear aimless and disaffected—the intimate product of a strangely absent maker—the monumental marks of the latter are modelled after enlarged photographic details, and are thus explicitly second-degree painterly signs that render the painter's touch as coldly displayed and mechanically petrified spectacle. Where Titian, four and a half centuries before, had employed his own bravura technique in the service of communicating, even inhabiting,

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the fleshly and essentially unfigurable wonder of the Annunciation, Richter, at precisely the moment of his own annunciatory turn, was reduced to diagramming painting's alternate aimlessness and petrification **within** an age of art's intensifying subjugation to corporate sponsorship and speculative **collecting**.²⁸

The declarative abstention of Richter's post-1973 *Greys*—their will to say as little as possible—comprised a means to paint in such a context without speaking for, or as, anyone or anything: no company, no message, no ideology, no nothing. As such, the works can be understood to be in direct dialogue with, as a form of declarative response to, the pre-programmed market reification of Richter's simultaneously produced polychromatic panels. Indeed, the *Greys*' explicit refusal, as Richter noted in a 1977 letter to Buchloh, was to serve as not just an end but a beginning, a tabula rasa of painting as such in the face of its specific conditions circa 1973.²⁹ The *Greys*, that is, sought—in their anti-subjective and non-communicative abstention—to lay bare what might, in the wake of such abnegation, come to be said. And this project was rooted in the same essential impulse as the 'figuration against itself' located by Didi-Huberman in Fra Angelico's earlier *Annunciation*, and which had motivated Richter's own Titian series of that same year: that of making manifest, in painting's own material traces, an essentially non-figurable mystery.

If, for Fra Angelico (as traced by Didi-Huberman): the mystery at hand had been that of **Saint** Gabriel's visit to Mary, for Richter it was the riddle—as he himself called it—of Titian's **own** representation of this theme. Which is to say, the riddle of painting's long-ago capacity to function as a vehicle of deep aesthetic experience and widely held cultural conviction. The obdurate non-communicativity of the 1973 *Greys*, in tandem with the alternately petrified and dismembered strokes of the *Red-blue-yellow* paintings made that same year, puts on display contemporary painting's absolute *incapacity*, on every level, to match this earlier significance. But not only this. For just as Fra Angelico, five centuries before, had sought to figure **in a brief patch of bare white wall** the mystery of Christ's birth **in a brief patch of bare white wall**, so Richter probed the renewal of painting's potentiality, in 1973, by returning to and amplifying the austere blankness of his *Greys*. As if to echo Adorno's 1951 conclusion that culture can only be 'faithful to man' in-so-far as it 'withdraws from *Man*', so Richter worked through a radical rejection of painting's aspirations and means—as he had seen them so

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brilliantly exemplified at Venice's Scuola *Grande* di San Rocco—as the only possible path by which to sustain the medium's actually existing viability.³⁰

~~He Richter~~ pursued this program most forcefully in his post-Annunciation *Greys*' explicit ~~utilisation-use~~ of the non-subjective stroke: paint, in these works, is laid down in broad horizontal sweeps or uniform mottled fields, more closely resembling cheaply painted walls or ceilings than the product of a compositionally minded maker. The works also lack any traceable system guiding their creation: they are uniform but distinct; made but not authored; expressive, as Richter would have it, of a desire not to express. In all of these qualities, the *Greys* are distinct from the monochromatic precedents, such as those of Robert Ryman and Brice Marden, to which the artist was then looking. As Richter noted of his works' relation to Ryman's exploratory practice, which he had seen in both New York and Germany, and in which he was particularly interested: 'they have nothing to do with Bob Ryman's [pictures], because his *show* something: the way it is painted... an exploration of material qualities'.³¹

Lacking both Ryman's precise analytical touch and the supple colouristic nuance then driving the encaustic canvases of Brice Marden, Richter's post-1973 *Greys* more closely resemble the radically non-compositional precedents of the Soviet avant-garde than the works of his own contemporaries. Most specifically, his paintings recall the 'dumb and blind wall'³² of Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1920 triptych *Red, yellow, blue* and the stripped down, matter-of-fact surface of Kazimir Malevich's 1915 *Black square* (Fig. 6.8). Richter himself, it must be noted, has downplayed any such links. Rodchenko is nowhere to be found in ~~his Richter's~~ published interviews and statements, and was ~~likely-probably~~ little known to the artist by 1973 (though their shared turn to the primary colours at points of painterly crisis betrays the deep structural connections between their two practices). Richter's references to Malevich, meanwhile, repeatedly make the point that the latter's work demonstrates the means by which *any* painting, even the obdurately material *Black square*, creates illusionistic effects. As Richter told Dorothea Dietrich in 1985:

I have only made reference to Malevich in order to say that painted pictures are always illusionistic. If you don't see something in Malevich's *Black Square* then the picture is simply a stupid black spot. But more immediately, there's connections to *Informel* or maybe to the Romantics [in Malevich].

There's no hierarchy in these pictures ... [and thus] everything is dissolved, revolutionary, anarchistic, at the beginning of anarchy.³³

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Malevich's painting, for Richter, feigns at non-meaning but nevertheless always appears illusionistic, and thus meaningful—either as a 'stupid black spot' or as an anarchistic levelling of hierarchy reminiscent of romanticism or recent gestural abstraction. At the root of this operation is the Russian artist's reliance on figure-ground relationships and the minutely differentiated stroke, both of which function as elementary signifying prompts.

Richter's post-1973 *Greys* jettison all of this: they discard Malevich's finicky brush-strokes and rudimentary figure-ground relationships, and push the pursuit of painting nothingness to its limit: no colour, no figure, no composition, no evident painterly touch. Where the series remains fundamentally linked to the Russian's seminal 1915 *Black square*, however—and where the earlier work becomes revelatory for considering the later project of the *Greys*—is in its shared concern with the foundational convictions, if any, by which painting is motivated. For if Richter's monochromes, in their most radically abstemious form as begun in 1973, emerged out of a desire to drain all signifying intent as a way to both figure and contest contemporary painting's apparent incapacity next to Titian's *Annunciation*, so did Malevich, in painting his obdurate black quadrilateral six decades earlier, attempt to realise a generative atom of signification that recalled nothing so much as the annunciatory force of Gabriel's declaration to Mary: that of a single germinal utterance that, in a manner escaping the bounds of any established representational structure, might give birth to an entire system of judgement and belief. The Russian artist, as has been much discussed, initially installed his work as if a religious icon (hanging it, in 1915's the seminal *0,10* exhibition of 1915–16, in the upper corner traditionally reserved for such holy images) and, in pronouncing its central form as 'the face of the new art ... a living, royal infant ... the first step of pure creation in art', positioned it as a miraculous instantiation analogous to that of the Christ Child himself.³⁴ This connection was made even more direct in a 1920 letter to Mikhail Gershenzon in which the artist declared that:

—were humanity to draw an image of the Divinity after its own image, perhaps the black square is the image of God as the essence of His perfection on a new path for today’s fresh beginning^{2,35}

Both Malevich and Richter arrived at the respective caesuras marked by *Black square* and the newly austere 1973 *Greys* as a result of particularly rigorous historical probing. In Malevich’s case, this was emblematised by his historically driven polemic ‘From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism’, published in conjunction with *Black square*’s inaugural exhibition.⁵ In the case of Richter, as we’ve noted, the later *Greys* were a culmination of more than a decade spent working through everything from socialist-minded landscape to *informel* abstraction to monumental portraiture, and were developed together with his *Annunciations* as a response to the necessary—indeed, inevitable—failure of each of these painterly modes. And for both Malevich and Richter, the historically driven and religiously inflected turn to the abstemious monochrome functioned as a—ground zero² from which to reinvent painting itself—not just in terms of formal procedure but, most crucially, in terms of what Malevich called the medium’s ‘true essence’.

Malevich’s understanding of this essence was not far from Richter’s—much later, thinking. For just as the Russian saw *Black square*’s declarative reduction as having enabled painting’s return ‘to its original state of pure sensation’, so Richter described his *Greys*, through precisely their sparseness of incident, as having functioned to regenerate painting by making manifest his canvases’ concrete (which is to say, sensual) particulars.³⁶ ‘As time went on’, he—Richter wrote in 1975 to Edy de Wilde:

I observed differences of quality among the gray surfaces ... that ... betrayed nothing of the destructive motivation that lay behind them. The pictures began to teach me—Destitution became a constructive statement; it became relative perfection, beauty, and therefore painting.³⁷

This comment echoes not just Malevich but also late—medieval explorations of the generative force of the void—of emptiness, in Elina Gertsman’s words, as ‘a place in which our universe was created, and in which God may yet create another universe’—as well as the narrative of the Annunciation itself.³⁸ Destitution and nothingness

transforming into beauty, even perfection: this is the rhetoric of miracles, of the world's redemption engendered by the barest sign. And the generative seed ~~that~~ Richter saw the *Greys* as ~~announcing sowing~~ was precisely that of the medium's own renewed potential, born of near nothingness, as a materialised locus of belief.

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Spurred by such thinking about the catalytic energy of renunciant painting, Richter began, shortly after his 1975 conversation with de Wilde, to generate an explicitly constructive abstract idiom from the austere blankness and petrified gestures of his *Greys* and *Red-blue-yellow* paintings. Notably, the very first work in this development—1977's *Construction*—was painted over one of Richter's 1973 *Fictions*, literally grounding his new abstract mode in his 1973 production, and specifically in its joint structuration by reductive abstraction and the Titian variations.³⁹ As Richter described in his 1982 statement for the catalogue of *documenta 7*, where he showed five of the vividly coloured and heterogeneously constructed abstractions that emerged in the wake of this development:

“In abstract painting we have found a better way of gaining access to the unvisualisable, the incomprehensible; because abstract painting deploys the utmost visual immediacy—all the resources of art, in fact—in order to depict ~~“nothing”~~.²⁴⁰

If this alone does not immediately recall Fra Angelico's desire to instantiate the Annunciation's wonder in his blank patch of wall, we need then recall Richter's claim to Buchloh, made just a few years later, that ~~it is~~ only in abstraction ~~that can~~ painting ~~can~~ begin to approach its grandest, most deeply rooted goals: those of striving 'for lost qualities, for a better world—for ... redemption'.⁴¹

The terms by which Richter first pursued such goals—generated by and rooted in the essential dialectics of his 1973 Titian variations and their pendant abstractions—continue to motivate much of his practice today. Is it any wonder that he turned to a series of portraits of his daughter Betty in 1977, immediately after initiating his new abstract idiom in the shadow of the *Annunciations*' own particular birth announcement (whose palette it shares)? Or that, three decades later, he completed a stained-glass window for ~~the~~ Cologne Cathedral that conflated the word-as-beam-of-light of his Titian paintings with the chromatic grid-work of his simultaneously produced colour

charts? Both these projects, produced decades apart, demonstrate how Richter has continued to motivate his practice by continually re-~~engaging-examining~~ the essential terms and tensions—between God’s Word and grey’s ‘nothingness,’¹ desired belief and declared abnegation—that he first confronted and worked through in 1973. ~~In~~ this essay ~~has-I have~~ sought to tell the beginning of this story: how those ‘few little details that don’t really matter’ enabled painting’s regeneration through destitution, long after the age of angels had passed.

Commented [BN159]: I avoid ‘engage’ because it is so vague – aim for something more specific. I hope this has captured the meaning. Or perhaps ‘reconsidering’, ‘returning to’, ‘exploring’, ‘seeking to understand’, ‘seeking to interpret’, ‘questioning’?

¹ One hundred of Richter’s *Red-blue-yellow* canvases, ~~it should be noted, comprised-formed~~ a single ten-by-ten grid when first shown in Munich in March 1973,² and were simultaneously dispersed, as a series of small individual pictures, to dozens of discrete collections. For details on this and other aspects of his 1973 production, see Dietmar Elger (ed.), *Gerhard Richter: Catalogue Raisonné, vol. 2: Werknummern 199–388, 1968–1976*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin, 2017.

² These figures are taken from the up-to-date catalogue raisonné ~~record~~ as maintained at *Gerhard Richter*, <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/>.

³ For details of ~~in~~ Richter’s visit to Venice, ~~as well as and~~ other aspects of his long career, see Dietmar Elger’s indispensable biography, *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting*, ~~trans.~~ Elizabeth M. Solaro (~~transl.~~), University of Chicago Press, ~~Chicago~~, 2009.

⁴ Gerhard Richter, ‘Interview with Gisli Naba~~bk~~owski, 1974’, in Dietmar Elger and Hans Ulrich Obrist ~~(eds)~~, *Gerhard Richter: Writings, 1961–2007*, Distributed Art Publishers, New York, 2009, p. 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶ For particularly astute English-language discussions of Richter’s work to around 1970, and particularly of his interrogation of images and their structuring belief systems, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ‘Gerhard Richter: Painting After the Subject of History’, PhD ~~thesis~~, City University of New York, 1994; Christine Mehring, Jeanne Anne Nugent and Jon L. Seydl (eds), *Gerhard Richter: Early Work, 1951–1972*, Getty Publications, Los Angeles, 2010; Luke Smythe, ‘Lightness and Loss: Abstraction in the Work of Gerhard Richter’, PhD ~~thesis~~, Yale University, ~~New Haven~~, 2012; and the relevant essays ~~of in~~ the Tate Modern’s retrospective ~~catalogue~~ *Gerhard Richter: Panorama*, ed. Mark Godfrey, ~~exhibition catalogue~~, Tate

Publishing, London, 2011.

⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ~~trans.~~ Robert Hullot-Kentor ([transl.](#)), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 155. For an analysis of Richter's abstraction through the lens of Adorno's thinking, particularly in the former's continued link to the structure of photography, see Peter Osborne, 'Modernism, Abstraction, and the Return to Painting', in Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (eds), *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1991, pp. 59–79.

⁸ [Gerhard Richter](#), 'Notes, 1973', in [Elger and Obrist \(eds\)](#), *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 70.

⁹ Armin Zweite, 'Sehen, Reflektieren, Erscheinen: Anmerkungen zum Werk von Gerhard Richter', in *Gerhard Richter: Catalogue Raisonné 1993–2004*, [K20K21](#) Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2005, p. 49. [What is this K30K21?](#)

¹⁰ For an insightful consideration of Richter's landscapes from this period, see Mark Godfrey, 'Damaged Landscapes', in *Gerhard Richter: Panorama*, pp. 73–89. As Godfrey cogently demonstrates, Richter's romanticised scenes are best understood as a self-knowing inquiry into the unbridgeable divide between his own practice and that of such romantic masters as Caspar David Friedrich. For a consideration of Richter's extended [engagement with exploration of](#) the structural model of the window, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Eight Gray: Between *Vorschein* and *Glanz**', in *Gerhard Richter: Eight Gray*, ed. [Benjamin H. D. Buchloh](#), [exhibition catalogue](#), Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 2002, pp. 13–28.

¹¹ [Gerhard Richter](#) as cited in Zweite, '[Sehen, Reflektieren](#)', p. 56.

¹² For a thorough—and excellent—overview of Richter's grey monochromes and their broader historical context, see Julia Friedrich's *Grau ohne Grund: Gerhard Richters Monochromien als Herausforderung der künstlerischen Avantgarde*, Strzelecki, Cologne, 2009, particularly the chapter 'Richters Graue Bilder im Kontext seines Werks'.

¹³ It is important to note here that [the Richter's](#) day-to-day sequence of [Richter's](#) paintings [aeross-in](#) 1973—just what followed what—is less important for this essay's claims than the fact that his thinking about, and working through the contemporary stakes of, Titian's *Annunciation* had [already](#) begun [already](#).

during his Venice sojourn in 1972 and continued through his practice of the following year.

¹⁴ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, ~~trans-~~Jane Marie Todd (transl.), University of Chicago Press, ~~Chicago-~~1995, p. 107.

¹⁵ Richter, 'Interview with Gisind Naba**k**owski, 1974', p. 85.

¹⁶ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Divided Memory and Post-Traditional Identity: Gerhard Richter's Work of Mourning', in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.), *October Files: Gerhard Richter*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, ~~MA-~~2009, p. 91.

¹⁷ Didi-Huberman, *Dissemblance and Figuration*, p. 122.

¹⁸ [Ibid., p. 227.](#)

¹⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, John Goodman (transl.), Penn State University Press, University Park, 2005, p. 24.

²⁰ Noteworthy here is Didi-Huberman's own recent [engagement-discussion of](#)with Richter's work, sparked by the artist's creation of the four-painting cycle *Birkenau* in response to the series of clandestinely shot photographs of Auschwitz that are the subject of Didi-Huberman's 2008-book *Images in Spite of All-*, University of Chicago Press, ~~Chicago-~~2008. In a series of letters to the artist reprinted as the volume *Wo Es war: Vier Briefe an Gerhard Richter*, ~~Verlag der Buchhandlung-~~Walther König, Cologne, 2018, Didi-Huberman reflects on the process and stakes of both Richter's specific series and the artist's broader picture-making practice, which he describes (with a nod to Adorno) as an 'exposition of history as destruction' (p. 131). See also *Gerhard Richter: Birkenau*, ed. Georges Didi-Hubermann, [exhibition catalogue](#), ~~Verlag der Buchhandlung-~~Walther König, Cologne, 2016.

²¹ On this notion in relation to Titian's practice and Richter's emulation of the Venetian master, see Julia Gelshorn, *Aneignung und Wiederholung: Bilddiskurse im Werk von Gerhard Richter und Sigmar Polke*, Wilhelm Fink ~~Verlag-~~, Munich, 2012, pp. 33–35.

²² Gerhard Wolf, 'The Origins of Painting', ~~in-~~*Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 36, Autumn 1999, p. 71.

²³ Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Jonas Storsve, 1991', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 272 (translation slightly altered). [Please confirm this is correct source.](#)

²⁴ Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Gisli Naberowski, 1974', p. 88.

²⁵ As cited in Heinz Holtmann, 'Grau als Indifferenz: zu Gerhard Richters monochromen Bildern', in *Gerhard Richter: Graue Bilder*, ed. Heinz Holtmann, exhibition catalogue, Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braunschweig, 1975, unpaginated p. See also his discussion of grey in his 1975 letter to Edy de Wilde in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, pp. 91–92.

²⁶ Richter described his small canvases to Marlies Grüterich in 1977 as 'the total antithesis of the purist grey pictures. Colourful, sentimental, associative, anachronistic, random, polysemic, almost like pseudo-psychograms, except that they are not legible, because they are devoid of any meaning or logic...'. See Richter, 'Answers to Questions from Marlies Grüterich, 2.-September 1977', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 95.

²⁷ For an examination of Richter's BMW commission in the context of his early-1970s practice, see Helmut Friedel, *Gerhard Richter: Red, Yellow, Blue; The BMW Paintings*, Prestel, Munich, 2007.

²⁸ For an analysis of Richter's mid-seventies-1970s turn to abstraction as a self-conscious 'simulacrum of spiritual space' in an age of unfettered spectacle, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's Facture: Between Synecdoche and the Spectacle', in *Art & Design*, vol. 5, 1989, pp. 41–45.

²⁹ See Gerhard Richter, 'From a Letter to Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 23 May 1977', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 93.

³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *Theodor W. Adorno, Prisms*, Samuel and Sherry Weber (trans.), MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, MA, 1981, p. 23. Richter, in 1977, directly echoed Adorno's in comments made to Marlies Grüterich about the GDR cultural policy amidst which his own career began—which, he claimed, focused so single-mindedly on 'so-called cultural heritage' that 'nothing creative ever [came] out of there'. With 'culture' and 'man' functioning as analogues, the two statements describe precisely the same dynamic. Richter, 'Answers to Questions from Marlies Grüterich, 2 September 1977', p. 95.

³¹ Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Bruce Ferguson and Jeffrey Spalding, 1978', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 108. Emphasis added.

³² The phrase is Nikolai Tarabukin's, from his 1923 essay 'From the Easel to the Machine', excerpts from which are republished in Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, Paul Chapman, London, 1982, pp. 135–142. The cited line appears on page 139.

³³ Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Dorothea Dietrich, 1985', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 155.

³⁴ Kazimir Malevich, 'From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting' (1915), in *Kazimir Malevich, Troels Andersen (ed.), Essays on Art, 1915–1933*, vol. -1, *Troels Andersen (ed.)*, Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (trans.), Rapp & Whiting, London, 1971, p. 38.

³⁵ As cited in Yevgenia Petrova, 'Malevich's Suprematism and Religion', in *Kazimir Malevich: Suprematism*, ed. Matthew Drutt, *exhibition catalogue*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 2003, p. 91. [Please confirm – this book is an exhibition catalogue?](https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/kazimir-malevich-suprematism)
<https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/kazimir-malevich-suprematism>

³⁶ For Malevich's comment, see his essay 'Suprematism' in Kazimir Malevich, *Essays on Art, 1928–1933*, vol. 2, Troels Andersen (ed.), Xenia Glowacki-Prus and Arnold McMillin (trans.), Borgen, Copenhagen, 1968, p. 38.

³⁷ Gerhard Richter, 'From a Letter to Edy de Wilde, 23 February 1975', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 92.

³⁸ Elina Gertsman, 'Phantoms of Emptiness: The Space of the Imaginary in Late Medieval Art', *Art History*, vol. 41, no. 5, November 2018, p. 829.

³⁹ As noted in Jürgen Harten, 'The Romantic Intent for Abstraction', in *Gerhard Richter: Bilder/Paintings, 1962–1985*, ed. Jürgen Harten, *exhibition catalogue*, DuMont, Cologne, 1986, p. 53.

⁴⁰ Gerhard Richter, 'Text for Catalogue of *Documenta 7*, Kassel, 1982', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 121.

⁴¹ Gerhard Richter, 'Interview with Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 1986', in *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 181. Notably, this statement echoes almost exactly the artist's 1974 comment to Nabokow that 'art fulfills certain functions that were hitherto the domain of religion—let's call it the realisation, or projection, of a higher world'. See *Gerhard Richter: Writings*, p. 90.

7

Circa 1970

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe

(fig. 1)

~~Just as I was getting around to writing this essay,~~ the Cheim and Read gallery in New York announced a show of Sean Scully's early work, called *'Circa 1970'*. ~~Just as I was getting around to this writing this essay.~~ The work in the exhibition reminded me of what a lot of us were doing in 1970, which was looking for a way forward after New York School painting and minimalist sculpture.

Nowadays, I think it less useful to think in terms of looking forward than about what and how the work performs, and I'll come back to why. But in and around 1970 artists generally did think in terms of how to follow what came last, and to where reinterpreting or otherwise developing it seemed to lead. Scully's work has some obvious sources—early Stella being one—but it ~~i's~~ not doing—or trying not to, you choose—what its sources do. Scully's *Red slide* (1972) (Fig. 7.1) is in fact fiddling with some idea of an interior, more or less unimaginable in Stella's paintings at that stage or earlier, while Stella himself was about to launch his first reliefs, for instance *Ostropol III* (1973) (Fig. 7.2). Stella's reliefs are even more literal than his earlier paintings; even as he was being influenced by ~~him~~ Stella, Scully was seeing if there was a way to move in another—perhaps even the opposite—direction. Boris Groys has suggested that Clement Greenberg's theory of the avant-garde was of an art that would contemplate the art of the past by examining how it worked, and that that is why his was an argument in favour of abstract art. Regardless of where any individual artist stood in relation to Greenberg, this definition seems to fit all the abstract art of the ~~sixties-1960s~~ and ~~seventies~~ 1970s. Scully was looking to intensify things in some way that built on immediate precedent, to find a path for his own thinking in—but also through—a cluster or chaos of ~~pursuits~~, Stella's ~~was~~ the most immediately apparent precedent, but all of them ~~were~~ fundamental, ~~that and~~ together constituted the state of painting and its ends as he, and generally speaking most of us, saw them then at the time.

Commented [BN160]: I think this opening is stronger with the sentence flipped around. The original took me back a bit – as if I had missed something somewhere. Just a suggestion though.

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Commented [BN162]: Added endnote with full details.

Commented [BN163]: Please confirm – was ambiguous.

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Commented [BN165]: This sentence was a long and convoluted one, with so many subordinate clauses. I think it is clearer when split into two sentences, but please confirm that I have interpreted correctly.

Designer, please take in Fig. 7.1 and Fig. 7.2 near here.

From a position ~~which~~that was not antagonistic to Greenberg's view of art, Michael Fried summed up the ambition in his monograph *Three American Painters*:

“The work of such painters as Noland, Olitski and Stella not only arises largely out of their personal interpretations of the particular situations in which advanced painting found itself at crucial moments in their respective developments; their work also aspires to be adjudged, in retrospect, to have been necessary to the finest modernist painting of the future.”²

I think we may say that the works of two of the artists Fried ~~he~~ was writing about are opposites: in Olitski's spray paintings nothing but space made by colour, perhaps involuntarily read as depth however thick the paint might become; in Stella's shaped paintings pictorial space rendered ambiguous by the continuity between the stretcher and the drawing on the surface (~~fig. 2~~). Olitski's paintings would get thicker and thicker, while Stella would make his first reliefs in 1973. I think Stella's subsequent turn to relief was implicit in the essay that Phillip ~~Phil~~ Leider wrote about him 1966, in which he talks about Stella's painting in terms of an interaction between the 'abstract' and the 'literal'.³ Stella is seen to bring the illusionary space created by colours and shapes on a flat surface into a more explicit relationship than had earlier art with the physical presence of the painting, its size being one factor and the inseparability of the structure from the drawing it supports being another.

Along with or around or as well as these two there were plenty of other approaches to abstraction which had nothing to do with Olitski's or Stella's use of the general truism asserted by Cézanne when he said that the smooth white canvas was already deep, the painter only had to carve it out. Ellsworth Kelly, for example, or Agnes Martin or Robert Ryman, also wanted to bring the work into a more and more direct relationship—interaction—with the space it shared with the viewer. Their precedents too included Manet, Mondrian, and the New York School, taking the painting off the easel and making it mural-sized. Various indifferent or hostile to Greenberg's ideas of where painting ought to be going, they shared the same ambitions but not the same assumptions. Most obviously, they did not assume that a painting had to have more than one colour in order to be painting, which is to say that it had to create

Commented [BN166]: Avoiding comma splice.

a spatial effect that was dependent on its being flat. Kelly's position seems ambiguous, but of Martin or Ryman one may say that they wanted to make work that was more literal, to use Leider's term (which Fried also adopted), than any traditional notion of the pictorial would permit: Ryman attached a work to the wall with screws through the front, saying happily: 'You can do that to a painting but you couldn't do it to a picture.'⁴ Greenberg would have said that in ~~doing that~~ attaching the work this way you turned ~~the work~~ it into a piece of sculpture, and ~~it is in that~~ in this distinction ~~that~~ the assumptions diverge, while the ambitions remain comparable.

Commented [BN167]: There were a lot of 'that's in this sentence! I've tried to make it a bit smoother.

By 1970, New York School painting, which Harold Rosenberg perhaps, and many others, had called expressionist, had been succeeded by several tendencies that eschewed gesture. The ends of painting were being re-imagined in several ways, but they were all ones ~~which that~~ had given up on gesture, looking for another way to achieve immediacy, a relationship to the viewer which would take place in the space the work shared with the person looking at it, as Mondrian had recommended. In the work of Martin and Ryman we see the beginnings, I think (now but not then, to be sure), of an attitude to non-representational or abstract painting which does not see abstraction as figurative painting reversed or emptied out. Greenberg's modernism was one in which abstraction was defined as being what representation was not, but it had the latter as a reference. In other approaches we maybe see the possibility of a deep space that is not based on the space of nature but rather that of, say, the page, or more to the point, the screen. Richard Shiff, the art historian who told us how Newman actually painted the zips, and much else besides, has also talked about how when ~~he~~ (he-Shiff) was a kid he used to stare at the black-and-white television signal that came on when broadcasting ended for the day, and noticed that it was actually ~~only~~ made of greys only, except when an aberrant something would cause everything to skew and for an instant produce some actual black and white. This was his experience of abstraction before he saw any abstract painting.

Commented [BN168]: This was unclear.

I doubt that ~~he-Shiff~~ was alone in this, and I think this anecdote tells us that by the early ~~nineteen fifties~~ 1950s another idea of space was in all our minds. A contemporary of Cézanne's white ground that 'only needed to be carved out'; (as he put it), it was also the heir of the depth of the white page ~~which that~~ had excited Mallarmé. The depth that Shiff saw on the television screen after the programs had

ended for the day was also without a horizon or a ground. It would be a space in which something like reading would take place—not because of citation, but because of rhythm and repetition, looked at closely as well as from a distance. On this development of ideas about flatness found in earlier writers, including and especially Greenberg, I should mention here (without spending any time on it) that circa 1970 is when objections to Greenberg's idea of flatness as a fundamental condition of painting that miss the point of his being a theory that proceeded from a paradox begin to be publicly accepted. I have noted elsewhere that one cannot actually see a surface that has more than one colour as flat; when one says one does, one is therefore being disingenuous or repressing one's involuntary response in the service of—to coin a phrase—a concept or even an idea.⁵ Here I note that Martin and Ryman tend to avoid or at least subdue the paradox by painting with greys or whites. There is *no* much colour and hence not so much space. Ryman's painting emphasises the surface's literalness, or non-spatiality. On the other hand, as with it's not being a picture, if it suppresses or limits one's (involuntary) sense of it as a space *then* it doesn't tell a story either. It is most significant (signifies most) in *how* it is there and least in *what* it might seem to say. Martin's early grids are automatically suspended over a depth (automatic because that *i*'s how one reads or sees grids) and are as much *in as on* the surface. If there is a depth, it *i*'s atmospheric, and if it *i*'s read instead as a surface it *i*'s ambiguous, because it is coloured and slightly uneven. One finds that looking at it involves concentrating on how it *wa*'s made. One could also mention here Twombly's early works, made out of words but perhaps best seen as fields of forces, eventually leading *of course* to the later work; fields of colour partially generated by words and bits of writing—the surface as a page turning inexorably into a depth once writing becomes painting.

Very different approaches to painting are evident in 1970, then, but it is not so clear to me that they lead to different ends. They all seek immediacy combined with a close regard for how what one is looking at is made. What is more the immediacy sought in each case involves bringing the implications of an interior into view as surface. I have mentioned minimalist sculpture, and shall also discuss briefly the influence of conceptualism on the context of painting and art in general in 1970, but first should like to turn to three things that happened sixteen years earlier, by way of providing background to what had happened. One is about colour being French, another

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about the difference between illustration and painting, and the third about painting never being able to be a thing because it i's an image.

Alex Katz says that a man at his first one-person show in New York, in 1954, told him that figuration was dead and that colour was French (Fig. 7.3).⁶ I think this anecdote is useful here because of the remark about colour, as well as being a reminder that once upon a time there were those who believed that abstraction followed figurative painting in an irreversible sort of way. Katz, who mentioned this exchange during a talk on Franz Kline, ~~didn't~~ did not say whether he had reminded the guy that Kline got his idea for his big black paintings from Willem de_Kooning and that their origin was a figurative image of his own. It's a famous story: Kline was stuck and de_Kooning had him come over to his place and run a drawing of a chair he ha'd made through an old overhead projector, with the lens out of focus so that the image was fuzzy. Not only was figuration not dead, it is in retrospect at least quite possible to see how de_Kooning was influenced by the abstract paintings of the artists he knew, as well as vice versa, which would suggest that figuration was enlivened by abstraction, rather than the reverse ~~by abstraction~~. By 1970 we should be hearing (for the second or third time in the century) not that figuration was consigned to the rubbish heap of history, but that painting itself and as such was dead. That rhetoric too may seem quaint to some, while for others it has become doxa. What is more important here is the rejection of colour because it i's French.

Designer, please take in Fig. 7.3 near here (image yet to be located and caption to be finalised)

By 1954 the rumour was rife, and true, that the centre of the art world had shifted decisively from Paris to New York. So we may take into account the nationalist side of the rejection of colour because it was French. In his essay on Pollock, T. J. Clark quotes D. H. Lawrence's line about everything that is truly American is white and hard in his essay on Pollock,⁷ and maybe there is indeed, in the national tradition, an urge to be authentic (rather than, say, artful, or seductive) which precedes New York School painting, incidentally making America always receptive to German influence.⁸

Certainly in Katz's anecdote 'French' is a code word for impressionist and post-impressionist painting in Katz's anecdote, which is to say for colour that is not necessarily violent and is founded in naturalism and perception—as opposed to colour

that denotes and is, therefore and by default, not responded to involuntarily, which is the case with pop art and symbolism in general. In practice, the New York School ~~artists~~ would be ~~quite inconsistent~~ in this respect, as they were in their approaches to materials as well. Pollock was very influenced by the Mexican muralists, and famously used car paint instead of oil paint, and colour that could be industrial as much as naturalistic, but Rothko did use oil paint and his bright paintings are pretty French. By 1970 it would begin to look as though for some you could only use French colour if it was not in a painting, for example it could be a Dan Flavin or a Donald Judd—just as long as there was something hard associated with it. As noted, painters would come to the fore who only used greys, or white, while Stella and Olitski would continue to use plenty of French colour.⁹

Commented [BN170]: Because you call them 'they' in the next clause and talk about their 'approaches' – I don't think you are wanting to lump them all together and treat the School as singular.

Commented [BN171]: I avoid 'quite' because it has two contradictory meanings, so doesn't add much. Mildly inconsistent? Deeply inconsistent?

Andy Warhol also had his first one-person show in New York in 1954. ~~He and~~ is generally relevant to the matter of painting's ends in 1970, because pop art ~~represented posed~~ a challenge to abstract painting in particular—and to painting and art in general—~~through~~ ~~because of~~ its ease with vulgarity. Clark has also commented on how modernist painters came to feel ~~themselves~~ unable to keep up with this aspect of the modern, finding it more and more difficult to make art that could exceed daily life in this respect.¹⁰ ~~As Equally~~, or even more, important here is ~~the fact~~ that Warhol and his influence brought about the return of the inert surface, absent from painting throughout the nineteenth-century (or at least most of it), and generally speaking a crucial aspect of painting's morphology. Andy was an illustrator, and the approach that goes with that was fundamental to his work and to his influence. Unlike painting, where the support has always been an active component—the Renaissance artists thinking that canvas was better than panel for portraits because the weave's slight unevenness made light flicker across the surface, adding vitality to an image that would be less active on a perfectly smooth surface, for example—the illustrator's work is destined for print, precisely for a flat white page that does not inflect the image and is, in that sense, not part of it. This is also true of photographs, ~~of course~~, and by 1970 much would have happened as a result of this aspect of pop that would have begun to affect how painting was being defined. Gerhard Richter, for example, whose presence was being felt in the New York art world by 1970, is insistent that pop art was an international phenomenon, and that the American version had little influence on his work, but he is inarguably an artist of the

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inert surface, and for the same reason as Andy. The inert is itself a kind of signification, and ~~alwhile-though~~ not much of a threat in 1970 it has since sometime in the ~~eighties~~ 1980s become a precondition for what is now a dominant view of painting. As to 1970 itself, the influence of Warhol's Brillo boxes on minimalist sculpture is not in much doubt, and similarly one might wonder about his use of bright flat colour and its possible influence on Stella.

The last time I looked up Jasper Johns' *American flag* (1954–56) on Wikipedia—I'm told the entries on it change without notice—it said that the artist ~~is~~ was named after a famous Jasper who saved the American flag in a battle during the American War of Independence, and that 'His work is often described as Neo-Dadaist and anticipates aspects of pop art, minimal art, and conceptual art.' American flag ~~It~~ is painted in encaustic on plywood with a ground made out of scraps of newspaper. The flag, presented as a very inflected surface, is ~~is~~ painted on a surface built up ~~uses-from~~ pieces of historical documentationary. The work is not spatial, but ~~much more about~~ being rather more an image ~~which-that~~ resists being a picture. It may be neo-dadaist, but (as plenty of others have said) it is more specifically associated less with dada, or surrealism, in general than with Marcel Duchamp specifically, and particularly with the idea of the ready-made. The flag is equated with the coloured rectangle that is a painting and is painted beautifully and carefully on newspaper and a bit of plywood. In undermining so much with which painting was traditionally associated, including the idea of a depth ~~within-inside~~ the frame or as a property of the stretcher, American flag ~~it~~ seems to support Duchamp's attack on (French, modernist) ideas of 'the retinal', and it would be in this regard that Johns' ~~this~~ work would ~~be used as the basis of support~~ arguments made against Greenberg. I think it a bit of an understatement to say that *American flag* 'anticipates' certain aspects of pop art. It would I think be more accurate to say that *American flag* sums up pop art ~~up~~ in advance: an image ~~which-that~~ is an icon; a semiotic arrangement, hard to forget and easy to recognise in the smoke of battle, the flag is the predecessor of every logo and of the language of advertising itself. Consider, for example, ~~s~~ the Brillo Pad or the Campbell's Soup can. While writing a catalogue essay about him and two other artists, I asked Johns ~~if it were the case~~ that whether he was more interested in French symbolist painters such as Redon than in painters like Manet and Cézanne, ~~-and~~ He said he was—and showed me some Redons

Commented [BN173]: Something was missing here, or needed deletion? I hope I have understood this sentence.

Commented [BN174]: Less wordy – same meaning I think?

he ha'd just bought at Sotheby's. Like theirs, his work did not begin with a thought about exterior space so much as one about the non-retinal—about thought summed up or embodied, conceivably ironically and as it were 'certainly' ambiguous, in an image and its presentation.

Commented [BN175]: the quotation marks make 'as it were' redundant (a phrase I avoid anyway – can sound a bit pompous).

It is these 'non-retinal' concerns that caused-made Johns to-be a formative influence on conceptual and minimal art. There are a number of ways to look at it. I suggested in an article on Robert Morris that Johns had established the stretcher as a ready-made (I didn't-did not realise at the time that the flag was on a piece of plywood, but the principle holds), so that one may say that painting, as a category of art, had become a ready-made.¹¹ Duchamp had gone no further than to hint at the idea with a bottle of scent—bottled sensation. Johns had substituted a stretcher/plywood panel for the bottle, substituting the art container for one that might be seen as a metaphor for it, in that and thus making painting, considered as the institutional locus of sensation (in its case of retinal as opposed to olfactory affect) into a ready-made. This was one way in which things moved towards circa 1970 by displacing painting into the broader category of art as a whole.

Commented [BN176]: I was unsure here – this was the intended meaning?

