

**TO RISK :**

**CAUTION!**

**HAZKULT ... WASTE!**

“ ‘Garbage ladies! Stick out yer can!  
Here comes the garb.g.jjj.mmnn...’  
‘Man, git away from my door!  
I ain’t got no garbage!’ ”<sup>1</sup>

‘Since  
in an outraged moral system the lying report,  
subject to efficient causes, is bound fast  
to a truth mostly formal, the efforts  
at mendacious grab exceeded all limits. Good  
taste was shunted into the slogan vestry and  
reconstructed as billboard nostalgia: the purest  
central dogma in the history of trash.’

J.H. Prynne, from “News of Warring Clans”<sup>2</sup>

‘... we must work out everything for ourselves, exposed as we are on a kind  
of refuse heap, with no centre and no meaning;’<sup>3</sup>

### **Condemned to Wasting**

If it is intrinsic to performing that it cannot know whether its activities in making-for-art and their resulting gests will become art, then all this activity, irrespective of the performer’s experience, reputation and ‘promises’ received, constitutes itself (and thus its gests) as a wasting-away. Performing begins and ends in advance of precisely that valuing that destines a gest for affiliation with art, with a machine-generated and maintained ‘tradition’. The passionate commitment and hope that mark performing, in its efforts to generate something that will warrant selection as a member to this socially ratified gathering-in, take this as their only chance, their hazard. Irrespective of their previous ‘experience’, or assurances they may have been given by those within the art-sustaining machinery concerning each new project, nothing can assure the performing process and its emergent gest of a life-to-come in and as art. And much that may be taken as ‘art’ by the machinery may, all too soon, fall away from public warrant and recognition as, simply and after all, just art, art-as-such. For, as we have seen, under the conditions of extreme representation, any ‘-as-such’, and especially ‘art-as-such’, remain radically elusive, up-ahead, elsewhere. In addition, we know that, in spite of the apparent ubiquity and routine availability of ‘art’ now, that the proportion of all those activities and gests that took art as their sole concern and which end up within the art-machinery is minuscule. From the perspective of both this machine and its broad cultural diffusion, the vast majority of this activity is a waste of time and materials; at best it is seen, however strong the commitment and vision of the practitioners, as fulfilling only a personal

<sup>1</sup> This is the introductory ‘call’ from ‘Call of the Freaks’ (composed by Paul Barbarin) recorded by The Rhythm Kings on Bluebird in 1931, and, in several versions, by Luis Russell and his orchestra.

<sup>2</sup> J.H. Prynne, ‘Poems’, Bloodaxe, Tarsset, 2005, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> G. Richter, op. cit., p. 128.

need and being thus no more than a personal indulgence. And, while the exercise of such personal commitments may be taken as an index of the culture's liberality, what it is prepared to indulge, nevertheless most making-toward-art, lacking *in the course of its making* anything of value to the culture, is, at the end of the making day, like Kafka's hunger artist, refuse, something to be swept away and forgotten.

Thus, performing-for-art (and consequently all response to it) is, from its very beginning, confronted by and required to find a way of living with this lack – that it is the 'without', the outside, of value. In terms of cultural value (that infinitely strange amalgam of aesthetic and commodity value), all the time and materials given over to this performing remain at best potential value and at worst valueless. All performing begins from and in this hazard. But it also begins in the know-how that in its attempt to make, through its gest, a path toward nothing-but-art, it is exempting itself precisely from the culture's sense of value embedded in the aesthetic commodity. The very 'thing' that drives performers to perform is what they value in and as its relation to other art-things, for it is this relation that generates the performer's 'vision' of making-for-art as a way of surviving life. And this has nothing to do with the commodity value (and thus the market 'status') of any gest. In constituting its hoped-for relation to art as the pure potential of an absolutely unanticipatable outcome – its love for but lack of art – it enacts an elsewhere-value. It has no option but to perform aside from the market conditions and commodity form through which the culture attaches specific values (and thus identities) to whatever is 'produced' for 'consumption'. And for the culture nothing is easier now than the representation of everything as a commodity. For it, art becomes just another form of cultural production.

In approaching performing-toward-art and its gests, then, we need to be very wary, for, whether as performers consumed by a felt affinity with art's gests or as respondents-to-be, our relation to something that might just be, might belong with, art confronts us before anything else with the question of value. The performing processes and gests themselves require this of us first of all. They force us (this is perhaps the limit of their otherwise powerlessness) to choose between them and something, anything, else. Choosing to go with them, to spend time with, on, through, them, however briefly, is already to have valued them a little, to have deferred their fate as refuse. Yet we know, for example, that making for visual art under modernity began its 'public', its 'cultural' life, when it gathered itself around the rule of refusal, precisely as refuse (the *Salon des Refusés*...). And its threat was perceived as toxic, as hazardous both for the body of past art, and for present culture and the latter's always emergent and formalised senses of its own boundaries, boundaries that were, still are, strictly patrolled. For making-toward-art itself entailed, performed, its own refusal; it said 'yes' to art as an open possibility, but 'no' to the authority and conventions under which art was required to perform. In searching for itself, performing had and still has to operate under, to construct as it goes along, its own aegis, risking both its own potential toxicity and its possible fate as refuse-to-come. From the outset performing has to admit to, to accept and live with the consequences of, the likelihood that it is wasting its time, that the conviction that its art-dedicated activities and gests are indeed art may extend no further than the edge of its own vision.

Performing knows in advance (this is fundamental to its know-how) that it is always verging on, hazarding itself as, waste. It knows only too well that the institutions' entire project, their own very life, depends upon the fanatical attention they pay to their attributions of value and their sustenance of their own value judgments. But, because performing and its gests are gratuitous, because they come from nothing (that is, from nothing known or knowable in

advance of the performing) and risk returning to nothing, they emerge in and offer all potential respondents an absolutely fuzzy region. It is a non-place where nothing has been decided. No matter that institutions have to make their own value-judgments count and stick, making-toward-art has to hold to the necessity of its own refusing activity as a founding constituent. It takes off knowing that it is taking on as its very significance – its value to its maker-performer – its own demise. Just as in Kafka's extraordinary evocation of disappearance in his 'Josephine' story, performing now is inevitably suffused by, haunts itself with, the spectre of its own disappearance. And this is backed by its recognition that, as far as the enfolding economy is concerned, it is most probably wasting its time.

In its very gratuitousness it has to find ways of living with the possibility that it is wasting words, paint, sounds, film, paper, cloth, stone, wood, metal, energies, time – whatever matters that matter to it – in its emergence and movement towards its parting *gest* – its offer. For the offer, beginning outside the economy and trying desperately to define its own idiom, is a response to no definable need, no consumer demand. It is the outcome of nothing but the performer's submission to the always inexplicable conjunction of an insatiable affection for what counts as art and an obsessive-compulsive desire to join the latter. But, sadly for it (a sadness coursing through and inflecting its know-how and exemplifying, perhaps the melancholy with which we have been familiar since Durer's figuration of the complex), it only gets to join the latter, the socially recognised and validated 'tradition', through decisions (value-conversions) over which it has no control. The time (and place, places...) of its passing that it gave over to delivering the offer has to be converted into and measured by money, by what counts. It can live on only by being pulled, like all else, into the economy and the disastrous drifting of capital flows driven all over the place by technoscientific representation. Auden, citing Van Gogh's last letter to Theo<sup>4</sup>, offers 'calm even in the catastrophe' as art's necessary condition and aspiration. But, if this is still art's last hope (as well as its first), can performing and its *gests* remain calm even in the face of catastrophe now?

Only, perhaps, by pretending to excise a sub- or micro-economy of its own within this all-suffusing capitalised seizure. And such a defended reserve, art's mini-stockade, its bunker, pitched somewhere near, but just outside, the city's (the city-as-factory) threshold, can only be sustainable by remaining within the terms of the surrounding general economy, by accepting exchange, trading, through the gaps deliberately left in the palisade it has constructed for its own protection. Anne Carson seems to hope for such a reservation in her proposal for an 'economy of the unlost'.<sup>5</sup> In exploring the poet's founding dilemma - whether to write knowing that words and thus her 'own' time will be wasted (in an economy where time is firstly money) - she locates *poiesis* as the making of 'works' under and within 'production'. But can we gather making-for-art under and as the 'production' of 'works'? Or do these terms, taken-for-granted as precise representations of the processes through which all economies are sustained, miss completely the 'otherwise' that entirely absorbs and drives performers in their off-and-away trajectory? Perhaps performing, whatever its medium/media, does not make 'works' and is not part of some 'production' process or line. Perhaps the *gests* it leaves behind, on offer, and what remains of its performances, are remnants of something other than productive work. Perhaps everything 'in' them is there to show what might be involved in risking oneself to waste on behalf of the outside chance that they might hold good. Indeed this is what Carson herself, spanning the 'life' of *poiesis* in her

<sup>4</sup> W.H. Auden, 'Calm Even in the Catastrophe', in 'Poets on Painters', ed., J.D. McClatchy, University of California Press, London, 1990. See especially p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Carson, 'Economy of the Unlost', Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2002.

alternation between the very early (Simonides) and the very late (Celan), seems to acknowledge in her proposal of performing's telos:

‘Every time a poet writes a poem he [sic] is asking the question, Do words hold good? And the answer *has to be yes*: it is the contrafactual condition upon which a poet's life depends.’<sup>6</sup>

Through the wasting, something might just be saved, something which holds good, a good whose very contrafactual condition guarantees its being aside from productive work. For the condition of the latter, its guarantee, is precisely its factuality fixed firmly in its exchange value.

### **Decreation as Not-Work**

In gathering a later collection of diverse writings (poems, scripts, essays...) under the title ‘Decreation’<sup>7</sup> Carson moves art-making yet further away from measurably productive work. Taking the word from Simone Weil's notebooks she uses it to intertwine the writings of Weil, Marguerite Porete and Sappho, three women who ‘had the nerve to enter a zone of absolute spiritual daring’, where each underwent ‘an experience of decreation’<sup>8</sup> in order to move out of the creaturely zone of humanity towards the inhuman zone of God. The experience entailed an ‘undoing of the creature in us – that creature enclosed in self and defined by self.’ To undo self ‘one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition.’<sup>9</sup> Each then paradoxically constructed a telling of this experience of the absolute loss of language, its falling away, in the very thing supposedly just lost (language), and performed in the telling from the ‘big, loud, shiny centre of self from which the writing is given voice...’<sup>10</sup> This, surely for Carson, bears more than an echo of the undoing, the suspension, of the self that has been a defining feature of the contemporary arts’ informing drive to perform.

If performing toward art entails a questioning and setting aside of dimensions of the self's mundane becoming (its being in hock to conventions of living) then this interruption – a wasting of the self's ordinary supports – is what allows for the gest's emergence. Indeed this is pointed to directly in Carson's quotation of Weil's claim that ‘we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves’<sup>11</sup>, for this entails the interruption of the creaturely continuity required by our immersion in the taken-for-granted flow of the everyday. A break, a caesura, a time-splitting, is opened up within which a different voicing might just break out, even though it will be told, made up, and offered, in, supposedly, the very same ‘language’, whatever its medium, that was placed in suspension: the same, yet inflected ever so slightly differently through the unique idiolect that, hopefully for the performer, takes it somewhere else entirely - into art's realm beyond. This caesura is also emphasised by Agamben in noting Weil's proposal that wings ‘raised to the second power’ allow things to fall weightlessly. He considers Twombly's sculpture ‘Untitled’ (1967) of a broken flower fixed, suspended, at the ‘moment’ of its fall. This sculpture incorporates a quotation from Rilke's Tenth Duino Elegy that remarks the emotion experienced when happiness's ascent is reversed into a fall. For Agamben this sculpture exposes the very ‘point of de-creation, when the artist in his supreme way no longer creates but de-creates...’. It figures the messianic moment, both in and out of

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<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Carson, ‘Decreation’, Jonathan Cape, London, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> op. cit., p179.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

time when art ‘stands still’.<sup>12</sup> He returns to this and generalises his sense of de-creation in his comments on Debord’s film when he proposes that ‘at the heart of every creative act there is an act of de-creation’. This figures a ‘resistance’ that entails ‘de-creating what exists, de-creating the real, being stronger than the fact in front of you.’<sup>13</sup>

But decreation, if it entails an undoing of our current creatureliness, also seems to point towards performing as a differently specific kind of return. Surely the caesura opens it into that plunge through culture and back out towards our pleistocenian emergence – our splitting off and away from the creature-as-such. It echoes Olson’s urge to those who make-for-art to ‘go out the back door of you inheritance’, to reach out, perhaps, to an ‘innocence’ and what he calls ‘animateness’, where ‘the animate’ is the ‘aboriginal instance of activity’.<sup>14</sup> Certainly the prefix ‘de’ attached to ‘creation’ offers perhaps unrecognised self-scattering implications for whatever word it prefixes. Taking the ablative case in Latin, ‘de’ means movement or departure, spatial and/or temporal, away from something. Whilst it seems to suggest in Weill’s use a kind of going back through, a return journey, ‘de’ is sufficiently open to allow for any sense of leaving-separating, including leaving behind that which it is attached to! Picking up Weill’s use of decreation, Wallace Stevens enlarges its scope dramatically: ‘Modern reality is a reality of decreation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our powers’.<sup>15</sup> Thus his sense of poetry and art is that they reveal truths of these ‘powers’: poetry is a paradoxical decreative-creating that draws on the decreation that surrounds and presumably permeates it. To show art’s difference it would have to decreate, depart from, this permeating charge. If, as I suggest across these texts, art’s ways of opening onto these human powers themselves epitomise the weakness (abjection) of art’s gests, then we are left with reconciling Stevens’ sense of art’s relation to the external powers under whose rule it has to try to survive. Weill’s narrower usage would imply just such an undoing if it entails a return through creatureliness...

Perhaps the emergent and generalisable value of the caesura and thus decreation for Agamben can be traced back further. It is in something like this split-time voiding, Holderlin’s ‘anti-rhythmic interruption’, that he locates the art-maker’s quasi-messianic moment when the movement of creation is almost thrown into reverse. But his opening onto decreation occurs in the context of his philosophical pursuit of the relation between contingency and potentiality.<sup>16</sup> And in this pursuit he is drawn through a formula earlier characterised by Deleuze as ‘ravaging, devastating,’ which ‘leaves nothing standing in its wake’.<sup>17</sup> It is that of ‘Bartleby’, Melville’s ‘scrivener’, whose decline of his attorney-employer’s requests that he copy and correct, *in short that he write*, is prefaced by, ‘I would prefer not to’. Where Deleuze had considered the implications of this strange refusal in terms of its agrammaticality, as the performance of a formula at the limit of language, Agamben is

<sup>12</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, ‘Falling Beauty’, in ‘Cy Twombly: Sculpture 1992 -2005’, Munchen Alte Pinakothek, in cooperation with Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, 2006, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben (2008), op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> See Charles Olson, ‘Collected Prose’, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander, University of California, Berkeley, 1997, p. 339, p. 281, and p.p. 368-9.

<sup>15</sup> See Wallace Stevens, ‘The Necessary Angel’, Vintage, New York, 1951, pp.174-175. In his response to Stevens’ later poetry Thomas Hines uses the term ‘decreation’ frequently to characterise many differing features of these poems; Thomas Hines, ‘The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens’, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 1976. See also, Roy Harvey Pearce, ‘Toward Decreation: Stevens and the ‘Theory of Poetry’’, in, ‘Wallace Stevens – A Celebration’, eds. Doggett and Buttell, Princeton University, Princeton, 1980, pp.286-307.