In this Johns is one of those who cleared the way for what would be called conceptual art. If Johns blurred the outlines of and the links between and categories—painting, sculpture, prints, for example—it is important to remember how preoccupied with these distinctions people were at the time, and why. They still are preoccupied, but now it is a matter of the market on the one hand and a persistent Oedipal relationship to painting on the other. Art had preserved the assumption that different mediums were suited to doing different things. Johns anticipated conceptualism in-by destroying or fatally undermining the category, making the work be about an idea about what a work of art might be—especially when it was no't doing what art in general had previously done. 'Undermining' is not here incompatible with 'emphasizing-emphasising'. It was in the way that his work emphasised the category—making the work be about the distinction between sculpture and an idea about painting which it was seen to follow and replace—that Johns anticipated minimalism.

Conceptual art itself has been said to begin with Sol LeWitt's *Buried cube* containing an object of importance but little value of 1968 (—a rare example of an important work being made in a year notable for political activity). A cube was dug out

Commented [BN177]: Please confirm – this is the full title of the work?

of the earth and then filled in, so that the work itself was invisible. A ~~pretty thorough~~ ~~strong~~ challenge to New York School and other, both earlier and later, attempts to make art be about immediacy and directness, *Buried cube* reminds us that the one thing ~~that~~ conceptual art tends not to be about is concepts, except perhaps general ideas that support—remind you of—what you’re looking at (or not, in the case of this particular work). Invisibility is not a concept, but suggesting that a work of art might be something you could ~~no²t~~ actually see *is*. Conceptual art presents us first with a thought about art history, not as a bunch of stuff containing both documentation and sensation, variously interpreted, but as a discipline, whose categories the work seeks to undermine and simultaneously expand.¹² If not born of Duchamp, ~~it-conceptual art~~ is definitely consistent with his attempt to devalue the retinal in favour of conceptualisation, a pre-modernist impulse, it seems to me, and certainly an anti-perceptual one.¹³ I think it is best, actually, to think of ‘conceptual’ in the case of conceptual art as meaning little more than ‘not perceptual’. Johns’ torn-up newspaper could come to mind. To the extent that perception is involved, the object of attention ceases to be ‘purely’ conceptual. LeWitt’s buried cube is a case in point: knowing that one is standing on top of where the ‘cube’ is ‘buried’ is ~~certainly a bit~~ different ~~than from~~ just knowing about it. Otherwise conceptual art is heavily invested in substituting reading for seeing, which I ~~don’t-do not~~ think are the same thing.¹⁴ The insistence that they are the same thing goes with the refusal to let painting be spatial, the views of Art ~~and &~~ Language and Michael Asher both being dogmas of repression ~~which-that~~ turn the art object into a non-aesthetic historical element rather than one with a dialectical relation to history. Passively in the service of the word, the visual is permitted only to reproduce—, and in that, safely not able to subvert—interpretations ~~which-that~~ are imposed on it, and ~~that~~ also precede it. These are the attitudes ~~which-that~~ have led to institutional critique and the present establishment in general, but in 1970 they were ~~as-yet-not~~ ~~yet~~, at least not in New York (Berlin, Los Angeles and London were already taking them seriously) the force for maudlin banality ~~which-that~~ they have become.¹⁵

What suggests that Johns is a precursor of minimalism is less his use of Duchamp (—whom Judd brings into play only in passing, in his attempt to delegitimise Greenberg’s view of art)—than his emphasis on the way the object is made, its thingness.¹⁶ While an image is by definition not a thing, how it is made as and into a thing

Commented [BN178]: Wasn't a steel cube-shaped box created specially, and then buried in a hole dug in the earth? I found this description a bit cryptic.

Commented [BN179]: Please confirm this is what you are referring to here.

will influence how it is read, which is to say, how it communicates everything about itself that is ~~as it were~~ not a thing. Stella's famous remark that 'we' owe it all to Jasper had to do with how the work ~~that~~ communicates the way it does because of how it ~~i's~~ made, beginning with the first shaped paintings, where the stretcher bars are the width of the lines on the painting's surface: something was done to the stretcher, considered as an image (of itself).

In having a ~~recognizable~~ ~~recognisable~~ image (~~unlike~~, say, a Pollock), and likewise in being non-~~gestural~~ or not very gestural, Johns' *American flag* could be seen as a critical response to the values of New York School painting. In the case of Katz, the work was taken to be an inappropriate response to that school, as we have seen. Significantly, it was not taken to be a direct response so much as simply an example of what could no longer be done—paint figures, or use naturalistic colour. In Warhol's case the show was of graphic work, as far from anything one might associate with the New York School as could be imagined, made to be printed on an inert ground: the opposite of any of the attempts at immediacy that involved Pollock *et al* in making huge works with lots of marks.

Katz's, Johns' and Warhol's works were all quite small, but in 1970, painters were still ~~by and large~~ ~~generally~~ making large if not always huge works. Painting had not returned to the stretcher, while ceasing to be expressionist (~~i.e., that is,~~ gestural) and also again becoming for the most part made of paint that was bought in an art store. By now it may have become a trivial aspect of painting, large works being what the market demands, but ~~at~~ that time it was still the case that the equation between size and scale that the New York School was largely responsible for introducing was a challenge of a certain sort. ~~It~~ ~~This equation~~ helped ~~with~~ ~~attain~~ the goal of making the painting ~~be~~ continuous with the space ~~which~~ ~~that~~ it shared with the viewer, and it is worth remembering that we were still, again for the most part, not quite ready to move painting completely out of the frame. Stella's paintings never had frames (~~and this,~~ no doubt owed to Jasper), but this was taken to be an indication that the shaped works confused the traditional distinction between how painting worked in an imaginary ~~space~~ and ~~how~~ sculpture ~~worked~~ in an actual space. Otherwise the paintings made by members of his generation remained just barely framed, as was the case with those of the previous one. Even though (~~as~~ was signally important for us all and had to do not

Commented [BN180]: two different uses of 'large' too close together

least with the determination to remove the painting from the easel⁵, Newman had made an issue of removing the frame and of his works being unframed of necessity, it is ~~not certain~~ by ~~any-no~~ means certain that they were actually always shown unframed. Rather, not only his and Pollock's but also Olitski's and Kenneth Noland's paintings were shown in very thin frames, as were Agnes Martin's. In this respect, as in others, 1970 looks like a year of transition. It was the imminently emergent generation that would do without frames altogether, for example Brice Marden, for reasons ~~which-that~~ can be directly related to Johns. Marden's paintings of the early ~~seventies~~ 1970s, for example the *Grove group* (1973-~~7~~-4), demonstrate more clearly than most the influence of minimalist sculpture on painting and also the influence of Johns' example. Dispassionate rather than expressionist, Marden's paintings nonetheless preserve signs of labour and process in the bands at the bottom and, significantly, by leaving exposed the edge of the work and the accidental marks that found their way onto it ~~during-while~~ it was being painted.

Johns and his influence seem to me to be central ~~in-to~~ so many artists' attempts to locate an end for painting that would unite its contradictions, especially its identity as at once both image and thing, in a way that was plausible in the contemporary situation circa 1970. Plausibility would require that the image, or the surface if there were no image, ought not suppress one's sense of the physicality of the support. This is a requirement because we want the work to share our space, in the sense of the work being in ~~it-the~~ space with us, not for ~~it-the~~ work to be an image or space that is behind the surface and within the frame. In Marden, but also before that in Stella, one sees that Johns' concern with the total painting—sign and also object—had come to affect how frontality was being considered. The thin frame concentrated attention on the front: paintings that had been painted unstretched—Pollock's⁶ and also Olitski's⁷, for example—were framed so that one would not look at the sides. Johns showed the way towards making the whole work be involved in what one saw. A point that ~~doesn't~~ does not seem to be made very often is that Johns' emphasis on the physical has always been predicated on a central feature that cannot be physical because it i's a sign. Space—active emptiness—takes the place of the iconic in abstract or non-representational painting. As with the paradox of the surface that ~~can't~~ cannot be flat in Greenberg, in Johns the relationship between the linguistic and the material is one of mutual

Commented [BN181]: Please confirm – this was unclear.

exclusion, or at least non-relationship, which also anticipates for instance Stella and Marden, in that their works are made of the incompatibility between the painting's surface and the pictorial space and movement it brings into play, and its physical construction, active in different ways in both artists—as relief in the one, as memory in the other.

Returning for a moment to Agnes Martin, her early paintings provide an indication of what caused circa 1970 to be a time in which ~~quite strongly~~ contradictory attitudes to painting seemed to be either synthesising, or becoming irreconcilably opposed. Ryman's *Varese wall* (1974) (Fig. 7.4) may be the work ~~which that~~ most obviously achieves one of the ends of painting as ~~they~~ were set forth by earlier painters, most explicitly by Mondrian but also most implicitly in the New York School's conversion of painting from easel- to mural-size. This was (is) the goal of making the space of the painting ~~be~~ continuous with the space of the room in which it hangs, so that the idea that the work took place not on the surface but between it and its viewer, in the space they shared, could be active and direct. ~~This space was,~~ uninterrupted by the demilitarised zone which was the frame, ~~that~~ announcing a change of scale between what was inside and ~~what was~~ outside ~~of~~ the painting, ~~which,~~ ~~By~~ 1979 ~~this change of scale,~~ was no longer meant to be there. But it is Martin's paintings from the early ~~sixties-1960s that~~ ~~which~~ show the way towards the view of abstraction, or non-representation, on which Ryman's work depends, and which is less evident in his earliest works than in hers. Martin is crucial to our understanding of circa 1970 because of what she does with the grid. It becomes the place where the picture plane is at once asserted and subverted, suspended in an infinite space if read one way, made continuous with the surface of the work from another.

Later in life, Martin would say:

I'd done every kind of picture—portraits, landscapes, still lifes—but I didn't want to show them. It wasn't till I found the grid, in New York in 1960, that I felt satisfied with what I was doing. When I first made a grid I happened to be thinking of the innocence of trees, and I thought the grid represented innocence, and I still do. So I painted it, and I've been doing it for thirty years.¹⁷

Commented [BN182]: Please confirm (or delete altogether). 'Quite' doesn't add anything to the meaning.

Commented [BN183]: The sentence was long and rather convoluted. I'm trying to clarify, but not sure that I have understood correctly.

Designer, please take in Fig. 7.4 near here

Mondrian said he wanted to paint the sound of trees (and also of lamp-posts and hoardings), but he ~~didn't~~ did not say anything about them striking him as innocent (or guilty) of anything. His thought surely has more to do with making painting be as musical as it was architectonic. That is not unusual. Mediums are usually characterised in terms of what they're not; ~~e.g.,~~ for instance, painting has to be concerned with duration, while music tends to be described by musicians as if it were spatial. In contrast, Martin attributes innocence to trees and then transfers that to the grid. The grid is an example of Kant's sublime of pure ratio (nothing but mathematical extension, to infinity). Martin found in it something to work with that rearranged the New York School's terms. (Stella comparably retained the scale of New York School painting but eliminated the gesture.) Martin's grid in *The islands* (1960) (Fig. 7.5) runs under and over (or through) an almost uninflected field, and supports almost impersonal rectilinear marks. It represents a search for innocence that avoids or suppresses the language of the earlier generation; gesture as the place of risky decisiveness is replaced by the relatively impassive but wholly decisive, the drama of the inflected surface is replaced by its opposite; the grid that evens out the surface ~~out~~, or keeps it even.

Designer, please take in Fig. 7.5 near here

Donald Judd's essay 'Specific Objects' (1965) is almost a parody of Newman's 'The Sublime is Now' (1949), in that it foists off onto painting what Newman had attributed to European art in general. Asserting the innocence of the object purged of an allegedly false interiority—whether that be the illusionary interior of the painted space or the interiority of which the gestural mark is automatically seen to be an index, ~~The~~ object has an innocence that the image it bears cannot possess, or something like that.¹⁸ Martin distanced herself from minimalism, but her work has too much in common with it for the distance to be seen to be very far. Martin's *The islands* (1960) has no colour to speak of, avoiding the French entrapment that Katz was warned against. ~~None~~ None of the involuntary spatiality (or depth) caused by an Olitski painting, for instance. Martin's very early paintings look like Matisse by way of Arshile Gorky, but they are grey. And while Gorky was as experimental with materials as the Mexican muralists were, Martin just worked with oil paint. Innocent of the decadence that comes with colour and

Commented [BN184]: Please confirm. The first sentence 'Asserting the ...' was not a complete sentence on his own – did not make sense. I hope I have interpreted correctly.

Commented [BN185]: You've already given the date of this work.

gesture, her paintings are perhaps fulfillments of whatever the opposite of decadence is. The grid is perhaps innocent because it is colourless and without human inflection—although I note that later in her life ~~she-Martin~~ would specify a certain kind of grid as the one ~~that~~ women should use. A grid made of rectangles wider than they were tall was, in her opinion, more female than one made ~~out~~ of squares, and perhaps ~~in~~ that helped her to make paintings that were in her view innocent of inflection's and seduction's historical baggage.

One may also speculate without much fear of contradiction that the grid attracted (seduced) ~~her-Martin~~ and others because it is an order void of hierarchy. This was the period in which Samuel Beckett was writing plays ~~which-that~~ just ended, without climax ~~and-or~~ denouement, and where John Cage was thought of as exemplary because he eschewed authorship in favour of chance. Some innocence may be found in setting things up so that certain decisions ~~don't-do not~~ have to be made—innocence asserted and ~~preserved-as it were~~, even while one is responsible for making the piece.

The islands (1960) is mostly painted with a small brush. The grid is small, drawing ~~one-the viewer~~ into the work (or close to it, if one wishes not to see space, I suppose), and more varied and detailed than one might think at first sight. Its perimeter is anticipated or doubled by an interior framing line; it is an almost entirely symmetrical painting. Calm and closeness rather than action and expression, ~~then~~, and Martin (and Ryman) would ~~probably~~ have ~~likely~~ agreed with Rothko when he said that ~~while-whereas historically~~ large paintings ~~in the past had had to do~~ were concerned with 'something very grand and pompous. The reason I paint them, however—I think it applies to other painters I know—is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human.'¹⁹

Rothko said that he painted large rather than small paintings because when you painted large you were ~~no't~~ outside the experience, which was the case with small painting, but rather '(you) are in it. It isn't something you command.'²⁰ Apropos the flight from Europe, so much for the traditional idea that large paintings were about mastery. For Rothko, they were just as much about getting lost, the human imagined as at once intimate and at the same time so big that you're in it rather than at a distance from it—by definition sublime because it ~~i's~~ ungraspable, as far as that goes. You have to get close to *The islands*, but it ~~i's~~ not so clear that the artist or the viewer might get

Commented [BN186]: I don't think 'as it were' adds anything.

Commented [BN187]: 'historically large' caused ambiguity. I think you mean in the past?

lost in it, at least not in the way that Rothko thought he might get lost in his. As noted, the difference between the two generations is ~~that the~~ difference between gesture and the repeated mark, and the grid and the repeated mark. Gesture and psychological expression were important or even central to Rothko, who once wrote that each of his marks had a different psychology. In contrast to that sentiment, the grid embodies repetition in the absence of singularity. Not one mark after another and each one different, so much as the same shape over and over. The grid points attention to how the painting was made as much as it establishes a space, just as Ryman's signature has as much or more to do with the work it generates than reminding one of who made it, and in both cases one becomes involved in the physical facts of what one is looking at. In Martin, one is looking at concentration that is at the same time about dispersal, about nothing being more important than anything else. (Her later paintings do not work in my view for exactly the opposite reasons that the earlier ones do. Her earlier work profits from the concentration that oil paint makes possible, its internal glow rendering the location of the mark in regard to depth or projection wholly speculative. In the later work she never gets on top of the plastic glow of acrylic paint, which makes it quite impossible for her to produce the kind of compulsion to concentrate ~~which that~~ the earlier work has. a Acrylic murkiness shut sting one out of the painting, whereas the intense clarity of oil paint brings one right up against its surface and even—I should say—into it.)

Commented [BN188]: 'that' was ambiguous here.

By 1970 there were plenty of painters who would say they did no²t see space in painting, certainly not of a naturalistic sort, but not so many who did not see movement. And actually, you can no²t have movement without space in which to move, so the ones who said (and still say) that they could no²t see space can no²t really have meant exactly what they were saying. It is clear though that the space with which they worked no longer mimics the space of landscape or any other space found in nature so much as it operates alongside the exterior space of the natural world. 'Space' may not even be the best word for what one sees in a painting like *The islands*, but if not I think one has to talk about the work in terms of a gerund, as a presenting or performing of an idea about the equal as opposed to the hierarchical, and as rehearsal of the passage from inside to outside—is the interior frame the beginning of the outside?² Where does the inside

Commented [BN189]: 'Impossible' is an absolute. You can't qualify it with 'quite'. You could say 'almost impossible', if that is your intention.

begin? In other words, if it ~~is~~ not to be talked about as space, it can ~~only~~ be thought about only in terms of duration and concentration.

That is largely how we do talk about Ryman or Martin, and I think it reflects how the artists themselves thought about their work. Thanks largely to Johns, what was invisible as well as what was apparent in a painting had come to play a bigger part in what painters did in 1970 than theretofore. Thanks to film and the photographic—including the video screen—space was ceasing to be an experience based on looking at landscape. Thanks to French colour, abstraction as atmosphere and infinite depth could be developed by Olitski to a point where the painting as thing could be both emphatic and dematerialised, and by Stella to one where thingness was the key to how the non-material was working (or out of control). Thanks to a certain rejection of colour, or suppression of it, abstraction or non-representation as process as much as image could find a new kind of articulation. There is a sense in which Olitski and Stella seem to be the culmination of a tradition, while Martin and Ryman are perhaps more, ~~perhaps~~, like a radical intervention in it. In both pairs of artists, though, an interior ~~which that~~ can only be seen on the surface is what we're looking at when we look at their work. That was the end of painting from Hegel's perspective. He thought it succeeded sculpture historically and as an element in the development of spirit (~~i.e., meaning~~ reason, as Robert Pippin has explained²¹) because it was better at expressing or communicating inner feeling on its surface. Shiff has shown how Johns fulfilled Greenberg's goals for painting while seeming to be his opposite—or possibly his nemesis—in compatible if not entirely similar terms, breathing taking the place of feeling towards similar ends for painting:

With a certain irony, Johns' *Target* satisfies the criterion Greenberg once articulated: 'The best modern painting... refers to the structure of the given world both inside and outside human beings.' In and out, back and forth, adrift between the sign and life itself, the 'best modern painting' becomes breath.²²

As is usually the case, Greenberg leads back to Hegel. (As ever, too, with him as with Fried, one wants to know—and is never told—what the modern painting that ~~is~~ not the best does.) I think that the painting and sculpture being made in 1970, and the

Commented [BN190]: I think an emphasis here sets up the contrast with the next clause.

discussion around them, had to do with a change in the 'given world' that was about a further stage being reached in the development of (our notion of) subjectivity. The notion of an interior that was implied by the exterior was giving way at greater and greater speed to the more plausible, from a contemporary perspective, idea that the interior was actually inscribed on the exterior. The terms remained, but they ceased to be comfortable opposites, instead being more imbricated in one another. Stella's reliefs being the ~~to coin a phrase,~~ most literal examples of that development.

—I am for an art that is political-erotic-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.

Claes Oldenburg, 1961²³

—When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.²

Sol LeWitt, 1967²⁴

By 1970 Oldenburg was in every major museum that could get a hold of a piece of his work. By 1970, too, the low value that conceptual art placed on execution ~~by conceptual art~~ had become very attractive to lots of artists and theorists. LeWitt's idea of the machine that makes art would surely be most fully realised much later, in Zaha Hadid's computer, which, once fed the right information, goes on to make drawing that a human could not imagine, while in art I think it is best seen as a critical gesture, displacing authority ~~elsewhere than in~~ from the hand, and which is also a search for partial innocence. Suffice to say, ~~here that~~ by 1970 the putatively irreverent and the idea that art did not need to be performed by the artist had both found permanent homes in the museum and in art history. The radical had become the norm, but would forever be described as radical—1970 was the start of that nonsense.

As it happens, I showed my first painting in New York in 1970. My painting was less minimal than Sean's, but it was not unrelated to what he was trying to do. Patterson Sims (who worked at the gallery) told me that Clement Greenberg had come

Commented [BN191]: I don't think that you are coining a new phrase here, but maybe I have misunderstood something?

by and seen the show and liked my painting, [Sims](#) adding ‘That’s a bad sign.’ We had reached the point when, for some, including some who worked in galleries and would go on to run museums (~~—Patterson would soon be overseeing the Whitney Museum’s permanent collection~~), ~~—abstract paintings~~ ~~which-that~~ could be seen to work in terms that involved an involuntary experience of spatiality were by definition on the wrong track: Ryman yes, Olitski no. We had reached a point where it was possible to reject abstract painting as such. Circa 1970, abstract or non-representational painting was being rejected by more and more people, even as new artists came along and sought to make it do something it had ~~no~~’t yet done. As noted, no one actually noticed what that might be. We all thought we were continuing something, whether through extension or inversion, either way through negation.

~~It-Abstract painting~~ was being rejected for at least two reasons, both bad, and which are themselves incompatible. One was that minimalist sculpture was thought by the people who made it and their fans to have fulfilled and then exceeded the ambitions of the last generation of modernist painters, for example and in particular Jackson Pollock. The other was that conceptualism rendered any art that needed to be constituted as an actual thing redundant, painting especially perhaps because it has to be a thing in order not to be one, becoming as it does a space that is ~~no~~’t ‘really’ there. ~~This applied perhaps even more especially to~~ ~~—abstract painting,~~ ~~therefore, perhaps even more especially-~~ than ~~to~~ painting in general, because it is spatial but cannot be traced back to an actual space that it represents.

Both arguments for rejection missed the point of painting’s ambition to exceed the frame and invade what was then referred to as ‘real’ space. If ~~it-the point~~ was to jam together the experience (or other kind of thought) of the exterior and the interior, one could not do that by simply eliminating one of them, as minimalism purported to do, and even less by getting rid of both. I also note that the conceptual work can never be abstract, actually, but is always representational. When Sol LeWitt had a cube of earth dug out and then filled in outside the Arsenal in New York in 1968, making a work that had to be imagined because it could ~~no~~’t be seen (a buried cube) and ~~which~~ is generally regarded as the first work of conceptual art, he made a representational work. Not to make a pun, the conceptual work is representation because it re-presents, as in LeWitt’s definition of conceptual art: if it is the opposite of an abstract or non-representational

painting, it is not a negation of it. It is, rather, something else. Where abstract paintings bring into view indeterminate spaces that are not really there but are most certainly present as far as involuntary perceiving goes, LeWitt's buried cube brings to mind something ~~which that~~ in a sense really *is* there; a cube was made as a negative space and then filled in. You are not being asked to imagine something that did not really happen; you just did not need to be there to see it. That could never be true of a work that involved one in seeing something that was not really there.

~~1970-Nineteen-seventy~~ was the year of Henry Geldzahler's ~~exhibition~~ *New York Painting and Sculpture 1940-1970* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. An enormous exhibition ~~which that~~ demonstrated the range and energy of the New York art world at that time, it included a work by Ellsworth Kelly made of thirteen canvases, and one by Larry Poons that was messy and dense; ~~and~~ these could have been taken to stand for possible extreme differences in abstract painting. If someone were to make such a show today, of art from 1970 to, say, now, it would have to be not only about New York painting and sculpture, but about painting and sculpture and video and performance ~~ete., ete., and so on and so forth~~, to be international rather than confined to the production of one city's artists, and it would be sure to have much less abstract art in it than Geldzahler's did. 'The social', always an easy lay in art and now a dominant prejudice, would undoubtedly be all over it. A further (but it is to be hoped not final) pursuit of innocence perhaps, which generally takes the form of self-righteousness in the face of problems for which the artist can be said to have no responsibility, like endless photographs of third-world poverty—which could lead back to Newman's American boy who dropped the bomb, but I have no-t seen that level of implicitly acknowledged guilt in connection with contemporary displays of implicit virtue as alleged criticality.

Painting in general was soon going to explode in various kinds of representation, from Polke to Schnabel, all much more influenced by Warhol than by Katz. Abstract painting was in turmoil and very exciting. I have spent some time here talking about Johns, because it is he who shifts painting slightly, from the abstract plane to something that follows from that but is messier. I agree wholly with Shiff on Johns' relation to Greenberg, while thinking that in their different ways Olitski's sprayed paintings (he said he felt as if he were painting on air) and Martin's grids point towards the endless

space which is not that of nature, which Shiff saw after the television stations closed down. That space is more firmly in all our heads than is the dream of the wholly flat landscape that led Newman to want to go to Alaska, and it is the space that takes painting beyond the terms in which Greenberg thought of abstraction—~~and terms that~~ make him all the more relevant to representational artists. In circa 1970 the ends of painting were being talked about historically, but realised through how paintings were being made, and it is there that confusion emerged and has remained.

Commented [BN192]: Please confirm – this was ambiguous.

Isabelle Graw is, I think, quite right to say that painting maintains a special place in the contemporary art market/art world, because its being hand-made allows it to communicate a special kind of persona not available in the less hand-made arts, ~~and~~ I suppose this is how painting has remained important in the market in an art world in which the general opinion is that ~~#painting i~~'s dead. Painting was declared dead several times before 1970, most notably by the surrealists and by Rodchenko, and also by Ad Reinhardt. In practice, all that it could do was be made to perform a final state for itself, because painting is not actually an argument about historical logic, and it is able to do what none of the other arts do. ~~It is not dependent on empirical truth like photography. It is not entirely in the space like sculpture.~~ There's very little that is specific about a painting, because you can't help but see what's not literally there.

Commented [BN193]: I think this is much stronger broken into three straightforward sentences. It seems to me to be one of the most important paragraphs in the essay, and worth emphasising in this way.

That something has to be there in order that one may see what is not literally present, but which you can't help but see anyway, is what keeps painting alive despite its obituaries. This returns me briefly to a distinction I mentioned at the beginning, which boils down, I think, to the difference between being of the contemporary and being in the moment. I recently discussed the question in regard to the contemporary situation, but I think it has some relevance to circa 1970. I talked about how I had heard the jazz pianist Herbie Hancock tell an interviewer on the radio that on one occasion when he and Miles Davis got it just right he felt as though his fingers were playing the music themselves.²⁵ He said he was 'in the moment'. The interviewer on ~~NPR-National Public Radio to whom he said that~~ asked him if that was what he was doing on his new recording. He said No, because that was that and you ~~can't-cannot~~ repeat that, you have to find it all over again. Not a straightforward relationship to either history or an historical model of development; ~~then, but~~ rather, another work is another work. This way of working is what we find in Charline von Heyl's ~~practice; I think. It is a practice~~

Commented [BN194]: I think there are a few too many 'I think's in the essay. 😊 In one sense this applies to the entire essay, so no need to repeat too often.

~~which~~ She continually produces paintings in a pattern ~~which-that~~ goes all over the place. ~~There is~~ I see no necessity ~~that I can see~~ for one group of paintings preceding or following another. Rather, her work roams around in a continuing present, like Hancock's. I compared von Heyl's work to Jeff Koon's², and said that ~~while-although~~ every work tells us something about the epoch, the difference is that while Koons' work is only about a very severely defined version of the historical present, ~~hers-von Heyl's~~ has a messy relationship with any notion of art history as a question of development—, particularly (~~—~~which was one reason I was talking about it); ~~with~~ the notion ~~which-that~~ seems to be generally in charge.

~~I think that~~ In order to grasp what was happening in 1970 we might similarly think about ~~what-which~~ works were making painting perform, rather ~~than—~~or as much ~~as—about~~ what their origins (let alone their consequences) were. We allow them to slip ~~to—~~completely into a narrative, which ~~largely—~~was ~~largely—~~like all history—made of accident and the unpredictable. Once thinking about what the works do in terms of art, it ~~i's~~ more possible to think about how they are of the contemporary but not in the way that Koons' work is, for example. They are of the aspects of it ~~that~~ are indirect, as would also be true of Hancock's improvisation. Like Martin's grids, Noland's long horizontal paintings move us across₂ but also inevitably into₂ a space with no ground, like the space of the computer screen₂ which did not yet exist. They were working with what painting had to offer, which is a space that does ~~no't~~ have to be the one that one knows but can instead be the one through which one ~~thinks that space~~. Immediacy will not be guaranteed by the work's being hand-made, but will be dependent on its relationship to the hand-made. Olitski's spray and Martin's grid are the same in this respect₂; they relocate immediacy into something other than the visible gesture, again, like others mentioned here, bringing the apparatus into tension with properties and qualities like intuition and touch. Hegel notoriously wrote a lot about art but does ~~no't~~ seem to have been interested in much of it, except for the Dutch paintings ~~which-that~~ were all ~~about~~ ~~concerned with~~ what he wanted to talk about regarding social history. Similarly, art historians and others seem to have become interested in ~~the year~~ 1970 only in terms of how ~~it-that year may be said to~~ might relate to the present, in which things that were thought about then have been largely pushed aside in favour of (quite undialectical) concerns with innocence and guilt. I suggest we think about how varied the art of 1970

Commented [BN195]: 'thinks that space'? Not sure of meaning here.

is, while also thinking about how it is clear from here that factions ~~which-that felt~~ perceived themselves as opposed were in fact much closer than seemed ~~be the case~~ at the time. The grid that runs through Martin, and the stretcher that becomes drawing as well as support in Stella, are ~~I think~~ related in wanting to achieve immediacy through the object that ~~won't will not be~~ only ~~be~~ an object, because one ~~can't cannot~~ help seeing it as a space. In Stella this is a space inseparable from the movement that creates it, in Martin a surface that becomes a space thanks to the grid that subdivides it and the small painted squares which, as Heidegger said of Cézanne's brushstrokes, hover over the depth ~~which-that~~ is the surface as much as they sit in or on it.

Only paintings share a space with you in a way that is like sharing a space with a being rather than a thing. The presence of the hand (or not) has something to do with the expectations that go with a medium made of surface and stretcher, which is to say skin and skeleton, a body ~~which-that~~ is entirely a face. Around 1970, painters found new ways in which to make painting come abreast of a present (or 'given world') that would within thirty years be filled with video colour and was already thoroughly conditioned by the experience of the photographic. Morris Louis saw it coming. In the photographic there is no separation between surface and support, and what is in the image is in the surface. The stained painting realises that this—what Newman denounced as 'batique', snobbery ~~which-that~~ also underscores the notion that painting involved an interior—was from another point of view prescient (Fig. 7.6). As has been said, the ~~fifties-1950s~~ were over. Newman's zip is at times actually a colour that runs underneath the field that it also divides, a similarity of a sort with the newspaper under John's encaustic surface. In Stella and Olitski, Martin and Ryman, very little if anything is ever underneath anything else. That would certainly change. The first thing one sees in the Scully painting is that there's something behind the lines. The ends of painting always involve seeing what the surface can contain, always a mixture of involuntary response and conscious recognition and appreciation of how it was made, its logic and how its facture affects how one feels. It would have to do it in some way that worked for people who'd stared at the television as much as we all have. Circa 1970 was a period of transition, of clarification in the face of a reorientation that no one discussed because they had ~~n't~~ noticed it—no wonder ~~#~~ 1970 was so confused. No surprise, either, that everyone was so certain about everything ...

Designer, please take in Fig. 7.6 near here

Postscript: There was no beginning.

We know only approximately when painting began, and can only speculate about what its goals, or ends, were, although we're fairly confident that it involved having or sharing power over the spirit of something ~~was involved~~. As to abstract painting, ~~if Kandinsky was able to by~~ titling a work *The first abstract painting* (1912), ~~he Kandinsky was in that~~ the founder of a kind of abstraction from ~~whom whom~~ which most abstract painters ~~ing has have~~ kept ~~at~~ a distance, Malevich and Mondrian being far more influential general sources. They, of course, contradict one another at nearly every level, having had in mind quite different ends for painting ~~in mind~~. With the indeterminate past as well as the over-determined immediate present in mind, I have suggested here that it may be better to think about the act (practice) of painting, rather than about its historical origins or goals.

~~Of course~~ Barthes' adage is apposite here: that a little formalism drives history from the work, but a lot brings it right back in.²⁶ ~~is apposite here, but~~ That said, when I received the invitation to write about 'The Ends of Painting' in 1970, it sounded ~~to me~~ too historicist a way to think about it, given ~~as it were~~ paradoxically—the historical state of things. Instead, I want ~~instead~~ to suggest that we think of painting in terms like those suggested by T. J. Clark (who has played a prominent role in this essay) with regard to politics.²⁷ Clark has proposed that the Left stop thinking of history as an extension of evolution, with revolutionary success an eventual inevitability ~~which that~~ politics either speeds up or seeks to impede. I think painting too needs to be described (and made) in different terms that move elsewhere than, and in that away from, from the definition to which we have become accustomed. I ~~have suggested that~~ This requires ~~one us~~ to think of painting more in terms of performance than of the historical character and obligations of a medium, now certainly but then too might have been a good idea.

Commented [BN196]: I think the original was very wordy, but the meaning is straightforward, and can be summed up this way?

Commented [BN197]: The 'I think' at the beginning of the previous sentence still applies here – no need to repeat the point.

Commented [BN198]: I don't understand this final clause.

¹ [Sean Scully: Circa 70](https://www.cheimread.com/exhibitions/sean-scully_1), Cheim & Read, New York, 20 May – 1 July 2016.

https://www.cheimread.com/exhibitions/sean-scully_1.

² [Michael Fried, Michael Fried, Three American Painters: Noland, Olitski, Stella](#), Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts MA, 1968, p. xx. [On WorldCat I can find only references to 1965, not 1968. Can you please confirm? This is not the same publication as the exhibition catalogue?](#)

³ Phillip Leider, 'Literalism and Abstraction: [Frank Stella's Retrospective at the Modern](#)', *Artforum*, vol. 8, no. 8, April 1970, pp. 44–51.

⁴ For more on Kelly, see [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) 'How to be Tangential: Ellsworth Kelly and American Art', *Art & Text*, vol. 57, May–July 1997, pp. 59–65. For more on Ryman, see [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) 'Appreciating Ryman', *Arts Magazine*, November 1975, pp. ??–??, reprinted in [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) *Immanence and Contradiction: Recent Essays on the Artistic Device*, Out of London Press, New York, 1986, pp. ???–???

⁵ See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) 'Marginalized But Not Demystified', *Abcrit*, 1 January 2016, <https://abcrit.wordpress.com/2016/01/01/24-jeremy-gilbert-rolfe-writes-on-marginalized-but-not-demystified/>.

⁶ 'Alex Katz on Franz Kline's Black, White and Gray', *The Artist Project*, n.d. <http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/5/alex-katz/> <http://artistproject.metmuseum.org/5/alex-katz/>.

⁷ Published in [I think](#), more than one form, I first heard it as a talk given at the Art Center College of Design on 1 April 1987. See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts, 1986–1993*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1995, pp. 160–163.

⁸ The influence has typically had to do with a preference for the unadorned but big and fundamental, over the pretty and therefore potentially frivolous—as with Newman's sublime, see below. The sublime in American nineteenth-century painting is an obvious example; the Bauhaus finding a happy home in America [is](#) another; Reinhardt wanting to go to Cologne on his first trip to Europe [is](#) an anecdotal third (see [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) 'Reinhardt and the Picture Plane', *The Brooklyn Rail: Critical Perspectives on Art, Politics, and Culture*, 16 January 2014. https://brooklynrail.org/special/AD_REINHARDT/black-paintings/reinhardt-and-the-picture-plane http://www.brooklynrail.org/special/ad_reinhardt/black-paintings/reinhardt-and-the-picture-plane);

and Ludwig Sander (who spoke German) studying in Munich with Hans Hoffman before the war is a fourth—Sander tells us Hoffman never used the words ‘push’ or ‘pull’ in Munich, it was just that they were almost the only English words he could master when it came to teaching in America. The implication seems to be that it ~~did not~~ ~~didn’t~~ matter; that ~~i~~’s not what Hoffman talked about anyway, and what he did discuss suggests that American artists who said they studied with him without it having much influence may have been mistaken, or disingenuous. See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) ‘Michael Goldberg’s Color and a Speculative Note About What Influenced It’, in [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Audrey Walen \(ed.\), *Abstraction Over Time: The Paintings of Michael Goldberg*, ed. Audrey Walen](#), exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Florida, 2014, pp. ??–??. Now we have been living for more than a quarter-century under a gloomy cloud of sanctimony, heavily German in every respect, reinforced by native tendencies similarly driven by an Oedipal relation to post-war American painting in New York. Michael Asher’s sophistry is treated as if he had been literate in both Germany and Los Angeles, while at the kitschy end of the establishment the relationship between Mike Kelley and Martin Kippenberger is exemplary in every respect, including those that fans and hagiographers prefer to gloss over.

⁹ Animadversion ~~regarding to~~ the ‘Frenchness’ of colour is recurrent but unstable in its reference. Katz was undoubtedly being told that French colour was bad because it ~~wasn’t~~ ~~was not~~ macho enough, but fifty or so years later I ~~woul~~d be told by Norman Bryson that I used the kind of colour (~~i.e.~~ ~~that is~~, post-impressionist) that he had ~~been~~ taught, or had otherwise learned, to despise. I doubt that this was because it was ~~no~~’t macho enough. I have suggested that colour in painting is a threat to those who for one reason or another do ~~no~~’t like involuntary experiences—take no pleasure in them—as it is ~~of course also~~ to those who want art to be at the service of ideas that precede, and are not exceeded by, it. See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999.

¹⁰ See T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from the History of Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999, pp. 371–392.

¹¹ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, ‘Robert Morris: The Complication of Exhaustion’, *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 1, September 1974, p. ??, n#–2. Reprinted in [Gilbert-Rolfe, my](#) *Immanence and Contradiction*, pp. ??–??.

¹² The essentially implausible basis of conceptual art was pointed out by Jean Baudrillard, in a conversation with John Johnston. Baudrillard observed that an idea is already complete; there is nothing that may be done to it—as opposed to *with* it—although he thought that would imply that one could do

something with a bad idea and complete it in a way by turning it into art. This is why I have suggested that the only really plausible conceptual art practice is John Baldessari's, [John's-whose](#) early works [having-been-were](#) made specifically out of bad ideas. See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), 'JAB/Panic', in [Gilbert-Rolfe](#), *Beyond Piety*, pp. ??-??. originally given as a lecture at Baldessari's retrospective at [MeCA:the Museum of Contemporary Art](#), Los Angeles, in 1990.

¹³ For Duchamp's pre-modernism, see [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), my 'Duchamp and Cultural Nostalgia', *Visual Arts and Culture: An International Journal of Contemporary Art*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2000, pp. ??-??. and [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), 'The Impressionist Revolution and Duchamp's Myopia', in [Gilbert-Rolfe](#), *Beyond Piety*, pp. ??-??.

¹⁴ See for example [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), 'Vision's Resistance to Language', in *Beyond Piety*, pp. ??-??.

¹⁵ Art and Language have since become known for not only talking about painting but for making some. What they make is quite consistent with a general tendency, post-Warhol, to use the blank format of minimalism as a signboard for this or that message. Regarding Asher and the disinclination to see depth in painting, see (*inter alia*) a recent catalogue essay for a show about four representational painters working with a sense of the historical priority of photography; [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), '*Outside*', MiM Gallery, Los Angeles, 2016.

¹⁶ Judd would enlist Duchamp in his own defence, only to have him turned against him, as minimalist sculpture's interest in the object came to be seen as no more than Greenberg's emphasis on the optical turned upside down. See [Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe](#), my 'Nietzschean Critique and the Hegelian Commodity, or The French Have Landed', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 1, Autumn 1999, pp. 70–84.

¹⁷ [Source of this quote?](#)

¹⁸ Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', *Arts Yearbook 8*, New York, 1965, pp. ??-??.; Barnett Newman, 'The Sublime is Now', *Tiger's Eye*, March 1948, pp. ??-??. reprinted in [John P. O'Neill \(ed.\)](#), *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. ??-??. ed. [John P. O'Neill](#). University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992, pp. ??-??. In 'The Sublime is Now' and other writings of the same time, Barnett Newman would invent (or repeat but in a new way) the by then ~~traditional-established~~ myth of a European tradition wholly concerned with beauty, which could be contrasted with an American proclivity for the sublime. As was (and is) also fundamental to established belief, the one is decadent and the other vital. Innocence, however, is not for Newman necessarily a property of that vitality, as it is for

Martin and Judd. Newman mentions Longinus but his is, at least in that essay, essentially the sublime considered in Burkean terms ('Whatever is truly terrible, that is sublime') rather than [in Kant's](#). However irretrievably decadent Europe may be and have been, Newman reminds us that it was an American boy who dropped the bomb. Innocence of, or indifference to, the beautiful is [in](#) his account of what the sublime is now [not](#) incapable of wickedness. It is the American sublime purged of an interest in innocence such as Martin and Judd find in the one case in trees, and the other in plywood.

¹⁹ Mark Rothko, 'I Paint Very Large Pictures' (1951), in Kristin Stiles and Peter Selz (eds), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1996, p. 26.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Robert B. Pippin has [addressed-discussed](#) this in more than one place, but [see](#) in particular [see his](#) *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Cambridge University Press, [Cambridge](#), 2008.

²² Richard Shiff, 'Breath of Modernism (Metonymic Drift)', in Terry Smith (ed.), *In Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity*, Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney, 1997, p. 213.

²³ [Claes Oldenburg](#), [Please give Title of Oldenburg Text](#), in Stiles and Selz (eds), *Theories and Documents*, p. 335.

²⁴ [Sol LeWitt](#), [Please give Title of text](#), 1967, [Reprinted](#) most recently in the brochure for the exhibition [Conceptual Art in Britain 1964–1979, held of British Conceptual Art](#) at the Tate in 2016.

²⁵ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, [lecture](#), 'Teaching What Can't be Taught', [lecture delivered](#) at ZHdK Zürcher Hochschule der Künste, Zurich, [on 18](#) November 2015, [in a](#) symposium organised by Colin Guillemet.

²⁶ Roland Barthes, 'Myth Today', in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Annette Lavers (transl.), Hill and Wang, New York, 1972, p. 112: 'The more a system is specifically defined in its forms, the more amenable it is to historical criticism. To parody a well-known saying, I shall say that a little formalism turns one away from History, but that a lot brings one back in.' For the whole passage, which is about how 'historical criticism might have been less sterile', see Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, 'James Hayward: Nonrepresentation Which Doesn't Represent', in Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beyond Piety*, p. 352.

²⁷ T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with no Future', *New Left Review*, no. 74, March–April 2012, [pp. ??–??](#).

8

Althusser's painting lesson

Sami Siegelbaum

In October 1965, a group of artists affiliated with the Salon de la Jeune Peinture presented a suite of eight paintings titled *Live and let die, or The tragic end of Marcel Duchamp*, depicting the murder of Duchamp (Fig. 8.1). They distributed a collectively authored text explaining that the attack on the father of the readymade should be interpreted as an attack on a reactionary bourgeois ideology.¹

[Designer, please take in Fig. 8.1 near here.](#)

In January 1967, the painters Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni, publicly executed, hung, then removed a series of minimally abstract, equally sized, paintings at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris for the ~~18th~~^{18th}-~~eighteenth~~^{eighteenth} Salon de la Jeune Peinture (Fig. 8.2). A type-written text accompanied the action:

Since to paint is a game.

Since to paint is to harmonise or clash colours.

Since to paint is to apply (consciously or not) the rules of composition.

Since to paint is to value gesture.

Since to paint is to represent the outside world (or interpret it, or appropriate it, or contest it, or present it).

Since to paint is to offer a springboard for the imagination.

Since to paint is to illustrate interiority.

Since to paint is a justification.

Since to paint serves something.

Since to paint is to paint for the purpose of aestheticism, of flowers, of women, of eroticism, of the everyday environment, of art, of dada, of psychoanalysis, of the war in Vietnam.

WE ARE NOT PAINTERS.

The text advanced the claim, which would be subsequently reiterated by the four artists, who had since been dubbed BMPT, that painting was 'objectively reactionary'.²

[Designer, please take in Fig. 8.2 near here.](#)

In September 1970, a group of six artists calling themselves Supports/Surfaces exhibited cut-out and stained canvases, stretchers, wooden poles, and fibre grids at the Musée d'Art Moderne (Fig. 8.3). Three of the artists authored a tract in which they insisted on the Marxist-Leninist political significance of their self-reflexive approach to painting.³

Designer, please take in Fig. 8.3 near here.

Among the most difficult challenges posed by art of the late 1960s and early 1970s for viewers today is how to make sense of the revolutionary political claims that were appended to such disparate and seemingly apolitical approaches to traditional artistic media. Why, for example, at this moment did artists in France as formally and conceptually distinct as the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, BMPT, and Supports/Surfaces feel the need to justify their work politically through supplemental texts? Furthermore, why was it that such political claims were advanced specifically in relation to the medium of painting?⁴

Though there has been a tendency to ascribe these expressions of militancy to the general atmosphere of revolt that characterised the late 1960s and early 1970s in France and many other parts of the world,⁵ the actions cited above share a more specific set of assumptions about art's ideological function. The years surrounding the mass protests and general strike of May–June 1968 saw a renewed urgency around questions of ideology, thanks largely to the work of French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. From the early 1960s, Althusser's ground-breaking readings of Marx were avidly followed by a new generation of intellectuals, activists, and artists yearning for more rigorous analyses than those offered by the prevailing mixture of existentialism, late surrealism, and philosophical Marxism. While Althusser's influence in the intellectual field has been well surveyed, his **impact-influence** on artistic practice of the 1960s and 1970s remains under-appreciated.⁶

This essay will examine the **impact-effects** of Althusser's thought on artists in France at this pivotal moment when artistic **engagement-activity** vacillated between the political and the theoretical, generating wildly varied and often incompatible responses. Each of the groups considered here—the Jeune Peinture committee, BMPT, and Supports/Surfaces—grappled with Althusser's writings, finding in them a justification for painting as a critical praxis. These examples also indicate the degree to which

Commented [BN199]: I avoid 'impact' in all but the literal sense – it is over-used and has lost all specific meaning.

Commented [BN200]: 'engage' and its derivatives I also avoid – so widely used to have lost any meaning. I try for something more specific. I hope I have captured your meaning. If not, maybe 'debate' or 'production'?

~~textual engagement and production~~ writing and publishing became a crucial component of artistic practice for painters during these years, at least as important as the production of actual paintings.⁷

Commented [BN201]: Please confirm. Avoiding 'engagement'. Is this what is meant here?

Beyond acknowledging the role that Althusser's writings played in such approaches to painting, these responses attest to the ways in which the breakdown of both artistic modernism and the French Left became entwined circa 1970. The political claims made for these aesthetic practices, so crucial to the artists at the time, remain opaque without a deeper historical understanding of this dynamic, and of the complex debates regarding the relationships between theory and practice, politics and philosophy, and ideology and science, that Althusser formulated for his followers. Above all, what appealed to artists as formally distinct as the Jeune Peinture, BMPT, and Supports/Surfaces, was how Althusser's rigorously anti-humanist philosophy offered a way to think about painting's relation to class struggle. I argue that Althusserian Marxism's appeal for these artists must be understood in the paradoxical historical context of increasing ~~skepticism~~ scepticism towards the model of political art propounded by the French Communist Party in the years around 1968. In this context, attempts to expunge expression, individuality, ~~or and~~ and uniqueness from art were no-t ~~merely~~ seen merely as avant-garde gambits but as necessary means of dismantling an ideology that sustained the ruling class.

~~1956~~ Nineteen fifty-six was a watershed year for the French Left. The acknowledgment of Stalin's atrocities at the twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the USSR's suppression of the Hungarian uprising later that year, and the French Communist Party's (PCF) lacklustre support for Algerian independence prompted the defection of scores of intellectuals and increased calls for reforms within the ~~Party~~ PCF. The fallout also triggered ~~the a~~ search by French radicals for non-communist models of leftism ~~amongst French radicals~~. The Sino-~~Soviet~~ split of 1961, when diverging national interests and doctrinal disputes prompted the Chinese Communist Party to sever relations with the Soviet Union, exacerbated tensions within the French Left that would ~~ultimately~~ climax in 1968.⁸

Against the calls to reform the PCF through more humanistic and liberal interpretations of Marx, Althusser argued that an 'epistemological break' existed between Marx's early works, which he regarded as still saturated with bourgeois

ideology, and his later works, especially *Capital*.⁹ These ‘mature’ works, he argued, detach themselves from ideology and establish a new scientific discipline capable of objectively describing the structure of historical development without recourse to a human subject positioned as its engine or telos.¹⁰ According to Althusser, ‘it is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical, theoretical myth of man is reduced to ashes’.¹¹ It was precisely this attack on the ‘myth of man’ that would captivate a number of French artists dissatisfied with the increasingly stale gestures of post-cubist painting.

Throughout the 1950s, the French government and the art market promoted expressive, gestural styles often grouped under the umbrella category of *art informel*.¹² While much of this work was figurative, it prioritised the spontaneous painterly touch in similar ways to American abstract expressionism. For example, at the first Paris Biennial, in October 1959, the French contribution was dominated by the various forms of abstract painting ~~practiced~~ practised at the time, as well as by a selection of works by masters of the early École de Paris. The new Fifth Republic’s minister of culture, André Malraux, proclaimed at the opening: ‘Now we have the proof here that painting is what painters make of it. Freedom has henceforth been attained in the domain of art.’¹³

~~Within~~ In the postwar French debates between figuration and abstraction, Malraux thus equated ‘freedom’ with the supposed aesthetic autonomy represented by *art informel*.¹⁴

This cultural campaign by the French state occurred during the bloody peak of the Algerian War ~~for~~ of Independence, which officially lasted from 1954 ~~to~~ –1962 and caused the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958. Malraux’s association of *informel* painting with the École de Paris, and therefore with an implicitly national legacy of modernism at a time when the definition of the nation was being deeply contested, prompted many leftist artists to reject, if not directly criticise, that legacy and its ideology of individual expression.¹⁵

Throughout the conflict, the ~~French Communist Party~~ PCF had supported Algerian independence in word but not in deed. As the war ground on into the Fifth Republic, and as reports of torture and extreme right-wing terrorism split the nation, the PCF became more outspoken proponents of full independence. However, for many on the Left, particularly students, intellectuals, and artists, it was too little, too late. In their

eyes the PCF was little better than the Gaullist state of which it sought to become an official part.

This critique extended to cultural matters as well. Though the PCF had maintained an official policy of socialist realism, it welcomed and benefited from the membership of modern artists such as Picasso, Léger, and Paul Rebeyrolle. When the pressure to de-Stalinise mounted following the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, the party held up these artists as evidence of its tolerance and liberalism. These theoretical and cultural attempts by 'reformers' to humanise the ~~Communist Party~~ PCF appeared congruous with the Gaullist state's own promotion of similar cultural values at the beginning of the 1960s. This convergence is key to understanding the role Althusser would come to play for a new generation of artists ~~committed-wanting~~ to recovering a revolutionary potential for art. The ~~challenge~~ ~~difficulty~~ for such artists was how to resist or critique what they saw as a pervasive bourgeois ideology without resorting to a socialist realism now seen as 'Stalinist'—a charge that was increasingly deployed by French leftists.

The Salon de la Jeune Peinture's ideology critique

This ~~challenge-difficulty~~ became evident in 1965 when a group of militantly left-wing painters took control of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, an artist-run exhibition organisation that had been established by Paul Rebeyrolle in 1949. Under Rebeyrolle's leadership, the Jeune Peinture had staked out a middle position in the ~~abstraction~~ versus ~~figuration~~ debates of the 1950s, which saw them support eclectic though generally expressionistic figurative styles. However, the arrival of a younger generation of painters, including Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, Pierre Buraglio, and Antonio Recalcati, initiated a radical change of direction for the Salon, transforming it into a crucible of political art. Even though these artists were not PCF members, Althusser's heterodox anti-humanist insurgency ~~within-in~~ the party resonated with their own mutiny against the reigning dogma of aesthetic expression that had overtaken the Jeune Peinture.

The first major public manifestation of this new direction was the ~~16th-sixteenth~~ Salon de la Jeune Peinture, held in January 1965 at the Musée d'Art Moderne. For the Salon, Arroyo stipulated that all seventeen members of the Jeune Peinture committee

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Commented [BN203]: 'Challenge' is another over-used word I try to avoid, and use something more specific instead.

Commented [BN204]: If you are actually citing someone here, please reinstate quote marks and add an endnote. But if you are using quote marks in an ironic sense, then I suggest making it clear with a word like 'so-called' or 'supposed' or similar. Otherwise just omit the quote marks.

must paint on two-by-two-metre canvases, using only the colour green. The results were displayed in the so-called *Salle verte (Green Room)* and featured a variety of subject matter—generally not overtly political—in various shades of green. The committee’s collective adherence to the predetermined format was an explicitly anti-individualist and anti-formalist statement, which was also intended as an attack on the tendency to privilege relations of colour and gesture associated with the ‘Bonnardist’ lineage ~~within-in~~ the Jeune Peinture.

The insurgent members of the committee each deployed the formal restrictions of the premise towards the figurative subjects they were exploring at the time: Aillaud’s depictions of animals in enclosed interiors, Recalcati’s body imprints, and Arroyo’s ironic references to the history of European portraiture. Though the paintings in the exhibition manifested an eclectic range of styles, the common size and chromatic restrictions prevented each painting from being read as an expression of unmediated individual sensibility. According to the Salon’s catalogue, the *Salle verte* represented the Jeune Peinture’s new conception of art as a form of ideology critique: ‘by pushing the game [of art] to its limits, we are no longer playing the game’.¹⁶ Nonetheless, critics almost universally pilloried the exhibition.¹⁷ In the ~~Communist PartyPCF~~-affiliated ~~publication~~ *Les lettres françaises*, Georges Boudaille condemned the works on display for being ‘visually vulgarly coloured, of a hazardous or clumsy composition, often executed with a total ignorance of the craft’. ~~Boudaille-He~~ insisted that they:

~~bring~~ nothing to their authors since in the present state of things, it is practically impossible to distinguish the productions of one from another. It is the same anonymity as the artists who design the labels for canned goods.¹⁸

Boudaille’s criticism of the anonymity of the works in the *Salle verte* inadvertently anticipated the increasing emphasis the group would place on anonymity as a political value, a means of escaping the ideology of individual creation.

The Althusserian aspect of the Jeune Peinture was made more explicit in the committee’s public response to the critics of the *Salle verte*. In June 1965 the ~~committee~~ issued the *Bulletin d’information de la Jeune Peinture*, where they insisted on:

~~removing~~ the debate from the aesthetic level, that is the level of relations between art and the history of art, and replacing it at the only level that interests us, that of the relations between art and history².¹⁹

The Jeune Peinture committee sought a radical break with the conception of artistic ‘expression’—circumscribed within ideology at the ‘aesthetic level’—by establishing a connection between the superstructural activity of cultural production and its ‘objective’ historical bases.²⁰ Though no explicit reference to Althusser was made here, this was an artistic equivalent to Althusser’s project ~~within-in~~ the intellectual field: to conceive of ‘its conditions of existence as a relation of production, and not of expression’.²¹ Even if the *Salle verte* paintings ~~themselves didn’t~~ did not overtly enact this shift, the *Bulletin* ~~itself~~ was emblematic of such an initiative. Devoid of any images, it not only resembled but indeed functioned as a political tract and financial report, rather than as an exhibition catalogue. Though signed ‘the Committee’, the text was ~~likely probably~~ written by Aillaud, a former philosophy student who had attended Althusser’s lectures at the École Normale Supérieure.²²

The *Bulletin* outlined the committee’s new platform as a radical critique of aesthetic autonomy and freedom in art. The new collective program was to be ‘objective and partisan’ and would increasingly involve continual group discussion and textual production, not as supplements to the annual painting exhibition, but as fundamental components of a militant political-artistic practice.

The collective analysis of politics and theory became a defining characteristic of the Jeune Peinture, distinguishing it from other organisations and artist groups active in Paris during the mid-1960s.²³ As the figurative painter Bernard Rancillac, who shared the Jeune Peinture’s leftist politics though not their collectivist dogma, recalled, ‘when the Jeune Peinture members got together, it was to discuss politics, not art ... Aillaud said that style was the enemy—style was bourgeois.’²⁴ Group political discussion was both the form and the means for expunging humanism from it by establishing an extra-aesthetic collective orientation which would forestall the supposedly unmediated expressivity associated with painterly abstraction. This reflected Althusser’s argument that ‘left to itself, a spontaneous, technical practice produces only the “theory” it needs to produce the ends assigned to it’.²⁵ The Jeune Peinture’s theoretical and political

discussion was seen as a way of distancing art from its own practice—particularly of a kind associated with ‘spontaneity’.

The year 1965 was a particularly significant ~~year-one~~ for both Althusser and the Jeune Peinture. Althusser’s *For Marx* and *Reading ‘Capital’* were published that year, causing an immediate sensation in intellectual circles in France.²⁶ The Jeune Peinture artists avidly discussed these works, particularly *For Marx*, ~~where-in which~~ Althusser denounced humanist freedom as an ideology lived and manifested through a ‘system of mass representations’.²⁷ The terms ~~that~~ Althusser used to describe the imaginary relation of the ideology of freedom to capitalist society provided the Jeune Peinture with a theoretical standpoint from which to denounce modern art:

Thus in a very exact sense, the bourgeois *lives* in the ideology of *freedom* the relation between it and its conditions of existence: that is, *its* real relation, the law of a liberal capitalist economy, ~~but~~ *invested in an imaginary relation* (all men are free, including the free laborers). Its ideology consists of this play on the word *freedom*, which betrays the bourgeois wish to mystify those (‘free men’!) it exploits, blackmailing them with freedom so as to keep them in harness, as much as the bourgeoisie’s need to *live* its own class rule as the freedom of those it is exploiting.²⁸

Althusser’s suggestion that the system of representations sustaining the ideology of freedom included ‘images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case’²⁹ intrigued the Jeune Peinture committee, suggesting a possible terrain upon which they might wage political struggle as artists. Furthermore, Althusser’s insistence that ideology is ‘an organic part of every social totality’ that serves a necessary and practical role ~~within~~ a given social formation justified the Jeune Peinture’s ~~s~~ continued adherence to an artistic medium so ~~heavily-closely~~ associated with bourgeois culture. At a time when a Euro-American neo-avant-garde was reviving the project of merging art with everyday life through strategies of appropriation, dematerialisation, and performance, the Jeune Peinture’s steadfast rejection of such approaches found reinforcement in Althusser’s charge that

only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies *without ideology* and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not

just one of its historical forms) would disappear without a trace, to be replaced by *science*. For example, this utopia is the principle behind the idea [...] that *art* could merge with knowledge or become ‘everyday life’.³⁰

The Jeune Peinture’s reading of Althusser mandated an art ~~which-that~~ acknowledged and confronted its nature as ideology ~~with~~in bourgeois society, rather than purporting to transcend that nature through practices of provocative or affirmative identity with non-art objects, practices, or spaces.

The Jeune Peinture’s critique of avant-gardism was made more explicit in October 1965, when Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati submitted a collaboratively produced work to *La Figuration Narrative dans L’Art Contemporain*, an exhibition curated by critic Gérald Gassiot-Talabot at the Galerie Creuze in Paris.³¹ *Live and let die, or The tragic end of Marcel Duchamp* (1965 Fig. 8.1), consists of eight paintings depicting the humiliation, torture, assassination, and funeral of Marcel Duchamp. The scenes of Duchamp’s humiliation and emasculation are decorated with several of his best-known works. The final panel shows members of the French and American neo-avant-garde—Robert Rauschenberg, Martial Raysse, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Arman, and Pierre Restany—dressed in military uniform, carrying Duchamp’s American flag—draped coffin.³² Other Jeune Peinture artists were invited to modify Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati’s work until individual contributions were indistinguishable.

Live and let die elicited violent reactions and was even physically attacked when it was shown at the Galerie Creuze.³³ As noted above, Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati released a manifesto articulating the political intent of the work and insisting that it constituted an attack on the *ideology* of art epitomised by Duchamp, rather than on Duchamp himself. According to the artists, this ideology was built on the false image of freedom that art represented in capitalist society. Through Duchamp’s selection of everyday objects, the manifesto claimed, the artist was endowed with an almost magical ability to transform anything into art.³⁴

Such a reading of the readymade was largely influenced by the first major book on the artist, *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, by historian Robert Lebel, which appeared in France in 1958. Lebel argued that the essence of the readymade was the ‘sacralisation’

of the commonplace through the ‘*sovereign* choice’ of the artist.³⁵ Lebel’s framing of the readymade was extended in France by Pierre Restany, who sought to link *nouveau réalisme*, the appropriation-driven movement he founded in 1960, to what he termed Duchamp’s ‘artistic baptism of the object’.³⁶ As well as rejecting the neo-avant-garde reactivation of the readymade, Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati also explicitly challenged interpretations of the readymade proffered by the ~~Communist Party’s~~PCF’s cultural doyens, such as former surrealist poet Louis Aragon. Earlier in 1965, Aragon had written an essay in which he attempted to assimilate the readymade into a broader history of collage. ‘No longer the despair of the inimitable’, the readymade in Aragon’s reading ‘proclaimed a preference for the personality of the choice over the personality of craft’.³⁷ Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati countered these postwar receptions of the readymade in their manifesto:

Marcel Duchamp’s sudden rupture with oil painting does not constitute, in fact, any reversal of perspective ... there is no surpassing of the traditional demiurgic notion of the ‘creative act’. How could it be possible, like Aragon in 1930, to see in this attack on pictorial technique and technical personality a ‘trial against personality?’ If one wants art to cease being individual, better to work without signing than to sign without working.³⁸

Rather than offering a critique of the individual expressivity associated with modernist painting, the Jeune Peinture authors argued that the readymade constituted an extension, even optimisation, of its logic. By attacking the readymade artist’s ‘magical act’ of ‘pure subjectivity’, Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati implicitly proposed as a critical alternative their own collective mode of figurative painting as a form of ideology critique.

The Duchamp painting and manifesto divided the Jeune Peinture ~~between-into~~ those who, like Aillaud, were influenced by Althusser’s conception of culture as a semi-autonomous ‘instance’ of class struggle, and the remaining defenders of an *art informel*—style painterly figuration. Several of these latter artists signed a protest petition against the work and its proximity to socialist realism, a charge that was becoming a default accusation levelled against the radical elements ~~within-of~~ the Jeune Peinture group.³⁹

Indeed, the radical Jeune Peinture artists' increasing repudiation of aesthetic considerations, which they denounced as bourgeois 'formalism', sounded suspiciously close to the Soviet Communist Party's inevitable accusations against all art that did not fully conform to its official dictates. Yet, at the same time, the paintings' comic-strip format and pop cultural references aligned it more with an American and western European 'new realism', recently defined as a broad postwar tendency comprising movements such as neo-dada, pop art, French nouveau réalisme, and West German capitalist realism.⁴⁰ The title, *Live and let die*, was taken from the second James Bond novel by Ian Fleming, which appeared in French translation in 1964 but had appeared in a comic-strip version even earlier.⁴¹ However, unlike pop art's reproduction of the iconography from its sources, *Live and let die*'s connection to its pop cultural referents appeared limited to the comic-strip narrative format and a vague tough-guy sensibility.⁴²

In 1966, the three artists released another manifesto, entitled 'How to Get Rid of Him, or, One Year Later', in which they extended their earlier argument against the ideology of creative freedom. Duchamp, they argued, 'by proposing to us this magical image as freedom, the image of the omnipotence of the mind, wants to make us understand that we are *already* free'.⁴³ The very existence of a neo-avant-garde in the 1960s suggested to Aillaud, Arroyo, and Recalcati that the readymade was in fact not only unobjectionable to bourgeois society but served to ~~enhance-reinforce~~ its liberal ideology of individual freedom.⁴⁴ 'Culture functions thus as a safety valve within the general process of integration that governs us', they wrote, 'by defending freedom as individual freedom, culture only defends those rights which are not threatened because they are not threatening'.⁴⁵ If Duchamp symbolised the elevation of everyday objects to the status of art, this was precisely why, according to the radicalised artists of the Jeune Peinture, he had to be rejected.

By 1966, the Salon de la Jeune Peinture's committee had developed a collective practice and identity premised on a relentless anti-humanist critique of both *art informel* painting and neo-avant-garde practices. Inspired by Althusser's assault against philosophical Marxism and the attempted de-Stalinisation of the PCF in the years after 1956, the Jeune Peinture called on Althusser to justify ~~their~~ its continued adherence to painting as a method of ideology critique. If Althusser's reaction to the twentieth party congress and the liberalisation of the ~~Communist Party~~ PCF was to offer 'the first left-

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wing critique of Stalinism' by insisting even more forcefully than Stalin had done on the scientific validity of Marxism, the Jeune Peinture adopted an analogous approach in their painting, which they saw as more anti-humanist, depersonalised, collectivist, and world-oriented than socialist realism.⁴⁶

Althusser's more direct engagement discussion of with art in two essays written in 1966 appeared to sanction endorse the Jeune Peinture's program of waging class struggle within ideology. In his 'Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre', Althusser built on his earlier insistence on the 'relative autonomy' of the various levels of the superstructure from the economic base, proclaiming that, through a process of 'internal distantiating', real art was capable of separating from ideology and thereby making the *'ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*', visible, perceivable, and sensible (*'nous donner à voir', 'donner à percevoir', 'donner à sentir'*).⁴⁷ This internal distantiating from ideology was thus different from modernist notions of aesthetic autonomy that purported to either transcend lived experience or offer its most authentic representation. Any discourse of creative 'spontaneity' served to mask the ideology that art was capable of making sensible.⁴⁸

Though Althusser's examples in this essay are limited to literature (Tolstoy, Balzac, Solzhenitsyn), a means by which they might be applied to visual art was suggested in an essay he wrote that same year on the Italian figurative painter Leonardo Cremonini.

Arguing against a reading of Cremonini's paintings of faceless individuals in mundane yet ambiguously menacing interiors as 'expressionist', Althusser claimed that what made the paintings 'anti-humanist, and materialist' is the absence of any assertion of the artist's spontaneous creative presence in the work.⁴⁹ He concluded ds that art maintains a 'privileged relation' with ideology through the exertion of a *'direct and inevitable ideological effect'*.⁵⁰ This claim, combined with his earlier insistence on the relative autonomy of different 'instances' of class struggle dispersed throughout the superstructure,⁵¹ provided the basic theoretical model for the Jeune Peinture from 1964 to 1968. In the second *Bulletin*, released at the end of 1968, Jeune Peinture they described this as their-its 'general line':

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In the struggle against bourgeois society, we intend to fight on the terrain of 'culture' according to our particular means by turning the Salon de la Jeune Peinture into an instrument of ideological struggle. Our 'front' is therefore the ideological front.⁵²

The Jeune Peinture committee thus staked a paradoxical position that rejected modernist aesthetic autonomy, while at the same time insisting on art's unique and semi-autonomous position ~~within~~ the ideological superstructure of society.

BMPT's 'theoretical practice'

As the Jeune Peinture group developed ~~their-its~~ collective, 'Althusserian' program in the years leading up to 1968, ~~they-it~~ came into contact with another Paris-based group of artists who sought an anti-humanist critique of art. On ~~3~~ January ~~3rd~~, 1967, over the course of eight hours, the artists Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni painted a series of large canvases on the floor of the Musée d'Art Moderne during the opening of the ~~18th~~ ~~eighteenth~~ Salon de la Jeune Peinture. Buren applied white paint to the outer edges of white and grey vertically striped squares of canvas, Mosset painted a black circle in the middle of his white canvases, Parmentier spray-painted broad horizontal bands across folded sheets, and Toroni marked his squares of canvas with evenly spaced imprints of a paintbrush. As they performed these repetitive technical operations amidst ~~st~~ the onlookers, a looped tape ~~--~~recording blared the following statement through the gallery in French, English, and Spanish: 'Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni, advise you to become intelligent.' The collectively written tract ~~(quoted at the beginning of this essay) that, which~~ stated why the four were 'not painters', was distributed to audience members.

This action comprised the first *manifestation* of the group that would subsequently become known as BMPT.⁵³ The group's second *manifestation* occurred later that evening, ~~as-when~~ the four artists removed ~~from the walls of the gallery~~ the works they had painted hours earlier ~~from the walls of the gallery~~, replacing them with a banner that read: 'Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni do not exhibit.' ~~The third~~ *Manifestation* ~~three~~ took place on ~~2~~ June ~~2~~, 1967, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, where four paintings, each emblazoned with the respective signature ~~mark~~ of ~~one of the~~ four members of the group, were displayed in a grid format at the front of an

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auditorium. Instead of a presentation by the artists—as had been implied in the invitations and promotional posters—a text containing a basic description of the works was distributed to the audience ~~containing a basic description of the works~~. A fourth *manifestation* took place at the Biennale de Paris in September 1967, when a series of photographs of traditional painting subjects (landscapes, flowers, nudes, animals, the pope) was projected onto the ceiling, above the four artists' works arranged in a grid on the wall, while a narrow plywood structure covered in posters with-bearing mugshot photos of the four artists emitted an audio recording of statements about art's mystification of reality.

Together, these actions have secured the group's status as avatars of minimalism, conceptual art, and institutional critique in France.⁵⁴ Molly Warnock has identified BMPT's actions as 'the most radical' of all post-war 'attacks on painterly subjectivity and traditional modes of authorship.'⁵⁵ Benjamin Buchloh has valorised the BMPT *manifestations* as the 'most ambitious and epistemologically challenging proposition to emerge from Paris that decade, if not the postwar period as a whole', while dismissing the Salon de la Jeune Peinture as merely an 'outmoded cultural apparatus' serving as an aesthetically conservative foil to the BMPT action ~~as an aesthetically conservative foil~~.⁵⁶ While Buchloh's assessment of BMPT's significance is debatable, what this view overlooks is not only the radicalisation of the Jeune Peinture but also the shared theoretical investments that animated both groups, and the different ways in which Althusser was put to use by painters at this moment.

The BMPT actions certainly appeared agonistic towards their contexts. A tract distributed with in the gallery during the second *manifestation*, as the artists removed their works from the museum, implicitly attacked the Jeune Peinture:

This second public demonstration, though apparently directed against this Salon, irreversibly defines our attitude towards all salons of any sort [...] because these Salons are the heritage of the Salons of the 19th century [...] because these Salons exacerbate the laziness of the public [...] because, above all, these Salons show Painting and Painting, until proven otherwise, is by vocation objectively reactionary.⁵⁷

Though openly dismissive of the Jeune Peinture's adherence to the salon format and figurative easel painting, BMPT nonetheless shared ~~its committee~~ with it several motivations:—chiefly, an antipathy towards painting as individual expression. As Buren explained, each artist's repetitive action and motif resulted in an 'anonymous' object, devoid of 'aestheticism, sensitivity, and individual expression'.⁵⁸ The unvarying and interchangeable formats reduced painting to a compositionally and stylistically neutral series of iterative statements, emptied of signification, while on-site production and bland literal descriptions countered the mystique of studio creation.⁵⁹ Like the Jeune Peinture's emphatic rejection of formal criteria, the BMPT artists also insisted on a total indifference to 'problems of form'.⁶⁰ Also like the Jeune Peinture artists who participated in the *Salle verte* and *Salon rouge*, BMPT used two-by-two-metre square canvases as a sign of ~~their~~ its formal neutrality.

~~What~~ But the insistence on the relative criticality of BMPT's approach glosses over ~~is~~ the extent to which notions of form, style, aesthetics, or expression associated with a modernist history of painting were targeted in a variety of ways by artists in France at this moment. That is, the degree to which either BMPT or the Jeune Peinture successfully drained their work of such considerations misses the larger question of what socio-political meanings did such notions carry ied, and to what resources and strategies did artists hostile towards them look ed to in order to develop a counter-practice. With further distance, we can now consider what philosopher Gabriel Rockhill has termed the 'force field of agencies' that formed the 'politicity of aesthetic practices' of that historical context.⁶¹

For both BMPT and the Jeune Peinture committee, a return to the readymade was a false and mystifying solution. In a December 1967 interview with Georges Boudaille, Buren responded:

Let's get one important thing clear: Duchamp is not anti-art. He belongs to art. The art that celebrates consumer society. Reassuring art ... It's a problem that touches on the ethics or function of the artist—he who assumes the right to possess that super-human role which permits him to say to others: 'Everything I touch with my finger is transformed into art.'⁶²

Commented [BN211]: Refers to BMPT collectively – singular.

Buren's language here is remarkably close to that of the *Live and let die* artists. Like these artists, Buren also denounced neo-avant-garde approaches of the 1960s.⁶³ Clearly, both the Jeune Peinture and BMPT artists felt that the postwar 'object strategies' emanating from the readymade did not offer the significant challenge to bourgeois cultural ideology as claimed by critics such as Pierre Restany or Otto Hahn.⁶⁴ On the contrary; for these groups, the neo-avant-garde's contestation of painting's hegemony only extended the logic of the mystifying omnipotence of individual artistic expression, sanctioned by the institutional context of art, to encompass the world of mass consumerism.

And yet, despite such convergences, BMPT staked out a distinctly different approach terrain than from that of the Jeune Peinture, and focused on a different aspect of Althusser's work.⁶⁵ Proclaiming BMPT's practice as a 'degree zero of painting', Buren instead invoked Roland Barthes' earlier polemic against the ethical dictates of communication and expression in literature, advocating a painting whose unyielding monotony prevented contemplation and displaced considerations of reference.⁶⁶ Instead of provoking a phenomenological experience for the viewer, as was claimed for minimalism, within the French leftist political context of the late 1960s, BMPT's work was conceived as a thoroughly materialist and anti-humanist gesture. If, as Althusser later claimed, Marx had described history objectively as a 'process without a subject',⁶⁷ Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni sought to demystify art by presenting artwork that was without a subject, neither an expressive creator nor idealised viewer.

Besides the rejection of humanist values in the BMPT *manifestations*, the most explicit reference to Althusser from anyone in the group occurs in Buren's essay titled 'Mise en garde', dated July–August 1969, which he re-used and revised on multiple many occasions from 1969 to 1973.⁶⁸ Following the BMPT *manifestations*, Buren furthered his proposition of a 'neutral' painting that retained the format of identically spaced alternating vertical bands of white and coloured stripes by situating them in different spaces and contexts: public billboards, doorways, postcards, room corners, etc and so on. By working *in situ*, Buren intended his work to respond directly to its site, which determined it both physically (its size and material support), and ideologically (the particular values and meanings it was given by the context). Though partially intended to distinguish his work from conceptual art, 'Mise en garde' exemplifies the

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role of the textual supplement in French painting circa 1970. In terms reminiscent of Althusser's claims regarding the anonymity and absence of subjectivity in Leonardo Cremonini's paintings, Buren offers a detailed analysis of his own work's insistent refusal of authorship. Due to the neutrality of style, repetition of form, and variance of the site:

it may be said that the work of which we speak, because neutral/anonymous, is indeed the work of someone, but that this someone has no importance whatsoever ... Whether he signs 'his' work or not, it nevertheless remains anonymous.⁶⁹

In other words, no longer masked by the individual artist's subjectivity, ideology was now made 'visible, perceivable, sensible'.

Buren's text concludes with an insistence on theoretical rigour as a means to achieve 'complete rupture with art—such as it is envisaged, such as it is known, such as it is practiced/practised'.⁷⁰ This rupture 'can only be epistemological', and will be:

the resulting logic of a theoretical work at the moment when the history of art (which is still to be made) and its application are/will be envisaged theoretically: theory and theory alone, as we well know, can make possible a revolutionary practice.⁷¹

By evoking Althusser's notion (borrowed from Gaston Bachelard) of the 'epistemological break' that produces scientific knowledge, Buren frames his own work, painting as well as writing, as 'theoretical practice'. Buren closes with the following statement:

Finally, as far as we are concerned, it must be clearly understood that when theory is considered as producer/creator, the only theory or theoretic practice is the result presented/the painting or, according to Althusser's definition: 'Theory: a specific form of practice.'⁷²

In its identification of painting with theory, this essay marks an exceptional convergence of philosophical and artistic claims to expunge humanist values. Buren applies Althusser's insistence, following Lenin, that theory is indispensable to

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revolutionary practice—indeed that theory itself is a form of practice that gives rise to other, new practices through its ability to produce knowledge.⁷³ In terms of Buren's attempt to differentiate his work from conceptual art, the reference to Althusser serves to justify the continuation of painting as a 'theoretical practice' because it produces ~~ed~~ knowledge about its own ideological status.⁷⁴ Just as Althusser criticised idealist philosophy for the 'empiricist' mistake of confusing the 'real object with the object of knowledge',⁷⁵ so Buren criticises conceptual art for mistaking the concept for the object of art. According to Buren, the humanist values from which conceptual art claimed to escape were inadvertently reinstated as an idealist empiricism of 'the concept' synonymous with the art object. For Buren, only theory offered a true solution to this dilemma.