<sup>16</sup> Giorgio Agamben, ‘Potentialities’, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1999, pp. 243-271.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, ‘Essays Critical and Clinical’, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997, p. 70.

concerned with the way that the conditionality of the ‘would ... not’, as negative preference falling short of finality, bears on potentiality. And in those processes we conventionally characterise as ‘creation’ (precisely the ‘gap’ of interest here, in which something - the gest-for-art - seems to emerge from nothing), everything turns on and in the passage from potentiality to actuality. Agamben thus offers Bartleby as a limit-figure:

‘The scribe who does not write (of whom Bartleby is the last, exhausted figure) is perfect potentiality, which a Nothing alone now separates from the act of creation.’<sup>18</sup>

And this pure potentiality appears to be in advance of, on the very verge of, just before, an act of will that would intervene and resolve everything. Yet the supremacy of such a will(ing) is precisely what Bartleby calls into question. For ‘preferring not to’ displays a capability that, being aside from any wanting, strangely exceeds will. For Bartleby,

‘succeeds in being able (and not being able) absolutely without wanting it.’<sup>19</sup>

His repeated formula lays waste the possibility of relating capability (pure potential) to a willed outcome. The success of the potentiality seems to lie in being able to say no and yes simultaneously. By not quite saying yes or no his ‘would prefer not to’ performs both at once. We are reminded of Celan’s exhortation (to himself? to other poets/artists? to all of us...?) to keep no and yes unsplit. And Deleuze writes of the ‘zone of indetermination that renders words indistinguishable, that creates a vacuum within language.’<sup>20</sup> The formula thus effects a suspension between acceptance and refusal, a suspension that displays, as the condition of its very in-betweenness, not Nothing but rather what Agamben calls the ‘luminous spiral of the possible’.<sup>21</sup> It is the setting aside, perhaps the exceeding, of reason; the negative preference enacted by ‘preferring not to’ simultaneously removes sufficient reason and ruins willing. Potentiality, as the what-is-no-more-than-it-is-not, is disconnected from, cannot be accounted for by, the giving of a reason dependent upon a will.

Surely this brings us right up to (up against...?) and confronts us with the utter unreasonableness of the performance, so often glossed by the word ‘creative’, which makes-for-art? For every would-be gest-for-art offers us, at some point(s), that which cannot be accounted for with the ‘reasons’ enfolding and justifying acts of willing. Yet in the realm of reasoning, never more powerful than now under techno-representation, art’s gests seem to show nothing more than their instrumental impotence; they are unable to resist their appropriation by the converting methods and discourses whose routine activities sustain the institutions responsible for the arts’ representation. In and as its very materialisation, art’s performance process, though coming from within and aiming for its own elsewhere, leaves its peculiar potentiality absolutely vulnerable. Making themselves available through materialised or materialising gests, art’s performances challenge us with the question of whether in their emergence (the leap across the void from potentiality to actuality) they lose their potential. Turning themselves out as actualities they appear to instrumental reason to be immediately amenable to its analytical accounting procedures. They are dragged into ‘meaning’ through the attribution of reasons. Once identified and accounted for, and thus prepared for placement, they can be drawn into the sites of exchange where the work and contest of valuing takes place according to the interests and terms of analytical, critical, and

<sup>18</sup> Agamben, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>19</sup> op. cit., p. 255.

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, op. cit., p. 73. This ‘zone of indetermination’ echoes that equivalence of all interpretation noted earlier as offered by Jarry as the condition and challenge of art’s relation to language.

<sup>21</sup> Agamben, op. cit., p. 257.

market reason. It is in the relations constituting such sites that ‘aesthetics’, its reasoning and its judgments, are routinely assembled and maintained quite independently of the terms on which performers plunge into and commit themselves to making-for-art.

But what if the plane of this making-for cohered around, kept itself together loosely, chaotically, through performers’ overwhelming desire to offer their things as performances of nothing other than potentiality? What if their very ‘point’ were the keeping of yes and no unsplit in spite of, and therefore paradoxically because of, the distinctive character of their actuality? What if art’s case, the case every making-toward-art tries to make and leave a remnant of in and as its gests, is the performing and displaying of *something that is always before*, in advance of and aside from, every actuality – an openness to a future-becoming enfolded in its always unrealised and as yet unrealisable potential, its capability?

Perhaps the only way this can be done is through things, things offered as gests. Perhaps performers have to feel their way out through a necessary detour in which they come up against things that will not leave them alone, touching things which, passing through them, leave their marks and in turn receive the performer’s passing marks: blessed by things and blessing them in return. Perhaps this is the only way performers can take themselves and, possibly, us, towards that withholding of something which cannot yet be made. Perhaps we might imagine each performance trying to make for art as an extended repetition (but each time anew under context-specific conditions) of Bartleby’s ‘I would prefer not to...’: “I would prefer not to have to perform my ‘preferring not to’, my commitment to potential, to a possible world, to a world yet to come, through things, but how else can I show my love and hope for that possibility?”

But, aside from art, potential is only of worth, of use, to everyday reasoning if it can be converted into a positive, if the potential can be switched into an actual by an act of willing. In the case of would-be-art-gests, reasoning’s good luck is that the potential’s mode of becoming is vested in diverse materials that propose its readiness, its availability, for others. Performing, in trying to make for the revelation of its own potential, in the very ways that it gathers and juxtaposes its materials, simultaneously prepares them, makes them ready, for conversion. It gets them to the point where they can be grasped by and turned towards other interests than that vested in the yes-and-no of their not-yet. Once it has made its paradoxical detour through materials, potentiality inevitably lays itself open to a second order transformation – it offers itself as a seemingly willing candidate for transformation into a thing of use. Whatever coherence its appearance offers gives the illusion of a thing already willed by reason. Yet right up to this turning, and perhaps for the performer well beyond it too, because it has been generated only as the fixing and surfacing of a potentiality, it tries to persist as that which is outside the economy, as a refusal of any value other than that of this refusal-as-refuse. But, once coopted by exchange value, the remnants of its refusal are placed in absolute jeopardy. Already in practical terms on its way, planing away through the weakness of impotence, its survival as materialised potential must remain in permanent doubt.

Agamben proposes that the concept of an experiment without truth (offered by Lussi in relation to the writings of Robert Walser) ‘should be transformed into a paradigm for literary writing.’<sup>22</sup> If making-for-art entails calling ‘Being’ (that and how we ‘become’) into question, it does so outside any relation to truth, for ‘...these experiments are without truth, ... truth is

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<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p. 260.

what is at issue in them.’<sup>23</sup> In terms of the sense of potential offered above, then, art is the site where experiments with possibilities are explored through materials *but in advance of anything that is or was the case*. It is where the potential to be and not to be is explored, interwoven, in ways which draw them through materials and leave their traces coexisting materially. In such performing-as-experiment the past is thus no longer ‘what happened’, it is also what could have been but what was not (just as ‘the present’ is not only ‘what is happening’ but also the other possibilities that this very happening is delightfully-disastrously-calmly-violently ruining). And Bartleby’s experiment with capacity, that which is simultaneously true and not true, seems to locate itself on the same point of indifference. It is the point of decreation where the creature (this recalling, perhaps, Weil’s creaturely invocation...) ‘reaches the indemonstrable centre of its “occurrence-or-nonoccurrence”’.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, if we do take up Agamben’s offer of a paradigm for performing as an experiment that has retreated from all relation to truth, then decreation’s point of indifference marks the gapless gap towards which performing tries to make in its performance. Yet, in trying to subsist in and to explore itself as potentiality (the many-ness of its multiple possibilities) but always through actualities - its materials - performing enacts, and thus seeks to manifest, the disastrous terms of its endemic crisis. *For it risks everything on trust*: it has to trust that it can draw others through its materials to the good that it so desperately wants its materials (every thing that it puts into the gest) to ‘hold’. And this of course is a good that bears no relation to either truth as we know and use it, or the values through which the culture reproduces itself. In the latter’s terms its good is unreadable until converted into the culture’s exchange medium. Unless it is converted into the currency of reasons and knowledge, to which an exchange value can be attached, it remains as waste, a remnant signalling only wasted time and energies.

In the course of making-for-art then there can be no line demarcating the waste (time, energies, materials) from the good (the actualising of potential as still just potential). The performer forms the mobile and jiggling zone where such a line is the indefinable issue; it is what is at issue - the very goad and question driving the performing on. In trying to make only towards art, in a hope absolutely bound to uncertainty of outcome, through an attention (endlessly shuttling between delirious abandon, precise focus, drifting reverie, blank detachment, and sleep) committed to things unnoticed or quite beside the point of the interests of everyday life, performers know only too well that their forming zone is intimately tied to trash.

Performing’s fate is thus always in the balance. What the culture isn’t pleased by, doesn’t know what do with, can’t recognise, can’t stomach, refuses, is always already remaindered. Performing lives on only in and through this rejection. Rejection is its condition. And, perversely perhaps, it is this very refusal that sustains it. Most of what is made in art’s name, aspirant performing’s outcomes, is unsniffed, unseen, unheard, untouched, unsung, undanced. For most of this stuff is excess to the culture’s requirements – rubbish – the upshot of wasted effort that cannot be turned into a product, an exchangeable good or service. Unless it can be re-formed and turned out into the info-entertainment emporium, there to be given the treatment of an extended face-and-body-lift and lined up for potential consumption, it lies prostrate, left over, remaindered beyond the appropriating panning and focus of the information machine. When Werner Herzog, apropos his making of ‘Fitzcarraldo’ (itself a

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 271.

messageless allegory of the struggle to sustain art...dragging a boat over a mountain...establishing an opera-house in the jungle...) says that, 'I am a Conquistador of the Useless',<sup>25</sup> he is pointing precisely to performing's possible achievement and its plight. For the destiny of the gest that is the outcome of the struggle to overcome is decided by the needs of a machine over which the performer has no (or absolutely minimal) influence – and never more so than in the global digitised video-cinema industry. Knowing that the vast majority of what is made for art will either be cultural detritus or entertainment fodder situates performers and their activities in an irredeemably ambiguous relation to everything gathered up in the fixed conjunction of production and consumption.

But if and when performing is picked out, hybridised and sent on its way under representation's management, it then becomes part of a very different cycle of waste generation. For it is processed as a stream, an unending flow of passing moments, to be poured into the multimedia's insatiable maw. In trying to satisfy its own energy needs the latter converts everything it gathers up into the same mush for near-instant regurgitation as briefly scintillating shards of meaning-interpretation that can be pulped at a moment's notice. Its shelf-life, the possibility of living-on, of repeat appearances and performances, is dependent upon how and where the representing machine can endow it with an attractive identity, a glittering surface that can be given appeal, attract attention, within the flow of consumables. After their brief moment of scintillation, in which they contribute to the maintenance of the intertwined flow of entertainment and knowledge-as-information, the contents are scattered and deposited across multiple waste sites where they go through various stages of de- and re-composition, recycling, preservation by injection of cultural fluids, decay and disappearance. Yet the seemingly simple fact of a thing's continued preservation as an 'art-thing', its construction as a valuable memorial, cannot be taken as a guarantee of some intrinsic possession or performance of art's difference. This is a judgment that has to be endlessly put to the test and renewed or rejected according to the irrecusable demands of each 'present' judging and responding context. And such demands are, 'naturally', confidently and carefully managed, and, crucially, brilliantly theorised in and by the representing machinery. The job of theorising-analysing, as representation's crucial sustaining agent, is to flow all around performing's gests. It is to permeate them at the same time as it keeps them afloat, on the move, circulating within representation's on-rushing collections.

### **Performing's Extreme Challenge**

It may thus be that the challenge confronting performing, and which is endemic to the problem of living-on, surviving, within representation, is whether it can make itself superfluous, whether it can flow away beyond the seemingly all-enveloping cultural flood. Can it find (or make) little chinks, holes, tears in the surfaces of whatever it is that seems to hold the flow together and guide it onward – representation's limiting conditions? For, undoubtedly, performing seeks the open oceanic-beyond, where the means of representation (its languages, technical apparatus and systems) may be dissolvable, turned, perhaps, through and out of themselves, or, at the least, set aside. And, precisely because the very point of representation's machinery is to drive endlessly to its own extremes, to experiment with, test and produce evermore 'efficient', broader and spectacular means for representing everything, making-for-art's response is driven to and challenged to explore its own extremities. It is condemned to begin in and with the terms of the extremity in which it finds itself. And because this extremity is the unhinged vagueness of the marginal, the fuzziness that is just

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<sup>25</sup> 'Herzog on Herzog', ed. by Paul Cronin, Faber, London, 2002, p. 179.

beyond our edges, it has to take on, find ways of living with, the errancy that this vagueness calls forth. Tipped into the margins, it finds and has to make do with only its own lostness. Guideless, it has to make its own tracks aside from any knowledge of a possible destination.

Thus thrown, it discovers (and this becomes the site of its experiments and explorations) that it is always, as Kafka revealed, on the brink of disappearance. Every attempt to put in an appearance through a gest, to assert a place and a presence for a possible art-thing, comes up against interests with the power to dwindle it, responses which need to lessen it, to take it out of itself on their own terms. To find and assemble a zone where it can, at least temporarily, perform, performing thus has to confront its own superfluity. For it knows only too well that it is superfluous to the culture's everyday requirements of self-maintenance – to the endless productive-consumptive drive of the culture's machinery for reproducing and sustaining itself. Uncalled for, unplanned, unknowable in advance, its gests emerge in all their superfluity as the other to the useful, as that which meets no needs, responds to no demand (except that other voice which summons the performer to make for the outside).

And because, in their emergence, they represent no interest outside their own particularity, they begin, from their own point of view, with a very slight advantage over culture. For their attempt to excavate and transliterate their own extremity, via the specificity of their elsewhere-gests, leaves both the agents of appropriation and audiences nonplussed – if only for the time being (they await their inevitable theoretical appropriation with a resigned fate). Initially at least, provided they have managed to stick with their extremity's elusive demands, their resulting gests will be unrepresentable. They offer nothing that can be assimilated to the known, the familiar, the need-satisfying objects, services and processes through which the reciprocal relations of everyday life are represented and maintained with relative equanimity. In short, they fall outside the unspoken terms of trust which, tacitly, enable the easy flow of routine exchanges of sense, of knowledges, held in common. The hoped-for good that their gests might just be able to secrete will not be available to commonsense, to the representing work of everyday language, for it is precisely the latter that their performance suspends. They cannot be exchanged for the common currencies of 'meaning', of meaning as the means to 'use' and application.

And that is each such offer's challenge to culture. To reach and get into them one has to exit from culture's 'givens', from the representations and the representing work, which stand in for, substitute themselves for, the tensed intensity of present thinginess. By transforming presence into a past tense, representation, through the repetition that its 're-' prefix performs, defers for ever any kind of unmediated relation to things. And, in this relegation of things to the behind of the past's 'over there', every act of representation simultaneously acts as culture's representative. For it bears the warrant of an authorised commonsense. The work that representing performs displays a communally grounded confidence in the abilities of a shared process of reference. It constitutes any and every 'whatever' as a referable known 'something' that, possessed in common, can be used (exchanged) without question in the routine construction of a world-in-common – the culture's everyday life. The full weight of this 'in-common' is now carried (mediated to, through and by us), in all its denseness, by the complexity of the electronic machinery whose multiform languages permeate the tissues of our routine relationships. Like everything else, making-for-art has to begin from within the midst of this density. But, unlike everything else, its own question to itself, its experiment with its own becoming, challenges it to try to withdraw itself from the density into becoming-differently, to dissolve the supports crucial to the self's maintenance in the routine work of representation.