Here we can grasp a further dimension of the appeal of theoretical anti-humanism, as well as the political stakes at play for artists who struggled to conceive of art itself as revolutionary praxis. For Althusser, the attempts to reform the PCF following the upheavals of 1956 threatened to water it down with bourgeois ideology. Theoretical rigour was the necessary antidote. Likewise, for painters who sought to escape from the entrenched categories of expression, spontaneity, and formalism in modernist painting, yet ~~who~~ also scorned neo-avant-garde strategies as mystification, theory offered a way to be both 'objective and partisan'.⁷⁶ Whereas the Jeune Peinture looked to Althusser's notion of art's privileged ideological status ~~with~~in the semi-autonomous 'instances' of class struggle to justify a programmatic and collective figuration, Buren and BMPT drew more heavily on Althusser's definition of theoretical practice and the epistemological break to frame their work as devoid of subjectivity and idealism. This was crucial, Buren insisted, in order to break the successive chain of negations that characterised modern art.⁷⁷ As he suggested, 'perhaps the only thing one can do after seeing a canvas like ours is total revolution'.⁷⁸ The BMPT *manifestations* were thus an attempt to surpass the debates over the purpose of painting, in which they felt the Jeune Peinture was still trapped, as ~~instrumentalizing~~ instrumentalising and thus reactionary.

The Salon de la Jeune Peinture's praxis

In the meantime, the Jeune Peinture had found a purpose for painting cited by BMPT in *their-its manifestation* tract. At the end of 1967, the committee began plans for a collective project in support of the 'victorious fight of the Vietnamese people'.⁷⁹ The result, the *Salle rouge pour le Vietnam*, marks both a zenith of political *actengagementivism* in art of the period and, correspondingly, a shift in the Jeune Peinture's position *vis-à-vis* Althusserian theory—one mirrored in the intellectual sphere *amongst occupied by* many of Althusser's students and followers.

By this point, critical response to the Jeune Peinture and the BMPT *manifestations* had exerted further pressure on the contradiction between relative autonomy and political *engagement-activity* that had constituted the committee's 'general line'. Indeed, many of Althusser's followers had grown uneasy with the separation *of-between* theoretical *and-and* political practice. The philosopher himself had pointed to a way out of this bind, through his heterodox *engagement with interpretation of* the writings of Mao Zedong. Though the Maoist injunction for intellectuals to join the people's struggle seemed to contradict Althusser's insistence on pedagogical rigour, both Althusser and Mao attacked the Communist Party's revisionism by insisting on a stricter adherence to Marxist-Leninism. Althusser even drew on Mao's formulations for some of his *key-most important* theoretical writings,⁸⁰ thereby opening the door to 'Mao Zedong Thought' for his radicalised followers who were anxious to integrate theory with practice in the increasingly politicised days leading up to May 1968. In late 1966, a number of Althusser's students broke with the PCF's student union to form the Union des Jeunes Communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJCml). The UJCml created a number of 'Vietnam committees', whose early activists included Jeune Peinture artists Gilles Aillaud and Pierre Buraglio, to organise actions and raise awareness of anti-imperialist struggles.⁸¹ These groups called for 'active solidarity' with the Vietnamese people, distinguishing themselves from the more passive calls for peace put forth by the PCF. Through such actions, the UJCml became largely responsible for initiating the Maoist movement in France before the events of May '68, drawing numerous artists and intellectuals into its orbit and inspiring actions such as the *Salle rouge*.⁸² As Kristin Ross observes, in its battle with 'the worldwide political and cultural domination the United States had exerted since the end of World War-II,

Commented [BN215]: Could also use 'involvement' or 'participation' if 'activism' is too strong? But avoid 'engagement'.

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Vietnam made possible a merging of the themes of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism', while the Chinese Cultural Revolution was hailed as a 'renewal of the promise of revolutionary socialism that had been betrayed by the Soviet Union'.⁸³

The *Salle rouge* can be seen as a political application of the theoretical principles demonstrated in the 1965 *Salle verte*. Each participant would again be restricted to a common format of two-by-two-metre panels.⁸⁴ However, instead of red constituting a formal parameter within which each painter was to work ~~within~~ (as had been the case with green in the *Salle verte*), it now signified the political perspective that unified the various works ~~with~~ in the exhibition into a coherent statement.⁸⁵ Content was dictated by group discussion of texts written by National Liberation Front leaders as well as slogans from the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁸⁶ Political discussions, group critiques, and painting modifications were carried out over the course of February–April 1968.

Though all figurative, the works displayed a range of styles and subjects, including cartoonish pop (Buraglio, Fleury, Schlosser), romanticist and expressionist battle scenes (Caratella, Cueco, Peraro, Vilmart), surrealist symbolism (Darnaud, Parré, Tisserand), news-media imagery (Aillaud, Alleaume), and Chinese *dazibao* posters (Bodek, Leroy). Rather than by uniformity or anonymity of style, the presented works were united ~~through~~ by their subordination to a consistent and legible political message.

Though planned for the nineteenth Salon de la Jeune Peinture, which was scheduled to open at the Musée d'Art Moderne in June, the committee also intended to display the paintings at factories and workers' clubs, and in the streets of communist municipalities. However, following the events of May 1968, when the PCF struggled to maintain control of the workers' uprising, the party and ~~their~~ its affiliated trade union often prevented the display of the works at such sites, viewing it as a form of Maoist agitation.

The eruption of protests and strikes in May also prompted the cancellation of the 1968 Salon de la Jeune Peinture. Many of the committee members and *Salle rouge* participants joined the Atelier Populaire poster workshop initiated in the occupied École des Beaux-Arts during May and June, designing and screen-printing thousands of posters in support of the strike movement.⁸⁷ The *Salle rouge* would eventually be exhibited in early 1969 at the Musée d'Art Moderne's recently established Animation–

Recherche–Contestation (ARC) department, where it was met by the art world with ‘quasi-complete indifference’ (Fig. 8.4).⁸⁸ In *Les lettres françaises*, Boudaille stated that since he was not a specialist in politics, he had to restrict himself to aesthetic judgements of the works: ~~thus his judgements which, as such,~~ were regressive.⁸⁹ The catalogue for the show visually resembled Mao’s ‘Little Red Book’, and included images of Vietnamese posters, as well as a statement from the committee insisting that the content of the show was more significant than the site in which it was exhibited. Given the attempts to exhibit the works at politicised sites of worker contestation, the contradictory nature of this assertion exemplifies not only the tensions inherent ~~tensions~~ ~~of~~ the Jeune Peinture’s conception of political art, but also those faced by Althusserianism in France at this moment, when the insistence on the relative autonomy of theory from politics collided with the new forms of revolutionary action ~~which that~~ Althusser’s theory had helped inspire.

Designer, please take in Fig. 8.4 near here.

~~While-Although~~ many of Althusser’s erstwhile followers criticised his aloofness and continued loyalty to the PCF in the midst and aftermath of the May uprisings, the Jeune Peinture embarked on a collective painting that explicitly addressed the philosopher.⁹⁰ Executed by Aillaud, Francis Biras, Lucio Fanti, and Fabio Rieti for the 1969 Salon de la Jeune Peinture, *Le datcha* (The datcha, 1969) mimicked the format of academic history painting (Fig. 8.5). This extended even to the label affixed to the frame of the two-by-four-metre painting, which reads:

Louis Althusser hesitating to enter Claude Lévi-Strauss’s datcha. Triste Miels, where Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes have gathered at the moment when the radio announces that the workers and students have decided to joyously abandon their past.

Designer, please take in Fig. 8.5 near here.

The figures comfortably assembled in a sparse interior are the key-most prominent French thinkers associated with structuralism. The painting mocks their bourgeois insularity from political reality, which is mediated for them by the state-controlled radio.⁹¹ Through the sliding glass door in the background, Althusser is silhouetted against a crepuscular landscape. Will he join his fellow intellectuals amongst their

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‘well-appointed décor’ which ‘favours the creation of structures’, or will he devote himself to the class struggle?⁹² The style of the painting is reminiscent of *Live and let die*’s uniform and schematic figuration. The dacha of the title, with its Soviet connotations, also ~~indicates~~ implies a certain distance or ~~skepticism~~ scepticism towards the PCF in the wake of the party’s response to the *Salle rouge* and, more broadly, its condemnation of the May uprising’s anti-communist leftist orientation.⁹³

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It is perhaps unsurprising that the Jeune Peinture adopted an ambivalent stance towards Althusser in the wake of May ’68. His theory had been a useful means of critiquing humanist ideology within art, while also suggesting why the technical conventions of this ostensibly reactionary cultural form could form the basis of a radical practice. However, this stance was tested by a situation in which the autonomy of the cultural from the political appeared to collapse. In this scenario, for the Jeune Peinture, figuration was useful because it offered more possible links between painting and propaganda than abstraction or appropriation did. The theoretical practice that Althusser wanted to insulate from political practice was impossible to sustain for painters who sought to ~~directly enter~~ join the workers’ struggle. The trajectory of the Jeune Peinture, from the 1965 radicalisation, through the *Salle rouge* and to May ’68, demonstrates some cultural consequences of the shift from Althusser to Mao ~~within~~ among the French Left. One of the surprising questions that emerged from this development was how this same shift could also validate a mode of formalist abstraction in painting after 1968.

Supports/Surfaces’ objects of knowledge

In June 1969, *Salle rouge* collaborator and frequent Jeune Peinture contributor Louis Cane participated in an exhibition at the Musée du Havre titled *‘La Peinture en Question’*. The exhibition also included the painters Vincent Bioulès, Marc Devade, Daniel Dezeuze, Noël Dolla, Bernard Pages, Jean-Pierre Pincemin, Patrick Saytour, André Valensi, and Claude Viallat. The catalogue text established the principal aesthetic position of the artists who would soon become collectively known as Supports/Surfaces:

‘The object of painting is painting itself, and the works displayed here only refer to themselves. They make no appeal to an “elsewhere” (for example, the artist’s personality, his biography, the History of Art).’⁹⁴

Although they used terms similar to American minimalist painting and sculpture of the 1960s, rather than embracing industrial forms, materials, or processes characteristic of that movement, the artists of Supports/Surfaces dug deep into the material components of painting—breaking them down, disassembling them, ~~serializing~~ ~~serialising~~ them—, in order to ‘take a position against an individualistic conception of Art’.⁹⁵ This could be done in an ironic vein, as with Cane repeatedly stamping ‘Louis Cane, Artiste Peintre’ across a linen sheet in a grid format, thereby bringing together the repetition of a simplified visual motif with a commercial branding technique. It could also be accomplished through various materialisations of the frame or grid:— in fibre (Viallat, Valensi), wood (Dezeuze, Grand), or on stained or folded canvas (Arnal, Devade, Pincemin, Saytour). Some adhered to the format of the stretched canvas but sought to avoid compositional and formal decisions by ~~various means: , in the case of~~ Bioulès, for example, applied ~~ying~~ masking tape to the surface of the painting, parallel to the edges, and removed ~~ing~~ it after applying colour. Deconstructive strategies were also explored by situating everyday materials in simple forms in the outdoor environment or landscape. In all these works, the constitutive elements of painting—support, surface, colour, process—were laid bare, in order to ‘prevent mental projections or oneiric wanderings’.⁹⁶ If the stretched and primed canvas had served for centuries as a site for the subjective projection of both artist and viewer, then it would have to be literally dismantled and exposed if painting was to avoid idealism and exist as a concrete signifying practice, an ‘object of knowledge’.⁹⁷ In terms remarkably similar to BMPT’s, the Supports/Surfaces artists insisted on the ‘neutrality of the works presented, their absence of lyricism and expressive depth’.⁹⁸

Like the Jeune Peinture artists and BMPT, Supports/Surfaces was also dismissive of the neo-avant-garde. While ~~Supports/Surfaces they~~ opposed ~~the neo-avant-garde’s their~~ materialism ~~to-and~~ the expressionism of *art informel*, ~~they were the group was~~ equally hostile to nouveau réalisme and conceptual art.⁹⁹ Here, as well, Althusser was crucial. ~~Althusser’s His~~ repeated critique of empiricism, as noted earlier, for mistaking the ‘objects of knowledge’ for the ‘real objects’—that is, for conflating concrete phenomena with their theoretical apprehension—is applied to artistic practice in Supports/Surfaces’ texts, such as the collectively written statement for ~~their-its~~ May 1971 exhibition at the Cité Universitaire in Paris:

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In order to combat the traditional and bourgeois—that is, neurotic and religious—conception of Art, painting is here presented as means and object of knowledge, inscribed in a process of production of writing-reading [*écriture-lecture*] in perpetual transformation—and not as the production of ‘real objects’ or of attitudes around these objects for use on the market—it is not given here only to be visible [*-à voir*].¹⁰⁰

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The description of painting as a ‘process of production’ in ‘perpetual transformation’ was based on Althusser’s definition of ‘practice’ as ‘any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*’.¹⁰¹ In the Supports/Surfaces statement, this practice is counterposed to an ideology of expressive objects that evokes critic Pierre Restany’s famous characterisation of nouveau réalisme as ‘making visible [*nous donnent à voir*] the real in the aspects of its expressive totality’.¹⁰² Rather than the direct presentation of ‘raw material’ as expressive objects, Supports/Surfaces members repeatedly insisted on their painting as a ‘theoretical practice’ that transformed the raw materials of painting into an ‘object of knowledge’. In the Supports/Surfaces statement, this focus on process is counterposed to an ideology of objects that ~~they~~ the group associated with the principal neo-avant-garde movements of the 1960s which, ~~they~~ it contended, presented false solutions to the idealism of traditional pictorialism.

Supports/Surfaces’ combination of self-reflexive formalism and extreme leftist politics found its literary parallel in the journal *Tel Quel*, with which it maintained an affiliation.¹⁰³ Marcelin Pleynet, the managing editor of *Tel Quel*, was the group’s primary critical advocate and pushed a Marxist reading of ~~their~~ its operations. The journal’s editors and key-most prominent contributors, such as Pleynet, Sollers, Kristeva, Derrida, and Barthes, were opposed to the postwar model of the *engagé* intellectual personified by Sartre and instead insisted on the specificity of language and writing. Similar to Supports/Surfaces, in the early 1970s *Tel Quel* looked to Althusser to provide the link between modernist formalism and Maoist politics.¹⁰⁴ Althusser’s insistence on the relative autonomy of the various levels of the superstructure, determined by the economic level ~~only~~ ‘in the last instance’ only, was taken as a call to interrogate the specificity of various practices and how they produced forms of knowledge.¹⁰⁵

Though the radical politics of Supports/Surfaces was not shared by all its members, it ~~formed-made~~ a more central-significant facet of a theoretical ~~output~~ contribution that was unparalleled by than any other French artist or group of the period. The primary theoretical platform for Supports/Surfaces was the journal *Peinture*; *Cahiers théoriques*, established in 1970 by Bioulès, Devade, Cane, and Dezeuze, who together made up the Paris-based Maoist faction of the group.¹⁰⁶ In an essay co-written by Cane and Dezeuze titled 'For a Pictorial Theoretical Program', in the journal's first issue, the artists listed the various ways that conceptual art, land art, pop art, minimalism, and assemblage had all failed to fully contend with the material specificity of their practices.¹⁰⁷ They closed the essay with the following passage from *Reading 'Capital'*: 'The knowledge effect is produced as an effect of the scientific discourse, which exists only as a discourse *of the* system, that is, of the object grasped in the structure of its complex constitution.'¹⁰⁸ In other words, only by laying bare the codes of a 'signifying practice' *as a system* could an artwork produce knowledge and reveal its role in sustaining the dominant ideology.

The political terms of this endeavour were set forth on the occasion of what is widely recognised as the first official Supports/Surfaces exhibition, in September 1970 at the ARC, when Cane, Devade, and Dezeuze distributed a collectively written text known as the 'Green Tract', which insisted that painting must base itself on 'theoretical practice, [...] itself articulated in social practice: the class struggle'. Evoking Althusser's notion of semi-autonomous levels of class struggle, the text argued that 'a coherent group linked to the national and international struggle for people's liberation can, at the level of this specific practice that is painting, exist only by the systematic elimination of any subjective practice'.¹⁰⁹ This was followed by a calculation of the price of each artist's painting based on materials, manual labour, intellectual labour, and tax, in order to signal the imbrication of painting within a capitalist economy, and demystify its value.¹¹⁰ This economic breakdown was paralleled visually in the ways the works separated out the components of the traditional *tableau* as mentioned, as well as through use of humble materials, e.g.-such as stained linen sheets without a stretcher, wooden grids without canvas, polka-dotted dishcloths tacked to the wall, and cut-out sections of corrugated cardboard linked by rope.

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The Supports/Surfaces emphasis on the didacticism of the artwork was clearly different from that of the Jeune Peinture or BMPT. Rather than prompting a critical evaluation of imperialism, the neo-avant-garde, or the exhibition context, Supports/Surfaces turned its focus inward, upon the object.¹¹¹ But unlike Greenbergian modernism, which insisted on a separation of aesthetics from politics, Supports/Surfaces sought to reveal the material bases of a superstructural ‘signifying practice’ that ‘anchored’ the dominant ideology.¹¹²

That this effect could not be achieved or perceived without an equally robust textual production is emblematic not only of the particular impasse that painting ~~confronted~~ reached after 1968, but also of a French Left attempting to counter charges of Stalinism without being co-opted by the liberal state. Both Althusser, and his followers in Supports/Surfaces, advocated ‘a return to the authentic objects which are (logically and historically) prior to the ideology which has reflected them and hemmed them in’.¹¹³ For Althusser, this meant abandoning any reference to man and returning to Marx’s later works, with their analyses of structural formations and relations. Althusser’s claim dovetails with Supports/Surfaces’ attempt to abandon expressive or referential signs in painting, and its focus on the medium’s constituent elements. If an unstretched canvas or a bare stretcher did not read as class struggle, this was because, as Althusser insisted, the ‘reality of theoretical practice in its concrete life’ was of an separate order separate than from the ‘reality of the practice of revolutionary struggle in its concrete life’. While the former was tasked with ‘*drawing a dividing line* between true and false ideas’, the latter’s mission was ‘*to draw a dividing line* between two antagonistic classes’.¹¹⁴ The artists of Supports/Surfaces, like their literary counterparts at *Tel Quel*, seized upon such distinctions as a justification for a continued formalist interrogation of the signifiers internal to their particular discipline. To mimic in painting the forms taken by the workers movement in painting would have been the height of the empiricist ideology criticised by Althusser, that which seeks an unmediated correspondence between historical reality and its ‘expression’.¹¹⁵

The catalogue essay for the April 1971 exhibition at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, likely probably written primarily by Devade, for the April 1971 exhibition at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, stated that although historical and dialectical materialism formed the basis of Supports/Surfaces’ theory and practice, it was not ‘art for the

Commented [BN226]: I think the phrase is to ‘reach an impasse’ rather than to ‘confront an impasse’.

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people'. Instead, it was a pedagogical tool for the petit bourgeois intelligentsia, who would later join or ally with the working class.¹¹⁶ This thesis introduced the Maoist emphasis on re-education of intellectuals into the sphere of French painting, while also acknowledging the limitations of a propagandistic figurative art.

The same argument precipitated the schism and collapse of Supports/Surfaces. Ironically, both sides made reference to Althusser to justify their positions: ~~—with~~ the provincial faction (Noël Dolla, Toni Grand, Patrick Saytour, André Valensi, and Claude Viallat) claimed ~~ing~~ that the Parisian~~s~~ were separating theory from practice without considering the role of ideology,¹¹⁷ while the Parisians (Arnal, ~~Bioulès~~~~Bioules~~, Cane, Devade, and Dezeuze) accused the others of 'playing their little provincial games' far from the actual ideological struggle happening in the capital.¹¹⁸ For the remaining Paris members of the group, particularly Devade, Maoism became even more of a guiding force. In 1971 he shifted from using acrylic to ink, staining sections of canvas with a single colour by pouring ~~it~~~~ink~~ onto an area bordered by a ruler. This was motivated by the importance of ink in Chinese art—both in classical painting and in the hand-painted propaganda posters of the Cultural Revolution—but, as Devade explained, transposed into the frame of Western painting.¹¹⁹ This transposition was also ~~theoretically~~ enacted ~~theoretically~~ in ~~Peinture~~; ~~Cahiers théoriques~~, which read the forms of Chinese painting through Marxist and Freudian categories.¹²⁰ Thus, just as theory had mediated between political and artistic practice for Supports/Surfaces, BMPT, and the Jeune Peinture, it now served as a means of translation between East and West. ~~Within~~~~In~~ this operation, it was crucial to retain the fundamental Althusserian position that only theory could 'disclose the particular structure of an ideological vehicle' and its position ~~within~~ 'the field of other social practices'.¹²¹ Even more ~~so~~ than in the case of BMPT, with whom ~~they~~~~it~~ shared certain formal affinities, for Supports/Surfaces theory became a way to construe a formalist practice as politically radical. If, as Althusser insisted, theory was linked to class struggle, and painting was a theoretical practice, then painting was also a mediated form of class struggle—even if this was not immediately apparent. For this to occur, though, textual supplementation was needed to make the connection intelligible.

The crisis of Althusserianism

Even as May '68 appeared to offer the political manifestation of the experiments in radical theory that had flowered in the mid-1960s, it also presented a crisis. This was particularly the case for Althusserianism, which had staked its epistemological value on an extreme insistence on scientific rigour—that is, on its separation from political practice. The May movement erupted as much from the mounting reaction against Stalinism as it did from hostility to capitalism or the French state.¹²² The attack on hierarchy, jubilant celebration of bodily presence, and humanistic emphasis on desire that characterised many forms of expression in 1968 were antithetical to the dogma of intellectuals or political organisations, and vastly expanded the arena of what was considered ~~political practice~~.

The consequences of the post-May crisis of Althusserianism were widespread, and *The dacha* was only the most explicit artwork to confront it. Supports/Surfaces' embrace of Maoism was also a response to this crisis on the level of theory. Daniel Buren continued to produce work in the vein of his pre-1968 work with Mosset, Parmentier, and Toroni, but found little support in France; ~~during the 1970s he and~~ mostly exhibited abroad ~~during the 1970s~~, where his work was generally identified more with conceptual art and institutional critique than with either painting or Marxist theory. For Parmentier, having taken painting 'to its limit' left him with no other option than to ~~completely~~ cease it altogether in 1968.¹²³ Others, such as Maoist militant Pierre Buraglio, became so-called *établi*—working in a printing factory for a short time after 1968. The Jeune Peinture attempted to build on the initiative of the *Salle rouge* by orienting its post-1968 efforts towards more straightforwardly activist and *engagé* collective projects, but the Salon suffered severe setbacks ~~during in~~ the 1970s ~~with due to~~ the extended closure of its venue, the Palais de Tokyo.

Althusser himself grappled with the question of practice after 1968, abandoning his most 'structuralist' premises such as the notion of the 'epistemological break', and developing his highly influential theory of 'ideological state apparatuses', before a series of mental breakdowns culminated in his ~~sm~~ tragically murdering his wife in 1980.¹²⁴ However, his anti-humanist counter-assault on the de-Stalinisation of the PCF in the wake of 1956 sustained a far-reaching investment in theory that spread beyond philosophy, penetrating the field of cultural production in ways that were highly

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contradictory or incompatible with each other. Beginning in 1965, the Jeune Peinture viewed any painting practice that concerned itself with abstract formal properties as such to be an ideological mystification, while, conversely BMPT's strategy of negation challenged the Jeune Peinture's institutional and aesthetic premises. Though formally related to much Supports/Surfaces work, Buren, Parmentier, and Toroni disavowed any connection to the group.¹²⁵ Supports/Surfaces, for its part, insisted on the material bases of painting hidden behind, on the one hand, the representational agenda of the Jeune Peinture, and on the other, the degree-zero site-specificity of BMPT. Yet Althusserianism frequently transcended the figurative/abstract divide, even in the case of individual artists such as Buraglio and Cane. Each of these approaches emerged from a shared belief that art occupied a privileged position in maintaining bourgeois class rule—a belief prevalent among the cultural Left of the 1960s. However, rather than abandoning painting in favour of either more anarchic actions such as Happenings or the 'dematerialised' strategies of conceptual art, these artists looked to the rigours of theory to reground painting as a pedagogical, counter-ideological activity—just as Althusser had attempted within the Communist Party (PCF).

Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, painting served as an arena for radical claims. Whether political, philosophical, spiritual, or utopian, these claims were sustained by an abiding faith in the medium's exemplary capacity to translate the material and intellectual currents of an epoch into visual form. In France, the crisis of that faith by the 1960s not only paralleled but became entwined with the fate of a political Left whose existence and legitimacy, like modernist painting, had depended on a certain unity sustained by official institutions and grand narratives. From the long wake-trail of rubble left by the collapse of those supports, it has become hard to imagine a moment when theory appeared as a vital horizon of truth as all the modernist myths began to fade.

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¹ Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo and Antonio Recalcati, 'La fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp' (1965) in [Jean-Louis Pradel, *La figuration narrative*, ed. Jean-Louis Pradel, exhibition catalogue](#), Hazan, Paris, 2000, p. 163.

² Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier [and](#); Niele Toroni, 'Open Letter, Manifestation 2', Paris, 3 January 1967, in [Daniel Buren, *Daniel Buren: Mot à mot*](#), exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou and Éditions de la Martinière, Paris, 2002, p. M5.

³ Tract written by Louis Cane (who did not appear in the exhibition), Marc Devade, and Daniel Dezeuze, dated [23 September-23](#), 1970.

⁴ This is in contrast, for example, to the discourse surrounding nouveau réalisme in the early 1960s. Artists associated with this group largely rejected painting in favour of sculpture, assemblage, found objects, and performance that claimed some purchase on everyday postwar social reality. Yet their critical framing, largely at the hands of Pierre Restany, avoided explicit political claims, particularly of a Marxist variety. See Pierre Restany, *Le nouveau réalisme*, Union Générale, Paris, 1978.

⁵ See, for example, Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, 'Les artistes et la révolution', in [Geneviève G-Dreyfus-Armand, Robert-Frank, Marie-Françoise M-F-Lévy and](#); M. Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *Les années 68: Le temps de la contestation*, Complexe, Brussels, 2000, pp. 225-237. Catherine Millet associates these practices with a pervasive and politicised attack on the integrity of the art object during this period. See Catherine Millet, *L'Art contemporain en France*, [3rd edn](#), Flammarion, Paris, 2005, pp. 20-9.

⁶ Sarah Wilson's *The Visual World of French Theory: Figurations*, [Yale University Press](#), New Haven, [Yale](#), 2012, examines Althusser's [engagement-involvement in](#)with contemporaneous artistic practice, though is limited to only those artists with whom he directly corresponded. Althusser's [impact-influence](#) on the context of painting in France in the 1960s and 1970s is acknowledged in Philip Armstrong and Laura Lisbon, 'Problematics', in *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, eds. Philip Armstrong, Laura Lisbon, and Stephen Melville, [exhibition catalogue, Columbus, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus](#), 2001, pp. 27-54. Armstrong and Lisbon situate a series of painting practices in relation to Althusser's concept of the 'problematic'—the apparent unity governing what questions may be posed of objects in a particular field of knowledge—in order to illuminate what painting's 'limits' are. This essay, however, attempts to identify how and why Althusser was seen as offering a justification of painting for leftist artists at this juncture.

⁷ That such texts were discussed, produced, and circulated alongside paintings differentiates the textual engagement-activity of this moment both from the more ambitious performative function of the manifesto, which inaugurated earlier twentieth-century avant-garde movements, and from contemporaneous practices associated with conceptual art, in which texts were presented *as* the artwork. See, for example, Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005; and Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003.

⁸ There had already been stirrings of such projects prior-to-before 1956, most prominently in the case of the group Socialisme ou Barbarie-group, founded in 1948 by Cornelius Catoriadis and Claude Lefort. See Marcel van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949–65)', *Left History*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1997, pp. 7–37.

⁹ Althusser discusses Marx's break with German idealist philosophy, specifically Hegel and Feuerbach, in 'On the Young Marx', in Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, Benjamin Brewster (transl.), Verso, New York, 2005, pp. 51–86. (First published as Louis Althusser, *Pour Marx*, Maspero, Paris, 1965).

¹⁰ '... we can see that [Marx] founded a new scientific discipline and that this *emergence* itself was analogous to all the great *scientific discoveries* of history' (ibid., p. 85). Althusser would later distance himself from the scientism of his claims in *For Marx*. See: Gregory Elliott (ed.), Louis Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott, Verso, London, 1990, pp. 77–81.

¹¹ Louis Althusser, 'Marxism and Humanism', in Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 229.

¹² The term is associated with the critic Michel Tapié and his 1952 book *Un art autre*, Gabriel-Giraud et fils, Paris, 1952.

¹³ André Malraux, Quoted in 'La machine à faire de la peinture abstraite a intéressé M. Malraux', *France-Soir*, 3 October 1959, p. ??.

¹⁴ On Malraux's nationalist project and the Biennale de Paris, see Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945–1962*, Duke University, Durham, NC, 2014, pp. 41–45.

¹⁵ See Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *L'Ordre sauvage: Violence, dépense et sacré dans l'art des années 1950–1960*, Gallimard, Paris, 2004, pp. 186–211.

¹⁶ Editorial committee, Salon de la Jeune Peinture, 1965, quoted in Francis Parent and Raymond Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture: Une histoire 1950–1983*, Jeune Peinture, Paris, 1983, p. 48.

¹⁷ Pierre Cabanne, 'Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture', *Arts*, January 1965, p. 38.

¹⁸ [Georges Boudaille](#), cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Bulletin d'information du Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, June 1965, p. 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ [Louis Althusser et al.](#), ~~Althusser et al.~~, *Reading 'Capital'*, Ben Brewster (transl.), New Left Books, London, 1970. (first published as *Lire le Capital*, Maspero, Paris, 1965).

²² Parent and Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, p. 55.

²³ For other groups that attempted similarly politicised forms of collectivity during this period, see Jacopo Galimberti, *Individuals Against Individualism: Art Collectives in Western Europe (1956–1969)*, Liverpool University Press, ~~Liverpool~~, 2017.

²⁴ [Bernard Rancillac](#), 'Quatre peintres racontent', *Le Monde*, vol. 16, April 2008, p. 24.

²⁵ [Louis Althusser](#), 'On the Materialist Dialectic', in [Althusser](#), *For Marx*, p. 171. Here, Althusser specifically lists art as a practice that, lacking Marxist theory, produces a 'dangerous ideological menace'.

²⁶ *Reading 'Capital'* was a collaborative effort between Althusser and his students; Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière.

²⁷ Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 233–234.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 231.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 232.

³¹ The show's title came to designate a new kind of figurative painting, ~~practiced~~ practised by artists primarily in France, ~~that which~~ was distinguished by 1) a tendency towards narrative or sequential temporality within the image; 2) iconography drawn from popular consumer culture; and 3) an anti-painterly 'coldness'. See Jean-Louis Pradel (ed.), *La figuration narrative*, Hazan, Paris, 2000.

³² Duchamp had become a U.S. citizen in 1955. Gassiot-Talabot later referred to these artists as 'Duchamp's grandchildren'. See [Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, *Le monde en question*, exhibition catalogue. please give full citation.](#)

³³ Gérald Gassiot-Talabot, in Parent and Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, p. 46.

³⁴ Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati, 'La fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp'.

³⁵ Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, George Heard Hamilton (transl.), Grove Press, New York, 1959, pp. 35–36.

³⁶ Pierre Restany, 'À quarante degrés au-dessus de dada', in [Restany, *Le nouveau réalisme*, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1978](#), pp. 13–43.

³⁷ Louis Aragon, *Les collages*, Hermann, Paris, 1965, p. 120. Aragon had developed this reading of the readymade, including the notion of an affirmative 'personality of choice', much earlier, in a well-known essay from 1930, titled *La peinture au défi*, Librairie Corti, Paris, 1930.

³⁸ Aillaud, Arroyo and Recalcati, 'La fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp'. Parent and Perrot note that most *figuration narrative* artists had adopted the practice of signing the back of the canvas rather than the front. (Parent and Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, p. 56).

³⁹ Clément Layet, 'Flegme et feu de Gilles Aillaud', *OwnReality*, vol. 33, 2017, pp. 17–21. These criticisms were joined by André Breton and other surrealists, who wrote a tract, 'The Third Degree of Painting', in [Eduardo Arroyo, *exhibition catalogue*](#), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 1998, p. 91. Jill Carrick, 'The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp: Collectivism and Contestation in 1960s France', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2008, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Alexander Potts, *Experiments in Modern Realism: World Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar*

European and American Art, Yale University [Press](#), New Haven, 2013, p. 157.

⁴¹ Laurence Grove, *Comics in French: The European Bande Dessinée in Context*, Berghahn, New York, 2010, pp. 253–254.

⁴² Jill Carrick has suggested parallels between the Mr. Big character in Fleming’s novel and Duchamp in the painting, though Aillaud and Recalcati repudiated such associations. Carrick, ‘The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp’, pp. 7–8.

⁴³ Gilles Aillaud, [Eduardo Arroyo and Antonio Recalcati](#), ‘Comment s’en débarrasser ou un an plus tard’ (September 1966), in *Opus International*, no. 49, March 1974, p. 102.

⁴⁴ This is the argument that would be most influentially advanced by Peter Bürger in his 1973 work *Theorie der Avantgarde*/*Theory of the Avant-Garde*. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw (transl.), University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1984.

⁴⁵ Aillaud, Arroyo [and](#); Recalcati, ‘Comment s’en débarrasser ou un an plus tard’, p. 102.

⁴⁶ Althusser’s claim to offer the ‘first left-wing critique of Stalinism’ was made during his doctoral defence in 1975 and is quoted in ‘News’, *Radical Philosophy*, no. 12, 1975, p. 44, but is more fully articulated in his ‘Reply to John Lewis’, in [Louis Althusser](#), *Essays in Self-Criticism*, Graham Locke (transl.), New Left Books, London, 1976, pp. 35–93.

⁴⁷ Louis Althusser, ‘Lettre sur la connaissance de l’art (réponse à André Daspre)’, *La nouvelle critique*, no. 175, April 1966, pp. ??–??.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Louis Althusser, ‘Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract’, in [Louis Althusser](#), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2006, pp. 164–165. [Please confirm.](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

⁵¹ Louis Althusser, ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’, in [Althusser](#), *For Marx*, pp. 100–116.

⁵² *Bulletin du Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, no. 2, December 1968, p. 2.

⁵³ The French term '*manifestation*', along with its English equivalent, 'demonstration', carries the connotation of a collective political event.

⁵⁴ See Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds), *Institutional Critique*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2009; and Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, vol. 55, Winter 1990, esp. pp. 136–43; Millet, *Contemporary Art in France*, no. 27, pp. 117–119. **Please give full citation, or make consistent with French version cited earlier.**

⁵⁵ Molly Warnock, 'Michel Parmentier: Painting for Nothing', *Journal of Contemporary Painting*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2016, p. 238.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Buchloh, 'The Group That Was (Not) One: Daniel Buren and BMPT', *Artforum International*, vol. 46, no. 9, May 2008, p. 311.

⁵⁷ BMPT, 'Lettre contre les salons', 3 January–3, 1967. A postscript on the tract thanks the Salon de la Jeune Peinture for allowing the artists to carry out the *manifestation*.

⁵⁸ Daniel Buren, 'L'Art n'est plus justifiable ou les points sur le "j"', interview with Georges Boudaille, *Les lettres françaises*, March 1968, reprinted in *Daniel Buren: Les écrits (1965–1990), tome I, 1965–1975*, ed. Jean-Marc Poinot, CAPC: Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, 1991, p. 44.

⁵⁹ At an exhibition at ~~the~~ Galerie J in Paris in December 1967, Buren, Mosset, and Toroni each painted the other two motifs in addition to their own. This new approach prompted the defection of Parmentier, who regarded it as a betrayal of the group's anti-humanist refusal of choice. See Michel Parmentier, 'Le Groupe Buren–Mosset–Parmentier–Toroni n'existe plus' (–December 1967), reprinted in Guy Massaux, *Michel Parmentier, décembre 1965–20 novembre 1999, une retrospective*, ed. Guy Massaux, exhibition catalogue, Loevenbruck, Paris, 2016, p. 76.

⁶⁰ Daniel Buren, 'Mise au point' (1970), in *Daniel Buren: Les écrits, tome I, 1965–1975* ~~Les écrits: 1965–1976, Tome I, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain De Bordeaux, Bordeaux~~, p. 138; See, also, Olivier Mosset, 'Échapper au poids du signe. Entretien avec Catherine Millet', *Art Press*, no. 11, October 1977, **pp. ??–??.**

⁶¹ Gabriel Rockhill, *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014.

p. 7.

⁶² Buren, 'L'Art n'est plus justifiable ou les points sur le "i"', p. 42.

⁶³ See, for example, Buren's response to nouveau réalisme in Buren, 'Mise au point', p. 43.

⁶⁴ On the significance of the readymade in European and American art of the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Julia Robinson (ed.), *New Realisms: 1957-1962: Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle*, ed. Julia Robinson, exhibition catalogue, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2010. Buchloh points out that such a position disavowed Buren's own indebtedness to the ready-made's revelation of institutional authority, as well as the ready-made status of the industrially produced striped canvas used by the artist. Buchloh, 'The Group That Was (Not) One', p. 313.

⁶⁵ See Sami Siegelbaum, 'The Riddle of May '68: Collectivity and Protest in the Salon de la Jeune Peinture', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2012, pp. 53-73.

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, Éditions de Seuil, Paris, 1953.

⁶⁷ Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, p. 99. Of course, the BMPT artists' disavowal of subjectivity in their work is of course not without its own contradictions. For example, Freud's notion of the 'repetition compulsion' interprets the individual's drive to repeat an action as an attempt to assert subjective mastery over trauma. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, Penguin, London, 2003, p. 285. Buren, for one, has become so indelibly associated with the stripe motif that it now functions as a kind of signature or authorial brand.

⁶⁸ This essay originally appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition *Konzeption / Conception* at the Leverkuysen Städtischen Museum in October 1969. It was also reprinted in numerous English-language venues/publications as 'Beware!', including Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (eds), *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, University of California, Berkeley, 1996, pp. ??-??.

⁶⁹ Daniel Buren, 'Mise en garde', p. 93.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 96.

⁷³ See Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic', *For Marx*, pp. 161–217.

⁷⁴ Althusser suggests this specifically for domains such as art in: [ibid.](#), 'On the Materialist Dialectic', in *For Marx*, pp. 169–170.

⁷⁵ 'This investment of knowledge, conceived as a real part of the real object, in the real structure of the real object, is what constitutes the specific problematic of the empiricist conception of knowledge.' Althusser [et al.](#), *Reading 'Capital'*, p. 38.

⁷⁶ *Bulletin d'information du Salon de la Jeune Peinture* [sp.-cit.](#) Please confirm.

⁷⁷ By adopting the thesis of the 'epistemological break', Buren thus rejected the dialectical principle, articulated by Engels, of the 'negation of the negation' which Althusser denounced as a preservation of Hegelian logic in official Marxism. On the 'negation of the negation', see [Freidrich Engels, Anti-Dühring by Frederick Engels 1877. Part I: Philosophy. XIII: Dialectics. Negation of the Negation., 1877, available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch11.htm.](#)

⁷⁸ Buren, *Les écrits*, p. 38.

⁷⁹ *Bulletin de la Jeune Peinture* no. 2.

⁸⁰ This is most evident in 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', which draws on Mao's 'On Contradiction' (1937) without mentioning his name. Althusser also anonymously contributed an essay on the Cultural Revolution to the UJCl's journal, the *Cahiers marxiste-léninistes*, in 1967.

⁸¹ Pierre Buraglio, email to [the](#) author, December 2010.

⁸² A partial list would include Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Sollers, Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Badiou.

⁸³ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, p. 80.

⁸⁴ The artists who participated in the *Salle rouge* were: Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, René Artouzoul,

Bernard Alleaume, Baratella, Zipora Bodek, Francis Biras, Pierre Buraglio, Louis Cane, Henri Cueno, Maxime Darnaud, Loïc Dubigeon, Lucio Fanti, Lucien Fleury, Philippe Leroy, Olivier Olivier, Fabio Rieti, Michel Parré, Gérard Tisserand, Jean-Pierre Peraro, Gérard Schlosser, Spadari, Vilmart, and Christian Zeimert.

⁸⁵ As noted in the *Bulletin*, 'Red must thus be the opposite of green in more than one sense. Not only is red not green but red must not be the colour materially spread on the canvas. Red must be the colour of the criteria according to which each picture finds its place within the room.' *Bulletin de la Jeune Peinture no. 2*. Have assumed this is your translation, so have changed spelling of 'colour' and corrected 'within' to 'in'.

⁸⁶ The National Liberation Front, founded in 1960, was the political organisation, ~~founded in 1960~~, ~~which that~~ sought unification of North and South Vietnam and opposed the US-backed South Vietnamese government. Its military wing was the Viet Cong.

⁸⁷ On the role of Jeune Peinture and other *figuration narrative* artists in the Atelier Populaire, see Liam Considine, *American Pop Art in France: Politics of the Transatlantic Image*, Routledge, New York, 2020, pp. 112–140.

⁸⁸ Parent and Perrot, *Le Salon de la Jeune Peinture*, p. 93. The exhibition was only possible thanks to ARC director Pierre Gaudibert, a friend and follower of Althusser. The audacity of this undertaking in the repressive atmosphere of post-May 1968 was reflected in the City of Paris's decision to reduce the ARC budget by two million francs in response to the *Salle rouge*.

⁸⁹ Georges Boudaille, *Les lettres françaises*, 9 July 1969, Should this include title of article, and page number?

⁹⁰ The most significant of these critiques by former followers is Jacques Rancière, *Althusser's Lesson* (1974), Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2011.

⁹¹ On the politicisation of radio media in May 1968, see Sami Siegelbaum, 'Authentic Mediation: Art, Media and Public Space in May '68', *Kunstlich*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2011, pp. 38–49.

⁹² *Bulletin de la Jeune Peinture no. 5*, 1969, p. 15.

⁹³ On the PCF's reaction to May 1968, see George Ross, *Workers and Communists in France: From Popular Front to Eurocommunism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, pp. 215–223; and Daniel Singer, *Prelude to a Revolution: May '68 in France*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1970.

⁹⁴ Vincent Bioulès et al., collective statement for exhibition 'La Peinture en Question' (Musée du Havre, June–July 1969), reproduced in 'Supports-Surfaces', *Le blog*, n.d., MAC'A: Maison des Arts Contemporains d'Avignon. <http://www.mac-a.org/pages/Supportssurfaces-6575969.html>. Please confirm Also, whose translation?

⁹⁵ 'Positions du groupe Supports/Surfaces', collective statement, April 1971, reprinted in Marie-Hélène Grinfeder, *Les années Supports Surfaces: 1965–1990*, Herscher, Paris, 1991, p. 56. The name 'Supports/Surfaces', sometimes written in the singular, was created by Bioulès for the first official exhibition of the group, at the ARC in September 1970. There are Only a handful of exhibitions that could be attributed to the group between 1969 and their dissolution in June 1971, though many members continued similar experiments into the 1970s.

⁹⁶ 'La peinture en question', op. cit. Bioulès et al., collective statement for exhibition *La Peinture en Question*.

⁹⁷ 'Positions du groupe Supports/Surfaces', p. 56.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ See Marcelin Pleynet, *Quelques problèmes de la peinture moderne: Louis Cane*, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, 1972, and Marc Devade, interview with Giovanni Joppolo (1975), cited in Marie-Hélène Grinfeder, *Les années Supports Surfaces: 1965–1990*, Herscher, Paris, 1991, p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ 'Positions du groupe Supports/Surfaces', p. 56. The distinction between the 'object of knowledge' and the 'real object' is most fully articulated in: Louis Althusser et al., *Reading 'Capital'*, Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (transl.), Verso, London, 2015, pp. 40–43 (First published as *Lire le Capital*, Maspero, Paris, 1965). You cite two different editions of the English *Reading 'Capital'*, which makes subsequent citations confusing. Can we get all citations from the one edition?

¹⁰¹ Althusser, 'On the Materialist Dialectic', *For Marx*, p. 166.

¹⁰² Pierre Restany, 'À 40° au-dessus de Dada', exhibition essay, Galerie J, May–June 1961. For Althusser's critique of the Hegelian notion of 'expressive totality', see Althusser, *Reading 'Capital'*, pp. 240–244, and *Essays in Self-Criticism*, pp. 182–184.

¹⁰³ Marc Devade was a frequent contributor to *Tel Quel* and served on its editorial board from 1971 to 1982.

¹⁰⁴ Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of Tel Quel: Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement*, Penn State Press, University Park, 1996, pp. 21 and 106.

¹⁰⁵ Althusser, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination', *For Marx*, pp. 100–113.

¹⁰⁶ Published until 1985, the journal long outlasted Supports/Surfaces, as well as the founding editors' Maoist politics.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Cane and Daniel Dezeuze, 'Pour un programme théorique picturale', *Peinture: Cahiers théoriques*, no. 1, 1971, pp. 73–75.

¹⁰⁸ Althusser *et al.*, *Reading 'Capital'*, p. 71, quoted in Cane and Dezeuze, 'Pour un programme théorique picturale', p. 81.

¹⁰⁹ [Supports/Surfaces], 'Tract vert', 23 September 1970, reproduced in Bernard Ceysson, *Le moment Supports/Surfaces*, IAC Éditions d'Art, Paris, 2010, p. 292. Supports/Surfaces issued a number of short polemical statements, mimeographed on light-green paper, starting in 1970. Most were written by Devade.

¹¹⁰ The 'cold' objectivity of this approach to painting was in some respects foreshadowed in literature by the *Nouveau Roman*, which *Tel Quel* championed in the early 1960s, as well as by the 'rapport financier' in the 1965 *Bulletin d'information du Salon de la Jeune Peinture*.

¹¹¹ This is not to discount the attempt by members of the group to explore exhibiting their works outdoors, for example in the Mediterranean landscape, as an antidote to institutional or market-oriented forms of display. See Rosemary O'Neil, 'Été 70: The Plein-Air Exhibitions of Supports-Surfaces', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2012, pp. 349–368.

¹¹² ‘Positions du Groupe Supports/Surfaces’, p. 56.

¹¹³ Althusser, *For Marx*, pp. 76–77.

¹¹⁴ Louis Althusser, ‘Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon’, first published in *L’Unité*, February 1968, pp. ??–??, and translated in *New Left Review*, no. 64, November–December 1970, pp. ??–??.

¹¹⁵ See Althusser *et al.*, *Reading ‘Capital’*, Part-2H, Chapter-9: ‘An object cannot be defined by its immediately visible or sensuous appearance, it is necessary to make a detour via its concept in order to grasp it.’

¹¹⁶ ‘Positions du Groupe Supports/Surfaces’, pp. 55–56.

¹¹⁷ Noël Dolla, Toni Grand, Patrick Saytour, André Valensi, and Claude Viallat, ‘Supports/Surfaces’, 14 June 1971, reproduced in Grinfeder, *Les années Supports Surfaces*, p. 59.

¹¹⁸ ‘Matérialisme conséquent et incon séquence d’une scission’, signed by Arnal, Bioulès, Cane, Devade and Dezeuze, dated 15 June 1971, reprinted in Grinfeder, *Les années Supports Surfaces*, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ ‘Marc Devade’, interview with Camille Saint-Jacques, in Grinfeder, *Les années Supports Surfaces*, pp. 156–157. Also see Jenevieve Nykolak, ‘Painting with Desire: Color after Collectivity, 1972–1974’, *Selva*, no. 1, 2019, <https://selvajournal.org/article/painting-with-desire/>.

¹²⁰ See Marc Devade, ‘Peinture et matérialisme I’, *Peinture: Cahiers théoriques*, no. 1, August 1970; and Marc Devade, ‘Comment voir la Chine en peinture’, *Peinture: Cahiers théoriques*, no. 2/3, January 1972.

¹²¹ ‘Positions du Groupe Supports/Surfaces’.

¹²² See, for example, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Le gauchisme: Remède à la maladie senile-sénile du communisme*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1968; Alain Touraine, *Le mouvement de mai ou le communisme utopique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1968, p. 18; Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération-1: Les années de rêve*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1987; Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 in and Contemporary French Thought*, McGill-Queens, Montreal, 2007, pp. 26–27.

¹²³ Michel Parmentier, ‘Lettre ouverte à François Mathey’, 16 March 1972, published in *Douze ans d’art*

contemporain en France, 1960–1972, [exhibition catalogue](#), Grand Palais, [Réunion des Musées Nationaux](#), Paris, 1972, pp. 294–296. Parmentier took up painting again in 1983.

¹²⁴ Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in [Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*](#), [Aakar Books](#), pp. 85–126. For Althusser’s reflections on his mental illness, see his autobiography, *The Future Lasts Forever*, Richard Veasey (transl.), New Press, New York, 1992.

¹²⁵ ‘Mettez-m’en trois belles tranches, dit-elle, on a Ginette à diner ce soir’, open letter signed by Buren, Parmentier, and Toroni, September 1980, reprinted in [Daniel Buren, *Les écrits: 1977–1983, tome 2II*](#), CAPC; Musée d’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, [1991, Bordeaux](#), pp. 273–275. In a 1979 interview, Buren charged Supports/Surfaces with academicism, characterizing it as a ‘pseudo-renewal of so-called abstract painting’. Daniel Buren, ‘BMPT n’a jamais existé!!’, interview with Charles Le Bouil, Bernard Mazaud and Patrick Jude, in *Toponymies*, Éditions A.R.S.I.C., Limoges, 1980, pp. 5–7.

9

Andy Warhol: Money and image

Sebastian Egenhofer, trans. James Gussen

Of the many ends of painting in the twentieth century, the beginning of [Andy Warhol's](#) artistic career coincides with the moment of the exhaustion of modernism as it was influentially defined by the critic Clement Greenberg.¹ In 1962, Greenberg himself already saw that the historical process of the self-criticism of the medium, which in 1939 he had claimed ~~to be~~ [was](#) the only way to save high art from the decadence of mass culture,² had run into a dead end: even the raw, unpainted canvas—the bare, bounded ground—could appear, as a consequence of Greenberg's own theory, to be a legitimate picture.³ Already at the start of the 1950s, Robert Rauschenberg's monochromes seemed to have reached this kind of vanishing point. Around 1960, in the first of Frank Stella's series—the Black Paintings (1959) and the Aluminum and Copper series (1960 and 1961)—the identification of the image with the very materials that constitute it was taken to a seemingly unsurpassable extreme.⁴ It has been widely discussed that minimal art, one of the defining departure points for post-medium art since the 1960s, emerged out of *this* end of painting. Donald Judd's early *Specific objects*, Dan Flavin's *Icons*, and even Carl Andre's *Pyramids*—more explicitly sculptural but nonetheless directly influenced by Stella's work—can be understood as ~~outcomes~~ [products](#) of this historical moment in which painting—along one of its dominant lines of development at least in the North American context—lost every trace of representation. The *ground* of the former image had become a self-identical object that had cast off any pictorial illusion and related henceforth only to itself.⁵

From the start, Warhol's artistic practice had this end of modernist painting behind it. For ten years he had observed the shifting market for high art from the financially secure yet socially less recognised and less prestigious position of a commercial graphic designer.⁶ When he entered the art scene in 1961, he had already integrated the final product of modernist self-criticism—the raw, unpainted, or monochrome canvas—into his own concept of the image. Warhol's silk-screen paintings of the 1960s maintain the non-representational, or amnesiac, function of this

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empty image-ground; this function presents, however, no more than just *one* side of a split structure. In Warhol's work, the often-monochrome ground—the legacy of late modernism's endgame—is juxtaposed with the apparition of the screen-print, an originally photographic, technically multiplied trace of a singular referent. In Warhol's *Philosophy* (1975), which I read in connection to his painting of the 1960s, this split structure is systematically conferred onto two further registers: the structure of subjectivity and the commodity form. It finds, I argue, its analogy in the relation of the bare surface of a forgetful mind—the very sort of forgetful mind that Warhol ascribes to himself in his *Philosophy*—to the flow of impressions and technically mediated images that affect this mind. It is, however, in the commodity form and in its inherent division into abstract, non-qualitative exchange-value and a specific use-value oriented towards a social world; that I locate the *model* not only for Warhol's concept of the work of art, but also for his concept of subjectivity. In an analysis of the essential characteristics of Warhol's silk-screen painting of the early 1960s, I reveal how stringently he translated this split structure into the aesthetic form of his work. In so doing, he unfolds the *epistemological potential* of the commodity form. This-which is not merely an effect of an economic constellation; rather, it shows itself to be the *key* to central features of modern society and the modern world.

That this aesthetic *mimicry* of the commodity form could be sustained only for only a brief period explains in turn the temporary end of Warhol's 'art career' in 1966. He overcame-did not overcome this crisis of-in his painting only-atuntil the beginning-of theearly 1970s, when he discovered a new genre and a new work form: the individual portrait for individual clients and patrons.⁷

4. A hermeneutics of the subject: Warhol's machines

The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again) begins with a telephone conversation between A (-Andy, 'nobody')_; and B (-'anybody'). As they chat about the misfortunes of their morning ablutions—the consequences of dehydration pills and chocolate-covered cherries on the carpet—A recalls a recurrent fear: that of looking in the mirror and finding 'nothing' there: ‘

I'm sure I'm going to look in the mirror and see nothing. People are always calling me a mirror and if a mirror looks into a mirror, what is there to see?’⁸

However, every morning the endless procession of mirror reflections is interrupted by a material reality through which the subject's identity is stabilised.

'Day after day I look in the mirror and I still see something—a new pimple. If the pimple on my upper right cheek is gone, a new one turns up on my lower left cheek, on my jawline, near my ear [...]. I think it's the same pimple, moving from place to place.' I was telling the truth. If someone asked me, 'What's your problem?' I'd have to say, 'Skin.'⁹

Designer, please take in Fig. 9.1 near here.

The relationship between the mirror and the porous skin¹⁰ that still allows a face to appear in the 'nothing' of the self-reflections of the mirror, points to the model of emptied subjectivity that Warhol frequently evoked in the 1960s. This is exemplified in Warhol's claim that he was nothing but a surface: ('If you want to know all about Andy Warhol just look at the surface [...]. There is nothing behind it.')¹¹ or in his stated desire to become a 'machine'.¹²

In his *Philosophy*, Warhol proposes a series of analogies for this relationship between machine and surface, mirror and image, reflective emptiness and skin. He relates various anecdotes to illustrate his forgetfulness, comparing, for example, his 'mind' to 'a tape recorder with only one button: erase'.¹³ By depicting the structural forgetfulness of consciousness, which Sigmund Freud ~~connected~~ in his 'Note Upon the "Mystic Writing Pad"' ~~connected~~ with the need to *discharge* the currently cathected stimuli from the system of perceptual consciousness,¹⁴ as independent of any memory-related function, Warhol reinforces the analogy of his 'mind' and the mirror, which retains no permanent traces of the outside world it reflects.

At the same time, Warhol associated this forgetfulness, which pushes consciousness towards the condition of a perpetual Now, with a machine that normally serves to record and conserve the traces of that Now. In Warhol's account, however, a tape recorder takes the place of the wax-layer of Freud's 'mystic writing pad', in which all inscriptions on the surface of the consciousness are conserved as 'permanent traces'.¹⁵ Together with other reproduction devices, this machine replaces the human subject's lost memory function; or rather, as an objective medium for outsourcing

subjective memory, it provokes this loss and thereby eliminates this dimension of psychological authenticity.¹⁶

When I got my first TV set, I stopped caring so much about having close relationships with other people. I'd been hurt a lot to the degree you can only be hurt if you care a lot. So I guess I did care a lot, in the days before anyone ever heard of 'pop art' or 'underground movies' or 'superstars'.

So in the late 50s I started an affair with my television which has continued to the present, when I play around in my bedroom with as many as four at a time. But I didn't get married until 1964 when I got my first tape recorder. My wife, my tape recorder and I have been married for ten years now. When I say 'we', I mean my tape recorder and me. A lot of people don't understand that.¹⁷

The TV-set and the functioning tape recorder thus initiate what Warhol describes as the cold, glittering '60s.

The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing.

During the 60s, I think, people forgot what emotions were supposed to be. And I don't think they've ever remembered. I think that once you see emotions from a certain angle you can never think of them as real again. That's what more or less has happened to me.¹⁸

Though ~~he was~~ married to a tape recorder, the recording devices ~~that~~ Warhol ~~worked with~~~~used~~ were of course predominantly visual. In addition to the so-called *Time capsules*—some ~~six hundred~~600 cardboard boxes in which he stored, after 1974, materials that were no longer needed for his work—he used various movie and still cameras, from the 16-mm camera with which he subjected visitors to the 1960s

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Factory₃ to three-minute ‘screen tests’, to the Big Shot Polaroid ~~utilised-used~~ for the society portraits of the 1970s. The interior capacity for memory was exteriorised: the internal subjective memory of the individual replaced by the external objective memory of the machines.

Warhol’s 1960s paintings thus do not pursue the same abolition of the structures and vestiges of representation carried out by the avant-gardes of classical modernism, as they were framed by formalist art historians and critics like Alfred Barr and Clement Greenberg. Rather, they stage a split between the emptied or blank ground, that is, a monochrome (often silver) canvas, and those externalised traces of past events that were transferred (deprived of spatial depth and narrative consequence) to the picture surface. For Warhol, it was only the human subject that was freed from the burden of memory. The past itself, however, survives on its own—whether in analogue traces such as moving images, photograph~~ie~~, or audio recordings₂ or in material remnants—in a memory space or archive outside the human psyche. Warhol stocked his 1960s work with material drawn precisely from the most recent layers of this exterior memory space. Press, advertising, and police photographs of car accidents, movie stars, notorious criminals, race riots, and the electric chair were transferred from this external memory space to the surface of the canvas. In Warhol, these images lose the nostalgic quality that Roland Barthes later claimed is *essential* to photography, binding the photograph to its absent referent, the unrepeatable moment when the image was taken.¹⁹ Unlike the materials of the *Time capsules*, which eventually gain the character of relics, the photo-generated silk~~2~~-screened images in Warhol’s paintings float like two-dimensional, disembodied₂ ghostly shadows: serialised images projected onto a memory-less ground—often a monochrome, silver surface. This suggests that the structural function of the mirror, evoked in Warhol’s writing as a model of a ‘mind’ without depth, is also present in his pictorial work.

The images that Warhol appropriates and multiplies thus retain the fleeting and ephemeral character of mass-media simulacra. Indeed, Warhol underlays the spectral images of the mass~~2~~-media with a ground that is irreproducible in its materiality and extension; the spectral images never organically merge with this ground—not even in the silk-screen prints with polychrome backgrounds. As well, Warhol’s openness to chance, as manifest in his high tolerance—indeed, deliberate incorporation—of error,

which singularises the contact of the silk screen and the canvas, further highlights the tension between the ground that makes the repetition of the serialised image possible and this image itself.

It is into this tension between static material surface and repeated image in Warhol's 1960s paintings that the dialectic of mirror and image, emptiness and skin, is translated into: this is how the superficiality, indifference and forgetfulness of the 'mind' that Warhol professed to have in his *Philosophy* relates to the structure of his silk-screen paintings. The work is split (as the subject or the self is split) into a tense, but superficial attentiveness—materialised in the mirror-like monochrome ground of the paintings—and those technically mediated perceptions that glide over this ground.

A hermeneutics of the subject that approaches Warhol's work with the expectation, inherited from the European tradition, of an historical self-consciousness that articulates itself in a singular work of art is thwarted by its bipartite structure.²⁰ Serial production obviously plays a crucial role in this interpretative failure.²¹ For the first time in the history of twentieth-century art, quantitative output became a central structural feature or 'quality' of a work.²² Warhol emphasised this quality in his single-subject exhibitions.²³ However, it is only latently present in the contemplation of the individual work—in the repeated impressions of the same screen on the canvas. Hence it is above all the catalogue raisonné that offers insight into this dimension of Warhol.²⁴ It is only when confronted with the sheer quantity of thirty-six Elvis paintings from the same screen, forty Liz Taylors (of the same type), ~~two hundred~~200 Jackie Kennedys (of the same type), more than ~~four hundred~~400 flower paintings, and so on, that one comprehends the falsely ennobling effect of exhibitions (even comprehensive retrospectives) featuring Warhol's work, which necessarily treat the individual painting as a self-contained work.

It is, however, not only the paradigm of mechanical reproduction in Warhol's practice and the blind efficiency of production that frustrate a hermeneutics of the subject grounded in psychological memory and historical self-consciousness—it is also the apparent lack of intentionality behind these machines, the seeming absence of a director. The subject is split into the frail or glamorous screen image²⁵ and the blind machine, whose automatic operation records and erases the images and, by repeating them, cuts them off from their date and historical referent.

At the beginning of Warhol's *Philosophy*, identity and image coalesce around the skin, a blemish of the skin. In the morning telephone conversation, this 'extimate' identity aid²⁶ is draped with a long list of qualities attributed to Warhol by the press:

Nothing is missing. It's all there. The affectless gaze. The diffracted grace ... The bored languor, the wasted pallor ... The childlike, gum-chewing naïveté, the glamour rooted in despair, the self-admiring carelessness, the perfected otherness, the wispiness, the shadowy, voyeuristic, vaguely sinister aura, the pale, soft-spoken magical presence, the skin and bones ... The albino-chalk skin. Parchmentlike. Reptilian. Almost blue ... It's all there, B. Nothing is missing. I'm everything my scrapbook says I am.²⁷

Personal identity belongs to the dimension of the image, to surface, skin, and makeup—not to the nothingness of the 'mirror machine' on which the contingent image appears. It is thus precisely Warhol's self-portraits, both the purely photographic and those translated into paintings (see Figs 9.2–9.4), that rehearse the variability of personal identity. They stage the subjectivisation of the individual as an endless collage of masks that move and mix above the faceless machine.²⁸

Designer, please take in Fig. 9.2, Fig. 9.3, Fig. 9.4 near here.

2. At modernism's outer limit: the extroversion of the work

If we link the development of modernist art to the process of social modernisation, and identify the real abstraction of the money form of exchange-value as the engine of the modernist critique of representation,²⁹ then this split between mirror and image, machine and mask, also marks the *historical* site of Warhol's work of the 1960s. That work occupies the boundary between modernism's progressive critique of representation and what I would like to call 'contemporary' art. This boundary runs between the memory-less mirror—the monochrome surface—and the photographically generated shadow that is imposed on it from without, connecting it to the actual world and to that world's mediated visibility. Rather than open representationally to a world, as the tradition of the image as window pretended to do, Greenbergian modernism is the development toward a self-referential art that is satisfied to simply present its own medial or material means. According to Greenberg's model of self-criticism, painting—here the

principal medium in a broader theory of medium-specificity—reached its full autonomy with the working-out of its self-identical materiality.³⁰ Particularly in minimal art, however, this tautological presence and visual immediacy of the programmatically self-referential object begins to resonate with the form of exchange-value, which had subverted and superseded the representational artwork's mnemonic relationship to the world. From this perspective, 'contemporary' art is art that *reacts* to this constellation and takes the self-identical signifier that is lacking the immanent worldliness of the picture, and faces it outward, putting it into a relationship of reflective, lateral reference to its world. The contemporary work thus has abandoned its representational relationship to the world, and is instead related as a thing among things to its actual surroundings. The depth and rootedness of memory ~~is-are~~ replaced by the flow of exchange and the law of equivalence as the matrix and model for conceiving the work of art's relationship to the world.

This extroversion of the artwork's structure is broadly characteristic of 'neo-avant-garde' art of the 1950s and 1960s. In Warhol, however, it is carried out with unprecedented methodological consistency (~~Fig. 9.5~~). His work therefore undoubtedly belongs to the paradigm of art 'After Abstract Expressionism', to quote the title of the already mentioned essay by Clement Greenberg from 1962. Marked by the belated influence of Duchamp, this paradigm was defined by the avoidance of expression and the erasure of the dimension of private interiority that found its echo in the expressive, indexical pictorial signs of New York School painting. Early on, this anti-expressive paradigm took shape in Robert Rauschenberg's *White paintings* of 1951,³¹ which John Cage, who adopted them as the model for his silent piece *4'33''* (1952), described as 'airports for the lights, shadows, and particles'.³² The empty structures of Rauschenberg and Cage were attempts to sideline artistic intentionality.³³ In Rauschenberg's subsequent work, for example the *Combine paintings* (after 1954) and the *Dante cycle* (1959), dust and shadows took the form of real objects and reproduced images, references to the debris of the capitalist world and the visual world of the print media. Even in the early 1960s, however, when Rauschenberg was also using the silk-screen technique, his combination of these images continued to be governed by a poetics of dreaming and free association ~~which-that~~ made his works a space for the projection of a pre-~~conscious~~ or unconscious layer of the subject. The surface is hollowed out,

becoming a shallow container in which image fragments float like Freudian residues of the day.

In Warhol's work, even these remainders of subjectivity are erased by his customary use of just one screen per canvas, either once or multiple times, arranged in a grid or aleatorically scattered. Unlike Rauschenberg's work, Warhol's pure parataxis no longer implies the synthetic act of a subject. The indexical relationship between the photographic original and its referent, that is, the singular object or event, is counteracted by the indexical relationship between the repeated silk-screen impression and the general production process in the Factory. The repetitive~~ness~~ness of this process is emphasised by the defects and overlapping of the screen's impressions, which do not dynamically resonate with its monochrome ground.

In 1963 Elvis Presley is cut out from his slightly musty photo-studio background and swept up into the clattering momentum of a reproduction process across thirty-six hand-primed silver canvases (Figs. 9.65–9.87).³⁴ The dual referent—Elvis the film hero with knife and revolver, whose racial and sexual ambiguity is highlighted in David McCarthy's reading of the series,³⁵ and Elvis the star, ~~both both~~ simulacra of the movie and music industry—is indifferently fed into Warhol's production and reproduction process.

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Just as Frank Stella's house-painting brush was only capable of generating stripes, one after the other, with no recourse to the synthetic act of a subject,³⁶ so Warhol's photo-impregnated silk-screen automatically turns out Elvises, Marilyn's, car accidents, and electric chairs. Warhol's often casually primed monochrome canvases, still uncut and unstretched, are channelled through the Factory, where they are marked, not with the pictorial elements of a now autonomous, or rather, solipsistic abstract painting, but with the impressions of the screen. An outside world pre-formatted by mass media enters a studio lacking any remaining resemblance to the intimate space of artistic production of individual artistic genius associated with the romantic tradition.³⁷

Thus, in Warhol's paintings, the extroversion of the work's relationship to the world is marked in picture-like impressions of the photo-impregnated screen. These impressions restore neither a representational pictorial space nor the memory space of

an individual subject. Warhol is no less radical in his avoidance of representation than is minimal art, pop art's more puritan sister. The loss of the immanent articulation of the image, the destruction of iconic difference,³⁸ inevitably brings this extroversion with it. In minimal art, the extroversion often manifests itself in the use of environment-sensitive, reflective or mirroring surfaces to open the object to a social situation, for example, in Robert Morris's 1965-Mirrored cubes (1965).³⁹ Warhol graphically fixed his 'mirror images' in advance—images that overtly position themselves in relation to the world—thus opening up the artwork to factors far beyond the institutional context of art and its reception.

In this historical context, the mirror is obviously more than a metaphor for a real or invented personal defect. The loss of memory that Warhol attributes to himself, provoked as well as compensated for by technological reproducibility, distinguishes his work as the culmination, and consequence, of the modernist critique of representation, which had sought to banish narrative structure from painting and any temporal dimension from the visual arts more broadly. While Greenberg's theory of medium-specificity, fully articulated at the time of Warhol's emergence as a visual artist, was a forceful and appealingly simple explanation of this anti-representational and anti-mnemonic dynamic, with the rise of pop and minimalism it became evident that it also covered up the socio-economic factors that shaped it. It is precisely these factors that are systematically brought to the fore in Warhol's work.

3. 'A Coke is a Coke ...'

In a late interview, Warhol admits to having made a mistake. He should have produced his Campbell's Soup cans and stuck to that first serial motif, just as Josef Albers stuck to his *Homages to the square*, and just as 'the person I really like, the other person who did black-on-black paintings'⁴⁰—Warhol forgets, or pretends to forget, his name—just as Ad Reinhardt, from 1960 until his death in 1966, stuck to his *Black paintings*: matte oil paintings, 150-cm by 150-cm square, and structured by a barely perceptible cross. Reinhardt conceived his paintings as a ritualistic turning-away from the world, the systematic filtering out of all particularity and contingency. His compositional method goes back to the history of modernist abstraction, which from impressionism onwards broke reality into its coloured elements and, with cubism and Reinhardt's great

hero, Piet Mondrian, reduced form to the two opposing horizontal and vertical vectors. Continuing this tradition, in Reinhardt's *Black paintings* a sum of past pictorial representations is compressed into the fundamental parameters of painting. The cross, with its minimal bluish, reddish, or yellowish tint, is the concentrated ashes of all previous paintings. Reinhardt desired an appropriate environment for these ashes—a museum, 'a treasure house and tomb', as he asserts in his writings—that would shield and keep out even the vulgar vitality of the viewer.⁴¹ In its ritual repetition of a single, unchanging formula, Reinhardt's painting tends conceptually and phenomenally towards an absolute image, in which the minimal internal differentiation would be accessible only, as he writes, to an 'initiated' seeing.⁴² ~~seeing~~—As a replacement for a damaged painting, Reinhardt thus offered the Museum of Modern Art a later version of the same painting, which was, as he put it, more like MoMA's painting than the original itself; it was closer to the vanishing point of the absolute image.⁴³

For Warhol, by contrast, repetition does not aim to divest the work of worldly reference. It is dictated by serial production, which once again, as he reports, dominated his way of life. 'I used to have the same lunch every day, for 20 years, I guess, the same thing over and over again. Someone said my life has dominated me; I liked that idea.'⁴⁴ While the Campbell's Soup paintings continued to accommodate the brand's variety of products, America's master commodity, Coca-Cola, is not just one popular-cultural subject among others. It functions in Warhol's *Philosophy* as the model of monotony that he strived for in his own production:

A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.⁴⁵

The parallel between this conception of the egalitarian aspect of the commodity form and one of the maxims of Warhol's own work becomes evident in ~~another a~~ passage that includes what may be a conscious allusion to Reinhardt:⁴⁶

I like painting on a square because you don't have to decide whether it should be longer-longer or shorter-shorter or longer-shorter: it's just a

square. I always wanted to do nothing but the same-size picture, but then somebody always comes along and says, 'You have to do it a little bit bigger', or 'A little bit smaller.' You see, I think every painting should be the same size and the same color so they're all interchangeable and nobody thinks they have a better painting or a worse painting. And if the one 'master painting' is good, they're all good. Besides, even when the subject is different, people always paint the same painting.⁴⁶

The sameness of all pictures is something that Reinhardt attempted to realise with his single 'master painting', which he released for general use and recommended as an effective formula for other painters. A claim to originality was the last thing he associated with his formula.⁴⁷ He sought to achieve this sameness by encapsulating the history of paintings in each of his paintings, superposing all possible pictorial representations into the purified cruciform blackness of his works. In this way, Reinhardt's painting is a medium of memory that, by condensing the totality of all possible memory images, sublates the necessity of representing the outside world. But of course, the medium that makes Coca-Cola the master commodity, the universal medium for representing all other commodified objects, is not memory—but money. While Coca-Cola's minimal use-value still stands out, however faintly, against this element of universal exchangeability, the sameness of all Cokes, whether drunk by the president, Liz Taylor, or 'me', is a suitable emblem for the homogenising function of the monetary form of exchange-value, which makes possible the serial production of unlimited quantities of standardised products for an anonymous market.

The forty-three paintings of dollar bills from 1962 are the first silk-screens Warhol produced. Ironically, they were produced from pencil drawings, since the silk-screen company would not accept a photograph as a template. Here Warhol's subject is that singular commodity without useful attributes, the pure medium of the equivalence of all other commodities. Although Warhol regarded the American dollar as the best-designed paper currency in the world, it only occasionally appears as a literal subject of his paintings.⁴⁸ More than any other artist of the 1960s, however, Warhol not only accepted the artwork's commodity status, but emphatically translated it into the formal structure of his painting, and thus activated the commodity form's epistemological potential. The fact that the artwork, like any other commodity, is not the translation or

condensation of a singular, unrepeatable experience, but rather the incarnation and maturation of the monetary form of abstract exchange-value, is above all made clear by Warhol's mechanisation of production. The latter is most obviously manifest in the quantity of Warhol's output, but it can also be gleaned from the 'look' of Warhol's paintings: specifically, their use of a ground that functions like a mirror for the shadow-like silk-screen image that gives the ground a testimonial function. This relation of the photographically generated image to its homogenous ground is analogous to that of the commodity's use-value to its exchange-value, that 'congealed quantity of undifferentiated human labour', as Marx put it in his elaboration of the commodity form.⁴⁹ Money, the medium that makes equivalent all qualities of the secularised world, is given a new form as the medium of art, in the flat, abstract pictorial grounds of Warhol's paintings. A look at Warhol's *Silver clouds*, which refuse to crystallise into any fixed image and are in this sense, as Warhol says of himself, forgetful surfaces, will help to further clarify this analogy.

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4-Space of light, image, and time

One medium through which the artwork that has been stripped of all internal articulation, and as an 'absolute commodity [...] has rejected every semblance of existing for society, a semblance to which commodities otherwise urgently cling',⁵⁰ is the medium of space of light, and its transmission and refraction. The incidence and glancing of the light that dances across Warhol's silver pillows give a fractured image of their surroundings. Exhibited at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966, *Silver clouds* (Fig. 9.85) was/were Warhol's version of final, absolute paintings—they were meant to announce the end of his artistic career.⁵¹ The silver pillows emphasise two main aspects of visibility. First, they create an experience of the ephemeral nature of visibility. Warhol further emphasised this aspect by simultaneously presenting *Cow wallpaper* (1966) in the neighbouring space of Castelli—the cow's heads functioning as a symbol of that innocent, merely seeing which-that aesthetic experience had become in the context of late-modernist painting and minimal art.⁵² Second, *Silver clouds* create an experience of undirected, all-round dispersion of visibility. Each of the silver pillows is effectively all-seeing; it reflects the light back into the space around it from every one of

its points. This disseminated light, an uncentered visibility, only becomes an image through its relation to a point of concentration and surface of projection. Whether in the eye or camera, it is only by being shaped into a conical bundle of rays that visibility is transformed into an image with outline, depth, and contours. The space of the image and that of perception are constituted in analogy to the *camera obscura* through which the image is formed. The fixed image—whether in the eye or a photograph—lends a profile to visibility's ephemeral actuality by binding it to a dated and determinate sight that at the same time prescribes a vantage point in space. When a sight constituted in this way is preserved—whether as a memory trace, a photochemical imprint, a drawing or a painting—both of the qualities of visibility emphasised by Warhol's silver pillows are negated: its ephemeral actuality and its dispersion in space.

Thus, the silver pillows make clear the analogy between the mirror-function, which they isolate as the enclosing of a weightless volume, and the money form of exchange-value, which is the *other medium* (alongside the space of light and its transmission and refraction) through which the emptied, image-less, extroverted work relates to its world. One of Warhol's comments on money highlights the qualities that underpin this analogy to the mirror-function:-

I don't feel like I get germs when I hold money. Money has a certain kind of amnesty. I feel, when I'm holding money, that the dollar bill has no more germs on it than my hands do. When I pass my hand over money, it becomes perfectly clean to me. I don't know where it's been—who's touched it and with what—but that's all erased the moment I touch it.⁵³

Reinhardt, the great conservative, the painter of pictorial memory, and Warhol, the forgetful mirror; representation and exchange; the absolute, filled, and concentrated image that sublates within itself the totality of a world, and the emptied, pure surface that reflects the world. Both can, as polar opposites, mark the end or boundary of the autonomous art of modernism.

5-Business art: money as pictorial support

In his work of the 1960s, Warhol thus gave a place and a form to the boundary between modernism and contemporary art. His work embodies a conflict between the

structurally, if not literally, mirrored ground and the pictorial information superimposed on it. Through repetition, it becomes ornamental and bound to what lies on *this side* of the mirror's surface. This form was ~~only~~ stable for ~~only a brief momenta~~ moment. The epistemological function of exchange-value had just been discovered by Warhol as well as by minimal art. Against the backdrop of the artwork's humanist, mnemonic structure and its destruction in modernism, that function became identified with the phenomenal characteristics of the reflective, outward-facing surface, that is, with the work's mirror function.

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With the success of contemporary art on the growing international art market in the 1960s, this mirror-function became overdetermined by the artwork's actual monetary value. The fascination of the moment when the 'congealed quantities'⁵⁴ of abstract value substance are laid open and made visible as the medium of the tautological, self-referential visual object's relationship to all other objects in the world did not last. It faded as soon as real money started pouring into artist's studios and avant-garde galleries.⁵⁵ Economic change was the principal motivation, even the condition of possibility, for the shift of attention away from the object itself to its institutional and economic context, which was carried out in various ways in late-1960s art. Conceptual art and institutional critique called into question the very production of material objects ~~into question~~, while land art sought to counter the movable commodity form with monumentality and quasi-architectural permanence. By contrast, after exploring the epistemological consequences of the commodity form in his early 1960s work, Warhol ~~in the 1970s produced's~~ portraits ~~of the 1970s~~, starting in 1972 with the long series of portraits of Kimiko Powers, that made the economic conditions of art explicit in an unprecedentedly direct way. The actual monetary value of art was mimetically integrated into the structure of the portraits, thus permitting them to reflect its function and its socio-economic context.