Yet such withdrawing is fraught with difficulties, even perhaps impossibilities. For, viewed from within the culture, from the sites where values and power are mutually effected, exchanged, and maintained, nothing can escape the representing machinery. The latter's telos is expansion through containment. The very point of this representing work is to display its ability to bring everything into its frame through terms developed precisely for allocating identity, place and means of relation and exchange. Such work is thus the endless performing of value, the routine installing and affirmation of what is to count, what is valuable - the without-which-not - in and for the culture's self-maintenance. Valuing and the largely taken for granted values that it institutes, embeds, and sets going, implicitly permeate the making of sense (the sense of everything) that reproduces the culture's everyday life. And so dense are the layerings, the enfoldings, the intertwining of these routines that all performing has to begin within, take on, and find ways of adapting to them. But in making-for-art, where the performance is premised at least in crucial part on the refusal or withdrawal from certain values and modes of valuing, performing experiences valuing as the site of an excruciating tension.

In order even to get under way, it has to affirm itself as a participant in the culture's public spaces and means of relating. If its performing is to subsist it has to accept and share some values and valuing. Thus, for example, value-judgments about its materials, how they can be brought into play in the performing and how these may impinge on a gest's eventual destination (its cultural place and identity), implicitly inform every performance's actions and decisions. And intrinsic to performing is negotiation with others, some of whom may be responsible for the representing machinery's response to the performance. Such negotiation requires endless value-judgments about qualitative aspects of the performing process. They range from the broadest parameters, such as time, size, length, and cost, through the myriad 'content-shaping' decisions (are they simply 'decisions' or is the cut of 'deciding' too precise to characterise performing's selections?) and acceptances constituting each performing. Without the value-sharing entailed in these relations with and participation in the sense-making and accounting processes, there would be negligible cultural response to any performance's gest. Performing and its offer would remain effectively culturally invisible.

Condemned thus to maintain its quest in culture's midst while trying to make, through its emerging gest, towards an 'over there', an 'elsewhere' outside culture's margins, performing finds itself penned in an 'in-between'. Called by the demands of its emerging gest to suspend the givens of culture and its 'knowledge' about art, yet simultaneously drawn back into representation by demands to negotiate a shared sense for its activities, it finds itself having to try to subsist in an in-between no-space. If it survives at all it does so only within this tension of irreconcilables. It can only attain the space-time needed to be faithful to, to commit itself to, art as a quest that lays waste to culture's already-felt-knowns, by immersing itself in and using those already-knowns in the quest's pursuit. Performing has, from the outset, to live out the contradictions of this double life. It realises both that they will make themselves felt in unanticipatable ways in the gest that is generated, and that there is nothing that can be done to prevent this. It realises too that the value which it seeks to institute, through the absolute particularity of its gest (that of making-towards-art as a practical living through and displaying of art's hope for difference, via the concretising of its own potential), has nothing to do with the aesthetic values which the representing machinery uses to place, circulate and exchange it. And from the latter's point of view, of course, most of what performing does in the name of art is simply a waste of time and materials. Yet performers have nowhere else to go than this 'in-between'.

Perhaps the tension of surviving in it is experienced most acutely within the visual arts, and specifically, in painting and certain kinds of sculpture (especially marble, stone and wood carving) where the culture's allocation of value compounds so-called 'aesthetic' value and exchange-value. Valuing is tied absolutely to the materiality and thus the uniqueness of each painting/sculpture which occupies a singular location. The Benjaminian 'aura' resulting from this singularity turns it into a potential cult object, a fetish. Unlike even other visual art gests, which can be reproduced and thus multiplied in at least 'limited editions' (bronze/ceramic/resin casts, prints, performances and so on), a painting's and a carving's material plasticity renders them resistant to literal reproduction. While a painting can be transliterally reproduced through photography onto other receptive surfaces, its 'body' remains context-bound, and its complex 'value' is tied to and is a determinant in its siting. Valued by their performers primarily as residues of how their performances enabled them to relate their situation to their exploratory-celebratory vision of and hope for art, paintings seem to begin their cultural life as pure 'products'. Outside of any application they offer themselves only in and for the qualities that differentiate them from everything else: they offer the chance, always absolutely contingent to the situation of engagement, of relating differently.

Awaiting response they stand (and fall) on the quality of the hoped-for unique performance of this potentiality. But, sadly for this sense of value, they find themselves gathered up into and swept along by processes of valuing that are tied to the working out of market relations. The good that they want to hold is permeated by whatever exchange value is attached to them. Their potentiality as gest is qualified and transformed (perhaps fatally compromised...) by the fickle price on their head. Once sold they become exchangeable products from which status no amount of aesthetic valuing can shift them. For they are rendered indifferent to, the same as, the quantity of money/whatever-goods they can subsequently be exchanged for. This indifference (and thus the all-too real power(s) which control and maintain it) rules, collapses onto one scale and then measures out, the differences they had hoped to display as their potential. And, in the same indifferentiating movement, the vague possibility of regularised rewarded performance is held out as a lure. Subjected, via the price of its gest, to the measurement of its potential returns, performing itself becomes a product. It is counted in to culture. *Mene mene tekhel upharsin...*

### **Valuing Where the Difference Lies**

Inevitably, given the diversity of responses to painting's possibilities, this ambi-site generates and supports a range of responses to the challenges of exchanging. Cajoled into representation and the dynamics of exchanging, most performers opt for a tactic of avoidance within their gest; they hope that something can be encrypted in the performing that might just escape the processes of identity-allocation and value-adding through which the representing machinery places and handles them. Some, however, seek to challenge the appropriation 'head on'. They make the confusing of values an, if not the, explicit 'theme' of their gests. And the latter seek to insert themselves into the exchange process precisely as markers, patrollers, of the elusive, indefinable (non-existent?) 'line' between price and aesthetic valuation.

If the collaged gests of Picasso and Braque instituted the direct incorporation of materials which declared their external and everyday origins, then Duchamp's offers of a wine-rack, a bicycle wheel and a slightly altered (fictitiously signed) ceramic urinal, as potential entrants to art-hood, effected explicit and succinct stagings of the culture's and the maker's universal

dilemma. They performed the goad that required respondents, whatever their ‘interest’ in the placement of the gests, to acknowledge and come to terms with their own essential responsibility for the granting of value. They challenged, and still challenge us now, to recognise what every potential art gest has to go through and is itself taking on in the course of its performance – every gest’s transformation in the course of and as the condition of its possible entry into culture. Perhaps the recurring ‘good’ of Duchamp’s ‘ready-mades’ lies in the way that they have managed to insert themselves as an unavoidable translucent screen between every art-gest and all subsequent responding. We ‘know’ now that we can only ‘see’ the gests through them, for they confront us with an undeniable condition of our relating – our active but collusive (though necessarily confused and confusing) participation in the constitution of things as ‘art-things’ or not, as valuable or valueless. Transferred from everyday life into the art-representing machine they challenge us to recover our own responsibility for the attribution of difference, art’s difference, as a jolting transformation. They place us in a position where we have no option but to confront the question of art’s difference or sameness, of what makes the difference, of what might just turn the everyday into art. The happening of such a turn is precisely the jolt into another ‘world’ – art’s elsewhere – and it requires, enforces, a leap, in no time at all, over the void splitting art from culture; this void, hovering unplaceably between each respondent and the gest confronting them is, of course, invisibly narrow, virtually nothing, yet sheer, cripplingly steep, and bottomless. It has to be entered and passed through for the one to give itself up to the gest, for the gest’s good to get the better of one.

The salience (already anticipating the saltation to be discussed in the following chapter) of the ready-mades is in their succinct *witz*. But they served to make explicit that which was already the defining characteristic of the flowering modern arts: making-for-art entailed the putting into question of art itself. What art might be, might become - art as potential - could no longer be taken as given. It was no longer a site, a field of activity, with established known boundaries. Rather art as an open possibility, was to be explored through performers’ address of the conditions of living – the material processes through which our relations to self, to others and to nature are maintained. And, of course, the very process of putting itself into question necessitated a suspension, a doubting-questioning, of art’s means, the ‘languages’ and materials through which it mediated, offered, its project to others. And these, it believed and hoped, were means that could be shared, at least in substantial part, with others – its potential audiences. Without this assumption of a commonality-to-come the project would be pointless. Commonality, the fuzzy zone where art and life might interact, overlap and permeate each other through respondents’ collapse into art’s difference, thus became the arts’ focus. Their plunge into the ordinariness of everyday experience established the emergence of ‘the ordinary’, the constituents and processes of everyday life, as their common ‘theme’ and celebratory question.

Across the arts, then, performing developed its project as the thoughtfully sensuous probing of the genesis and the materials of the ordinary’s self-sustenance. The point of performing’s enactment, its out-foldings of the unquestioned matters and means of our context-bound relating, was to disclose, through its own transformations, the extraordinary in the ordinary: the ordinary as extraordinary potential! By drawing the mundane back through and out of itself into the specificity of each gest’s elsewhere, it challenged respondents, and especially the staid institutions already managing the arts, to perceive and experience anew the all-too-familiar. Its modes of attending to ‘things’, combining its sense of wonder with a paradoxical (absolutely untheorisable) double movement of both plunging into and estranging itself from things, sought to generate gests offering a different way of relating to world. And this

difference could only be shown in the way each gest's absolute particularity tore itself out of the world, made its own difference the 'source' of its charm, its seduction. If the point of performing's questing performance was to invent a gest showing its own unique relation to the possibilities it found secreted in its relations to things and world, it had to do this by trying to ensure that this difference, its own particularity, was its explicit accomplishment. Only through this could art's own potential, as the revelation of the yet-to-come exorbitant potential in things and ourselves, be made available as a sharable offer of this difference. Irrespective of the ways that the subsequent histories of the modern arts are mapped according to respondents' differing interests (particularly those of analysts and critics), the entire complex play of their performances' tracings and pathways circles endlessly around this search for difference through each gest's particularity: every gest's occasion is the attempt to reconvene here and now the difference that it makes, however slight, to art's difference from everything else. Its task is to convince respondents both to appreciate the good of this difference and to undertake the leap required to attain it elsewhere.

The challenge to performing thus begins to emerge in its difficult vagueness. For if 'art' is the sole 'authority' under which it is prepared to place itself, performing knows even as it sets out that this 'art' is an unknowable but hopefully possible site somewhere up ahead of it. The only 'rules' for reaching it will be the unruly self-dissolving receding ones which it always fails to find but which, unbeknownst as silent accompanists, have guided its search for those very same rules. They are the rules secreted in and by the gest and they are quite unlike the rules with which we are familiar in everyday life. For the only thing they turn out to have ruled is this one(-off) gest. Untransferrable, they turn out to be quite useless, inapplicable to anything other than this particular gest. Coming from nowhere identifiable, they fade away, disappearing as we try to disentangle them from the felt paradoxical fusions that constitute our 'experience' of relating to the gest. Thus the problem faced by performing is how to live (perform) 'now', under the authority of its love for what it takes art to have been, while knowing that the art it seeks can never be anything other than that uncertain future perfect tense always up ahead of it. Of necessity this remains way beyond its grasp in the time of its performing. Irrespective of the strength of their self-belief and commitment to art, performers perform in the dark, way beyond anything gatherable under 'enlightenment'. For the one thing of value to them – acceptance of their gests as art, as realising art's difference – is precisely what performing lacks. The unknowable what-will-turn-out-to-have-been-the-case is the lack that defines making's condition, its plight. It pledges itself to art while knowing that it has no way of knowing whether its promise will turn out to have been kept.

The ready-mades' subversive legacy to all subsequent performers was thus to have made it unequivocally clear that performing's site, the only identityless 'place' left to performance, would be in the disquieting darkness of a penumbra. Absolutely committed, driven, to make-for-art, it could only do this while penned in the subfusc of art's dense shadow. It would have to operate in a confusing region, putatively proximate to art but necessarily falling short of it, where the only light to penetrate came from culture's sad spotlights. Performers know well enough that these send precisely the wrong kind of light, the very light whose singular identifying clarities and authority they have to try to avoid at all costs. Only in art's shadows, but still on its outside, can they hold to and be true to the ambiguities, strange mixings, vanishing trails, and indistinctions which they have experienced as art's imponderable but vital anarchic counterweight to culture's enlightening probes. Performing gropes, feels for, its value in its responsive faithfulness to what it believes about art's indecipherability, which it knows is only ever readable in art's particular gests. And it also knows that each gest's fate –

to remain on art's outside or to be transferred within – depends on the kind of relation it develops with those who can effect such transfers. Somehow, without compromising the primacy of its own valuing of art's difference (being-beyond-comprehension), each has to hold and reveal, make accessible, the promise of another value – the exchange-potential of accessible appeal. It has to at least appear to be attractively available to those whose judgments will determine its comprehension and thus its recruitment to culture and consequent entry into representation. Performing is the struggle of holding this irreconcilable couple 'together' while always trying, however desperately, to hang on to and give primacy to its own feeling for art's difference.

Thus for any gest to become the occasion for the construction of an affective and evaluating dialogic relation (to it as both a particular thing-for-art and as potential object for representation and exchange), it has to find a way of displaying itself as an offer of and hope for such a relation. Somehow it has to make its hope patent, its invitational edge seductive, while recognising the threat this poses to the primacy it yearns to give to art alone. It has to be seen to want such a relation, all the while knowing that value, and thus accession to art-hood, emerges (or not) only through the lively response of engaged recipients (any of us, potentially, but crucially now those responsible for the representing machine) whose values can never be those which animate performing. Such gests would hope to disclose, and thus have to acknowledge as part of their *telos*, that the 'act' of reception, the goaded lured seduced response of participants, was the crucial creative complement to the prior offer of the gests – no value, no art, without an enacted response, a response entailing the induction of the gest into art but also, simultaneously, into both representation, ordinary language, and exchange. They would reveal the respondent's complicity in the emergence of a gest's value and its relation to the making of 'sense'. And, as a result of the modern arts' various stagings and explorations of this complicity, it has been impossible for the machinery of cultural response, in its ever-growing complexity and conceptual authority, to deny or avoid the consequences of its own constituting work in the construction and maintenance of value as a compounding of aesthetics and money. Because the survival, the cultural life-to-come, of every art medium, is machinery-dependent, it is not surprising that the rehearsal and re-staging of such gests have been recurring markers of performing's subsequent institutional career. Hovering irresolvably between gest and product (commodity) they enact, in the ways they seduce respondents into the play of the tensions of this hovering, a blurring of limits and edges. Their ambivalent alternations trace out the culture's dilemmas around what should (must?... might?...) be given value and saved, and what must (might?... the hazard of the ontological error...) be cast off as waste.

For makers it is the performing itself, the constitution of an emerging gest, that is the value; performing constitutes itself as a valuing. The accomplishment of the gest exhausts the value for the performer. Any subsequent valuing by the performer is a gratuitous, a fortunate, supplement and is of a different order (it may well be related to the gest's achievement (or not) of an exchange value). But, for respondents and the entire machinery of aesthetic management, valuing is the compounding of aesthetic and exchange value: the attribution of special qualities to a gest, the granting it of the label (status) of 'art', entails its simultaneous transformation into a product to be sent forth as a representative of the collectivity of 'all art things'. Once recruited, identified, and thus sent on its way to work as a cultural representative, each gest participates in the culture's everyday life, the routine and unquestioned processes of exchange (of everything) through which all our relating gets done. Entry into the public realm entails absorption into and permeation by the very thing(s), the mode of living, which its performer, in making-toward-and-for-art alone, had sought

simultaneously both to enter in a unique way and to radically distance her/himself from – the ordinariness of the everyday. And across the multiplicity of the modern arts - their movements, transitions and ‘internal’ dynamics – this ordinariness, the quotidian’s mundanity, has constituted their ‘field of play’. It is that which, while containing them and setting the terms on which they are represented, becomes their inescapable subject matter. They take over ‘everydayness’ (as ‘theme’) at the very ‘points’ (the pointers pointing beyond the supposedly ‘knowable’) where the analytical disciplines (anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and so on) have sought to set the terms of relating for all of us, by laying down the law(s) of their own boundaries.