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Warhol's 'business art' of the 1970s—the step that comes after Art⁵⁶—was thus based on accepting the market economy's fetishisation of the artwork ~~in the market economy~~. If Warhol's early-1960s work absorbed the structure of universal exchangeability embodied by money, then fetishisation—if no longer of the artist's hand then of his or her 'aura'⁵⁷—withdrew the artwork from the law of equivalence. The labour invested in the artwork—made clear by Warhol's machine-assisted production of

the 1960s—is *not* the measure of its value.⁵⁸ Hence in 1975, the year his *Philosophy* was published, Warhol’s reference to the egalitarian model of Coca-Cola was already just hot air.

After surviving a serious attempt on his life in 1968,⁵⁹ Warhol increasingly withdrew from the underground scene. At parties and, receptions, and under the cover of his magazine *Interview*, Warhol went hunting for portrait clients among the rich and famous. Ethical, personal, or conceptual criteria do not appear to have played a role in his choice of clients.⁶⁰ Anyone who was willing and able to pay—~~\$25,000 dollars~~ for the first canvas, \$15,000 for the second, and \$10,000 for each additional one—received a photograph and silk-screened portrait in a variety of colours and painterly styles.⁶¹ With its images of race riots or the electric chair, its aggressive appropriation of Hollywood’s specific commodity, the star, and its anti-narrative underground films, Warhol’s work of the 1960s could still be interpreted as the manifestation of a critical and reflective stance: that of a subject methodically employing self-alienation and the ‘mimesis of the hardened and alienated’⁶² to make visible the process of reification. By contrast, the self-prostitution of Warhol’s portraits (Figs 9.9 and 9.10), in which he breathed new and counterfeit life into the notion of a personal artistic style beneath the silk-screen print, continues to elicit above all rejection and often a slightly superior sense of disappointment, even today.

~~(figs. 10–11)~~ Designer, please take in Fig. 9.9 and Fig. 9.10 here

Warhol’s practice of the 1960s was defined by its intimate coupling of techniques of modernist high art such as seriality, the grid, and anti-composition—which suggest an assimilation of artistic to mechanical production—with pop culture and mass-media references that had been excluded by high art.⁶³ In the 1970s works, the old humanist genre of the individual portrait was re-animated—along with an exhausted version of the gesture, an extinguished expressiveness of the painterly trace through which the product is individualised—both of which catered to the still-dominant idea (despite the anti-gestural tendencies of the 1960s) of the artwork as a vehicle for personal expression.

Attempts to read into these portraits an empathetic or unmasking function—or both at once—~~into these portraits~~ are unconvincing.⁶⁴ The critical potential of the portraits is not directly based on (or oriented towards) the psycho-social profile of their

subjects, but instead derives from their *form*—from the relationship between the portraits' mode of production, their subject, and their function or site. I have discussed this point in relation to Warhol's 1960s works, in which he translates the epistemological potential of the commodity form into the formal structure of his silk-screen paintings: the relationship between the mechanically generated, repeatable image—the shadow of the silk-screen print—and the monochrome ground that I read as a reflection of that between use-value and exchange-value. The work displays within itself this split, on the one hand binding it to the 'placeless place' of exchangeability, the principal site of modernist art, and on the other transforming it into a reflection of the actual world formatted by technological media. Warhol's 1960s subjects were anonymous, already massively multiplied commodities—Coca-Cola, the soup can, the star—or quintessentially 'American deaths' (at least in the American imagination) from the car accident and the leap from a skyscraper to the electric chair and the assassination of a president. By contrast, the subjects of Warhol's portraits of the 1970s do not possess a comparable public, mythic, and mass-media relevance. This limits the illuminating potential of the works right from the start. Moreover, as commissioned works—thus resulting from a kind of pseudo-feudal deal between artist and client—they weaken the abstract universality of the commodity form reflected in the split structure of the silk-screen works of the 1960s, a weakening that has its counterpart in the morbid re-animation of gestural painting in the background. Above this ground, however, the Warhol-look of the 1960s with its counter-cultural prestige still slides into place: the flat incision of the silk-screen print, which must now assert the flatness and reproducibility of the picture against the weakened painterly gesture in the ground beneath it.

This analysis does no more than briefly delineate the form of Warhol's portraits—the first major genre of his business art—as a problem. It would be the task of an in-depth analysis to describe how this form's specific reflectiveness, its slightly corrupt iridescence and ambiguity, underpin the beauty of these images and their capacity for truth.

¹ [This essay is based on my inaugural lecture at the University of Zurich, delivered on 5 May 2014.](#)

² See especially Clement Greenberg, 'Avantgarde and Kitsch' (1939) and 'Towards a Newer Laocoon' (1940), both in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: John O'Brian (ed.), The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. I, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, ed. by John O'Brian, pp. 5–38.

³ Greenberg writes with a tone of resignation: 'By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture: thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a successful one.' See Clement Greenberg, 'After Abstract Expressionism', in John O'Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* John O'Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. IV, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1993, pp. 121–34, especially pp. 131–32.

⁴ For the similar, albeit less prominent, case of Robert Rauschenberg, see Yve-Alain Bois, 'Rauschenberg's Tact' and 'Painting: The Task of Mourning', both in Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass and London, MA, 1990, pp. 215–44 and pp. 312–16.

⁵ This history is, of course, more complex. Abstract expressionism still remained dominant in the art market of the 1960s, and a painting of indexed gestures and broken expressions persisted in the shadows of the dominant movements of the 1960s. Achim Hochdörfer has recently addressed-considered this alternative history; see Achim Hochdörfer, 'A Hidden Reserve: Painting from 1958 to 1965', *Artforum International*, vol. 47, no. 6, 2009, pp. 152–59, and the catalogue of the exhibition [that](#) Hochdörfer curated with Manuela Ammer and David Joselit, *Painting-2.0: Painting in the Information Age: Gesture and Spectacle, Eccentric Figuration, Social Networks*, Prestel, Munich/London/New York, 2016. Of course, the line of development of Western or at least North American modernism represents only one strand in the array of modern art. I accentuate this one because I read Warhol's painting as a decisive interpretation and working-through of precisely *this* strand.

⁶ Warhol moved in 1949 from Pittsburgh to New York and ~~was~~ quickly emerged as a successful graphic artist. Early on, Benjamin Buchloh identified the instance of a process of modularity and repetition, as well as the pure indexicality of Warhol's graphic work, bringing it into relation with Warhol's interest in the painting of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Andy Warhol's One-

Dimensional Art, 1956–1966’, in *Neo-avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA and London, MA, 2000, pp. 461–529 (originally published in [Kynaston McShine \(ed.\), *Andy Warhol*, ed. Kynaston McShine, exhibition catalogue](#), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1989).

⁷ Despite its structural affinities with his painting, I will bracket Warhol’s filmic work of the 1960s because the ephemeral filmic image, which cannot be sold together with its ground—the screen—articulates a fundamentally different economic structure ~~than from that of~~ painting.

⁸ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, A Harvest Book, Harcourt [Brace Jovanovich Inc.](#), San Diego, ~~New York/London~~, 1975, pp. 7f.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Warhol mentions his overly large pores in his account of an unsuccessful cosmetic procedure on his nose (*ibid.*, p. 64).

¹¹ [Andy Warhol, quoted in](#) Gretchen Berg, ‘Andy Warhol: My True Story’ (1966), in Kenneth Goldsmith (ed.), *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962–1987*, Hachette, New York, 2004, pp. 85–96, quotation at p. 90.

¹² Andy Warhol, as quoted in G. R. Swenson, ‘What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I’ (1963), in Goldsmith (ed.), *I’ll Be Your Mirror*, p. 18.

¹³ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 199.

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, ‘A Note Upon the “Mystic Writing Pad”’ (1925), in ~~James Strachey (ed. and transl.)~~, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, ~~James Strachey (transl.)~~, Hogarth Press, London, 1961, pp. 225–232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, passim.

¹⁶ The replacement of the human memory by techniques of photographic reproduction is a central topic of the philosophy of Bernard Stiegler, who reads human history ~~as~~ fundamentally ~~as~~ a history of mnemonic techniques (Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, vols. ~~I–III~~3, Stanford University Press, ~~Stanford~~, 2008–2010). In Warhol’s *Philosophy* it is part of a self-caricature—but of a self-caricature with strong

systematic relations to the main topics of the book (love, work, death, media-technology, money). I try to show how Warhol's *construction* of his self in 1975 refers back to basic formal and technical structures of his earlier painting.

¹⁷ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 26.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 26ff. It is striking how closely Warhol's conception of the subject's extinguished 'interiority' dovetails with the tenets of ism, the dominant psychological theory of the 1960s.

¹⁹ Barthes, after some hesitation, discovered the 'essence' of photography in its indissoluble connection with the singularity of a past moment; see Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard (transl.), Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1981, pp. 3–21. This connection, which runs counter to the diversity of its subjects, constitutes its fundamental noematic statement—'*ça a été*', 'that has been' (p. 115). In this testimonial function, much of the archive-based art of the last few decades (from Christian Boltanski to Ilya Kabakov and Tacita Dean) has sought a counterweight against floating in art's structurally forgetful, market-based public sphere. Thus, it has often—sometimes deliberately and methodically (as in the case of Walid Raad)—produced simulacra of a memory function of what is nonetheless still commodified art. Warhol marked the dialectical split between the mirrored surface, with its hostility to memory, and the photographic trace, but he did not stage that trace as memorial ballast. While it often refers to death, the latter becomes a repetitive, ornamental incision on an indifferent ground.

²⁰ I refer here to the *traditional* conception of hermeneutics, developed with regard to the exegesis of texts (especially the Bible) by Friedrich Schleiermacher and others, transformed by Wilhelm Dilthey into a methodology of the humanities (the *Geisteswissenschaften*) and taken up by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur in their theories of historical *understanding* (*Verstehen*) of works of art and other human testimonies in contrast to the natural science's *explaining* (*Erklären*) of natural phenomena. The supposition of the structure of the work of art as an analogue to a self-conscious subject is, however, guiding in much of the art-historical literature of the twentieth century—and especially in the various humanist readings of abstract expressionism, that is, in exactly *in* that tradition which Warhol so rigorously disrupts. This disruption is ignored in humanist readings of Warhol, as for example in the writings of Robert Rosenblum, 'Warhol Portraits, Then and Now', in Tony Shafrazi (ed.), *Andy Warhol Portraits*, Phaidon Press, London and New York, 2007, pp. 22–23). Michel Foucault's, *Hérmeneutique du sujet*, Seuil, Paris, 2001, is of another *kind*, decidedly more 'superficial' (—that is, artistic) and

Warholian-kind.

²¹ Attempts to construct a humanist, engaged Warhol tend to ignore the ~~anesthetizing-anaesthetising~~ effect of repetition; see for example Thomas Crow, 'Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol', in [Thomas Crow](#), *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1996, pp. 49–65. By contrast, Hal Foster's suggestion that Warhol's repetition be seen in the context of the psychoanalytic model of the traumatically motivated repetition-compulsion implies that the repetition of the image is rooted in its referent. This seems to me to contradict the formal structure of Warhol's work, which indifferently repeats all conceivable types of images (both shocking and banal). The impetus for the repetition does not lie in having been injured by an event (the contact with the referent), of which the repeated image would then be the apotropaic trace, but in the operation of that 'machinery' which, according to Warhol, 'is always going' from the first breath to the last and perhaps continues after death (see Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 96). It is the machine's blind operation that erases the image and provokes its repetition.

²² The integration of industrial techniques or industrial style in the art of the earlier twentieth century (as in Picabia's machine drawings and paintings, Duchamp's readymades, and Russian constructivism's attempt to dissolve art into industrial production) is different from Warhol's mimicry of industrial production in his still decidedly *painterly* work.

²³ Here I refer to the research of Marianne Dobner, who is currently preparing a catalogue of Warhol's exhibitions; ~~Mar~~ Marianne Dobner, 'Warhol Exhibits: A Critical Approach Towards Andy Warhol's Exhibition Practice (1952–1987)', PhD [thesis](#), University of Vienna, in preparation). The most important early single (or nearly) subject exhibitions were: '*Andy Warhol*' (Campbell's Soup cans), Ferus Gallery, (Los Angeles), July–August 1962; '*Andy Warhol (silver Elvis paintings, with Liz Taylor paintings in a back room)*', Ferus Gallery, (Los Angeles), September–October 1963 (~~silver Elvis paintings, with Liz Taylor paintings in a backroom~~); '*The Personality of the Artist*', Stable Gallery, (New York), April–May 1964; '*Andy Warhol*' (flowers), Castelli Gallery, (New York), November–December 1964, and Ileana Sonnabend, (Paris), May–June 1965; '*Andy Warhol*' (cow wallpaper and floating silver pillows), Castelli Gallery, [New York](#), April 1966.

²⁴ Georg Frei and Neil Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*, Phaidon, London, 2002–2010. Volumes 1–3 have been published; they cover the years 1961–74 and contain 2,811 entries.

²⁵ Thierry de Duve vividly captures the difference between this ‘image’ and the traditional form of integral personal representation: ‘To desire fame—not the glory of the hero but the glamour of the star—with the intensity and awareness Warhol did, is to desire to be nothing, nothing of the human, the interior, the profound. It is to want to be nothing but image, surface, a bit of light on a screen, a mirror for the fantasies and a magnet for the desires of others—a thing of absolute narcissism.’ Thierry De Duve, ‘Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected’, *October*, no. 48, Spring 1989), pp. 3–14, [quote from](#) p. 4.

²⁶ For more on the ‘extimate’ support for personal identity according to Jacques Lacan, see Jacques-Alain Miller, ‘Extimity’, in *The Symptom* 9, <http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=36> (accessed viewed 1 July 2015). The concept finds its place in relation to Lacan’s basic theoretical assumption of a ‘heteroconstitution’ of the human subject, be it in the encounter with its own mirror image (as in the *Mirror Stage*, see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Bruce Fink (transl.), W. W. Norton & Co., New York/London, 1996, pp. 75–81), or with the automatism of the signifier in the symbolic domain. In Warhol’s account it is not the mirror image as such, but it is the pimple as the only visible content of the mirror image, that serves as the first support of the subject’s nascent identity. [Please check Lacan URL – it did not take me to the Miller essay](#)

²⁷ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 10.

²⁸ It is this heteronomous or social constitution of the subject that Louis Althusser called ‘interpellation’. [See \(see Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, Verso, London, 2014\).](#)

²⁹ Pictorial abstraction is thus seen as precarious analogue to the destruction of memory by the law of equivalence, [that which](#) rules social action as well as the movement of material goods in a capitalist economy. This parallel between the process of abstraction in the history of modern art and in the capitalist economy is drawn, in often hesitant ways, in the writings of T. J. Clark, starting with his work on Manet’s ‘flatness’ and the industrialisation of Paris in the nineteenth century (see T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1984, especially Chapter 1; ‘The view from Notre-Dame’, pp. 23–78), over remarks about Malevich’s white suprematism in relation to the hyper-inflation during the [Russian](#) Revolution (T. J. Clark, ‘God Is Not Cast Down’, in T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London, pp. 225–297 and 429–437, esp. 257ff.) to his reading of Pissarro’s pointillism in relation to the political anarchism of his friends (see T. J. Clark, ‘We-Field Women’, in

ibid., pp. 55–137 and 414–22). Other ways of framing this parallel is Adorno’s ‘mimesis of the hardened and alienated’ (Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (transl.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 21), or Marcel Broodthaers’ understanding of ‘reification’ as ‘the essential structure of art’ (Marcel Broodthaers, ‘Ten Thousand Francs Reward’, in Gloria Moure (ed.), *Collected Writings*, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 413–419, [quotation at p. 417](#)). I developed this parallel between socio-economic modernisation and the modernist critique of representation in Sebastian Egenhofer, *Abstraktion—Kapitalismus—Subjektivität: Die Wahrheitsfunktion des Werks in der Moderne*, Wilhelm Fink-Wilhelm, Munich, 2008, focusing primarily on minimal art. For a brief discussion of the relationship between real abstraction and pictorial abstraction, see also Sebastian Egenhofer, ‘Figures of Defiguration: Four Theses on Abstraction’, in Terry R. Meyers (ed.), *Painting*, Whitechapel Documents of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, Cambridge-MA and London, MA, 2011, pp. 209–217.

³⁰ See for example the classical essays of the mature Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960) and ‘After Abstract Expressionism’ (1962), in O’Brian (ed.), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, John O’Brian (ed.), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1995, pp. [??-??](#) and [??-??](#).

³¹ There are five *White paintings*: one individual panel and four groups (of two, three, four and seven) modular panels of varying sizes). A sixth painting consisting of five panels was abandoned by Rauschenberg. For an account of Rauschenberg’s early work, see [Walter Hopps, Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950’s](#), ed. [Walter Hopps, exhibition catalogue, the Menil Collection](#), Houston, 1991.

³² John Cage’s interpretation of this empty, subdivided, modular structure can be found in John Cage, ‘On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work’ (1961), in John Cage, *Silence*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, CT, [\[1961\] 2011](#), pp. 98–108, quotation at p. 102.

³³ For a wide-ranging interpretation of the connection between Rauschenberg and Cage, see Branden W. Joseph, ‘White on White’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 27, no. 1, Autumn 2000, pp. 90–121, as well as Branden

W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, Mass., 2003; see also Branden W. Joseph, 'John Cage and the Architecture of Silence', *October*, no. 81, Summer 1997, pp. 80–104.

³⁴ The original photograph is reprinted in Georg Frei and Neil Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné. Vol. 1: Paintings and Sculpture 1961–1963*, Phaidon, London, 2002, p. 374.

³⁵ See David McCarthy, 'Andy Warhol's Silver Elvises: Meaning Through Context at the Ferus Gallery in 1963', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 88, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 354–372.

³⁶ For Donald Judd and many other artists of the 1960s, Stella's striped paintings were exemplary in their avoidance of the compositional ('relational') structure of the European type and its implicit projection of autonomous subjectivity into the image: 'The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another', as Donald Judd wrote of Stella (see *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975*, Halifax and New York, The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, and New York University Press, Halifax and New York, 1975, p. 184). The attendant reduction of the subject to an executing machine is explored at length by Caroline A. Jones in *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

³⁷ Indeed, Warhol made fun of the cult of the solitary studio, which had been celebrated in the previous generation by Barnett Newman, among others (see *Caroline A. Jones*, 'The Romance of the Studio and the Abstract Expressionist Sublime', in *Jones, Machine in the Studio*). Warhol says of Newman: 'And then I heard about all these studios he used to have, like fifteen studios; one for every painting. Every time I'd go by a building they'd say, well, Barney has a studio there ... Isn't that true, Fred? Didn't Barney have a studio for every painting he ever painted? That was the most mysterious thing about him—that's what I thought was so great' (as quoted in Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, Da Capo Press, New York, 1992, p. 49).

³⁸ For more on this term, which was coined by Gottfried Boehm, see two of his more recent texts: Gottfried Boehm, 'Jenseits der Sprache? Anmerkungen zur Logik der Bilder', in *Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen: Die Macht des Zeigens*, DuMont, Berlin, 2007, pp. 34–53; and Gottfried Boehm, 'Indeterminacy: On the Logic of the Image', in Bernd Huppauf and Christoph Wulf (eds), *Dynamic and Performativity of Imagination: The Image Between the Visible and the Invisible*, Routledge, New York, 2009, pp. 219–229.

³⁹ In Morris's work, this 'social' turn, in the mirrored cubes still closely connected to his phenomenological interests, is informed from the early [Sixties-1960s](#) by his relation—via his then wife Simone Forti—to the scene around Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Dance Theatre. (See for example Anna C. Chave, 'Minimalism and Biography', *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, no. 1, March 2000, pp. 149–63)

⁴⁰ Benjamin Buchloh, 'Three Conversations in 1985: Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris', *October*, no. 70, Fall 1994, pp. 33–54, quotation at p. 41.

⁴¹ 'A museum is a treasure house and tomb, not a counting-house or amusement center', Reinhardt wrote in 1962, when this was already demonstrably untrue; 'any disturbances of its soundlessness, timelessness, airlessness, and lifelessness is disrespect and is, in many places, punishable'. Ad Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose (ed.), University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991, pp. 121ff.

⁴² Ibid., p. 113: 'prohibit revelation to the uninitiated / Not distinguish knower and known / ... Not "see" it, but "oned" with it.' Actually, all it takes is sufficient patience before the structure and space of what initially appears as a monochrome image comes into view: '[H]alf an hour in front of each painting'—this is the time span given by Yve-Alain Bois² for the latest paintings of Reinhardt. (See Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Limit of Almost', in *Ad Reinhardt*, ed. William Rubin, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art and Rizzoli, New York, 1991, pp. 11–33, [quotation at p. 28](#)).

⁴³ Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up After Artists: A Memoir*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 2003, p. 75; as quoted in Carol Stringari, 'The Art of Seeing', in *Imageless: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting*, ed. Yve-Alain Bois, exhibition catalogue, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2008, p. 20. (I am indebted to Heinz Liesbrock for providing me with the reference for this episode, which I had long been seeking.)

⁴⁴ Swenson, 'What is Pop Art?', p. 19.

⁴⁵ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴⁷ See Ad Reinhardt, 'Abstract Painting, Sixty by Sixty Inches Square, 1960', in Reinhardt, *Art-as-Art*, p. 84: 'This painting is my painting if I paint it. / This painting is your painting if you paint it. / This painting is any painter's painting. /...f.../ This painting is not copyrighted, is not protected, and may be reproduced.'

⁴⁸ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, Ben Fowkes (transl.), Penguin Classics, London, 1976, p. 155.

⁵⁰ Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 236 (translation modified).

⁵¹ 'I thought I was really really finished, so to mark the end of my art career I made silver pillows that you could just fill up with balloons and let fly away.' Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 150.

⁵² For the expression 'seeing seeing' (*sehendes Sehen*), see Max Imdahl, 'Cézanne—Braque—Picasso: Zum Verhältnis von Bildautonomie und Gegenstandssehen' (1974), in Gottfried Boehm—Max Imdahl, (ed.), *Reflexion—Theorie—Methode: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Gottfried Boehm, vol. 3, University of Basel, Frankfurt am Main, 1996, pp. 303–380. [Is this the correct publisher?](#)

⁵³ Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 137.

⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ The year 1968 marked, for example, the canonisation of minimal art by large-scale touring exhibitions such as the MoMA's *The Art of the Real: USA 1948–68*. See for example James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2001, pp. 246–70. For an account of the changes that made possible the emergence of conceptual art—an art form based on 'sign exchange-value'—possible, see Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, MIT Press, Cambridge-Mass. and London, MA, 2003, pp. 1–53. The famous sale of 50-fifty works of from the collection of Ethel and Robert Scull on 18 October-18, 1973, at Sotheby's is often seen as definitely marking the end of the old art market: Sotheby's sold works by abstract expressionist and pop artists for 50-fifty or 100-a hundred times the price Scull had paid in the 1960s. For an interpretation of this 'watershed' date, see Olaf Velthuis, *Talking Prices: Symbolic Meaning of Prices on the Market for Contemporary Art*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2005, see especially Chapter 6, 'Stories of Prices', pp. 142–45. See also Baruch Kirschenbaum, 'The Scull Auction and the Scull Film', in *Art Journal*, Autumn 1979, pp. 50–54.

⁵⁶ 'Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art.' Andy Warhol, *Philosophy*, p. 92.

⁵⁷ 'Some company recently was interested in buying my "aura." They didn't want my product. They kept saying, "We want your aura." I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it.' Ibid., p. 77.

⁵⁸ Couched in economic terms, singular authorship implies that the artist has a monopoly. He or she services *his or her* market. Hence the price is not determined by labour-time but by the relationship of supply and demand. See De Duve, 'Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected', p. 11.

⁵⁹ When Valerie Solanis attempted to assassinate Warhol, he had already moved to the new Factory in Union Square, which, with its glass door and reception desk, had lost much of the previous Factory's underground flavour, and already more closely resembled a corporate office. Hence it was probably not primarily the shock of the attack that prompted the shift in Warhol's practice; the crisis in his painting

began in 1966 at the latest.

⁶⁰ This indifference found its ultimate expression in 1986, when in the Christmas catalogue of a luxury department store a portrait—sitting with the famous pop artist was offered for ~~£~~~~35,000-dollars~~. See Buchloh, ‘Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art, ~~1956–1966~~’, p. 464).

⁶¹ This information is drawn from Georg Frei and Neil Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*, Vol. 3: *Paintings and Sculpture 1970–1974*, Phaidon, London, 2010, p. 64.

⁶² Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 21.

⁶³ Buchloh represents the first systematic analysis of this coupling. Buchloh, ‘Andy Warhol’s One-Dimensional Art’, ~~1956–1966~~.

⁶⁴ See for example Robert Rosenblum, ‘Warhol Portraits, Then and Now’, in ~~Tony~~ Shafrazi (ed.), *Andy Warhol Portraits*, pp. 22–23. By contrast, Warhol’s break with the humanist tradition of portrait painting is emphasised in Candice Breitz, ‘The Warhol Portrait: From Art to Business and Back Again’, in *Andy Warhol: Photography*, ed. Candice Breitz, exhibition catalogue, *Kunsthalle Hamburg (May 13–August 22, 1999)*, *The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (November 6, 1999–February 15, 2000)*, Edition Stemmler, Zurich and New York, 1999, pp. 193–199.

10

Agnes Martin, adventure

Suzanne Hudson

The adventurous state of /-mind is a high house.
 -#To enjoy life the adventurous-/ state of mind must be-/ grasped and maintained_-##
 The essential feature of adventure is that it is a /-going forward into /- unknown territory_-##
 -The joy of adventure is unaccountable_
 -#This is the attractiveness of /-art work. It is adventurous, /-strenuous and joyful.

Agnes Martin, -(19???)!

In 1974 Agnes Martin resumed painting after an interruption of nearly seven years. She turned away from the grids with which she had come to critical prominence in the 1960s, and instead began to fashion large-scale square compositions with effulgent if carefully metered stripes running the length of the support. In retrospect, viewed within the context of a career that stretched over nine decades, and which unfolded with such steady and cumulative force, Martin’s hiatus appears relatively trivial. And yet, at the time of Martin’s departure from New York City in 1967—her refusal of art-making coincident with her seemingly precipitous decampment—her abandonment of life and work was the source of much concern. Its causality remained the subject of ongoing continuing and unresolved speculation. A couple of years on, critic Barbara Rose remained confounded: ‘Not even her closest friends are sure why she made the decision.’² Martin’s time, as it were, off the grid, as it were so to speak, roaming Canada and the American West before settling on a remote New Mexican mesa, paradoxically secured her place at the centre of the world that she had left, and which she would later rejoin from a geographical remove.

Martin’s pause afforded the opportunity for reflection on what she already had accomplished, and also on how such work would subsequently be framed. This was

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I think it is better to preserve the line break at the beginning of each sentence (and reinstate the full-stops). The run-on is a random result of typesetting and not important to reproduce, in my opinion.

It is a smoother read without the forward slashes.

Commented [BN237]: Do we know the year in which she wrote this?

Commented [BN238]: “Within” is used incorrectly a lot these days. In most instances, “in” or “inside” or “into” is correct.

Commented [BN239]: I avoid “ongoing”. Over-used and jargonistic.

Commented [BN240]: I avoid ‘as it were’. Some people find it slightly pompous! I think ‘so to speak’ brings attention to the pun on ‘grid’.

especially true in the context of her first retrospective presentation, curated by Suzanne Delehanty for the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in 1973. In the meantime, and indeed thereafter, Martin herself was popularised as a retreating if sibylline presence, a trope recalling Emily Dickinson or the ever more proximate Georgia O’Keeffe. Little challenged this image of Martin. Her hard-won solitude in the desert became the stuff of myth, as the gnomic parables and synthesising, trans-cultural mysticism evident in her lectures and writings—first published in 1973, in the catalogue attending her ICA show³—contributed to near-hagiographic accounts that downplayed her own efforts at self-fashioning. But to return to 1967, and to pose the singularity as well as generational applicability of Martin’s temporary cessation of painting, is productive on many counts—not least for how it reveals something of the assumed possibility of Martin’s time away from canvas. As this text suggests, the narrative of rupture and return, while true in certain respects, also reveals biases with broader relevance, which provide a key to a deeper understanding of this art-historical moment.

It is worth stating up front that Martin’s 1967 departure from New York City was not her first such move. The decade from 1957 to 1967 does represent her longest continuous stretch there, but New York was more a temporary than a permanent residence. Martin was born in 1912 in the Canadian town of Macklin, in Saskatchewan. She recounted that her Scottish Presbyterian forebears crossed the Atlantic, then ‘the prairie in covered wagons’, and that her paternal grandfather was a rancher and a fur trader and her maternal grandfather a wheat farmer.⁴ After her father died when she ~~she~~ Agnes was two, she and her siblings left with their mother for the family farm; in 1919, they relocated to Vancouver.⁵ After having gained a teaching certificate in 1937, she moved in the autumn of 1941 ~~she moved~~ to New York to attend Teachers College at Columbia University ~~in New York~~. Although serious about her work as a teacher, she later admitted to having taken it up to gain US citizenship, which happened in April 1950. Throughout these years, she also took fine arts courses and painted while doing odd jobs (e.g., including playground director, childcare-centre staff member, tennis coach, baker’s helper, waitress, dishwasher, and logger for the Canadian government).

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In 1946, Martin ~~matriculated at~~graduated from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, where she took art classes and made naturalistic portraits and landscapes. Her first exhibition was mounted that year at the Harwood Museum in Taos. She returned to New York in 1951, enrolling in the Master of Arts program at Teachers College. After finishing, she again left the city for points west, travelling in New Mexico and briefly living in Oregon to teach art; she settled back in Taos in 1954.

Commented [BN242]: (in Australia, "matriculated" at that time had a different meaning – might puzzle Australian readers)

Commented [BN243]: See previous comment.

It was in Taos in 1956 that the art dealer Betty Parsons first encountered Martin's work, at that time a kind of biomorphic abstraction heavily indebted to cubist and surrealist idioms as well as to abstractionists Arshile Gorky and William Baziotés, but also in conversation with artists local to the area, including Emma Lou Davis, Beatrice Mandelman, and Louis Ribak. Parsons offered Martin representation should she come to New York. In 1957, Martin did just that. She stayed with Parsons before taking up residence ~~at in~~ a sailmaker's loft in Coenties Slip, an enclave ~~in of~~ Lower Manhattan where her neighbours included Jasper Johns and Lenore Tawney, as well as Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Ann Wilson and Jack Youngerman. This was the community in which her art moved to a more resolute geometry, predicated upon squares, triangles, and circles. She also scavenged considerably more obdurate stuff from the surrounding work-yards and interiors of old buildings, creating three-dimensional assemblages into the early 1960s; these found-object pieces coexisted alongside with her first grid paintings for a few years. The arrangement of objects in her studio moveds from, say, wire with bottle caps in *Water* (1958), to oil on canvas circles in *Night harbor* (c. 1959). Despite their considerable material differences, both works constitute 'a holistic form with kinship to the form of the canvas itself', as Lawrence Alloway put it.⁶

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Lenore Tawney became not only an especially close friend to Martin, but also an interlocutor, collector, and patron, purchasing *The laws* (1958), *Kali* (1958), and *Homage to Greece* (1959). Thanks to a small inheritance that Tawney received upon the death of her husband in 1943, she also supported Martin ~~monetarily besides financially~~. Parsons, too, had a great deal of significance for Martin's career: in addition to giving the artist her first break in a show at Parsons's Section Eleven space in December 1958, she introduced her to the up-and-coming clique at Coenties Slip. Nonetheless, Martin only showed with Parsons until 1961. After ~~the~~their professional relationship dissolved

(for reasons including the financial terms of the professional arrangement), accounts indicate that Leo Castelli introduced Martin to Robert Elkon, who was then starting a gallery. Tawney helped prepare Martin's show there in November 1962, the first of many that Martin would have at Elkon over the decade. Even after Arne Glimcher's Pace Gallery took Martin on in 1975, Elkon continued to show her pre-1967 works. Glimcher, who first met Martin at a party in Youngerman's loft in 1963, represented her from 1975 until her ~~passing-death~~ in 2004, at the age of ~~92~~ninety-two. Since that time Pace Gallery has managed her estate.⁷

Martin was hospitalised for what seem to have been paranoid schizophrenic episodes in either late 1961 or early 1962, and remained incapacitated for the better part of 1962.⁸ Her resumption of art-making on such a grand scale the following year, when she completed the resplendent ultramarine *Night sea*, the gold-leaf covered *Friendship*, and many other important large works—including *Flower in the wind* (~~all 1963~~), all rosy and blushing and vaporous form—must have seemed nothing short of astonishing. ~~The year~~ 1964 saw the collapse of painting and drawing into a single gesture. Instead of working as opposing systems, colour and line became one. It also saw the creation of the painting she herself declared as her first grid, *The tree*, ~~1964~~, (Fig. 10.1), thereby relegating the previous grids to the status of mere forerunners, approximations of the true grid to come.⁹ The following year, *The tree*, so tidy and graphic in its regulated pencil lines, was included in *The Responsive Eye* at ~~MoMA~~the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the watershed exhibition, devised by William C. Seitz, that was devoted to op art and other related contemporary styles of abstraction. ~~1965~~Nineteen sixty-five was also when Martin travelled by freighter to India and Pakistan, ~~during which~~a trip ~~where~~ she found 'that I have a mad passion for the sea', as she wrote to Tawney.¹⁰ ~~But~~ ~~W~~what started with such optimism ended in breakdown, with Martin returning after suffering another ~~breakdown~~psychological crisis. The exhibition of Martin's work continued apace irrespective of these personal circumstances, with her show at Elkon opening ~~in~~ April 1965.

Designer, please take in Fig. 10.1 near here

Martin's first show at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles opened on 4 December 1965, introducing her work to a West Coast audience. Even within the

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parameters of a flourishing career, Martin experienced a banner season in 1966, when she was included in both *Systemic Painting*, curated by Lawrence Alloway for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and *10*, the defining exhibition of minimalist art, organised by dealer Virginia Dwan. Following Seitz's reading of Martin's work *in The Responsive Eye* as part of a turn to perception and the fundamentals of illusion ~~in The Responsive Eye~~, Alloway's *Systemic Painting* placed Martin ~~within~~ a section of monochrome paintings—alongside Jo Baer, Al Held and Robert Ryman—and more broadly construed her as a painter involved with pattern and the organisation of repeating units ~~within~~ a coherent, non-hierarchical system wherein the ideational preceded the manual. The latter notion also underpinned the multi-media exploration of reductive form in Dwan's show. There, sculpture was privileged above painting, as it was in so many of the exhibitions around the so-called ~~primary~~ structures². (Though Dwan's emphasis was on irreducible positions rather than group affinity, ~~likely probably~~ a result of her having curated it with the significant assistance of Ad Reinhardt, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson.) Martin also won a grant from the National Council on the Arts, ~~which meant that she received~~ ~~bringing her~~ a modest financial windfall.¹¹

Commented [BN246]: 'so-called' makes the quote marks redundant.

This flurry of activity makes Martin's withdrawal ~~the following year~~ from New York and from ~~making art-making the following year~~ all the more meaningful. Various reasons have been more or less plausibly cited for her leaving the city in September 1967, including existential pressures internal to her practice, the ~~passing-death in~~ August of Reinhardt, her close friend, and the impending demolition of her studio at 28 South Street due to further gentrification of the Coenties Slip neighbourhood. But, all things considered, the motivations behind Martin's departure remain a matter of speculation, replete with discrepancies: the timing relative to Reinhardt's death may well have been a coincidence, since she must have been preparing to leave—purchasing and readying her camper and car, destroying by bonfire some works and storing others, ~~ete.~~—well before Reinhardt's heart attack. Accounts of the incident are also overlain with biases, chief among ~~st~~ them, ~~being~~ the reversely provincial idea of New York being the only place where art mattered. Her choice to settle in New Mexico returned her to the place where she had spent more time than anywhere else. In the words of Christina Bryan Rosenberger, who importantly emphasises the centrality of New Mexico to post-

War American modernism, and to Martin's version of it in particular, it was 'a return to familiar territory'.¹² Penning a note from the Grand Canyon in November 1967, Martin framed the matter to Tawney as having to do with asserting 'independence'.¹³

It is relevant to note that Martin's flight from the city came on the heels of the Summer of Love, that mass migration to the Left Coast, popularly imagined as a site of liberatory anti-authoritarianism, sexual permissiveness, and anti-capitalist reorganisation. Katy Siegel portrays this historical moment as one in which 'younger artists ... embraced the larger social rebellion against the rat race' and ultimately welcomed a transcendentalist return to the land, or followed Timothy Leary's charge to 'tune in, turn on, drop out'.¹⁴ Further:

Artists ... despite the imperative to live in the capital of the art world, [artists] left the city, disgusted not so much by personal success as by the irrelevance of art in the face of current American politics, as well as by the careerism of New York.¹⁵

Siegel's broad account has exceptional traction is particularly pertinent in Martin's case. Having visited Martin in New Mexico in 1973, Jill Johnston cited the artist as having said that 'she left new york [*sic*] because of remorse',¹⁶ and moreover, 'leaving new york [*sic*] has become as much a ritual exodus as going to new york [*sic*] is a ritual initiation'.¹⁷ Along these lines, Roberta Smith claimed that Martin 'felt that an artist could only survive ten years in New York'.¹⁸ She-Martin had written in 1967 to curator and collector Samuel Wagstaff about 'staying unsettled and trying not to talk for three years',¹⁹ but in the end, Tawney joined her in Big Sur and they travelled together across the Southwest; Martin also made a trip back to New England with Parsons. From Martin's own perspective, her move was an enactment of a social experiment predicated upon overwhelming solitude.

Martin travelled for nearly two years in Canada and the US before settling in 1968 outside the small town of Cuba, New Mexico, where she built a house. She made no art until 1973, when she completed *On a clear day* (Fig. 10.2), a monumental suite of thirty screen-prints of orthogonal grids; it was only then that she erected a studio, with the help of architect Bill Katz, and shortly thereafter got back to painting. She spent the next years painting horizontal and vertical divisions of canvases, divided into

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sequences by pencil lines and highlighted with fine tonal shifts in primary-derived pastels or greys achieved with thin acrylic paint that dried fast in the arid heat. This is to say that *On a clear day* brought Martin's hiatus to a close; she would paint for decades thereafter without another such pause.

Designer, please take in Fig. 10.2 near here.

At the time of ~~its~~the issuing and exhibition of *On a clear day* that same year, critics were relieved to learn that ~~her~~Martin's cessation had been a 'false alarm',²⁰ something confirmed by her making new work and also appearing in person around and after her retrospective. Writing about a talk Martin gave after her reappearance in New York in 1975, Roberta Smith portrayed her as a survivor who had 'returned from the brink ~~---~~... ready to be a regular living artist again'.²¹ Smith also remarked:

She spoke with the clarity of someone who had been through a crisis in her art and her life, and found that the other side of this crisis was only an edge. The experience of hearing her speak was intensely moving—but later it seemed somewhat offensive; Martin had a combination of excruciating humility and invincible arrogance, difficult to reconcile.²²

Asked in 1989 by the interviewer recording her life story for the Archives of American Art about her detachment from her existence in New York and the mind-clearing and work that it ultimately abetted, Martin replied:

²²A lot of people withdraw from society, as an experiment. So I thought I would withdraw and see how enlightening it would be. But I found out that what you're supposed to do is stay in the midst of life.²³

So fully had ~~she~~Martin absented herself from the art-world from 1967 to 1973 that, on the occasion of her 1973 retrospective at the ICA, Hilton Kramer could still claim in *The New York Times* that she lacked 'personal mythology or media celebrity'.²⁴ But for those looking, it was not difficult to find evidence that contradicted Martin's cool equanimity and seemingly monkish remove from worldly concerns—this before she herself would admit as a kind of intention the desire to remain 'in the midst of life'. As noted above, she appeared for talks, produced copious writing, and summoned her

life-story as an aesthetic project in its own right. Carter Ratcliff described Martin as a ‘presiding figure’, despite and indeed because of her absence, which lent her greater authority than she had enjoyed ‘when she was actually present’.²⁵ In a pecuniary vein, a report on her prices in *GQ* saw positive consequences for her market: ‘But her latter-day secretiveness in not exhibiting and, some reports have it, not even painting, also heightened interest.’²⁶ For her part, Martin took a calculating tone in a late interview in which she told Benita Eisler of *The New Yorker*: ‘I established my market and I felt free to leave.’²⁷

That the fact of Martin leaving New York and not painting for a few years has consolidated into a narrative laden with pathos or worse—whether through appeals to pressures internal to Martin’s practice, the death of a friend, or the loss of a studio—need not be taken as inevitable. Perhaps the reason for the appeal of such a narrative is because, beyond the details beholden to Martin’s biography, it apparently tracks so well with ubiquitous chronicles of modernist painting’s end. With colour field lumbering into a future in which it was perceived as mere décor—all alluvial paint flow, squeamish colour, and ostensibly empty style—and minimalist sculpture on the ascent alongside snappy, vulgar pop art; and, shortly, an expanded field of site-specific and ephemeral process-oriented practices, what was a painter to do?

When she joined the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1958, Martin was forty-six. Unaware of her ~~prior~~ exhibition history in New Mexico—which Parsons did not readily disclose so as to better introduce Martin as ‘fresh talent’²⁸—people assumed her youth at the time of her New York debut. As late as 1966, Max Kozloff regarded her work as a

~~—~~mid-point ... between the sensibility of the early fifties, with its loosely structured and empathetic recall of the outer world, and the ‘computerised’ pictorial systems of today. It is a condition perhaps emphasised by the fact that the artist herself is of the middle generation.²⁹

In truth, Martin was only two months younger than Pollock and a year older than Reinhardt. Martin did not abide by abstract expressionist notions of revelation of hyperbolic persona or triumphantly individuated selfhood, exemplified, say, by Pollock’s autographic drip, or the writings of Harold Rosenberg. Instead she claimed to eschew ego; for ~~her~~ Martin, expression was universal and intangible, ~~if though~~

Commented [BN249]: ‘prior’ is redundant here.

profoundly felt, and involved emotions of gladness, contentment, or joy. These emotions were to be instantiated and communicated by means of subtle use of colour, the visibility—expressivity—of her touch within a regulated and classicizing order, and the variability of surface it begot. Still, she famously identified as an abstract expressionist, not a minimalist (—despite her participation in so many group shows of the latter), whether out of hubris, convenience, or something else.

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Martin would deny the relevance of minimalism to her work, labouring to be considered separate from a movement—and its younger proponents—that she both preceded and ultimately survived. When strategically necessary though, she could be comfortable with the label. Petitioning Virginia Dwan in 1972 to lend a painting to her Philadelphia retrospective, Martin flattered her by saying how grateful she was for her inclusion in the hallmark *10*, an exhibition she called ‘the only one about which I have always felt happy and satisfied’.³⁰ In 1976, on the other hand, for an interview published in *Art News*, she had this to say on record:

Commented [BN251]: Please confirm, the hubris lay with her claim to be an abstract expressionist, not with her exhibiting with the minimalists? This was ambiguous.

... ‘we all make mistakes. I mean, when I exhibited with the minimal artists at the Dwan Gallery, I was much affected by my association with them. But, don’t you see, the minimalists are idealists—... — they’re non-subjective. They want to minimise themselves in favour of the ideal. Well, I just can’t.’³¹

Even later, about the same show, Martin related:

‘They were all minimalists, and they asked me to show with them. But that was before the word was invented. And I liked all their work, so I showed with them. And then when they started calling them minimalists they called me a minimalist, too.’³²

She reflexively added: ‘I consider myself an abstract expressionist.’³³

Martin’s collapse into an emergent cohort at odds with her self-dubbed ‘expressive’ art serves as yet another explanation for her 1967 departure from New York. In a New York art world in which the minimalists’ impersonal monoliths had risen to prominence, Martin hoped to differentiate herself rather than affiliate or assimilate. But this is merely one hypothesis among so many others, while the truth of

~~which~~ remains wilfully obscure. What becomes important to account for is not why Martin left New York and stopped painting—for such a point can never be ultimately proven—but to assert that the different versions of the event are given equal opportunity through the evidence Martin left behind. The story need not be dire, even without knowing ~~how that~~ it ended ~~—~~, and that it had another chapter ~~—~~, with her resumption of the brush. That it has been cast darkly anyhow says as much about the contemporary demands and successive historiography of the history of the ends of painting in the late 1960s as about Martin in all her specificity.

It has become a commonplace in the Martin literature to name *Tundra* (c.1967) (Fig. 10.3) as the last painting that she finished in New York. It may or may not be so, but it was certainly among them. Conceivably intended to echo a 1950 Barnett Newman painting of the same title, *Tundra* is a refined composition comprising six rectangles made from a single horizontal and two vertical lines. In 1973, Martin's *Tundra* was hailed by John Serber as 'the best white painting I have ever seen ...'.³⁴ The viscous canvas is an ode to toothpaste, meringue, aspirin tablets, skim milk, bathroom porcelain, clouds and human semen. For that reviewer it was a climax. For others it remained a sign of bleak foreclosure that anticipated Martin's time in the proverbial wilderness, which was rather more accurately a period of journeying through landscapes, some of which were already known, before her return to New Mexico (where, not coincidentally, the painting has returned, as a gift to the Harwood Museum in 2017). For Newman, his own *Tundra* was keyed to notions of sublimity, effecting ~~the powerful~~ terror and aesthetic magnitude of being overpowered by the phenomena of the natural world. As Richard Shiff writes: 'From the limitless four horizons of the tundra, Newman imagined the no-horizon of whiteout ... utterly disorienting visual blankness, no relations, no external indicators of direction.'³⁵

Designer, please take in Fig. 10.3 near here.

Martin was not a plein air painter, so it is unsurprising that she would not have ~~gotten~~ back to work until she felt settled, with a studio again in place. Yet the point is likewise that Dore Ashton's early and sustained readings of Martin's works as versions of landscapes, evocations of the natural world, prepared the grounds for a reading comparable to that of the Newman example. As early as 1959, Ashton posed that: 'Miss

Commented [BN252]: jarred with 'overpowered' in next line, and was redundant anyway. Terror is powerful by definition.

Martin's deepest feelings are related to nature—the vast, maddening infinitude to which she is drawn.³⁶ Against this, Martin argued not for a literal transcription of place but a conversion of it into an experience. I would put it like this: she showed nature to be representation, to be framed ~~with~~in and by the aesthetic act. In any case, ever since Ashton initiated this reading, nature has been a persistent shibboleth in the discussion of Martin's work. Thus does *Tundra* assume special resonance on the cusp of her travels.

But the overwhelmingly final, apocalyptic tenor at play here derives, too, from the evocative title of another painting completed around the same time as *Tundra*: *Trumpet* (1967) (Fig. 10.4). Jacquelynn Baas reads the latter in relation to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), a text with long-standing import for Martin. As Baas writes: ³⁷

The title recalls an episode directly following Bunyan's account of the Man in the Iron Cage: Christian encounters a trembling man who has just awakened from a dream in which he heard "a great sound of a trumpet" heralding the Last Judgment. When Christian enquires about the cause of the man's fear, he responds: "I thought that the day of judgment was come, and that I was not ready for it."³⁷

Designer, please take in Fig. 10.4 near here.

Throughout Martin's career there is the issue of titles. When Martin was hospitalised and preparing works for shows, Tawney appended musical names to works, which Martin revoked for the ICA show. But the others were her doing; they often ~~assumed relevance~~referred to literary and religious sources, as well as to parables of her own creation. (e.g., For example, the story Martin penned to frame *This rain* (1958) finds its genesis in Plato's theory of love in Aristophanes's fable from the *Symposium*, which discusses lovers searching the world for their lost halves.) There is no reason to doubt Baas's contention. Yet there is also no reason to read it relative to Martin's biography. For her, expression was universal and abstract, which is to say that she sought experiences—and the conveyance of them in picture and word—that were not hers alone.

I would submit by way of conclusion here a third painting that Martin completed in advance of her leave-taking. Far from the desolate *Tundra*, or even the clarion *Trumpet*, this other painting is called *Adventure* (c.1967) (Fig. 10.5). All these works might credibly anticipate setting off for the desert, though only *Adventure* suggests neither foreclosure nor the decree thereof; rather, it both holds forth and in itself instantiates incipient potential. Look at the work Martin did after her 1973 resumption of painting—how fully again, and in many instances anew, Martin worked, exploring different formats and even media, or adjusting to the rapidity with which acrylic dried in the unforgivingly desiccated heat. The year 1967 marked but another transition. In 1976, Martin, fully ensconced in a life that she had remade, turned to film-making with *Gabriel*, a one-off, 79-minute-long 16 mm picture of a boy hiking. She described it as being about happiness consequent of an adventure in gorgeous terrain. Here is a quote worth citing at some length:

As soon as I brought my paintings to New York, I went out to buy moving picture equipment. I'll be making a movie. Of course, I'll never consider my movie-making on the level with painting. But I'm making it in order to reach a large audience. The movie will be called 'Gabriel'. It's about happiness—exact thing with my paintings. It's about happiness and innocence. I've never seen a movie or read a story that was absolutely free of any misery. And so, I thought I would make one. The whole thing is about a little boy who has a day of freedom ~~---~~ in which he feels free. It will all be taken out-of-doors. I feel that photography has been neglected in motion pictures. People may think that's exaggerated, but, really, I think that photography is a very sensitive medium, and I'm depending on it absolutely to indicate this boy's adventure.³⁸

Designer, please take in Fig. 10.5 near here.

The titles *Tundra*, *Trumpet*, and *Adventure* ~~are~~ each refer, if differently, ~~self-referential~~ to their process as studio works; they are also indications of Martin's feelings about her life beyond them. That *Tundra* came to represent the end of her life as a New York painter—and for a few years served as the harbinger for and confirmation of the limit of her painting—is something to consider in light of broader historiographical and

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critical fortunes, the kinds detailed in this volume. *Tundra* allows for one story about painting's end—its presumptive punctuality the condition to which monochromatic abstraction first aspired and here consummates. *Trumpet* offers another myth, one about the judgements this finality might involve, and the relative preparedness for the subject in relation to a point of terminus and reflexive recall. But I hold out for the meaning of *Adventure* as the one that best encapsulates Martin's position in 1967, and not just because, with the perspicacity of time, I know that she kept going. She found in the 'out-of-doors' an elusive freedom. I hold out for *Adventure* because in its very moment of becoming it names the articulation of surface as something ventured towards, unknown and promising nothing but the ground of promise, as other things in life.

¹ Agnes Martin, *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften*, ed. Dieter Schwarz, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Cantz, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Hatje Edition-Cantz, Stuttgart, 1992, p. 19.

² Barbara Rose, 'Pioneer Spirit', *Vogue*, June 1973, p. 114. [Need to specify which edition of Vogue – USA Vogue?](#)

³ [Please add full reference here for catalogue of this show.](#)

⁴ ~~Oral history with~~ Agnes Martin, [Oral history](#), 15 May 1989, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, p. 30, ~~available at~~, <http://www.aaa.si.edu/files/resources/OHProgram/PDF/martin89.pdf>. [This URL did not work for me – please check.](#)

⁵ This summary derives from many published sources, the two most recent and important being the chronology compiled by Lena Fritsch for ~~Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell (ed.)~~, *Agnes Martin*, ed. Frances Morris and Tiffany Bell, exhibition catalogue, London: Tate Publishing, London, 2015, pp. 206–20; and Nancy Princenthal, *Agnes Martin: Her Life and Art*, New York: Thames & Hudson, New York, 2015.

⁶ Lawrence Alloway, 'Formlessness Breaking Down Form: The Paintings of Agnes Martin', *Studio*

International, vol. 185, no. 952, February 1973, pg. 61.

⁷ Arne Glimcher, *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*, ~~Phaidon, London and New York; Phaidon,~~ 2012, pg. 8.

⁸ The exact dates of Martin's hospitalisation have not been, and probably never will be, determined. See Tiffany Bell, 'Happiness is the Goal', in ~~Morris and Bell (ed.),~~ *Agnes Martin*, ~~op. cit.,~~ ed. Morris and Bell, pg. 26. The diagnosis is also debatable; ~~she might have had as~~ bipolar disorder, which then was often ~~mis~~diagnosed as schizophrenia.

⁹ ~~Martin, Oral history~~ *Oral history interview with Martin*, ~~op. cit.,~~ p. 11.

¹⁰ Agnes Martin to Lenore Tawney, undated letter postmarked 26 July 1965, Lenore G. Tawney Foundation Archive.

¹¹ Nan Robertson, 'Arts Council Focuses on Filmmakers', ~~The~~ *New York Times*, 20 December 1966, ~~p. ??~~.

¹² Christina Bryan Rosenberger, *Drawing the Line: The Early Works of Agnes Martin*, ~~Oakland:~~ University of California Press, ~~Oakland,~~ 2016, pg. 5.

¹³ The letter reads: 'Dear Lenore / I must give independence a trial. I will have to have more time. I am thinking about you too with love / Agnes.' Agnes Martin to Lenore Tawney, undated letter postmarked 17 November 1967, Lenore G. Tawney Foundation Archive.

¹⁴ Katy Siegel, *Since '45: America and the Making of Contemporary Art*, ~~London:~~ Reaktion Books, ~~London,~~ 2011, p. 106

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jill Johnston, 'Agnes Martin: Surrender and Solitude', *Village Voice*, 13 September 1973, p. 33.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁸ Roberta Smith, 'Reviews: Agnes Martin at Pace Gallery', *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 10, Summer 1975, p. 72.

¹⁹ Samuel J. Wagstaff Papers, Box 2, folder 11, Archives of American Art, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 1967.

²⁰ John Russell, 'Where to Go from Art of 1950s', *The New York Times*, 8 March 1975, p. ??.

²¹ Roberta Smith, 'Reviews: Agnes Martin at Pace Gallery', *Artforum*, vol. 13, no. 10, Summer 1975, p. 73.

²² Ibid.

²³ Oral history interview with Martin, p. 18.

²⁴ Hilton Kramer, 'An Intimist of the Grid', *The New York Times*, 18 March 1973, p. ??.

^{25,26} Carter Ratcliff, 'Agnes Martin and the "Artificial Infinite"', *Art News*, vol. 72, no. 5, May 1973, p. 26.

²⁶ 'Pulse: Agnes Art', *GQ*, May 1974, p. 6. Just checking – this is correct? Not 'Pulse: Agnes Martin'?

²⁷ Benita Eisler, 'Life Lines', *The New Yorker*, 25 January 1993, p. 70.

²⁸ Betty Parsons, 'Section Eleven to Open', Section Eleven Exhibitions, 1958–1961: Various Exhibitions, 1958–1961, Box 19, Folder 47, Betty Parsons Gallery Records and Personal Papers, c. 1920–1991, bulk 1946–1983, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

²⁹ Max Kozloff, 'Art', *The Nation*, 14 November 1966, p. 525.

³⁰ Agnes Martin to Virginia Dwan, letter dated September 1972, Dwan Gallery records, 1959–c. 1982, bulk 1959–71, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

³¹ Agnes Martin, quoted in John Gruen, 'Agnes Martin: "Everything, Everything is About Feeling ...

Feeling and Recognition”’, *Art News*, vol. 75, no. 7, September 1976, p. 94.

³² [Martin, Oral history](#)~~Oral history interview with Martin, p. 16.~~

³³ [Ibid.](#)~~Oral history interview with Martin, p. 16.~~

³⁴ John Serber, ‘Agnes Martin: The Painter as a Woman’, *The Drummer*, 27 February 1973, p. 22.

³⁵ Richard Schiff, ‘Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect’, *Barnett Newman*, ed. Ann Temkin, [exhibition catalogue, Philadelphia](#): Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002, p. 104.

³⁶ Dore Ashton, ‘Art: Drawn From Nature——Agnes Martin’s Paintings at Section 11 Gallery Reflect Love of Prairies’, *The New York Times*, 29 December 1959, p. 23.

³⁷ Jacquelynn Baas, ‘Agnes Martin: Readings for Writings’, in [Morris and Bell \(ed.\)](#), *Agnes Martin*, ed. [Morris and Bell](#), p. 226.

³⁸ [Agnes Martin, quoted in Gruen](#), ‘Agnes Martin: “Everything, everything is about feeling”’~~Ibid.~~

11

Forty thousand years of conceptual art: Fragments of a world art history without end

Ian McLean

But what is it that makes it possible to look at a Paleolithic cave painting, a seventeenth-century court portrait, and an abstract expressionist canvas and say that they are all *the same thing*, that they belong to the same category of knowledge? How did this historicism of art get put in place?

Douglas Crimp, 1981¹

There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one.

Walter Benjamin, 1940²

Conceptual art was born from deep-seated angst. With the wreckage of two world wars, Europe's once great empires disintegrating, and the threat of nuclear annihilation hanging heavy in everyone's minds, civilisation seemed on the brink. Its metaphysical foundations no longer held. An example: at the end of 1959, on small, flickering, black-and-white television screens, two French intellectuals speculated on the future of art (Fig. 11.1):

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS. After all ... painting is not an inevitable feature of culture ... So it is not inconceivable that after abstract art ...

GEORGES CHARBONNIER. There may be no more painting?

C.L-S. Yes. A kind of total detachment, heralding the advent of an 'a-pictorial' era.

G.C. I know some painters who think so ... [they] are for the most part very young ... [so] their judgment is less acceptable.³

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.1 near here.

A decade later, in New York, the young conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945) nominated 'the early sixties' as the moment when conceptual art first saw the light of day. At this point, he said, 'the language of painting had collapsed.' Pointing to the late 1950s paintings of Frank Stella (b. 1936), Kosuth observed that what once would have been pictures had become 'painted canvas objects' in real rather than an imagined pictorial space, indeed, 'occupying the same room you were in'.

Rather than representing an inward-turning world, as painting had, I saw this new work doing quite the opposite: it began the process of looking *outward*, making the *context* important ... This last stop on the formalist trajectory gave us nowhere to look but out: first the physical, then the social, philosophical, cultural, institutional and political contexts.⁴

In this emerging age of post-painting, said Kosuth, 'the dynamic of the new art ... has as its task the dismantling of the mythic structure of art as posited in the present day cultural institutions.'⁵ He meant Western cultural institutions.

At the time, the 'formalist trajectory' to which Kosuth referred was epitomised in Clement Greenberg's Hegelian theory of Western modernism's dialectical advance through negation towards its being (freedom and ends) in the specific qualities of its medium (*for instance, e.g.* the flatness of painting). In Kosuth's mind, conceptual art was the first -ism to be faced with the *task-question* of 'What now?'; after modernism had reached its end. His answer was a wholesale renovation of the metaphysical assumptions that had underpinned Western conceptions of art, as if to start anew. If conceptual art is an officially recognised short-lived -ism of the latter *sixties 1960s*, Kosuth's sense of it ending modernism and inaugurating a new historical paradigm rings true in the conceptualist tenor of art since then. Contemporary art, said Peter Osborne (b. 1958) in 2013, is 'postconceptual'.⁶

However, Kosuth's close identification of modernism with painting and the concomitant need to end painting in order to renovate art proved *to be off-target*. By 1980 painting had returned to centre stage with new expressionism, much to the frustration of those conceptualists who had just buried it. Douglas Crimp (b. 1944) fumed:

The rhetoric which accompanies this resurrection of painting is almost exclusively reactionary: it reacts specifically against all those art practices in the sixties and seventies which abandoned painting and coherently placed in question the ideological supports of painting, and the ideology which painting, in turn, supports.⁷

Crimp reserved most venom for traitors such as Stella. In 1959 his minimalist paintings ‘signalled ... that the end of painting had finally come’, said Crimp, but he sneered at the ‘pure idiocy’ of Stella’s recent wild expressionism: his ‘late seventies paintings are truly hysterical ... each one reads as a tantrum, shrieking and sputtering that the end of painting *has not come*.’⁸ ‘Perhaps’, continued Crimp, this ‘sheer desperation is an expression of painting’s need for a miracle to save it’.⁹

New expressionism ~~did not~~ need a miracle: it had mythic narratives aplenty. However, they are not our concern. Our task is archaeological. Sinking a shaft through the layers of myths about the ends and beginnings of art that have accumulated over time and across places, this chapter sifts unsystematically through their sediments, looking for unspoken agreements between generations and traditions.

Myth

Singing and dancing probably came first, because they are direct bodily expressions, as if a spirit released from within. Supplements to performance, such as painting the body, probably came later. Eventually paintings were made without the body, on the dance ground and rock walls and later church walls, but they still reverberated with the body’s song. In the end, painting became fully free: its own entity, a flat screen hung in a silent white or black cube for the mind’s eye only, no longer sung, no longer touched. This endpoint, fully liberated but also alienated from its origins in the performing body, is one reason why in the 1960s and ’70s painters destroyed their easels and returned to their performing bodies, where art had begun.

This story about the beginning and end of painting is conceived around several dualisms—same/other, intimate/distant, body/mind, ending/beginning, performance/painting. Lévi-Strauss called such dualisms ‘mythemes’.¹⁰ Because many mythemes are shared across cultures and ages, they constitute an underlying logic and thus a cross-cultural platform for translating the diverse myths of the world.

A -fundamental mytheme that operates in much visual art is, Lévi-Strauss said, the plastic/graphic binary. It manifests in many cultures as sculpture/painting, face/decoration, performance/painting, thus creating an aesthetic Esperanto.¹¹

A mytheme is a formal operation in which each term is locked with the other on two axes, one oppositional and the other analogous—an ambivalent binary relation of difference and sameness. Thus mythemes function like language: the prescribed *relationship of-between* the terms, not their individual significations or content, is what signifies. It means that the translations made possible through these shared mythemes are fixed—that is, i.e., the relationship *of-between* the terms is translated, not their content. It also means that within the mytheme neither term can signify without the other, and that ‘the modes of expression of the one always transform those of the other’.¹² Where there is a performing body there is a painting;; where there is an ending there is a beginning;; eteand so on.

While myths generally have many versions, reappearing in new skins through the ages, there is no true version, says Lévi-Strauss, as each has the same structure or genome: ‘Every version belongs to the [same] myth.’¹³ Hence the end of painting circa 1970 reiterates age-old myths: in it resonates universal mythemes—such as performance/painting and endings/beginnings—that are found around the world and throughout time.

Endings/beginnings: 1500–1900

The meaning is in the use, but sometimes there was little use for beginnings and endings. In the early modern European period (1500–1750), the end and the beginning were not pressing issues, because they were a matter of Christian doctrine. More pressing were the transformations that occurred between a fixed beginning and end, and, in particular, what was happening now. Here the new or ‘modern’ was understood in relation to the past, rather than an act of creation or absolute beginning. *Modernus* was first used to signify Christian Rome as opposed to ancient or pagan Rome.¹⁴ In similar fashion, what intrigued Giorgio Vasari was not the origin of art—for memory of it had already been lost in the mists of time—but its modern achievements. His *Lives of the Artists* begins with Cimabue, ‘since he originated the new way of drawing and painting’¹⁵—new, that is, in respect to medieval art.

Because Vasari uses relative rather than absolute concepts of beginnings and endings, it is unlikely that he would have recognised the very first painting if he tripped over it. When clambering in the Niaux cave (near the French–Spanish border) in 1660, Ruben de la Vialle inscribed his name and date of visit less than a metre from Ice-Age paintings of bison, horses and ibexes. We ~~can't~~ cannot know what he perceived in the limestone cavern, but we can be fairly sure it was ~~n't~~ not the first art that today holds us in awe. Then Western thought had no concept of prehistory; the received view was that the world had been created by God about 6000 years earlier, and would end with the Apocalypse.

Only from the eighteenth century, as science began to take hold of the modern imagination, did questions of the end and the beginning become a burning issue. Heated debate among geologists about the formation of the Earth challenged the biblical myth of Creation and radically revised estimates of the Earth's age. And because questions of beginnings are also questions of endings, scientists also calculated when the Earth's oceans would boil dry in the Sun's fiery death throes. Since the eighteenth century, any myth worth its salt ~~has~~ needed the imprimatur of science.

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The discovery of the end and beginning of art

During the nineteenth century, as scientists pondered the endings and beginnings of various geological, biological and cultural epochs over a huge span of time, and rapid industrialisation and urbanisation radically changed natural and social landscapes, the idea of duration became integral to the myth of modernity. Instead of a world fully formed 6000 years ago, ~~there~~ was an ever-evolving immanent existence embedded in its temporality. James Hutton (1726–1797), the geologist of the Scottish Enlightenment, set the ball rolling in a paper he read at the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1785. After close analysis of geological sedimentation and erosion, he concluded: 'The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end.'¹⁶ It was intended, and was taken in its day, as a challenge to the biblical myth of the Creation and the Apocalypse.

G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy of history is the first myth to answer this challenge, with a new metaphysics of temporality in which a teleological concept of ends is conceived in terms of freedom or self-sufficiency. Through a series of transformative

epochs or periods, various contradictions or blocks are overcome until the ends are finally realised. In this context Hegel (1770–1831) raised the idea of the end of art, which had a big part in his grander conception of the end of History. World History, said Hegel, traces the path of the ‘Spirit—Man *as such*’ towards freedom, after which human society continues indefinitely without further epochal changes.¹⁷ ~~towards freedom, after which human society continues indefinitely without further epochal changes.~~ Thus for Hegel History had a definite end and beginning, and one in which time was spatially organised: ‘The History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia the beginning.’¹⁸ The clock started in Asia and would stop in Europe. Then History would cease, and an endless Messianic Age would begin.

The history of art is also figured as a triumphal march towards its freedom—its autonomy and sovereignty: ‘Fine art is not real art till’, like science, ‘free from all interference, it fulfils itself in conformity with its proper aims’.¹⁹ By Hegel’s reckoning this happened in Athens about 2400 years ago. Then, he said, art attained the quality of religion and philosophy, but now ‘art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual wants ... [of] earlier epochs’. For Hegel, the end of art was just one small step in mankind’s journey towards enlightenment. In his day, believed Hegel, the ‘intellectual culture’ of the European Enlightenment was well ‘beyond the stage’ of art’s ‘sensuous’ consciousness. Now art’s only satisfaction is found in ‘the *science* of art’, by which he meant the history and philosophy of art.²⁰

Hegel’s theory spurred modernists to pursue the ends of art more fervently. Each succeeding generation pushed the frontiers or ends of art further, as if its ends were to test its ends. By 1970 Kosuth believed he had got there by reducing art to its core conceptual function. He would later describe his early conceptual art from the mid-1960s as a “naïve” Modernist art based on the scientific paradigm’.²¹

Hegel’s interest was the ends of art, not its beginnings, but as the idea of the end of art came into view in the nineteenth century so too did its beginning—thus confirming that a new myth was in the making. From 1859, reports were published of stone tools and carved and engraved bone objects—some recently discovered and others previously considered of Celtic origins—which were made in ‘primitive times’ by ‘primitive people’ in ‘the last geological era’, ~~that is,~~ the Ice Age.²²

Commented [BN255]: Should this be ‘means’? Or are you meaning two different types of ‘ends’, in which case should this be made clear?

What questions were being asked that drove scientists to these conclusions? In 1877, Gabriel de Mortillet (1821–1898) had the answer: ‘We are here in the presence of the childhood of art.’²³ The discovery of ‘primitive’ art, or the first art, guaranteed the modernity of European civilisation, effectively confirming Hegel’s philosophy. In this way was born ‘Westernism’: the European sense of being more grown-up or advanced than the rest of the world.²⁴

Endings/beginnings: circa 1940

In the 1930s the carnage of ~~the First~~ World War I and the spectre of fascism heightened the sense of living in the midnight hour. Longing for a day of reckoning or ground zero from which to start again, modernists transformed primitivism from modernity’s justification into its antidote.

Modernist primitivism

Primitivism is an age-old idea that since the first written records was defined against the idea of progress.²⁵ A typical example is Walter Benjamin’s (1892–1940) contrast—made in 1936—between painting’s ‘cult value’, first seen in ‘the elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave’, with the modern ‘mechanical reproduction’ of photographic media, ‘which separated art from its basis in cult’.²⁶

Four years later Benjamin deployed the progress/primitive mytheme very differently, proposing a radical primitivism to counter what he called ‘historicism’. He argued that historicism—a relic of Hegel’s philosophy of history—was a **key** **fundamental** narrative in modernity’s myth of progress that justified the European sense of supremacy (Westernism) by burying the past in a fading tradition. With the past safely **sidelined-consigned to irrelevance** as the childhood of mankind, modernity smoothed the way for the forward blast of progress. Against this, Benjamin felt a duty to ‘wrest tradition away from the conformism that is about to overpower it.’ To ‘have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past’, he wrote, requires you to be ‘convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.’²⁷

With an acute sense of the catastrophe of modernity and its repressions of the past, Benjamin’s exhortation to seize ‘hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger’ was part of the currency of the surrealist circle with which he associated in the 1930s. The urgency in his expression reflected the special circumstances of its writing

Commented [BN256]: I avoid ‘key’ because it is so vague – I try for something more specific. I hope I have captured the meaning.

Commented [BN257]: “sidelined” jarred here as a metaphor, because of the next metaphor – the forward blast of progress. I hope I have caught the meaning.

in the summer of 1940. For a Marxist modernist Jew fleeing ~~Paris from~~ the advancing Nazi army, which was the self-declared slayer of Marxism, modernism and Judaism, the sense of emergency was overwhelming. Entrusting his papers to a friend, the surrealist Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Benjamin ~~fled left Paris and headed~~ south the day before the Nazis entered ~~Paris~~the city.²⁸

For nearly 100 years, Paris had been less a place and more a no-place or utopia in which modernists the world over dreamed their redemption. They had made Paris into a myth. In 1940 Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978) called it ‘the Holy Place of our time’: ‘Almost in the span of a single generation, everything buried underground had been brought to the surface ... and threw up a shower of wonders.’ Rosenberg looked with horror at Europe in flames and modernism’s ‘native habitat’, ‘International Paris’, desecrated. ‘The laboratory of the twentieth century’, he declared, ‘has been shut down.’²⁹

Rosenberg pictured Paris as a sacred grove in a profane planet. Unlike the rest of the world, caught in the grip of progress and national prejudice, ‘Paris represented the International of culture’ and operated to a different temporality in which ‘sheets of time and space [were] picked from history like cards from a pack and constantly shuffled’. Hegel had been passed over and a new myth was in the making.

So the Modern became, not a progressive historical movement, striving to bury the dead deeper, but a new sentiment of eternity and of eternal life. The cultures of the jungle, the cave, the northern ice fields, of Egypt, primitive Greece, antique China, medieval Europe, industrial America—all were given equal due.³⁰

Living in a temporality that was out of step with modernity’s forward march, surrealists had a preference for the primitive. From the 1920s they welcomed into their circle the small scientific community of ethnographers and archaeologists, along with black modernists from the colonies, hoping they would deliver flashes of insight from the beginning of art.³¹ Picasso, arch-modernist and inveterate collector of tribal art, remarked to his friend, the ~~African-Senegalese~~ poet Léopold Senghor: ‘We must remain savages.’ Senghor replied to Picasso with his own ironic dig: ‘We must remain Negroes.’³²

Commented [BN258]: Picasso might have lumped all African countries in together, but I think we should be more specific.

The first art

The existence of European Ice Age cave paintings was first recognised in the late nineteenth century, but only by a few enthusiasts. Most experts believed these works to be fakes. Mortillet claimed they were too elaborate in conception and skilful in execution to be the first art. In other words, their aesthetic achievement offended his Westernism and presumably his Hegelianism. Historicism had consigned the ‘savage state’ of the primeval past to the oblivion of the natural history museum. However, as modernity’s grip increased, a few modernists found in the savage state a response to the demands of modern times.

By 1910 an emerging generation of modernist artists in Paris, led by Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), were adorning their studios with tribal art from the colonies, as if it was were a talisman of the future. That year Roger Fry (1866–1934) waxed lyrical about a drawing of a bison from the Altamira cave in Spain, praising ‘the certainty and completeness of the pose, the perfect rhythm and the astonishing verisimilitude of the movement’.³³ The greatest impact most powerful repercussions of European Ice Age art came in the 1940s and 50s following with the discovery of the Lascaux cave in September 1940, two months after the fall of Paris, and two weeks before Benjamin died on the Spanish–French border in the ancient heartland of this Ice Age culture (Fig. 11.2). At this fateful moment, the Earth seemingly opened in the middle of France to deliver an urgent message. Picasso would add replicas of Ice Age carvings to his collection, and reputedly repeated Fry’s claim that the art of the caves had never been surpassed.³⁴

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.2 near here.

To mid-twentieth-century modernists and scholars, Lascaux unlocked windows on the origins of not just art but also human consciousness, indeed humanity itself. For the first time, it seemed, art was revealed in its raw conceptual nakedness and, in Lascaux, with consummate aesthetic expression.

That modernists found such riches in Lascaux is testimony to their success in wresting ‘tradition away from the conformism that is about to overpower it’. As if projecting the postwar emergency back upon these Ice Age artists, they thought that this very first art was closer in spirit to the modern age than it was to contemporary

Commented [BN259]: Please confirm.

Commented [BN260]: Talisman is a magical object or good-luck charm, something that protects the holder. Is that what you mean here? Or do you mean something that predicts or represents what will happen in the future, maybe an ‘augury’?

Commented [BN261]: I avoid ‘impact’, it is so over-used and therefore vague. I hope I have captured your meaning. If not, maybe ‘effect’, ‘influence’, ‘significance’, ‘consequence’, ‘sway’?

Commented [BN262]: Referring to specific events in 1940. Please confirm dates though.

Commented [BN263]: 14 June 1940?
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-France-World-War-II/The-fall-of-France-June-5-25-1940>

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Indigenous cultures. The idea of Westernism had lost its grip on Europe's modernists. They had instead taken on the legacy of the first art that, a few decades earlier, had been the burden of indigenes. Forgetting that indigenes were also suffering the emergency of modernity, Bataille believed that 'modern primitives lack this outpouring, this upsurge of creative awakening that makes Lascaux man our counterpart and not that of the Aborigine'.³⁵

The first threshold

We now know that Europe's Ice Age cave paintings were not the first art. From Africa to Asia, modern humans and perhaps long-extinct hominoids chiselled and scratched geometric patterns on stone, bone and shell surfaces, carved rock figurines and used ochre.³⁶ There is no way of knowing how long the bundles of binary relations or mythemes playing in hominoid neural networks had been expressed in their singing, dancing, painted bodies. Perhaps, jealous of the freedom with which birds could fly between heaven and earth, or fascinated by their colourful plumage, dancing and singing, hominoids got the idea from them.

This is not an idle thought. It was widely believed that bird song was a secret mystical language, and the first people of north-west Australia claimed that birds had painted-made the Ice Age paintings adorning their rocky escarpments. And then there is one of the oldest paintings of a man: at Lascaux, some 17,000 years old, in which his upper body takes the form of a bird. A schematic, stick-like figure, stiffly poised with an erection, arms spread in a premonition of Christ on the Cross and seemingly on the verge of death or in a trance, this avian-hominoid hybrid falls backwards as if surrendering to a much more energetically painted bison that is also dying, its mane bristling and head bowed towards the man as if in some esoteric communion at this critical moment. The bison's entrails spill below its gut, cut open by a spear or perhaps gouged by the horned rhinoceros, its tail waving as it ambles past the falling man. And falling from his right hand as he enters a higher consciousness is a sceptre, which also takes the form of a bird's head. It looks directly at the nearby rhinoceros's tail, which echoes the curved outline of the bird's head. Connecting these two curved forms—a head and a tail—are six symmetrical dots in two rows, a mysterious code that occurs

elsewhere in the cave complex. A horse emerges from the opposite wall, holding this scene in its gaze. Whatever it means, this small shaft is packed with mythemes.

Before the discovery of Lascaux, Max Raphael (1889–1952) had recognised the compositional qualities of Ice Age cave paintings as if each cavern ~~was~~ were a unified text,³⁷ but none prepares us for this cryptic composition at Lascaux. Jean Clottes (b. 1933) called it ‘one of the rare obvious scenes in Palaeolithic parietal art’.³⁸ This alone distinguishes the work as particularly special and auspicious—a beginning of something. So too does its location in a small cavity called ‘the shaft’. ~~17,000~~ Seventeen thousand years ago it was probably a secret chamber reserved for special occasions, as it is in the deepest and most inaccessible part of the Lascaux complex, where heightened carbon dioxide levels soon induce delirium and death. Calling it ‘the ~~“”~~ Holiest of Holies’ of the cave’, Bataille speculated that it was a site of shamanistic performance and also of a momentous birth.³⁹

Archaeologists initially interpreted Lascaux as the place of magic rites to aid in hunting—a temple for the abattoir—but Bataille saw the birth of ‘religious unrest’.⁴⁰ He meant this literally, as if here humanity first discovered its religious vocation, and in so doing ~~so~~, gained self-consciousness. It was, he said, ‘the fundamental revolution ... from which [the idea of] man emerged fully formed’.⁴¹ With it came ‘the power—the desire—to make a work of art’.⁴² For him the painting in the shaft stood in for the first threshold, the conception of art and myth: the thought of thought, the consciousness of consciousness.