Caught up within the dynamic of consumption-production that both sets the parameters of daily living and generates its endless flow of waste, making-for-art, as a making towards an elsewhere, unavoidably has to take on, try to pass through and beyond, that which hems it in. Along the way it participates in, contributes to, is constituted by others as and sometimes constitutes itself as, wasting away. Taking as its topic everything that gets in the way of its attempts to pass out, it has to confront things as potential aids to and occasions for escape. Everything, all the mattering signs, are probed and scanned for holes, through which it might slip away unnoticed, constructing its means of escape, its gests, from the bits and pieces it knocks off *en route*. Once these potential constituents of gests-to-come have been transported to culture’s outside and reconstituted in the performance, they may become unrecognisable and deemed useless to the culture. This is the risk that all the arts take in treating that which routinely pens them in and seems to fix and restrain them in structures of sense and representation, as resource materials for their performances. For the all-encompassing ubiquity and complexity of the meaning-machinery now forces on the arts an extraordinary diversity of representing materials and processes which have to be taken on, disempowered, mutated, in the search for ways out of representation. And because, under the rule of technoscience, the means of representation undergo continuous and occasionally revolutionary modification, the different arts media are pulled along by and in the wake of these changes. Either singly or through increasingly complex amalgamations and joint projects, the arts inevitably find themselves confronting the ‘same’ problems as their predecessors – notably how to hold to each gest’s particularity as the possibility of art’s difference. But the changes in technical means of representation each time call for continual reassessment of the tactics which performing might develop in the engagement of these problems.

### **Out-Performing and Tactic in the Midst of Representation**

As the arts can only appear, have some kind of cultural sharable life now, on terms set down by the machinery of representation, they are caught up in and continually have to respond to the latter’s dynamic of endless self-generated and self-monitored transformation. And perhaps the most important ‘effect’ of this dynamic is the subtle reconstitution-without-end of everyday life, of our modes of routine relating and sense-making – the constituents of our commonsense-becoming that just seem to ‘happen’ without our needing to call them to attention or into question. This accomplishment (...getting by...) is the very same everydayness that the arts of modernity have, as already suggested, taken as their overarching subject matter. As that which contains them it has become their compulsive theme and resource. In order to achieve, or even begin to approach, the difference of their own beyond, their task of making for their own elsewhere has to take on and transform the materials which seem to set them up and going in the first place. They are condemned to make, to feel out, their distinctive meridians within this vicious spiralling circle. And perhaps the one thing in their favour, in their search for ways out, is that the spiralling is completely out of control. In

spite of the particularity of the awesome resources, knowledges and technical skills - the programmed planning - which drive the dynamic, no one knows what is going to 'happen' next.

Taken together these always specific energising resources constitute a generalised 'powering' that, answerable to no one, releases a momentum without purpose and beyond reason. It is this very lack which, as our defining condition, lets art in, offers it its chance to find, to make, its ways in-between, through and out. As 'gap' is both the hope and the possibility of art-making in its self-projecting towards a not-yet, the fact that technical representation still can't close the gap(s) its own work creates, allows art to hold on to the hope, however faint, of its own potential. The gests through which art's potential difference can be explored and offered can only be re-convened on the ever-shifting sites of technical representation which now define the terms and means of our everyday living. Art's performing possibilities, its strange combinations of tactics and unreason, have to begin with and pass through the conditions which define their and our lot. And these conditions include the wasting potential, the latent disposability, of every produced thing and process. Because it begins and ends in the midst of these wasting routines, performing has to find ways of living with, of surviving, and thus perhaps of celebrating its own potential, even likely, redundancy. In clinging on, its weakness may be increased (strengthened...) by its realisation that its uselessness, its defining weakness, is also the mark of its possible 'good'. It knows that, whatever eventually happens to its gests, it has nowhere else to go if it is to be true to art's pledge. For the elsewhere, which it seeks right there in the midst of the governing habits of usage, would be precisely the other, the beyond, of use.

This 'midst' has to be the ambi-site, the hollowing out of an in-between, where performing inevitably becomes intertwined with and partially shaped by tactical 'solutions' to the problems of its appropriation by others. Every gest is shaped and offered in ways which determine its possible destination, its cultural placement. For all performers act, either implicitly or reflexively, upon their knowledge about and intention towards their gests' anticipated reception. They know that all selection processes work through criteria, value-judgments, about both the terms on which and where a gest might appear. Knowing only too well that a gest's cultural appearance entails its transformation by the machinery of exchange and representation, they realise that the 'value' to themselves of their performance is irrelevant to its public reception. In spite of the primacy they try to give to the drive and content of their compulsion-to-make (the summons...), with its implicit hope that each gest will hold and offer traces of this compulsion's uniqueness, performers recognise that its cultural appearance is conditional on its appeal to, and thus appeasement of, at least some of the machinery's criteria.

A gest's constitution, always context-specific, is thus at least in part the result of the performer's struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable - the compulsion's requirement to suspend, avoid, the weight of 'external' rules and the need to submit to the latter as the condition of exposure. Tactic is the attempt to mediate this tension while, hopefully, preserving the dominance of the summons' requirements. Finding and holding the balance between these 'inputs' defines performing's permanent crisis, for each performing occasion faces different, situationally specific, conditions and demands. And if the compulsion includes, as it invariably has done for modernity's arts, in small or large part, a demand to confront, to take on, the machinery of representation itself, then this need to resist may come to dominate performing. Tactic itself thus becomes the gest's in-forming 'subject matter'. If

Jarry's performances were early precursors of such gests, the ready-mades inaugurated the merging of tactic and subject matter as their succinct gesture. And if, as Agamben proposes, making-for-art is an 'experiment without truth', they showed that, at the limit (their performance as the showing of limit), it might sometimes suffice, be necessary, to do nothing other than perform, to make patent, a question without an answer, a potential question about, perhaps, art as itself nothing but a potential waiting for an answer.

Significantly Duchamp took, as vehicles for bearing us to the limits – the margin between art and culture - objects which, withdrawn from mundane circulation, were re-sited and thus re-sighted. Their very ordinariness, as routine products of industrial mass production, was a crucial constituent in his compounding of tactic and subject matter. The pared-down precision of the gests not only mimes the processes from which their objects were taken but confronts us solely with their unanswerable question. Now overlaid with a certain charm, arising perhaps from the myths accruing to them through their exemplary role as instigators of subsequent gests by others, their potential may even be enhanced by the enervating bafflement (or exasperated annoyance...) they still, for all their weakness, succeed in generating.

But can others' later gests, which may seem to be performing the 'same' debilitating (for 'culture' that is) gesture, through their making and placement of single gests, be anything more than faint echoes, slight repetitions, of an essentially unrepeatable challenge? Perhaps the conditions of performing under techno-representation have changed in ways that invite not repetition of the gesture (albeit mediated through different objects) but different approaches to the combining of tactic and performance. Certainly info-culture's investment in the machinery of appropriation exemplifies its exorbitant ability to absorb the arts, along with everything else, into its routines of exchange and representation. It is surely impossible now for any single gest miming the ready-mades' tactic (even though inflected differently) to challenge the self-confidence of appropriating cultural judgment. Far from being taken as ontological challenges, as occult threats to the judgment or the placement of art, such gests are now received as potential contributions to the circulation of art's 'goods' as idea-bearers for and by the ever-more firmly entrenched cultural services industry.

If a gest's fusion of materials and languages does, because of its apparent 'idea-potential', attract organisationally placed selectors and critical interpreters, it may be picked up and sent on its way within representation. It begins its new 'life' by being turned into a positive contribution to a quasi-conceptual play or contest of 'ideas' supposedly constituting the 'substance' of art's current plane – it's living-on within institutional representation. This transformation marks the unspeakable (because unformulated) organisational strategy loosely organising the plane's tense dynamic. For the cultural machine colludes ever more intimately with, and has found ways of incorporating, the academy's interests in the theorising and placing of everything. Critical-interpretive skills have become crucial components of the methodic ways that the institutions responsible for representing and mounting the arts-as-spectacle assert themselves in the struggle for their own survival through the control of resources. To live-on themselves they have to find ways of placing the objects which they manage in the exact 'spot' where their own 'good' and that of the object can be made to coincide. They have, crucially, to establish these objects as objects of desire – as simultaneously commodities (to be exchanged) and fetishes (bearers of symbolic values enabling the assimilation, and thus elision, of art's difference in its entry into culture). The would-be-art-thing has to be made into a hybrid – something which is seen to come from and is thus presumed to be still carrying traces of *art*, but which is now, first of all, *for culture*. At

the least, art's gests, whatever their makers' intentions, have to be turned into and represented as complements, 'positive' supplements, to everyday interests and needs. Obviously, 'negativity', irony, allegory and the non-plussedness they typically generate, are no longer seen as major, let alone insurmountable, 'troubles' for appropriating institutions, patrons and purchasers. For the now routine work of art-institutions is to draw wider public audiences towards such gests through methodically worked-out placements, supported by enveloping strategies of media representation (the responsive rhetorical machinery of critical interpretation).

Thus, in the ways they are brought into use, gests are treated, rather, as if they perform a similar function to the 'interesting' differences characterising the internal dialectics - the rhetoric of claim and counter-claim, the construction of 'evidence', the exchange and re-formulation of conceptual knowledges – constituting the dynamic of academic life (as well, perhaps though slightly differently, as the wider struggle for control and manipulation of economic-political beliefs). They only survive within the channels of organised representation through being transformed, like everything else, into interchangeable signs and information. Once sent on their ways, the institutional challenge is to ensure their absorption and celebration as examples, representatives, of the lively, healthy, state of 'movement' (exchange, experimentation, debate...) within specific fields of knowledge and research. Once the academy colludes in this wider project it is all too easy to co-opt art, to give it the appearance of a knowledge-project, a practice making first of all for a possibly groundable 'body' of knowledge. Art quickly becomes, from the point of view of public accountability, a 'discipline' that is required to participate (albeit through the surrogate work of its exemplars in the machinery) in the play, via the specific forms of their materialisations, of ideas. Caught up in this transformation, making-towards-art as a 'discipline', performing is simultaneously re-conceptualised as 'research', with presumably at least implicit claims to be a 'field' of knowledge, currently latent but awaiting revelation through re-formulation and a hoped-for steady accretion. In this status-and-category-shift performing risks itself, not only as the potential wasting to which it is all too accustomed (the wasting away of the maker's own 'becoming', living-on as performing's sole resource), but also in and as its failure as a supposed truth-claim, according to a range of conventional criteria routinely used by other 'disciplines'. It risks its supposed 'researches' being trashed as not-knowledge because of their understandable and necessary failure to meet others' criteria.

Such judgments return us to Agamben's proposal that making-for-art is an experimenting aside from any engagement with or claims to a 'truth'. But, if making is an experiment, we have to be careful not to site its modes of experimenting within the models of experimenting bequeathed by technoscience. For performing's difference, the trajectory of its drive to not-represent, to become other to whatever 'is', lies precisely in its attempt to be absolutely specific: to try to affiliate to art through materialising, each time differently, its response to the context in which it 'finds' itself. By definition this performing occurs aside from all communally generated criteria for truth. Making-for-art is precisely not an attempt to generate a conceptual knowledge amenable to communal judgments about procedure (method) and the constitution of evidence. It is neither a 'theoretical practice' nor a form of 'empiricism'. It performs in an elsewhere to which any application of a truth-falsity criterion is irrelevant. Who is to judge (evaluate as 'truth' or 'untruth') a maker's decreative charge into their 'own' creatureliness which is exposed, somehow and in part at least, in that which is not their 'own' – the language(s) of the tribe (of other artists and of all of us)? If such making is an 'experiment', it is an experiment-in-becoming (in trying to live as if art were still possible), some of whose dimensions may just be set forth (performed) in ways that turn

out to be sharable because they do partake, in part, of resources (languages?) held in common, though never previously perhaps opened out in such ways. And, precisely because it does share these common resources, it lays itself open to multiple appropriations, including those of practices whose own institutional survival depend upon drawing it into the conceptual play of their own interests and ideas. It is in these practices, invariably very distant from the situational contingencies of performing, that the crucial judgments about a gest's 'value' are made. Consignment to the culture's waste-heap occurs through the application by the machinery's skilled representatives of criteria geared very precisely to meeting long-term institutional needs.

Developed in response to performing's situational plight, the 'practical' role of tactic(s) in performing is therefore to operate in the gap between the context of performance and the context of representation. It is 'about' exploring what it may still be possible and necessary for the performer to try to do in intervening in a gest's transformation into a cultural object, its emergence as a particle, coinage, in the exchange processes of a service industry. And, given the now relative global security of the modern arts through modes of public and private patronage (the global institution of contemporary performing sent forth as a self-monitoring 'tradition' of continuous but organisationally managed change), tactic intervenes to shape performing in seemingly contradictory ways. For it is a constituent not only in the bridging of the gap between performer and institution but also in interrupting the smoothness of that same transition. The challenge it faces in trying to cling to its specificity is to find ways of leading the institutional interests astray, of foiling, at least partially, their well-honed appropriating procedures.

Thus the critical issue for performing-as-experiment is how to perform in ways that preserve its gest's specificity, while simultaneously trying to maximise the possibility of its eventual public exposure. For it needs the latter to have a chance of living-on. But this necessary institutional take-over entails its transformation into a representative of 'things' outside itself (interests working their way into it and then out towards potential audiences through symbolic penetration). Once made public it is put to work in narratives in which it is imbued with a typicality whose job it is to suppress the virtue (good) of its difference, its absolute specificity. It can no longer (if it ever could...) be 'seen' for and as 'itself alone' (as just 'this very' art-gest); from now on it can only be approached in the place to which it has been allocated, and through the terms used to context this positioning. For it is right there, in the space it occupies in the controlling narratives, that the institution makes it perform its work as connector. In its role as a link in the stories (they are many...) the institution wants to tell (and continually modify and 'strengthen'), it points both backwards to what has preceded it and forwards to what follows it. Organisationally, this is its metonymic role. For this is where and how it is given its 'point': to contribute to the stories' conviction, coherence and continuity. And these narrative functions, irrespective of makers' subsequent 'feelings' – invariably very mixed - about the ways their gests may have been put to use, are utterly peripheral to the performance from which the gests emerged (the euphoric-depressive planing of every performing occasion). In the performer's in-between situation (trapped between the commitment to art and the realities of institutional management) tactic comes to the fore as a necessary component in the struggle to cope with this discrepancy, and the tensions of living with the melancholia which it generates. And, ever-present, the threat of wasting haunts this shadowing mood.

But when tactic itself becomes the point of the performance and the defining 'subject matter' of its gest, then the question of its affiliation to art, the quality of its relation to art, is

unavoidable for both performers and their audiences. If the gest seems to offer itself as, first of all, a tactical gesture, then it has to confront the possibility that it is ruled not by the search for difference but by a specific form of repetition. At one end of the tactical continuum, performing may want to try to ensure its institutional acceptability by offering gests which, though not quite, perhaps, 'to order', do effectively mime, repeat, the kinds of gests already managed by the institution. Once selected and represented, performers may be encouraged (various temptations are available as institutional strategies) to continue generating gests which echo that which has already been selected. In all performing there is a hazy zone between, on the one hand, holding to consistencies that not only mark the emergence of a singular 'vision', but also keep the possibilities for the vision's radical change wide open, and on the other, using such consistencies to establish a 'style' through repetitions that erode the possibility of self-questioning. When the construction of a 'style', in response to a performer's perception of institutional 'need', comes to rule then performing begins to operate within a tactic of external acceptability. Repetition rules and the possibility of specificity, of a break into the difference of an elsewhere, falls away.