Surrealism, mythemes and language

Surrealist interests in linguistic theory underpinned Bataille’s attention to the conceptual logic of dualisms that he saw in the shaft. His earliest article on Ice Age art, published in 1930 in the surrealist magazine *Documents*, which he edited, discussed ‘the categorical duality’ between its ‘intellectual’ and ‘visual realism’,⁴³ and his last book, *The Tears of Eros* (1961)—which concerns ‘the coincidence of death and eroticism’ in world art throughout the ages—is divided into two parts: ‘The Beginning’ and ‘The End’.⁴⁴ In 1955, beginning a lecture on Lascaux with reference to the imminent threat of nuclear annihilation, he remarked: ‘I am simply struck by the fact that light is being shed on our birth at the very moment when the notion of death appears to us.’⁴⁵ Such

Commented [BN265]: Endnote cites Clottes, not Bataille. Should endnote read ‘Georges Bataille, quoted by Clottes ...?’

dualisms were at the heart of surrealist thinking, and ~~drove-fuelled its-the surrealists'~~ interest in the origin of language and its semiotic operations. 'It is better to go back in one leap to the birth of that which signifies', said Breton in 1953, than to 'go back from the thing signified to the sign'.⁴⁶ For example, Bataille's analysis of the Lascaux paintings attended to the structural semiotics operating on the cave wall, rather than ~~on~~ to its outside referents. The bison might have, for example, real, totemic and magical referents (as archaeologists surmised), but its meaning lies in the conceptual dualisms or mythemes in play such as man/animal, horse/bovine, life/death.

Bataille's approach was common among~~s~~ surrealists. For example, in 1962 André Breton (1896–1966), the leader of the surrealists, pressed the reader to look beyond the cultural intentions of the artists to 'the heaven sent unity that binds together their component elements'. He wrote this in his preface to Karel Kupka's *Dawn of Art*, a book on Australian Arnhem Land bark painting. Comparing the paintings to a 'boomerang' returning lost knowledge to a Europe in its 'dissolution', he proposed: 'We are here at the source of *conceptual* representation'.⁴⁷

Breton's early experiments in the 1920s, searching for 'the actual functioning of thought ... in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern',⁴⁸ had by the 1950s shifted to 'the ~~“prime matter”~~ (in the alchemical sense) of language'.⁴⁹ From early on, Bataille and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) had been interested in language, their free wordplay geared, like the formalism of the Russian futurist poets, to unhinging phonemes from signifying systems in order to liberate language from 'the transcendental signified'.⁵⁰ 'Each thing', said Bataille in one of his earliest texts, 'is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form'.⁵¹ Duchamp made a study called the 'Conditions of a Language: The search for ~~“prime words”~~',⁵² and expressed an interest in Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) who, he said, 'worked out a system wherein everything is ... a tautology, that is, a repetition of premises'.⁵³

Surrealism's ruthless stripping away of cultural content to reveal the universal conceptual structure that inaugurates language and thought was instrumental in Lévi-Strauss's formulation of structuralist anthropology, which proposed a complete conceptual system underpinning Indigenous thought. His breakthrough ~~was-came from~~ befriending the brilliant ~~multi-lingual~~-linguist Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) when both

were exiled in New York during ~~the Second~~ World War II. Lévi-Strauss would also credit the Bororo—an Amazonian tribe he had studied in 1936—with being the ‘great theoreticians of structuralism’.⁵⁴

Returning to Paris for the winter of 1936–37, Lévi-Strauss exhibited his haul of ethnographic material—~~over more than~~ 1000 pieces—at the Wildenstein Gallery, which also exhibited surrealist art. Surrealism was formative for Lévi-Strauss—as it also was for Jakobson, who had mixed in futurist and surrealist circles in Moscow and Prague. Lévi-Strauss had become acquainted with surrealism when a student in Paris, befriended Bataille in the early 1930s, and in New York cemented a ‘lasting friendship’ with Breton and Max Ernst (1891–1976), ~~as well as and with~~ others of their circle including Duchamp and André Masson (1896–1987).⁵⁵ In their engagements consideration of with the first art, this circle of artists and scientists believed they had discovered the conceptual basis or universal structure of all art.

Commented [BN266]: I avoid ‘engagement’ etc as it is so vague. Could also use ‘study of’, ‘interest in’, ‘analysis of’, ‘interpretations of’.

Endings/beginnings: circa 1970

There are substantial connections between surrealism, structuralist anthropology, and the conceptual art movement that emerged in the 1960s. An obvious connecting point is Duchamp; conceptualists in America, Europe, Australia, and Asia claimed to be his heir. The most interesting connecting point is Kosuth. In 1971, already a famous artist and acknowledged as a leader of conceptual art, he enrolled in anthropology at the New School for Social Research, New York, where Lévi-Strauss had taught ~~30~~ thirty years earlier. After completing his study he visited some key-important anthropological sites:

I went to South America and lived with the Yagua Indians in the Peruvian Amazon, and Alice Springs in Australia, where I lived with Aborigines. I never had the pretence that I would enter their space but I wanted to feel what was the edge of mine.⁵⁶

‘The longing for a primitive mode of existence’, Kosuth said, ‘is no mere fantasy or sentimental whim; it is consonant with fundamental human needs’.⁵⁷ He went further, making ‘the study of primitive culture’⁵⁸ integral to his critical activity. From that point onwards, Indigenous cultural practices, along with those of anthropological methodology, were models for his conceptual art practice. He envied the political clout

of the shaman/artist in his community,⁵⁹ and compared his **own** art practice to that of an anthropologist. Acting like an anthropologist, he externalised the features of modernism, ‘making them explicit and capable of being examined’ scientifically, in contrast, he said, to the modernist ‘tribe’, which like true believers internalised them.⁶⁰

Commented [BN267]: Please confirm, or do you mean he thought the shaman was like an anthropologist? This was a bit ambiguous.

40,000 years of conceptual art

Like everywhere, the arrival of modernity in Australian Indigenous communities **had** **abrought** revolutionary **impact on change to** their art practices. The emergence of a painting movement in the 1970s at Papunya—a refugee camp of **over more than** 1000 people, one of several in which the so-called ‘last of the desert **nomads**’ were gathered—was widely seen as yet another sign of the demise of a tradition (Fig. 11.3).⁶¹ To these doomsayers, the commercialisation of ancient ceremonial practices in the form of abstract acrylic paintings on canvases announced the end of a cultural tradition—indeed, an ethnocide.⁶²

Commented [BN268]: I avoid ‘impact’ except in the literal sense. It is today’s most over-used word. Also ‘revolutionary impact’ is a mixed metaphor.

Commented [BN269]: “So-called” makes the quote marks redundant – only need one or the other. Also I added ‘supposedly’ before ‘nomadic’ in the endnote.

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.3 near here.

No wonder the admirer of Indigenous art Jean-Hubert Martin (b. 1944) was wary of this new form of Indigenous contemporary art. His celebrated *Magicians of the Earth* exhibition in Paris in 1989, which sought to demonstrate the vitality of contemporary Indigenous art around the world, did not exhibit any examples of Papunya canvases. He instead included bark paintings, which had an established pedigree **among the surrealists** as authentic primitive art **amongst the Surrealists**, and a ceremonial ground installation or earthwork from the nearby community of Yuendumu, which he paired with an earthwork by the conceptualist Richard Long. Perhaps the complex sets of forces from the Western and Indigenous worlds that were at play in the Papunya painting movement⁶³ were too much for the simplistic binary pairing of tribal and Western art that underpinned *Magicians of the Earth*. The only segments of the Western art world that seemed interested in Papunya painting, and **int** more than bark painting, were a few Australian conceptualists.

In 1971, urged by art teacher and filmmaker Geoffrey Bardon (1940–2003), about twenty Aboriginal men at Papunya began transposing ritualistic designs onto boards for sale.⁶⁴ Bardon then sold the paintings to tourist outlets. A number of conceptual artists became interested in the art. Tim Johnson, an Australian conceptual

artist, began including Aboriginal imagery in his work in the mid-1970s, and in 1980 travelled to Papunya (Fig. 11.4). Over the next several years he sat and painted with the artists, in effect becoming a participant in the movement. Impressed by this, Imants Tillers (b. 1950) (Fig. 11.5), another prominent Australian conceptualist artist, claimed in 1983 that conceptual art and Papunya painting were ‘two eminently compatible artistic movements [which] came together when Tim Johnson as a conceptualist became one of Papunya painting’s chief publicists’.⁶⁵ That same year, with the help of Johnson, Tillers curated an exhibition of paintings by Johnson and several Papunya artists that explored parallel ideas in Indigenous and Western traditions.⁶⁶

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.4 and Fig. 11.5 near here.

Tillers’ interest in correspondences between Indigenous and Western conceptualism, which appeared in an article critical of the hype around the recent return of painting in neo-expressionism, played ironically with current art-world myths. The Papunya men had reversed the trajectory of recent conceptualism, replacing their traditional conceptual-performative-installation-earth-body art practices of the 1970s with modern acrylic paintings on canvas that looked like the very art that conceptual artists had pronounced dead. This coincided with the trajectory of Johnson and Tillers’ art practices: away from installation and towards a painting format. In a deliberate structuralist spirit, Tillers set in place a conceptualist/painting dualism. Tillers’ argument for the correspondences ~~of~~ **between** conceptual art and Papunya painting was made in this vein, as part of his art practice. It was an absurd idea, but one that in his mind contained a blinding truth.

Conceptual art

‘By 1970’, wrote Gregory Battcock in 1973, ‘it was clear that a new type of art was emerging in the New York and European art worlds ... [which] was quickly labelled Conceptual or Idea Art’. While recognising the diversity of ‘Conceptualist’s aesthetic provocations’ and their close alliance with other ‘post-Modernist art (Pop, Minimal)’,⁶⁷ he singled out Kosuth’s writing as ‘perhaps the best criticism of the early (and influential) criticism in the Conceptual field’.⁶⁸ Kosuth was associated with the Art & Language collective of American, English and Australian artists that came to the fore in the late 1960s in New York. In some ways it resembled the surrealist collective, with

Commented [BN270]: Should the apostrophe come after the s – plural?

Kosuth as their pope. Astute publicists, the collective quickly gained recognition as the benchmark of ~~scribed~~ conceptual art. The art world's linguistic turn in the 1970s cemented their position as conceptualism's mainstream.

Tillers' claim for Papunya painting was part of a general tendency at the time to categorise a broad range of art practices as conceptualist. For example, in 1979 Boris Groys described contemporary Soviet 'unofficial art'—such as Collective Actions—as 'romantic conceptualism' (Fig. 11.6). Like most critics, Groys identified Art & Language as mainstream or classical conceptualism. He had ~~this groupem~~ in mind when he wrote that conceptual art originated 'in England and America' and 'meant the explicitness of a scientific experiment, clearly exposing the limits and the unique character of the cognitive faculties'. He believed that the classical conceptualism of Art & Language was 'a new form of academicism' because of its scientific and positivist tenor, which, he said, was not the case with Russian 'romantic conceptualism'.⁶⁹ Coincidentally, Russian romantic conceptualism echoes aspects of Papunya painting: namely metaphysical, mystical and lyrical content. Some romantic conceptualists, such as the Serbian artist Marina Abramovic, were attracted to the Papunya artists.⁷⁰

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.6 near here.

Collective Actions was part of a general conceptualist tendency in modernism, argued Groys, because it withdrew 'from considering art works as material objects for contemplation and aesthetic evaluation'.⁷¹ However, when Tillers commented on the 'dematerialisation' of Papunya painting and conceptual art, he had in mind a specific convergence between the 'dot-screen structure' of Papunya painting and the dematerialisation that, for example, occurs in the Art & Language artist Ian Burn's *Xerox book* (1968) or *Systematically altered photographs* (1968), in which repeated photocopying revealed the dot-screen structure of its imagery.⁷² Burn brought into question the nature of the image, perception and signification, and by implication the ontology of the original and its reproducibility—ideas that later occupied Tillers. At issue for all these conceptualists, romantic and classical, were metaphysical questions about the origin of language, meaning and the world.

The year 1959: a conversation between two French intellectuals

GEORGES CHARBONNIER: So you believe that the Surrealists were absolutely right to objectivise the object and turn it into a work of art? The chair which becomes an object by relinquishing its function as a chair is, then, a perfect realisation of the coincidence between object and work of art.

CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS: At any rate this seems possible in so far as the work of art, in signifying the object, succeeds in creating a structure of signification which is in relation to the structure of the object ... [but] the structure of the object to which I am referring is not present in immediate perception ... the feature of the 'ready-made' ... seems to me to have been that it was very rarely reducible to a single object: in order to make a 'ready-made', there must be at least two objects ... it only becomes a work of art in the new context in which it is placed.⁷³

Circa 1965: poetry inside the thinking machine

'What is it about this man [Wittgenstein], whose philosophy can be taxing and technical enough, which so fascinates the artistic imagination?' ~~asked~~ (Terry Eagleton)⁷⁴

Wittgenstein admitted his debt to 'Frege's great works'⁷⁵ but, said Terry Eagleton, 'Frege is a philosopher's philosopher', whereas Wittgenstein 'is the philosopher of poets and composers, playwrights and novelists, and snatches of his mighty *Tractatus* have even been set to music'.⁷⁶ Is then the notoriously indigestible *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* - an example of dadaism, with which it was contemporary? Eagleton saw *Tractatus*'s kin as 'Joyce, Schoenberg and Picasso', not Frege and Bertrand Russell, as if in it 'the modernist impulse' had migrated 'to occupy philosophy itself from the inside'.⁷⁷ In modernism's self-critical or deconstructive spirit, *Tractatus* (published 1921) is a series of propositions about the nature of propositions. Anyone who understands them, Wittgenstein concluded, 'recognises them as nonsensical'. To 'see the world aright', he urged his readers to 'transcend these

propositions’ and accept that ‘what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’.⁷⁸

Never hiding his debt to Wittgenstein, Kosuth is one of many artists drawn to the philosopher’s war on metaphysics. Quoting him, Kosuth declared: ‘Meaning is the use.’⁷⁹ Wittgenstein actually said, in his final, posthumously published *work*, *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘the meaning of a word is its use in the language’,⁸⁰ or as he put it in the *Tractatus*: ‘An expression has meaning only in a proposition’,⁸¹ or as he put it slightly differently in another proposition: ‘Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning.’⁸²

Kosuth and Wittgenstein each challenged the disciplinary expectations or traditional limits of his profession. ‘One should write philosophy’, wrote Wittgenstein, ‘only as one writes a *poem*’.⁸³ Kosuth compared his own works—exhibited in Vienna in 1989—as ‘not unlike Wittgenstein’s later philosophy’, in that they suggest *that* the traditional expectations of art ‘are a limited understanding of art’s language and role’.⁸⁴ ‘Wittgenstein’s task in the *Tractatus*’, said Kosuth, ‘... was a clarification of language ... what *could* be spoken ... [and] what *could not* be spoken’.⁸⁵ Here Kosuth was quoting the preface to the *Tractatus*, where Wittgenstein went on to say that ‘the aim of the book is to draw a limit ... to the expression of thoughts’. That which ‘lies on the other side of the limit’, he wrote, ‘will simply be non-sense’.⁸⁶ Art belonged to this latter realm of the unsayable, which fell ‘*outside* the limits of ... descriptive language’.⁸⁷

If the *Tractatus* mainly concerned the inside of language (as information), Wittgenstein’s later work focused on the outside of language—what he called the mystical and the poetic. Kosuth quoted Wittgenstein: ‘Do not forget a poem, although it is composed in the language of information, is not used in the language-game of giving information.’⁸⁸ Kosuth’s *One and three (chairs)* (1965–67) (Fig. -11.7)—amongst his debut conceptual art works *that* he conceived at art school when he was twenty but now an ancestral work of conceptual art—examined with considerable elegance this demarcation or limit point between inside and outside language. Adopting Wittgenstein’s signature form of propositions, it is on one level a didactic exposition of Wittgenstein’s unpacking or deconstruction of the propositional form by which language functions.

Designer, please take in Fig. 11.7 near here.

A proposition, said Wittgenstein, is ‘a thought [that] finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses’,⁸⁹ whether this expression is in the form of things, pictures, words or sounds. Wittgenstein believed that the nature of the proposition is most clearly understood when it is ‘composed of spatial objects (such as tables, chairs, books) instead of written signs’.⁹⁰

Second, ‘a proposition includes all that the projection includes, but not what is projected [the thought or idea] ... a proposition contains the form, but not the content of its sense.’⁹¹ Third, the propositional form—its symbolic or language-based structure—is a transcendental limit to the meaning immanent in thought, beyond which is the ‘mystical’. The mystical, Wittgenstein said, shows itself but cannot be expressed, and nor should it be.⁹² Thus the proposition is not, as in Plato, a degraded copy of the thought or idea of which it is a projection, but follows the Kantian maxim that our knowledge is delimited by the operations of human consciousness.

With this in mind, *One and three chairs* (1965–67) consists of a thought (the idea)—the ‘one’ unseen (unsayable) chair—and three projections of it in the propositional forms of a thing (an actual chair), an image (a photograph of a chair) and a text (a dictionary definition of chair), each juxtaposed on a wall as if a painting in three parts. While the one unseen chair could be considered a metaphysical Platonic ideal, the point is not that each element of the triptych is an imperfect projection or copy of an ideal chair, but that each is an independent analogous proposition that brings into view (or into the senses) the thought (the idea of chair). Theoretically, the three propositions or projections could be extended in an infinite series of formats, but their triangulation is enough to plot the idea of the unseen one chair.

Like the *Tractatus*, *One and three chairs* also appears or shows itself as a mysterious, unfathomable, even mystical, object, despite the metaphysical realm it has so assiduously sought to expel. Who knows how many vipers lurk there? For example, the one unseen chair shares certain qualities with Quentin Meillassoux’s (b. 1967) idea of an ‘arche-fossil’:⁹³ an ancestral chair that, like Plato’s Ideal, is autonomous and independent of human thought.

According to Meillassoux (echoing Benjamin),⁹⁴ ancestry only ever shows an aspect of its multiple manifestations at certain emergencies or sublime ruptures in ‘the

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normal [Kantian] regime of the description of knowledge', and which 'in a flash throws into a panic, their constituted classifications'.⁹⁴ If the 'one' unseen chair is the secretive (unsayable) ancestral in all its multiplicity and power, the three seen representations of chairs are its eruption in the realm of human comprehension or cognition—as thing, image and text. Such a reading brings *One and three chairs* close to the performative formats of Indigenous Western Desert song, dance, ephemeral ground and body paintings, and paintings on canvas for the art market. If each of these formats references an ancestral event that is secret and concealed—like the portrait of Lenin that is embedded in Art & Language's *Portrait of V. I. Lenin with cap, in the style of Jackson Pollock* (1979)—this situation is not, like Plato's Idea, a metaphysical transcendental ideal, but an ancestral truth revealed in the sublime eruptions of its signifying iterations.

If Kosuth ~~was-were~~ a Papunya painter

If Kosuth ~~was-were~~ a Papunya artist, the dictionary definition in *One and three chairs* would be the ancestral story (diligently transcribed by the art centre coordinator or anthropologist). Its 'singing' calls forth the ancestral 'one' chair. And the other two iterations, like all iterations, also call forth the ancestor.

In this context, Kosuth's one unseen (unsayable) chair is an ancestral truth that is concealed in the logic of projection as thing, image and text. That is, these propositions projected on the wall point back to a concealed, unseen, ancestral idea—and not to anything in the world. Language is in the business of concealing an ancestral truth, not revealing the world. 'You can't step outside it [this logic]' into the light of the outdoors or real world, said Wittgenstein, 'you must always turn back.' The reason 'there is no outside' (*Es gibt gar kein Draußen*), said Wittgenstein—in his longing for its presence—is that 'the idea is like a pair of glasses on our noses through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off.'⁹⁵ However, if the glasses are removed everything goes blurry. This was Derrida's often misconstrued aphorism: 'there is no outside-text' (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*).⁹⁶ There is only an inside-text. Due to 'the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified',⁹⁷ it has 'always already escaped'—what Derrida dubbed 'writing as the disappearance of natural presence'.⁹⁸

Wittgenstein believed that spatial objects call forth the idea in a more robust way than text or image because they provided the ‘friction’ of ‘the rough ground’ as opposed to the ‘slippery ice’ of metaphysics.⁹⁹ However, the chair is, like image or textual representations, a proposition or projection of an idea. Wittgenstein was fooling himself when he thought that ‘the spatial arrangement’ of everyday things better expressed ‘the sense of the proposition’. Rather, like Duchamp’s readymades, Kosuth’s actual chair is a sign, simultaneously signifier and signified. It transparently shows the ambivalence of language, in which, as Derrida said, it is ‘in principle impossible to separate, through interpretation or commentary, the signified from the signifier’.¹⁰⁰

Thus, as Heidegger wrote in his book on Parmenides, ‘in every case’ a sign is ‘a concealing that shows’,¹⁰¹ and a showing that conceals. Tillers, who frequently references Heidegger in his work, most felt the conceptualism of Papunya painting in its ontological concealment of ancestral truths, or what could be called the operation of the secret. Its ‘dot-screen’, he said, acts as camouflage: it simultaneously maintains the ‘invisibility’ of the ancestral secret sacred and reveals where it is.¹⁰²

This ‘realm of the concealed-unconcealed’¹⁰³ is another mytheme: it hinges on the operational dualism of concealed/unconcealed, or in Derrida and Wittgenstein’s cases, the inside/outside of language. Meaning is not passively given as if it is an illustration or a written instruction; it involves, said Kosuth, ‘a larger context’ against which it must struggle: ‘an artwork must involve a test’: ‘one kind of meaning needs to be produced through cancellation or denial or erasure of a group of meanings’.¹⁰⁴ Here, in the performativity of the language—its struggles between absence/presence, inside/outside, concealed/unconcealed—we sail close to the performativity of all art. The performing body is never far from painting.

Locality fails

The formal resonances in-between Indigenous Western Desert art and Western conceptual art are not enough to prove, as Tillers thought, that they are ‘two eminently compatible artistic movements’.¹⁰⁵ Papunya painting’s conceptualism will only be recognised within a world-historical understanding of conceptualism. This, however, is unlikely in the foreseeable future. There was, for example, no Papunya painting—or indeed any Indigenous art—included in the ground-breaking 1999 *Global*

Conceptualism exhibition in New York, despite it seeking to show that conceptualism was not just a product of New York but had multiple many points of origin around the world. In his essay in the catalogue, on Australian and New Zealand conceptual artists, Terry Smith, an art historian who lauds the contemporaneity of Papunya painting, noted, like Tillers, the coincidence of the emergence of conceptual art and the decolonizing decolonising practices of the Papunya artists circa 1970. However, he wrote, the latter ‘showed little interest in conceptual art’.¹⁰⁶ This is certainly true if ‘conceptual art’ is understood as a set of Western avant-garde ideas. However, Tillers’ point is quite different: he wanted to reveal the nature of Westernism still operating in the early 1980s.

Tillers saw Art & Language as the benchmark of conceptual art because it was, circa 1970, a centre of art-world power, a majoritarian discourse. Tillers’ primary intention was to deconstruct the centre/periphery (New York/Australia) dualism or mytheme that underpinned the Westernism of Art & Language’s prominence. In his mind, the congruence circa 1970 between acrylic paintings made at Papunya and the conceptualism of Art & Language in New York is an example of what he dubbed, in 1982, ‘Bell’s Theorem’—a reference to the physicist John Bell’s proof that quantum particles act in tandem in different locations as if they are entangled. In Tillers’ mind it was an apt scientific metaphor that in art ‘locality fails’,¹⁰⁷ but also that there is no transcendental cultural centre or signifier, be it New York or Papunya.

In 1969 Kosuth observed that conceptual art ‘existed no place’, and reiterated a point made by his New York dealer, Seth Siegelaub, that ‘an artist can live ... anywhere and still make important art’. European artists were purging themselves of their inherited traditions, said Kosuth, because ‘nationalism is out of place in art’.¹⁰⁸ A more likely reason is that the ideology of Empire and Westernism, which created the sense of a universal European mission emanating from a few Western centres, had, along with earlier European nationalisms, lost their-its footing.

With the end of Europe’s empires and the emergence of post-national globalisation, the local has become a series of ‘contact points’ or ‘interfaces’ that, says Reiko Tomii, intersect through either direct ‘connection’ or indirect ‘resonance’.¹⁰⁹ The latter include the sort of contemporaneous coincidences that Tillers, inspired by Johnson’s example, saw between conceptual art and Papunya painting. These

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coincidences run both ways: each resonates with aspects of the other, and in doing so ‘create contact points that puncture the established Eurocentric narrative’.¹¹⁰

Tomii thinks that such resonances will create ‘multiple clusters of stories’¹¹¹ rather than ‘a new master narrative’, yet arguably these new ‘narrative flows’ are already coalescing into a new myth or master narrative of transnational contemporary art. This is evident in the ways that the Papunya painting phenomenon, in interrupting existing master narratives of Australian art history, flashes up new, unexpected post-national histories.

Coda

The flashing of an Indigenous past in the contemporary speaks to a different emergency ~~than from the one~~ that ~~which~~ Benjamin fled, but its message of secret agreements between generations and traditions is similar. In 1940, as he fled the advancing Nazi army, with only morphine to calm his aching body and spirit, a painting of an angel that he had purchased in 1921 lit up Benjamin’s neurons; a thought flashed through his mind: ‘To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.’¹¹²

Commented [BN274]: Please check endnote. Is this Meillassoux quoting Tillers? Need to make this clear.

¹ Douglas Crimp, ‘The End of Painting’, *October*, no. 16, Spring 1981, p. 80.

² Walter Benjamin, ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, in [Walter Benjamin](#), *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, Fontana, Basingstoke, [SuffolkUK](#), 1982, p. 256.

³ Georges Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ~~trans.~~ John [Weightman](#) and Doreen Weightman ([transl.](#)), Jonathan Cape, London, 1969, p. 132.

⁴ Joseph Kosuth, ‘Painting Versus Art Versus Culture’, in [Joseph Kosuth](#), *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1969–1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, ~~MA~~, 1971, pp. 90–1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013.

⁷ Crimp, 'The End of Painting', p. 74.

⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, ~~trans.~~ Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (~~transl.~~), Allen Lane and Penguin Press, London, 1968, p. 211.

¹¹ Ibid., ~~Chapter: VIII~~.

¹² Ibid., p. 261.

¹³ Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity—An Incomplete Project', in ~~Hal Foster (ed.)~~, *Postmodern Culture*, ed. ~~Hal Foster~~, Pluto Press, London, 1985, pp. ??-??.

¹⁵ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, ~~trans.~~ George Bull (~~transl.~~), vol. 1, Penguin Books, London, 1987, p. 47.

¹⁶ James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth; or an Investigation of the Laws Observable on the Composition, Dissolution and Restoration of the Land Upon the Globe', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, vol. 1, T. Cadell, London, 1788, p. 304.

¹⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, ~~trans.~~ J. Sibree (~~transl.~~), G. Bell & Sons Ltd, London, 1914, p. 18.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy: Introductory Lectures to the Realm of Absolute Spirit*, Harper & Row, New York, 1970, p. 29.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 32–34.

²¹ Joseph Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', in ~~Joseph Kosuth~~, *Art after Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1969–1990*, ed. Gabriele Guercio, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, ~~MA~~, 1993, pp. 118–

19.

²² Edward Lartet, 'New Researches Respecting the Co-Existence of Man with the Great Fossil Mammals Regarded as Characteristic of the Latest Geological Period', *The Natural History Review*, vol. 2, no. 5, January 1862, pp. 58, 62, 69.

²³ [Gabriel de Mortillet](#), Quoted in Arnaud Hurel, 'Prehistoric Paintings in the Altamira Cave, Santillana (Spain)', *bibnum*, no. September 2014, <https://www.bibnum.education.fr/sites/default/files/breuil-analysis.pdf>.

²⁴ [Okwui Enwezor](#), 'The Black Box', in *Documenta 11. Platform 5 Exhibition: Catalogue, exhibition catalogue*, Hatje Cantz, Stuttgart, 2002, pp. 46–7. [Okwui Enwezor](#), 'The Black Box', in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002, pp. 46–47.

²⁵ Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997.

²⁶ [Walter Benjamin](#), 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in [Benjamin](#), *Illuminations*, pp. 227–28.

²⁷ [Benjamin](#), 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 257.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction', in [Benjamin](#), *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, Fontana, Basingstoke, Suffolk, 1982, pp. 1–17.

²⁹ [Harold Rosenberg](#), 'The Fall of Paris', in [Harold Rosenberg](#), *The Tradition of the New*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. ??–??.

³⁰ [Harold Rosenberg](#), 'The Fall of Paris', in *The Tradition of the New*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, *Ibid.*, pp. ??–??.

³¹ James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 4, October 1981, pp. 539–64.

³² Quoted in David Hecht, 'Arts Abroad; African Identity? An Art Show Turns the Tables', *New York Times*, 1 June 2000, Section E, p. 2, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/01/arts/arts-abroad-african->

identity-an-art-show-turns-the-tables.html.

³³ Roger Fry, 'The Art of the Bushmen', in [Roger Fry](#), *Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen, Oxford University Press, London, 1990, [p. 2](#).

³⁴ ~~quoted in~~ Paul Bahn, 'A Lot of Bull? Pablo Picasso and Ice Age Cave Art', *Munibe (Antropologia-Arkeologia)*, vol. 57, 2005, pp. 217–23, <http://www.aranzadi.eus/fileadmin/docs/Munibe/200503217223AA.pdf>.

³⁵ Georges Bataille, 'The Cradle of Humanity: The Vézère Valley', in [Georges Bataille](#), *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, ed. Stuart Kendall, Zone Books, New York, 2009, p. 159.

³⁶ [A-Z of Prehistoric Art, Encyclopedia of Art Education](#). <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/site/prehistoric.htm>.

³⁷ Max Raphael, *Prehistoric Cave Paintings*, Norbert Guterman (transl.), Pantheon Books, Washington, DC, 1945.

³⁸ Jean Clottes, *What Is Paleolithic Art?: Cave Paintings and the Dawn of Creativity*, trans. Oliver Y. Martin and Robert D. Martin ([transl.](#)), University of Chicago Press, [Chicago](#), 2016, p. 149.

³⁹ Bataille, 'The Cradle of Humanity', pp. 171–73.

⁴⁰ Clottes, *What Is Paleolithic Art?*, p. 149.

⁴¹ Georges Bataille, 'Unlivable Earth?', in [Bataille](#), *The Cradle of Humanity, -Prehistoric Art and Culture*, [Stuart Kendall](#) (ed.), [Zone Books](#), [New York](#), 2009, pp. 175–80, [quotation at p. pp-176-77](#).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Bataille, 'Primitive Art', pp. 38, 40.

⁴⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, Peter Connor (transl.), City Light Books, San Francisco, 1989, p. 23.

⁴⁵ Georges Bataille, 'Lecture, January 18, 1955', in [Bataille](#), *The Tears of Eros*, [trans. -Peter Connor](#), [City](#)

Light Books, San Francisco, 1989, p. 87.

⁴⁶ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, ~~trans.~~ Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (transl.), University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1972, p. 299.

⁴⁷ [André Breton, Preface to Karel Kupka, *Dawn of Art: Painting and Sculpture of Australian Aborigines*](#), Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965, pp. 7–11.

⁴⁸ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, ~~trans.~~ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (transl.), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1994, p. 158.

⁵¹ Georges Bataille, ‘The Solar Anus’, in [Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*](#), ed. Allan Stoekl, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 5.

⁵² Roberto Giunti, ‘R. R. S. E. Sel. A. Vy’, *tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, vol. 2, no. 4, January 2002, pp. 7–9, http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/articles/giunti/giunti7.html.

⁵³ [Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*](#), ~~trans.~~ Ron Padgett (transl.), Thames & Hudson, London, 1971, p. 107.

⁵⁴ [Claude Lévi-Strauss](#), quoted in Patrick Wilken, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Poet in the Laboratory*, Bloomsbury, London, 2010, p. 69.

⁵⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, ~~trans.~~ John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (transl.), Atheneum, New York, 1974, p. 25. See also Adam Kuper, ‘Claude Levi-Strauss: Intellectual Considered the Father of Modern Anthropology Whose Work Inspired Structuralism’, *Independent*, 4 November 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/claude-levi-strauss-intellectual-considered-the-father-of-modern-anthropology-whose-work-inspired-1814156.html> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/claude-levi-strauss-intellectual-considered-the-father-of-modern-anthropology-whose-work-inspired-1814156.html>.

⁵⁶ Joseph Kosuth, quoted in: Payal Uttam, 'The Writing on the Wall', *Prestige*. Please give full citation and update URL. This URL did not take me to the specific article, only the home page. 5

<http://prestigehongkong.com/2012/11/writing-wall>.

⁵⁷ Kosuth, 'The Artist as Anthropologist', p. 115.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 118–19.

⁶¹ This transformation from supposedly nomadic to settled life, its 'first contact' contexts, and the invention of a modern Western Desert art movement has have been extensively discussed. See Geoffrey Bardon, *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1979; Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya: A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement*, The Miegunyah Press, Carlton Melbourne, 2004; Vivien Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2010; Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink (eds), *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*, ed. Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales in association with Papunya Tula Artists, Sydney, 2000; Fred R. Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of an Aboriginal High Art*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2002; Scott Crane, *Pila Nguru: The Spinifex People*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2002; Jacqueline Healy (ed.), *Warlayirti: The Art of Balgo*, ed. Jacqueline Healy, exhibition catalogue, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, 2014.

⁶² This trope of the last art is so widespread in the literature on Western Desert painting that it has become a cliché. For a more theoretically argued case, see Anne-Marie Willis and Tony Fry, 'Art as Ethnocide: The Case of Australia', *Third Text*, vol. 2, no. 5, 1988, pp. 3–20.

⁶³ Johnson, *Once Upon a Time in Papunya*.

⁶⁴ For the best account of this process from a conceptualist perspective, see Paul Carter, 'The Enigma of a Homeland Place: Mobilising the Papunya Tula Painting Movement 1971–1972', in *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius*, eds Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney,

2000pp. ??-??.

⁶⁵ Imants Tillers, 'Fear of Texture', *Art & Text*, no. 10, Winter 1983, pp. 16–17.

⁶⁶ *Waiting for Technology* (1983), at the Yuill/Crowley Gallery in Sydney, 1983.

⁶⁷ Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Idea Art*, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., New York, 1973, pp. 1–9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Boris Groys, 'Moscow Romantic Conceptualism', *Art—JAZZ Contemporary Russian Art*, no. 1, 1979, pp. ??-??.

⁷⁰ Charles Green, 'Group Soul: Who Owns the Artist Fusion?', *Third Text*, no. 71, November 2004, pp. 595–608.

⁷¹ Groys, 'Moscow Romantic Conceptualism', p. 3.

⁷² Tillers, 'Fear of Texture', pp. 15–16.

⁷³ Charbonnier, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, pp. 89–91.

⁷⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Introduction to Wittgenstein', in *Wittgenstein: The Terry Eagleton Script; The Derek Jarman Film*, British Film Institute, London, 1993, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (transl.), Keagan Paul, London, 1974, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Eagleton, 'Introduction to Wittgenstein', p. 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.54, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Kosuth, 'Art After Philosophy', p. 15.

⁸⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (transl.), Blackwell,

Oxford, 1963, Fragment_43.

⁸¹ [Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Proposition_3.314.](#)

⁸² *Ibid.*, Proposition_3.3.

⁸³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value: A Selection From the Posthumous Remains*, ~~trans.~~ Peter Winch and Alois Pichler ([transl.](#)), revised ~~edition~~[edn](#), Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 28e.

⁸⁴ [Joseph Kosuth](#), 'The Play of the Unsayable: A Preface and Ten Remarks on Art and Wittgenstein', [in *Das Spiel des Unsagbaren: Ludwig Wittgenstein und die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, exhibition catalogue, Wiener Secession, Vienna, 1989, p. 249.](#) [Please confirm citation details.](#)

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁸⁶ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Kosuth, 'The Play of the Unsayable: ~~A Preface and Ten Remarks on Art and Wittgenstein~~', p. 245.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ~~trans.~~ G. E. M. Anscombe ([transl.](#)), ~~second-2nd edn~~, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1981, Fragment_160, p. 27.

⁸⁹ [Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Proposition_3.1.](#)

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Proposition_3.1431.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, Proposition_3.13.

⁹² ~~[Ibid.](#), Proposition 6.522.~~ [Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Proposition 6.522.](#)

⁹³ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, ~~trans.~~ Ray Brassier ([transl.](#)), Continuum, London, 2008, p. 10.

⁹⁴ [Quentin Meillassoux](#), 'History and Event in Alain Badiou', [Thomas Nail \(transl.\)](#), *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, no. 129, 2011.

http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia12/parrhesia12_meillassoux.pdf<http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia1>

[2/parrhesia12_meillassoux.pdf](#).

⁹⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Fragment 103.

⁹⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

⁹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Fragment 107.

¹⁰⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 159. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Derrida, see Terry Eagleton, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', *New Left Review*, no. 135, September–October 1982, pp. 77–97.

¹⁰¹ Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojewicz (transl.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1998, p. 32.

¹⁰² Tillers, 'Fear of Texture', pp. 15–16.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ [Stuart Morgan], 'Art as Idea as Idea: An interview with Joseph Kosuth', *Frieze*, no. 16, 6 May 1994, <https://frieze.com/article/art-idea-idea> http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/art_as_idea_as_idea/.

¹⁰⁵ Tillers, 'Fear of Texture', pp. 16–17.

¹⁰⁶ Terry Smith, 'Peripheries in Motion: Conceptualism and Conceptual Art in Australia and New Zealand', in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, exhibition catalogue, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ Imants Tillers, 'Locality Fails', *Art & Text*, no. 6, Winter 1982, pp. 77–97.

¹⁰⁸ Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', pp. 29–30.

¹⁰⁹ Tillers, 'Fear of Texture', pp. 16–17.

¹¹⁰ Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 7: *An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*.

¹¹¹ Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, MA, 2016, pp. 22–3. ²⁹⁷

¹¹² Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p. 256.