At the other end of the tactical continuum are those gests that exhaust themselves in their rejection of perceived institutional requirements. Such gests affiliate to, espouse, causes in the politics of art, hovering around the boundaries of its institutions in order to pose questions about how those boundaries are maintained, whom they include or exclude. But just 'down' from this extreme are those gests which, while giving primacy to tactic, also seem to want to affiliate to art through their retention of at least an element of ambiguity. They seek to hover in the gap between ironic gesture and art's elsewhere in order to partake of both. It is these gests which take the ready-mades as their apparent 'model', but try to adapt the model to the specificities of their own performing-context. Recognising the barbed necessity of their own negotiations with the institutional means for controlling art's placement, they seek to site themselves both at an ironic distance from any 'straight' acceptance of these means, while simultaneously trying to affiliate to art as always potentially, if only partially now, excessive to institutional representation. It is as if that supplement of ambiguity which they seek to embody might still, somehow, reserve a bubble of purity, art's difference untainted, in spite of coming under representation's rule.

In this mode, tactic's relative 'success' (apart from achieving selection by the representing machine) would lie in its ability to convince at least some others (and especially other performers) that it is possible for art to survive through leading this strange double life: accept hybridity in order to take up the challenge of hollowing out a half-life within, but in spite of, culture's representation. Any gest which offers itself under this double 'rule' is already disclosing its diagnosis of art's current fate as one that demands the primacy of tactic over decreation, over the unreason of self-loss, in a gest's performance. But, if irony rules, what is being celebrated on art's behalf? Does it leave us with a gest that tries to endow repetition with a privileged status in performing's offer, reminding us again of the latter's fate under appropriation, as if the 'again' has to be reiterated somehow on every making occasion?

Certainly, if performing now cedes primacy to tactic (even though it may be accompanied by an attempt at a supplement of otherness), by requiring each gest, first of all, to try to show that its potential lies in its self-distancing from what is happening to it, then the very insistence of the repetition is likely to negate, or at the least, interfere with, whatever its supplement might offer. And it leaves the repetition, once recognised as such, as essentially uninteresting. What it offers of 'itself' is a further (the 'again') draught of that mood of

essential melancholy surrounding the diagnosis of its plight. The gest becomes a paradoxical celebration of the gloom, the half-light, to which it sees art, and thus itself, condemned. Its only (its last?) hope, its embedded potential for uselessness, now seems to be vested in its maintenance of that series of post-ready-mades gests each of which reminds us of their shared plight through their rehearsal of repetition. In this way they serve only, perhaps, to keep 'alive' the model of repetition, a model whose own repetition seems likely to compound the steady debilitation of the series.

Nevertheless performers' felt need to repeat this tactic survives as a response to the changing conditions of representation. And, because of the singularity of the objects (paintings, sculptures) taken as defining its 'centre', it has been most explicit in the medium of the visual arts. The possibility of each gest's difference - its aspiration to membership of a 'tradition of otherness' (always elusive and escaping boundary-definition) through the way it makes itself felt - is vested in the singularity of its objecthood. Performers are all too familiar with (it is a founding constituent of their everyday know-how), and have to accept, the necessary transformation to which each gest-as-object is subject in the course of its recruitment into the machinery of culture. But the terms of their acceptance are set, and thus permeate the gest's appearance, by the specific ways tactic has entered into and shaped their performance. And tactic has to be concerned, implicitly or explicitly but always crucially, with the gest's acquisition of an exchange-value, for this is the founding condition of its placement and subsequent representation. It needs this in order to be sent on its way. Of course, the subsequent quality of a gest's cultural 'life' is dependent on the fruitfulness of the tension between this value and the overlay of 'aesthetic value' so carefully constructed by the machinery's techno-experts. The ways in which a gest may appeal to the latter is the reciprocal condition for its acceptance into the machinery. Whatever strange value-compound results from the conjunction of exchange- and aesthetic-value determines how it will be put to work and circulated within and through the everyday routines of cultural display.

But when tactic takes itself as its subject matter and its self-defining task, it faces the problem of how to make its gest display its relation to the market, its acquisition of an exchange-value, as ironic. It needs to find a way of preserving and showing, as the key to its offer, its performance of a self-distancing. For it has to create a 'gap' *between* the action that is its being-offered, and the very thing that will be its fate if it is to live-on - its entry into exchange-value. With this as the 'weight' of the task, it becomes exceptionally difficult to preserve, perhaps to conceal, any ambiguating supplement, something else that might just complement, rather than destroy, the effect of its primary 'point' (the showing of tactic itself). Yet it is only through some such ambiguous 'extra', with its likely interference with, if not contradiction of, the thrust of its tactic, that it could hope to retain its potential as an art-thing. It can only assert its hope for the difference that would keep it as a potentiality, through generating an irresolvable 'internal' tension which places it beyond reason. Lacking this it remains inevitably caught up in a dynamic, an entropic slowing down, that leads to its eventual discard as the waste matter of sheer repetition.

### **Passing Through Waste to Art's Elsewhere:**

#### **1) Via 'Fountain'**

And yet some gests do seem to be able to resist, partially, temporarily perhaps, this fading away. They manage to preserve traces of reserve, of withholding something, in spite of apparently giving primacy to tactic, making tactic the gest's explicit 'subject matter'. Essential to their tactic is their appearance as singular objects in a conventional art-institutional context. For what they seek to perform is a questioning of the relation between

this placing and the attribution of art-status, and thus of value (exchange- and aesthetic-), to their objecthood. But, to have a chance of performing something supplementary to repetition, the offered object must place itself in question. It has to try to be both pure tactic and more than tactic. It has to attract attention as question-performer, while simultaneously suspending its question and, in the process, leaving the respondent suspended in the hiatus between its question and something else altogether, something contradicting but not destroying its tactical pitch that cannot be reconciled with commonsense. It has to make both sense and non-sense. And, critically, if the founding ‘trouble’ for art, in a culture of work and use, is its uselessness, those objects which do manage to confront this plight, while resisting any attempt to be seen as offering a ‘solution’ to it, are precisely those which may just have a chance of preserving the ambiguating spirit of Duchamp’s inaugural performance.

Duchamp’s aided (chosen, moved, signed, titled) ready-made, the industrially-produced ceramic urinal (his ‘Fountain’ of 1917<sup>26</sup>), when sent on its way towards a gallery, focussed the key terms of art’s contemporary plight.<sup>27</sup> It provoked unstoppable reverberations (this is its performance as gest) through its succinct juxtaposition of the tensions defining an art-thing’s ‘identity’ and ‘place’. As, seemingly, pure tactic, it confronted respondents with the always and still unavoidable question of what a would-be-art-thing had to ‘have’ and ‘do’ (perform) in order to be affiliated to art, to be given ‘membership’. The specificity of its provocation lay in the ways that its treatments (initially by Duchamp’s interventions and subsequently by audience response) separated it, held it at a distance, from the conventions for relating to objects offered as ‘art’ in gallery contexts. It could not be approached (seen, felt, and interpreted) within the conventions of thoughtful-feeling that organised routine responses to recognisable, medium-specific, gests. In its play-full toying with and dissolution of all boundary-conventions, it refused the terms of judgment, and thus of ‘taste’, through which art was conventionally represented, assembled and maintained.

Any emergent relation to it had to pass by way of the intertwined questions it provoked about the ‘rules’, invariably tacit, used in arriving at judgments about art’s ‘presence’ and qualities. For possible audiences such questioning was profoundly disturbing because it confronted them with the ‘founding’ groundlessness of their own feelings and tastes, however ‘deeply’ felt these might be. Everything taken by cultural convention to define what art was and might (be allowed to) be was at stake through the provoked questions: originality, touch, beauty, function, form/content, potency, responsibility (of both maker and respondent), and so on – all had to be suspended, questioned and, perhaps, by-passed, in order to form a relation with the thing.

Yet, whilst its tactical ploy remained dominant – full-frontal and unequivocal - the thing’s material specificity, and the playful strangeness of Duchamp’s interventions in that specificity, generated a gest whose supplements, while not negating the tactic, modified in subtle and open-ended ways the tactic’s bluntness. At the least they blunt the tactic by seeming to withdraw in the direction of allegory. In opening a gap between the object as a recognisable and all too familiar, but now de-contextualised, functional industrial product and other interpretive possibilities, they shift the terms of any relation to it away from simple confrontation. To take on both what the thing might be doing (performing) in an art gallery and, crucially, how it might be doing it, respondents are invited to move into allegory,

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<sup>26</sup> See the reproduction of Stieglitz’s photograph of ‘Fountain’ in ‘Marcel Duchamp’, eds. A. d’Harnoncourt and K. McShine, Thames and Hudson, London, 1974, p. 282.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed Seth Price proposes that ‘Fountain’ constitutes one of contemporary art’s ‘primal scenes’. See Price, *op. cit.*, no pagination.

through inaugurating for themselves a self-questioning dialogue with details of the object's appearance. And, by this invitation (its offer), perhaps the thing is also hinting that such an apparent detour, by way of a silent, invariably unacknowledged, allegoresis, is a necessary constituent of a respondent's relation to every would-be-art-thing. Perhaps, in order to get itself to the threshold of possible entry into 'art', every art-aspirant thing already embeds, fixes within its very appearing, certain traces of another kind of movement. This other movement, almost parallel to its appearances, performs like a self-undoing 'thread' (an extending ex-tracting that is proximate to but never quite resolves into a 'story-line'). Such threading seems to offer hints about and links to the gest's 'origins', 'intentions', and the conventions of performing accepted by the performer in trying to be faithful to them.

This alternative fragmenting 'line' can be both complementary to, but possibly also in tension with, the surfacing textures of its apparent subject matters. And a gest's challenge, its potential for captivating and seducing respondents, may lie precisely in this ambiguous tension. It may be just what the thing, as a hopefully generative gest, is trying to be 'about'. For the other line, even if locatable, is rarely the bearer of an unequivocal 'message'. Opening onto the thing's 'dark side', the penumbra encasing its 'origins', it invariably peters out, collapsing into the vague shades of this unmappable region. Every performer knows (it is a defining constituent of know-how...) that performing's exploration of 'origin's' ungraspability has to occur by way of indirection and allusion. The hints and clues about performing's 'course', encrypted in the ways the gest appears, in its surface syntaxing, cannot be de-ciphered back into a simple alternative 'message'. Indeed, it may be that the gest's life-to-come depends precisely on this disappearance, this falling-short, of a readable allegory, an alternative line allowing respondents to render it 'sensible'. The disquiet engendered by this constitutive vagueness of 'origins' is surely a defining resonance of performing's contemporary plight, for there is no escape from its implications. Perhaps it was just this hole that art can make in the 'securities' of knowledge which Duchamp was trying to track, open up and enlarge in the ways 'Fountain' broaches questions of art's difference. Crucial to this opening were Duchamp's own transforming interventions which set the terms of the gest's offer.

Our primary visual resource for the appearance of the 'original' urinal is Stieglitz's rough-and-ready photograph taken after its rejection for exhibition. It seems to show how Duchamp intended it to be exhibited, though it still has a label (probably Duchamp's submission label) attached to the integral bracket on the left which would have been used to screw it to a wall for its designed use. The urinal is shown resting on its back on a rough plinth with its top curved rim facing the viewer. On the left side of this rim, is what (perhaps, or perhaps not...) we are invited to read as an authorial signature, together with a year-date, in black paint. It seems to read 'R.Mutt'; '1917' is appended just below it to its right. When taken together with the title, this inscription draws us directly, but uncertainly, into the play of Duchamp's concerns, which, since his abandonment of easel painting, turned around the impossibility of isolating any one sense in the making of art. Whatever medium performers made their primary focus (visual, aural, textual, tactile, etc.) was, for Duchamp, always fused and infused in essential, unavoidable ways, with a thought-fullness embodied, invariably, in some form of language.

Making-toward-art was the erotic exploration of the consequences of this fusion. Throughout his oeuvre (and thus bearing strong echoes of Jarry's precedent) it is the interplay of words in all their forms (aural, oral-phonetic, textual-visible), their languaging potential, with other senses (in his own oeuvre, primarily visual) that drives his explorations. And in particular it is

his delight in two closely related aspects of the life of words – firstly, their ‘meaning’s’ simultaneous dependence on and constitution of the context of their placement, and secondly, their seemingly inexhaustible doubleness (the pun being the most succinct exemplar of this) as ‘bearers’ of ‘sense’. In this second aspect, it was the absolute gap between the oral-phonetic sounding-out of a word/phrase and its readability, its textual appearance, that offered him the ‘space’ within which to generate his gests. This, of course, is the same gap considered in the preceding discussion of transliteration as performing’s transposition of sourcing into gest. How might we respond to his linguistic supplements to the urinal as possibly transformative interventions that are in tension with its tactical thrust (‘Could this be art or not?’)?

Duchamp consistently refused to interpret or even comment publicly on his own gests. So who is ‘R. Mutt’? As far as I am aware no independent R. Mutt has ever been identified or claimed the signature as hers or his. Is it a signature? Is it even a mock signature? Might Duchamp be offering us ‘himself’ through a pseudonym (joking or serious?) that seems to call into question any attribution of the gest to ‘him’? While the apparent ‘signature’ (and date) seems to mime the convention common amongst painters of signing their work, we should not rush to the assumption that this is its role on the urinal. Given his meticulous play with Rose Selavy and Belle Haleine in ‘Why not sneeze Rose Selavy?’ of 1921, it is unlikely to be a casual jokey ‘throwaway’ gesture. Not much is photographically clear in Stieglitz’s photo (even the ‘R’ only just emerges from the shadows) but only the ‘R’ and the ‘M’ are unequivocally capital letters. Not only could the ‘U’ and the two ‘T’s’ be lower-case, but the presumed ‘U’ could easily be a not quite completed rounded ‘O’; the tip of its left-side bends slightly towards and almost meets the rounded top of its right-side. Perhaps Duchamp is acknowledging his debt to the Mott Works which manufactured the urinal. In French *‘motte’* (feminine...) is a lump of earth, the matter to which all of us and whatever might flow through the urinal (fountain?) would, eventually, return; and *‘motte’* as ‘mound’ (as in the *‘motte and bailey’* castle form) takes us into the earthy vernacular for the female genital region... *mons Veneris*. In English mott is a variation on the ‘moat’ – ring of water - that surrounds the eponymous castle mound. Yet, even if retained as ‘Mutt’ it points in at least two directions simultaneously – towards the term of contempt (mutt as blockhead, or mongrel), or as a foreshortening of mutton or mutti (in German a child’s familiar form for ‘mother’). In other words (as ever...) we are left adrift among undecidables, for each of which a ‘case’ for their possible ‘relevance’ to the object, to what it might be offering, could be made out. But if we consider the ‘R’ as its prefix things take a different turn and bring us closer to our uncanny ‘home’. For the phonetic pronunciation for ‘R’ in French, already employed elsewhere by Duchamp, is identical to both *‘arrhes’* (a deposit or part-payment) and, of course, to *‘art’*. The ‘R’, on its own, short-hands(-tongues?) ‘Art’. Art (as a down-payment, a first instalment, for what?) here is attached to, is a prefix (though separated by a full-stop, a punctuating ‘point’...) to... what precisely? Only an extendable list of possible options - a clod, a dullard, a section of mutton, a mother figure, a feminine mound... and so on. In its being-sounded it is forever joined to but simultaneously held apart from the world’s things by a point. And it makes its point on the rim, the outer edge, of an up-ended waste-disposer.

Similar ambiguities haunt the title. For ‘Fountain’ immediately takes us back to La Fontaine, the famed writer who gave French literature a stream of fables with which Duchamp would have been intimately familiar since early childhood. And it was a convention for fables to offer ‘lessons’ or morals, as La Fontaine’s re-workings of Aesop’s writings would have made clear. Could ‘Fountain’ be echoing this fable convention and, if so, what might its ‘moral’

be? Perhaps that nothing is what it might appear to be at first sight in Duchamp's gests? In its functional life the urinal's own fountain, its jet of water, would be used to sluice away the waste it was designed to receive. And this waste, this no longer needed (male...) fluid, would also enter it as a fountain turning the urinal into a fountain-receptacle. But, as a ceramic transliterated by its encasing texts, laid out on its back (K. O'd?), by Duchamp, 'Fountain' could no longer flow on its own. Its only chance lay in provoking discomfited and conflicting streams of words to flow across its inert carcass. It seems to offer itself as a provocative (seductive?) armature (an R.Muttire?), around which such an invited flow-to-come might wind itself. And this, at least, it has accomplished through the ways in which its intertwining of tactic and supplements eludes all attempts to fix it conceptually.

But the unavoidable 'constant' around which its different flows are intertwined, the question it poses to and for us and which we cannot side-step, concerns art's and thus our, relation to waste. Through its selection, placement and supplementation, the gest invites us to take on the possibility that performing and its gests might be intrinsically bound up with waste and wasting. Laid out on its back, no longer 'working' (and thus, exemplifying art's worklessness, no longer a 'urinal?'), the thing nevertheless drags us, however reluctant we may be, onto its own peculiar terrain, a no-place where what is at issue is precisely valuing itself – what and how we value. And what it obliquely demands that we consider is that value in art (for both performers and respondents) may be irreconcilable with valuing in everyday life. At the very least it draws us down into the unbridgeable gap between performing-for-art and making-for-an-economy, while leaving us to haul ourselves out as best we can. Hovering in the gap it opens up, we are required to consider the possibility that the difference between performing and making may be defined by the struggle over the value-waste relation.

In the economy (from which art, of course, never can finally absent itself) waste's interest (value) swings unpredictably between two poles. Firstly, production-for-consumption under techno-capitalism founds itself on the need to save and put to work anything (i.e. virtually everything) that can be given a use-, thus an exchange-, and therefore a surplus-value. Under its parsimonious rule, to waste not is to want not. And, under the current global disaster, it finds its most developed form, belatedly, in the need to re-cycle whatever can be saved and turned back through the production-consumption cycle. But secondly, and pitched in a life-death struggle with saving, is the necessity of laying waste and squandering. This is induced by the need for production-to-excess of 'new' products, with its necessary partner-in-wasting of built-in obsolescence, as the vehicle for the unstoppable technoscientifically ordered drive to endless 'development' and, supposedly sustainable, 'growth'. Such production, subject to the rapid real ruthless movements of capital, entails not only endless devastation of place, and thus of human social potential, but also, through all the resources that are consumed in the production process itself, the generation of inordinate waste matters as its inevitable by-products. Waste is the necessary product, a fundamental constituent, of a process that, for its own 'good' (a bizarre form of survival), has to produce too much – the left-overs, the ends-of-lines, all the unsellable to-be-trashed remains. And the necessary complement to this process, consumption-to-excess, sustains the otherwise goal-less drive of the dynamic in complex symbolic ways.

Global techno-representation is ordered around the construction of image-rhetorics that bind 'aspiration' to the possible 'life-style' (epitomised by the represented 'celebrity-as-model-for-all-of-us') fundable by 'extreme wealth'. And the 'good' of the figured 'life-style' is not in the literal comforts and pleasures it affords, but in the ability to display it. Its 'use' is in the displaying, in its representation. This is its 'point', for it is on the basis of display that the

always strange and tenuous relation between (one's) identity and (one's) place is endlessly re-constructed. In this constructive 'work' we expose ourselves, give ourselves away, to others. And, in the context of the consumptive economy, giving is instructive. For, if the gift-relation (almost a cultural-universal spanning multiple pre-capitalist and capitalist formations) is pushed to extreme forms in the ceremonial potlatch, where the spiralling out-bidding of gift-exchanges necessitates the gift-as-waste (destruction in some cases) in order to display that which will give prestige, then techno-capitalism has grasped the social potency of this as its 'means' of ensuring its own continuous movement, its productive drive. How we give ourselves away is displayed in the ways that we are required (there is nowhere else to go) to participate in, and thus reveal ourselves through, the productive theatre of consumption. Through its delirious representation of itself, as a now unavoidable and unstoppable machinery for spectacularising the imaginary through "the phantasmagoric display-form of the market"<sup>28</sup>, the machine seeks to extend to infinity not only the desirability but also the absolute necessity of such display. Yet, working under the rule that ties the primacy of an erotics of the eye to a guaranteed return of 'the new', it has to ensure the permanent substitution and replacement of its tempting imagery. Invited to search for, reproduce, and thus place ourselves within the proffered imaginary, we are caught up in the simultaneous appearance-disappearance of its imagery. The appearance of the new performs its own wasting away, its becoming-an-anachronism, even as it appears. As our 'experience' of the time of modernity, the moment's ephemerality, moves towards the nano-speeds of virtual representation, so does it have to come to terms with the like speed of the disappearance, wastage-to-excess, of the very things in whose appearance it had been consumptively embroiled.

Representation, in its now systematic management, is thus always on the way, it is what bears us, towards waste, both in its figuration of wasting as the end without end of quotidian life (where, to 'survive', we learn to work in order to just waste away), and through its strict and necessary adherence to its own rule: it insists upon the almost immediate redundancy of its constituent products – the endless flow of info-image-texts that are obsolescent in the very 'moment' of their becoming. They have to be obliterated to make way for their essential successors in order that the 'now' remains under representation's institutional authority. Yet this same authority, manifesting the fore-mentioned tension between saving and wasting, seeks to underwrite its control through meticulously preserving the same obliterated remnants for a self-monitoring, increasingly digitised, archive of documents. Seemingly representing 'the past', the amassed data awaits retrieval for multiple transformative uses. The resulting memory-bank, enabling instant re-call, facilitates institutional control of, enables it to take responsibility for, the 'now' (what it can be constructed to 'look' and 'feel' like) by allowing it to merge (cut, paste, amalgamate, splice, re-form, transmute...) past and present at will (and isn't this just what so-called 'post-modern art' is described critically as performing?). When listening to and looking at its spectacularly crafty constructions, amalgams of fragments of whatever it takes to produce 'convincing' and seductive stories, we never know what 'time-space' we are passing through. We are lost to ourselves in no time at all in the seamless 'breaks' joining one fragment to another in its endless montage.

Despite these exorbitant transformations in representation and living since 'Fountain's' initial rejection, perhaps it is still able to open up and stubbornly occupy (it cannot easily be moved in either direction) a gap in representation between art and economy. It draws us toward the possible importance for art's survival of a certain hanging-in-between. Certainly,

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<sup>28</sup> C. Buci-Glucksmann, 'Baroque Reason', Sage, London, 1994, p. 165.

as an inaugural institutionally-aimed supplemented tactical gest, it seems to have been taken as an exemplary model by a fractured line of subsequent performances seeking to re-fashion a similar gap. Other makers, caught up in the specific problems of display peculiar to the visual arts, have sought to find ways of showing again, of exposing within the very 'host' institution, the persistence of its troubling question. But, if they seek to give primacy to tactic in their making, the problem they face in following in its wake is that of the 'copy': how to avoid the simple hagiography of repetition by finding a way of supplementing the tactic with elements that tie their gests to the specifics of their own making-context, their own plight. And this problem is compounded by the fact that, as an institutionally recorded and preserved gest (even repeated by Duchamp himself in his subsequent signed edition of of eight 'replicas' in 1964...), 'Fountain' has already been allocated roles in the institutional construction of the 'history' and 'significance' of the modern arts. Precisely as their inaugurating forebear, its opening up and occupancy of the gap has brought it under representation's rule and established it as a 'figure' (a notorious celebrity), a symbol, in the institutional history of art.

Yet, in spite of being a now carefully controlled, manipulated, and exchanged 'symbol' in the subsequent history of discourses addressing the relations between art and everyday life (necessarily including the present writing...), the peculiar qualities of its performance ensure its reserve. In the very 'moment' of its reception (its being-interpreted, including the present interpretation...), it retreats to an unplaceable elsewhere. Enfolded in its own ambiguity, it manages, in the very passivity of its openness, to decline, to fall outside, all attempts to incorporate it as an unequivocal particle into our 'knowledge' of the 'development' of the contemporary arts. I want to suggest that, in the challenge of its self-differentiating retreat, it manages to collapse the difference between tactic and strategy. For what it effects is not only a context-specific tactical foray in one performer's struggle with institutional placement. In addition, and crucially for how we come to regard art's potential (the real conditions of its plight), it achieves an ontological leap which has left an indelible mark on the situation of all subsequent making-toward-art. As a performance, it shows and traces the outer limit of what making-for-art might still hope to be able to reserve for itself within the stringent conditions of modernity's (and whatever follows it for the foreseeable future) machinery of representation. By simultaneously enacting the plight of performing while, in its ambiguating display, sealing itself off from appropriation, it performs and discloses precisely what every attempt to affiliate to art now has to take on and come to terms with. It shows that, irrespective of performing's always specific local conditions requiring its tactical response, such responses are always themselves already framed by processes of representation.

As a result of 'Fountain's' 'happening', this frame itself has to be included in the performer's explorations; in constructing its idiosyncratic one-off 'languages' performing has to confront and try to find ways of both breaking out of representation and partially insulating itself from its effects. If the possibility of its life-to-come is dependent upon the terms of its representation, this very condition of its becoming has to be seen as setting the always retreating fragmenting boundary whose binds its medium-particular 'linguaging' has to explore and aim to subvert. To be faithful to, to try to keep alive, art's hope as its potential otherness, performing is challenged to ensure that every performance celebrates this hope through the ways it includes, takes on, a questioning-undoing of representation's controls. The qualities of shaping and forming that constitute each performance have, in order to preserve the possibility of becoming-other, to take on the representational frame that seeks to control the destiny (placing and place) of every gest. Remembering 'Fountain', the context-bound tactic generating each performance's idiosyncratic explorations also has to anticipate

and try to block, perhaps to offer ways of unravelling, the placing fixing controls to come. To celebrate art's still (hopefully...) open potential, a gest needs to try to draw us towards its 'own' elsewhere through disclosing the necessity, the vitality, of its resistance to representation.

After 'Fountain' all performing is thus, in the most direct sense, post-modern: every making-for-art lies under its rule-less rule. At the most practical level, all subsequent performances across all the arts have to be taken as belated in relation to this gest's singular intervention in making and responding. Its subliminal (below the belt...?), barely recognisable (as art), move made all the difference in the (art's) world. It revealed all making-for-art, the life of performing, as bound to a rigorous thoughtfulness about the terms of its being-framed, its becoming-institutionalised. From that performance on, every gest, irrespective of the specific sensuous qualities of its medium/media, had to be received as a strange amalgam of feeling and thinking whose very 'point' was the thoughtful probing of its own medium's fenced-in possibilities. Each gest becomes the display-site of a struggle to reach out toward art's beyond, through the exploration of terms (the one-off 'language') in which the performer's relation to their 'situation' is offered as a compounding of feeling and thinking.

But when the shaping of a gest is focussed predominantly on interrupting the conditions of representation, on strategy to the exclusion of both sensuous supplements (the liveliness of the imaginative engagement of the idiosyncratic language) and context-specific tactics, the risk of simple repetition threatens to reduce the project to a gesture in the 'politics of culture'. And, because all gests are already in 'Fountain's' debt, every gest faces the double problem of acknowledging this and re-paying it. For surely this is 'Fountain's' legacy, the virtual Aesopian-Fontainian 'moral' that it suspends in front of and facing every making-project: *that art's contemporary condition now requires every performance to try to combine a self-conscious tactic (a critical response to the real conditions of its institutional representation) with situation-specific supplements that aim to cast its gest beyond culture's requirements.* Acknowledging the debt entails a recognition that, because tactic is now unavoidably intrinsic to making, each performance's self-questioning will entail a search for, and an invention and shaping of, a one-off 'site-specific language' which strives to suspend the strictures of both institutional control and commonsense knowledges. Given the devastating weakness (...the urinal lying there (but where, now, exactly?) inert on its back, but disappearing even before it was given the 'chance' to appear...) of Duchamp's intervention, occasional hagiography is hardly surprising, but without a context-specific supplementing transformation, tactical gests remain insignificant and institutional fodder. Rather performers are challenged now, by the very conditions of their plight, to find an idiosyncratic language that, irrespective of its destination under representation, encrypts something that breaks through and takes itself (and thus respondents) out of representation's reach.

Precisely because it failed to appear, 'Fountain' performed performance itself. It showed that every attempt to offer a gest in art's name embodies an absolutely specific performance. *Such an offering, in advance of and aside from every sense of 'gift' and 'giving', is an attempt to set out the terms of a desired relation. To perform for art is to offer.* Offering is the form of action peculiar to making-for-art as potentiality, where 'potential' seals itself into the performance and its gest as a peculiar form of weakness. By making only a virtual appearance (the much later subsequent appearance of the 'replicas' notwithstanding...), and thus achieving its 'effects' through its literal absence, 'Fountain' immediately disclosed, made unavoidable as a 'key' to its own reception and that of every subsequent gest-for-art,

every making and its gest as a performative – the constitution of a specific kind of offer. It revealed offering as art's mode of becoming, as its possibility and hope – its plight. In this it tacitly aligned itself both with the precedents of Jarry's multi-media theatrics, and with the near-simultaneous Dada activities at Zurich's 'Café Voltaire', in which the potential 'experience' offered by the gests was bounded precisely by the performances' temporal- and site-specificity; essential to such activities' drive was their emphasis on art as necessarily performative. But Duchamp's gest performed this on the terrain of the supposedly 'visual' arts, the conventional aesthetic response to which treated each gest as an object whose promise (its 'meaning' and thus its 'aesthetic significance') lay almost exclusively in its 'internal' relations (formulated by aesthetic discourses through criterial concepts and models of 'beauty', 'content and form', 'iconography', 'semiology' and so on). That every gest simultaneously embeds the terms of both its performance and of its offer (the relation with others it is actively but weakly hoping for and setting forth), was irrelevant to the object-focussed concerns of aesthetics. Yet 'Fountain' showed (this was what it performed) that the performing-offering combination, which each gest congeals and perhaps partially conceals, is precisely the constitution of a committed 'act', an act seeking to 'place' itself culturally by displaying desiring's potential for art. After 'Fountain' all performers could come to 'know', to realise, that how their gests performed relating-as-offer would define their possible life-to-come. It pointed up the way that each gest-for-art seeks to engage its other, culture, in and as its performance of an act of persuasive seduction in relation to different 'others' – to some current possible community of respondents and, via some of them, to the self-metamorphosing Body of Art as an 'open' tradition-for-otherness to whose membership it aspires. As a situated performance the gest seeks to show, through how and where it offers itself among the array of possible cultural display sites, both the kind of 'experience' of relating it promises and, through this, the 'basis' of its hope for affiliation to the tradition.

Such an act has to try to survive through an ambiguity necessarily generated by its oxymoronic combination of hubris and weakness. It has to show the strength of the conviction that sustained its performance (its belief in its own 'worth' to its performer and thus to possible others), while laying bare, exposing, its helpless weakness (its absolute reliance on others to gather it up and send it on its way). And it has to do this from within an always empty anticipation, for, as the 'uncalled for', there is no knowing in advance whether its exposure will generate acceptance or rejection. Under the institutionalisation of critique characterising modernity's 'progressive' drive, such exposure invites negation, dismissal, destruction and disappearance. Every gest risks being wasted. Its act of exposure performs an absolutely uncertain (there are no calculable odds) wager with waste in which its pre-history, all the 'life' (energies, breath, commitment, materials) that sustained its performance is on the line. This wager with wasting is what the always partially hidden 'tactic' framing every gest tries to confront and hedge, while knowing (performing's know-how) that, although it is its own becoming, its being-as-potential, which is at stake, there is nothing it can do about it. Its fate is beyond it.

But at least, courtesy of 'Fountain's' inaugural disclosure of performance's entwinement with waste, performing can now recognise how the incalculable tension it generates, between the imaginative and the tactical, is the outcome of a performative that constitutes, enacts, its relation to the enfolding culture. And it now knows that it offers this relation on terms, for 'reasons', quite independent of the aesthetic and institutional discourses that always seal its fate. Suspending itself, playing, in between waste and value, it has learned to 'live' with its own wasting away and its being wasted. It effects this through a form of life that continually reiterates, re-enacts, an attempt to draw 'culture' out of its familiar securities. This is the

hoped-for relation its gest tries to perform. It performs for, towards, an elsewhere, a not-yet, where the opposition between wasting and valuing no longer rules. But it has to try to hold to this hope in spite of knowing that, for many of its potential respondents, great swathes of the culture, it will be regarded as a complete waste of time (and thus of everything that constitutes ‘living’). Its performatives plight themselves to trying to hold to and offer what is other-than-culture, as the display of art’s hope for the difference to come. For performers, it is the exploration of this other-than that sustains their performance in the hope that its traces will be inscribed in their resulting gests. And, once offered, there is just the chance that these inscriptions will show their, and thus art’s, potential for something other than a wasting away of time, space, materials – of life.

If every offer, irrespective of its gest’s ‘content’, performs and risks itself as just such a wager with wasting, there are also gests that, as a matter of tactic or imagery, risk repeating, miming, Duchamp’s gesture through the resonance of their specific imagery with that of ‘Fountain’. As a performative its fate turned on the ways in which, as image-object, it positioned art, and thus us, as suspended in between contested antinomies that seem to define our relation to the body, to the demarcation of ‘nature’ from ‘culture’. Need and desire, sexual difference, gazing and writing, flow/process and stasis/solidity, machine-production and the body as consumer-producer, all are interlaced and left to hang ambivalently but resolutely in ‘Fountain’s’ static flow. Through the inversions at which it hints, it draws us inexorably into the question of what kind of ‘becoming’ becoming-human might now, under late-modernity’s iron-and-silicon rule, entail. At the time of its performance it hovered in the then typically repressed and still now (as the consumptive-productivity of the global pornography industry reveals) unresolvable, except by the violence of the law, border regions of the possible and acceptable. To follow, to echo and re-vivify, its intervention, without lapsing into repetitive mime, requires performers to re-contextualise its performance by integrating it into their own ‘language’. Somehow the ‘dialogue’ with art’s and the body’s relation to waste, their being caught between creatureliness and culture, has to be supplemented according to the situation-specific demands of their offering. And, since we now ‘see’ art’s things, partially at least, through the dark light cast by Duchamp’s gest onto the site of performing, we recognise that performing’s performatives are matters of embodiment. Performing and its gest-as-performative place the performer’s ‘body’, the sensuous body thoughtfully groping for its way, on the line, the imponderable virtual line marking off art from culture.

This performing, placing, weighted, soft-and-hard, pleased, painful, flow-replete, vulnerable body (so distant from the prostheticised competing techno-body of late-modernity), always both in and out of sorts with itself through the lure of its tempting limits, its potential, is the artist’s only given, necessary, prime and primitive, ‘material’. In the end nothing else matters except the mattering performing body and how, in its gest, it displays what was unavoidable for it, what could not have been otherwise, in its context-bound relation to its materials. For what the arts of modernity have revealed to us is that there are no privileged materials or media. Performing now takes for granted the absence of a rule or rules for ordering the way its offering develops through an interrelating of materials and media. Potential materials are without ‘value’ (for performing) in themselves; they only take on an idiosyncratic value for the performer in the course of a (site-)specific making-project. It is not that ‘anything goes’, but rather that performing can bring into play ‘whatever’ it takes (needs...) in trying to realise the fused conjunction of feeling and thought peculiar to the language of each project.

This ‘whatever’ marks the open horizon of performers’ explorations. And, because the ‘point’ of this conjunction is to generate an interruptive gest precisely in order to withdraw itself and its lured respondents to an elsewhere, to culture’s other, the chosen materials will be integral to effecting this interruption. They emerge from the ways in which the performing body, making-toward-art as a body experiencing the permanent crisis of its metamorphosis, discovers and tries to show the touching character of its relation to the ‘things’ of the world. Performing materialises itself at the fluid ‘point’ where ‘touching’ and ‘being-touched-by’ coalesce. It challenges itself to search out the most appropriate materials for bringing together what it ‘knows’ it has a feeling for and what has touched it. It also ‘knows’ that, facing this challenge, it may itself sometimes be the material – source and vehicle – that constitutes performing. Sometimes it looks no further than itself and its accoutrements when its own becoming constitutes its performative. The body in thrall to performing, the doubting but celebrating body, thus makes it the site where it is consumed by and devotes itself to its exploration of the chiasm of touch: it throws itself into the always unanticipatable leaping spiralling movements engendered within the open circle of, in Merleau-Ponty’s felicitous phrase, the toucher-touching-touched.<sup>29</sup> And this is a circle where wasting in both its primal and unavoidable, as well as its most socio-technically complex, forms is ever-present. In Duchamp’s wake a range of performers have figured this inescapability and its potential as a material resource in exploring the relation between the gallery-as-destiny and the possibilities of their own emergent languages.

## 2) Via Manzoni

When Piero Manzoni exhibited the sealed can entitled ‘Artist’s Shit’ (1961), he not only evoked ‘Fountain’s’ play on the relation between industrial production and the ostensibly ‘unique’ art-gest, he also entered the lists on the issues of both an art-thing’s ‘value’ and its ‘source’ (origin). By inviting us to value the sealed can in terms of its equivalent weight in gold, the gest blows a boundaryless hole, which it then proceeds to occupy, in the conventional processes of valuing art- and non-art things, of constructing both aesthetic and exchange values. It opens up, for all of us to recognise and enter, the void over which all valuing, monetary and non-monetary (aesthetic included), is permanently suspended. Once a ‘simple’ use-value is surpassed or supplemented (and when is it not?), every aspect of the activity of valuing becomes both opaque and fluid, utterly mysterious. And never more so than in the case of art, whose gests are offered precisely as the ‘beyond’ of use. If art’s gests are performatives on behalf of that which is other than ‘use’, then every such gest would seem, in a culture where use-function and value are intertwined, to begin their cultural life as exemplars of waste. For their potential lies, they hope, in their being superfluous to, the outside of, any other function, any application to non-art ‘ends’.

This is the gap that every gest tries to open up and move through in its search for its own way of showing art’s difference. But a further condition of this difference is that each gest be a unique display, a languaged rendering, of what is peculiar to, what differentiates, each maker’s ‘vision’. And this rendering appears, in trying to account for its emergence, to turn on how the ‘inside’ (the felt vision...) gets ‘outside’ (is manifested in a gest placeable in the world). Indeed, the rhetorics surrounding and supporting both performing and response in the arts of modernity rely, explicitly and implicitly, on largely unaddressed conventions for this transition. ‘Expression’ is the habitual resource used to account for the gest’s emergence:

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<sup>29</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Visible and the Invisible’, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968, pp. 130 – 155.

performing supposedly founds itself on and occurs through an act of ‘ex-pressing’, a pushing out of some inner substance. Thus the modern arts are gathered loosely as multiple workings out of a basic process of supposed ‘expression’, in which something already formed ‘within’ (some presumed complex of feelings and perceptions) is pushed out, ex-pressed, by forcing it into the terms of a, hopefully, sharable materialised language. All performing is ontologically gatherable, according to this underwriting, within ‘expressionism’. It is precisely this conventional rhetoric that Manzoni’s can both intervenes in and interrupts. And, however obliquely, in performing this interruption, it seems to anticipate and, *from the side and site of performing*, to touch upon the difference explored subsequently by Derrida in his opening up of philosophy’s concealed eliding of the difference between speech and writing.<sup>30</sup> For, silently but textually and perceptually, the can is the offer of something (a performative gest) which opens up and then proceeds to occupy, to hover in, the crack (sic...) between the inside and the outside. And it does this in a way which resists absolutely any rapprochement of the difference. Refusing to be allocated to one or the other, it hints, by its tactic of concealment, at both the inaccessibility of the ‘within’ and the absolute difference of the ‘without’.

Certainly Manzoni is inviting us to consider a double and perhaps troubling question: is every ‘thing’ offered, ex-pressed, by someone recognised as an ‘artist’, necessarily ‘art’, but is it at the same time, in the raw state of its emergence, ‘simply’ waste matter? If we follow his gest’s probings, we find that the can sets this dilemma before us without offering a solution. It suggests that, in their ‘beginning’, at the ‘point’ of their seeming evacuation and entry into ‘culture’, they are excess to requirements, ex-pressed from ‘within’ as pure waste. Art’s stuff, the can seems to suggest, is precisely that which, lacking a use, is therefore, irrespective of any ‘exchange value’ fixed to it, the equivalent of, the same value as, the performer’s (and, by extension, anybody’s) shit. Though the first condition for a gest’s ‘originality’ is the guarantee of provenance, the unequivocal attribution of a gest to a performer, perhaps this very attribution aligns every gest, all performers’ outpourings, evacuations, ex-pressions, with, finally, waste matter in all its ‘primitive’ but utterly routine rawness. Whatever is being processed within (pulped and bio-chemically and electrically transformed and sent on its way), through involvement in the body-wide and metamorphosing self-renewal of ‘digestion’, is condemned to generate nothing more than the by-product of waste. To become anything else, to get from culture’s margin into its valuing procedures, to be converted into some kind of strange value-cocktail, something else has to happen to the inner ‘substance’, the inchoate mass at the ‘point’ of its emergence and transition. To pass from, beyond, waste and to become gest, the ‘substance’ has to pass through some unremarked transforming rite of passage that converts it from a cultural ‘nothing’ into a cultural ‘something’. But through whose authority, by whose ‘hand’, is such transforming carried out? Where and how does the metamorphosis from waste to the valuable occur? Doesn’t it have to come from the performer’s ‘body’, from some unique aspect of his or her touch? Or is it, rather, a function of the context of response to it, of some element(s) defining and shaping a respondent’s, an audience’s, ‘taste’, as set out in conventions for valuing? But surely taste, especially a taste for the ‘new’, the ‘different’, cannot be grounding itself on a taste for waste, for the excremental, the all too familiar ‘same’, that which, unless buried or dissolved, carries toxic threats?

In the case of Manzoni’s can the transformation is both explicit and frontal, defining the very ‘condition’ of the gest’s materiality, but simultaneously elusively subtle. For its potential as a

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<sup>30</sup> See particularly his exploration of the relation between ‘expression’ and ‘indication’ in J. Derrida, ‘Speech and Phenomena’, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, and also his ‘Of Grammatology’, Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1977.

gest-for-art, the possible ‘beauty’ of its slippery gesture, lies in the ambiguity induced and enacted by how and what it conceals. And in this it is a further attempt by Manzoni to probe the ways in which the gests of art might, as performatives, be bound to, be dependent upon, concealment. In his ‘Two Infinite Lines’ of 1960, the two canisters, ostensibly containing rolls of paper inscribed with drawings of endless unmeasurable lines, appear as repositories, a kind of ‘safe-keeping’, of the fundamental ‘material’ of visual (and perhaps every other) art itself in its aligning of matters and materials. They remind us of what such art cannot do without yet, in their concealing, hint that we do not, can never, know what constitutes this essential condition. For, in practice we only ever have absolutely particular, and always fragmented, lines, lines that have to be stopped, broken, or cut off, by their very containment within and as their singular gest. The essential always recedes beyond, is, hopefully, pointed towards but simultaneously concealed by, what we can perceive – the appearance of the thing. Manzoni’s ‘Package’ (1961), likewise, offers us only its outer covering of paper, wire and seals. Again, the gest proposes that every gest-for-art is condemned to perform a cover-up. Every attempt to affiliate to, to align itself with, art, commits performing to a necessary withholding. The ambiguity that art’s gests offer lies precisely in the relation between their appearance, what their surfaces set forth, and that which they cannot ‘say’, ‘reveal’ - the unspeakable other that remains ‘over there’, separate from and indifferent to whatever culture does with it. What we are offered by ‘Artist’s Shit’, in the gap between the title and the appearance, is this very withholding.

The can ‘shows’ us that we have to take the artist’s word (the gest’s title is basic to how it appears before and to us) on trust. In order to fathom the gest’s potential as art, we have to ‘believe’ what its appearance, which includes the text of its ‘name’, ‘tells’ us. Yet, by withholding the named material, the real malodorous stuff of life-death, it draws us into that labyrinth where our unfolding search reveals that we ourselves, in and as our searching response, perform art’s only findable ‘content’. And what this response generates is a disturbingly unresolvable ambiguity: the can suspends us, undeciding, between the ‘real’ - could the can really be heavy with Manzoni’s excrement? - and the ‘symbolic’ - is the labelled can, irrespective of what ‘really’ fills it, rather a base metaphor for whatever matters an artist evacuates in the name of art? Is all art, symbolically, just waste matter until it has been authoritatively sited within culture by others as a potential object for consumption? Once allocated a speculative exchange value, in the course of that strange contract between aesthetic and economic judgment, perhaps this prime waste is transformed into a value the peculiar tensions of which have already been noted.

It seems, thus, that Manzoni, not only echoes Duchamp’s virtual intervention, but twists it subtly so that the representatives of art-as-institution, as the public protectors of the ‘good’ of art (the wholesome purity of its useless cleanliness...), are forced to confront the possibility that they may just be housing, still in the name of art, its structurally polar opposite (the ‘bad’ dirt that threatens to pollute the virtue of their entire collecting project). By miming, through the apparent gentility of its withholding concealment, the decorum expected of candidate-entrants to the halls of the ‘fine’ (arts), the can succeeds in gaining an audience for its performative. But, simultaneously, through enacting the very distance that mime constitutes between itself and its figured referents, it ironises both the decorum and the value judgments on which it is grounded. However slightly, the entire edifice and its collection is made to tremble. And, on our entry into the collection now, in the can’s wake, passing by way of the induction rites so superbly orchestrated by art’s institutional representatives, we cannot help but recall that, thanks to it, everything we ‘see’ under the ‘name’ of art still hangs in the balance, suspended between purity and pollution. In the simultaneity of this ‘potential

becoming' (its partaking of both 'at once'), we realise not only that there is no resolution, no deciding between them, but that it is in and as our very suspension in this peculiar non-resolution, that art's difference might just touch us. And, in touching us, it might displace, put out of play, the everyday certainties that ground themselves precisely on the structural oppositions toyed with by the can. We can recognise, too, that our disquieting fall into this other precipitous region, where culture's boundaries are both disclosed and at the same time soiled and dissolved, will be entirely due to our own collusion with, our participation in, the gest's performative seduction.

## 2) Via Acconci

Echoing Duchamp's originary offer, though ever more faintly, are three other gests which, in different ways, insert themselves into and open up art's unavoidable triangulation with waste and embodiment. Vito Acconci's 'Seedbed' (1971), a combined performance and gallery installation, confronted us with the diverting possibility that art, its performing and its gests, may be no more (nor less...) than an onanistic wasting of seed. But the performance sought to engage its potential respondents through a withholding that, echoing Manzoni's subterfuge with the matter of waste, hoped to draw them into the process of performing. Without their participation the performer's efforts, all his ex-pressions and ejections, would fall short of art and remain as inconsequential loss, a waste of time and matter. Apart from the wooden ramp across which the audience was able to move about, the material of the performance was constituted in the amplified fantasising and sounds made by the artist (we have to presume that it is indeed he concealed and vocalising beneath the ramp...) in the course of his (possible...) masturbation. These sounds became the condition for the performance's hoped-for transformation into something other than a wasting away. And this hope, in the case of 'Seedbed', had to include a further, no less important but equally buried, hope that its explicit gendered origin and 'content' would be at least partly elided in its reception.

It had to hope that its seeding performance would be taken as a cross-gendered metaphor for art as both renewal and the possibility of fruitful relating. The performance thus proposed that all art is conditional upon the active response its performances can generate. And always this response comes down to the relation between bodies, between Art's Body and the bodies of both respondents and, crucially, machined institutional bodies. If the performer's scattering of seed (real or metaphoric...for we can also recall that the seed flying from the hand of both Millet's 'Sower' (1850) and of Van Gogh's re-interpretation (1890) of the same (as well as the uncountable of 'seeds', registered by the latter's jots, dots, dashes, jabs and strokes that constituted his multiple 'cornfields'), may also fall as metaphors for their and all artists' efforts) is to be anything other than onanistic wasting, it has to set up the condition for a kind of seminar, a social gathering in which some scattered and hopefully, intendedly, 'good' seed may just be fortunate enough to fall on receptive ground, to generate an eventually (perhaps in a season yet to come...) fruitful response. Only when the performer's scatterings are responded to and nurtured by an audience will the energies expended in the wasting-away (still in the performing a wasting, for on the performance's occasion the performer cannot know the destiny of the scattered, the thrown-out, seeds, lines, sounds, marks, gestures, materials) come to fruition. The performance insinuated, then, that for a thing or act to be transformed from this lonely and solitary wasting activity into art, into a gest, required a respondent's active participation through the play of fantasy in the presence of the thing. Such a 'joining-at-a-distance', across the always unbridgeable divide (...the ramp...the frame...the institutional space-time...) between performer and responder, is a relation dependent upon, and perhaps constituted in, the mutual but separated playing out of a kind of

unfixable phantasmagoria. A virtual joining ‘charge’, sparked by the respondent’s desire for relation to a would-be-art-thing, arcs and loops across the divide.

Again, the possibility of getting to where art might just become ‘itself’, might come into its ‘ownmost’, beyond culture’s decorum, is revealed to be dependent upon the mutuality of trust between performer and responder. And, as with Manzoni’s gest, Acconci’s performance confirmed that this trust, in its turn, is dependent upon the performer’s absolute concealment in the course of the gest’s anonymous play. The most ‘Seedbed’ was prepared to declare was its gendered ‘origin’, in the hope perhaps that, though an inevitable condition of its appearing, it would be displaced in the course of its reception. For the very point of anonymity is to confirm and sustain the gest’s absolute separation from the performer. While exposing itself (while literally concealing the maker-as-performer), making itself patent, the gest effects an impenetrable barrier between respondents and the performer’s biography. For it has and can have nothing to say about the latter.

#### 4) Via Koons

If Acconci’s gest, precisely as performance, resists its ‘simple’ absorption into the exchange-value spiral, then Jeff Koons’ ‘New Hoover Convertibles, Green, Red, Brown, New Shelton Wet / Dry 10 Gallon / Displaced Doubledecker (1981-1987)’ (‘N. H. C.’ from here on...) marks and walks the now non-existent line between art’s gests as ‘art’ and as marketable objects of routine consumption. It engages art’s ‘involvement’ with waste in a double sense. Firstly, it deprives objects, whose ‘work’ is to remove waste, of their function and places them in an alien environment of non-work, proposing by this act that such re-siting by an ‘artist’ confers a new non-functional ‘identity’. And secondly, it shows the objects as both pristine but simultaneously in decline, becoming obsolescent, wasting remnants of the production-consumption cycle. As gest it thus recalls ‘Fountain’, but also re-aligns itself in relation to both art-as-institution and the market as the gest’s destiny.

Offered as a conventional gallery exhibit, the gest comprises three ‘new’ domestic vacuum cleaners, fluorescently illuminated inside a plexiglas vitrine. Each instrument is a slightly different ‘model’ and all are, as their very separation from the world of domestic work and their preservation in the gallery case emphasise, already on their way to obsolescence. The possibility of their transformation from dying (wasting away, removed from their functional possibility) objects of consumption to art gest turns on whether they can sustain a double offer. The gest has to insinuate itself into, align itself with, the art-full company of things (publicly perceived ‘tradition’) which may have already managed to sustain ambivalent elements in the face of institutional fixings and management. And, in order to demonstrate its own reaching towards this potential for ambivalence, for a revealing concealing, it has to perform its offer in a way which shows how it supplements and shifts the terms on which these other gests are placed and put to work.

By tracing and moving back and forth along a length-less ‘line’ (always invisible and unfixable) between the gest-as-art and the gest-as-commodity-thing, ‘N.H.C.’ opens onto the fate of all contemporary making-for-art: it shows the way every gest is condemned to lead a double (multiple?) life defined by two (at least) values that cannot be brought into any kind of alignment, let alone reconciled. It exposes the ‘trouble’ that all response to art’s possible things now faces. For each value-site from which a putative art-thing is approached excludes another which threatens to undermine it absolutely. Every ‘assessment’ of a potential gest’s significance is negated, undone, by the alternative which haunts its very ‘appearance’ under institutional auspices. ‘N.H.C.’ shows that there is no escape from this trap: destiny, as

circulation within the system of institutional exchange, is a matter of a permanent tremulous alternation between 'positions' as a result of which the 'thing itself', the art-thing-as-such, always recedes. There is no longer (was there ever...?) an 'it' that is 'given', 'simply there'. Such 'receding' constitutes performing's contemporary condition, both its plight but also its potential for ambivalence, for sustaining itself in between culture's awaiting sites.

Recession is the performance of a kind of unceasing disappearance, a wasting-away, that is only brought to an end when it is cast out of the institution as, precisely, waste-matter. When the global circulating institution decides a gest is no longer art-worthy it ceases simultaneously to be commodity-worthy as well, though both 'worths' lead absolutely independent 'lives'. Such not-quite-appearing-or-disappearing is the gest's current 'form', mode, of 'becoming' - 'becoming' not as the 'presence' of a 'here' or 'there' but, rather, as the recession of an alternation between them, and as thus a movement 'away' from any 'here' or 'there'. While the movement of this becoming is 'set off' and orchestrated under the terms of the interests of the cultural sign- machinery (the everyday productive work of art's institutional guardians), it is also art's way of trying to protect and sustain itself. From the institution's viewpoint, the aim of its signing work (the distribution of 'culture') is to maintain, at all costs, the forward thrust ('progress') of its own 'movement'. It tries to do this in art's case, through keeping this double valuing permanently 'on the go', rotating aloft without rest or resolution, like the ball supported by the fountain's jet. The point of this permanent movement is to try to hold to and represent the fiction of an identity between every gest's exchange- and its aesthetic-value (its art-historical 'significance'), to elide the difference. From performing's position, its possibility of living-on depends on finding ways of effecting and holding to this very difference, of preserving, through an irresolvable ambivalence, its otherness, its performing the beyond of reason's valuing.

If 'N.H.C.' is approached in terms of the likely exchange-value of the commodities which constitute it then, because of their obsolescence, and unless they are preserved as quaint historical documents in a different kind of museum, this will decline to zero - '...nobody buys vacuum cleaners like that any more...!'. But if approached as a potential art-gest, on the assumption that the artist's touch (hand-feeling-mind...) has accomplished an alchemical transformation, however slight (sleight?), then what might be 'seen' as effecting a radical shift in the mode of valuing, might also be taken as supplementing 'Fountain's' performance. In the case of 'N.H.C.' we face the further problem of 'Koons' as an image with a brand-name whose aura of market-value surrounds anything he offers. And we thus have to consider whether there might be something in this specific offering which undoes, however slightly, the very brand-name that authorised and guaranteed its exhibition in the first place, and which might enable us to pass beyond it into something other. It is not, of course, that Koons has transformed commodities into a 'sculpture' but, rather, that, through the terms of their gallery offer, these 'Hoovers' (another key brand name...) become 'something other' if they persuade us to 'see', to approach, them as performing a gest for art, a gest that, with our collaboration makes their and 'N.H.C.'s' exchange-value, for the 'moments' of our relation to it, irrelevant. For what we might then have to find our way through, what the encased trio confronts us with, is a teasing maze of questions that eventually require us to put into question the very site from which we ourselves are trying to 'see', to feel, our way towards them and their supposed performance-for-art. And, as in the other gests discussed above, it is a process of concealment, or, at the least, of separation, of sealing off, that interrupts their mundane 'presence' as, after all, 'just vacuum cleaners'. By encasing and illuminating them in a plexiglas, and thus transparent, vitrine, on display in a space-time that we do not enter as

if it were a shop (or, at least, not only a shop but a ‘place’ for seeing-feeling-thinking differently outside the frame of ‘price’), we are invited to ‘see’, to relate to, them differently.

Sealed off absolutely from the source of ‘power’ necessary to maintain their functional potential, they may just be drawable towards a different potential, perhaps into the play of power’s evaporation. For not only are they deprived of their ability to ‘hoover’ up that most evanescent of waste-matters which falls on us all without end and is also our end – dust - but they are themselves actually sealed off from its and other kinds of contamination (touch...), rendered (relatively) pure, almost ageless, by their isolation. The entire costly and complex apparatus of the exhibit’s representation - the work of its placement, the plexiglas, the illumination – seems designed to affirm and guarantee the coincidence of exchange- and aesthetic-value: the conditions of display as guarantee of a generalised ‘worth’. Yet, despite the techno-power at work in its exhibition, the singularity of this supposed ‘joint worth’ is precisely what evaporates when one enters into its ‘internal’ play. And it is the gest’s title that draws us into this play for, unlike ‘Fountain’, where the title effects a metaphoric shift of focus, it appears to be a literal transcription of the cleaners’ brand name and model reference. But what this ‘literal’ points us towards is ‘convertibility’ itself. Its vitrine may indeed now contain obsolescing objects which were labelled as ‘convertibles’ in their previous ‘life’ as domestic consumables, but as, potentially, ‘art’, the vitrine performs something rather different. It offers itself as the site and ‘condition’ of convertibility, a process which we ourselves activate when we take on and respond to its transparency. For what we can ‘see’ through to is our ‘own’ participation in and thus responsibility for the allocation of identities and attributes to ‘objects’. The terms of its ‘appearing’ turn us back upon our own stance towards its ‘content’, towards the ways in which we confer identity and significance on art’s gests. And, with ‘N. H. C.’, it is identity ‘itself’ which gives way, collapses ‘in’ upon itself. For it seems to offer ‘art’ as a ‘site’ where identity makes way for something else, where we can no longer be ‘certain’ about our own conferring of fixities and attributes to either ‘things’ or our ‘own’ activities.

As exhibit, ‘N. H. C.’ proposes that every gest-for-art is the offer of that estranging region where one thing can become something else entirely (thus recalling Jarry...). If the cleaners can no longer clean, are beyond cleaning, then what might they be doing? Perhaps they are performing that simultaneous ‘turning away from’ and a ‘turning into’ that ‘becoming art’ entails: the showing by performing, not of power’s controlling force, but of its absence in art, where the gest performs only itself as ‘potential’, where it ‘does’ convertibility, where something might just become absolutely other to ‘itself’, but only with our essential participation. The gest seems to situate, suspend, us in between nothing but possibilities, beyond the reach of any terms of power (authoritative controlling discourses) that would allow us to resolve the incompatibilities it sets before us. And perhaps the cleaners, now apparently separated off and released from any clean-up operation, are covertly, and insidiously for ‘Koons’ as itself a brand-name, de-toxifying themselves through the dissolution of their own brand-name. For what the gest invites us to take on is the absolute arbitrariness of all naming and the ‘values’ we attach to names in the interest of fixing ‘value’ to gests. And, given that art-as-institution (commodity) now depends on exactly this value-attribution for its distribution and placement, to display its constructed and motivated character is already to point us towards other possibilities for art’s performance.

Koons’ specific selection of three ‘Hoovers’ confronts us with a (brand-)name for the conjunction, the intertwining of different strands of power – corporate-economic (the giant manufacturing concern), political-legislative (Herbert), and state-covert-‘intelligence’ (J.

Edgar). Offered the eponymous hoovers in a gallery-context we are invited, perhaps, to consider the covert ties between the various strands of effective power and the carefully controlled (cleaned up?) everyday life of art's gests under corporate, state, and private patronage (control... including that of the very gallery in which they are displayed). Meanwhile 'N. H. C.' recedes from all our attempts to grasp 'it' as an 'it', into a vacuum of anonymity within whose vagueness 'it' offers 'itself' as, perhaps, nothing more (nor less...) than a solvent for the appropriating powers of labelling. What we seem to be 'faced' with is convertibility in action, a kind of undoing of the spectacle of value-maintenance, but realised only through our own cajoled participation. Right there, in the very place set up to supposedly confirm and reinforce the integration and hoped for unity of aesthetic- and exchange-value, value 'itself', valuing as the attribution of worth to our becoming, is evanesced, made lighter and more elusive than the tiniest particles of waste, the ostensible targets of the 'Convertibles' before the latter's conversion into another way of life.

### 5) Via Helen Chadwick

If the conversion process on offer in 'N. H. C.' appears to be a desiccated, dry-as-dust, 'at a distance', 'hands-off' affair, that keeps 'the organic' (living matter) well away from its 'own' opening onto art's relation to waste, then, for Helen Chadwick, echoing but re-siting 'Fountain's' flow-metaphor, art's implication with the visceral and wasting was unavoidable. For her, art's possible 'value', its 'worth', was the always open question driving her explorations of the processes constituting our all-too-real organic becoming. A continuing 'theme' of her *oeuvre*, to which she continually returned in a wide variety of gests, was the body's relation to what it ingests in order to maintain itself: the body as a self-reproducing organ (a near-machine...) that, through its simultaneous production of itself and waste, arranges the terms of its own appearing and disappearing among the world's paraphernalia. Across a range of very different gests (construction-assemblages, photographs, machines, performances) her and our relation to 'food-as-nutrition' was constituted as a 'site' of both delight and perhaps troubling paradoxes, a 'site' whose 'inner' (digestion, imagination-as-digestion) workings challenged her to find ways of making visible and wryly celebrating these always unconscious but always also 'felt' processes.

In 'Carcass' (1986) - one of two components (the other was entitled 'The Oval Court') in 'Of Mutability', a gallery installation at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (I. C. A.) - Chadwick had filled a transparent sealed box-tower with waste organic matter (vegetal remnants from food preparation, domestic compost). The vitrine's internal 'life' and transformations (the metamorphoses of bacterial consumption, decaying and re-vivifying through fermentation, transition from the solid to the liquid, falling and rising, and so on) became the visible 'content' of the installation. This vivified 'content', the installation as a self-activating, self-processing performance (acting as a surrogate for the artist's own performing and her emergent gest), constituted the gest's 'subject'. Just like the enforced evacuations of living human/animal carcasses subjected to unrelenting internal pressures, this 'Carcass' too, duly, though not according to any time-tabled toilet-training, began to leach elements of its rotting load; the smell of its lively waste, spread throughout the gallery and further afield. This brought an end to its life-as-art and its enforced return to its origin as waste. Deemed 'offensive' by the decorum police - the gallery management - it was removed from the gallery, thus destroying (wasting) at a stroke the very thing the gallery itself had facilitated as the essential content of the installation, the lively tension between its two components. The one thing this institute for the promotion and protection of contemporary art could not stomach was, it seems, art as the performance of contemporaneity itself - that which bursts with life.

Ironically, in this very act of censorship it revealed the inner dynamic, the guiding force that now organises and sets the terms for the ‘fate’ of all the arts’ gests - institutional authority. It revealed every gest to be an always temporary performance, let out on license as something ‘for the nonce’, whose end (return to waste) depends on the ability (power) to transform informal (personal) responses of ‘taste’ into formal (bureaucratic) judgments of value. No performer can anticipate where or how a gest may provoke censorship, for offense can be taken anywhere, and it is often, as with ‘Carcass’, viscerally excessive to the justifying words which accompany it. ‘Carcass’s’ ‘life’ confirms the unbridgeable gap, the absolute difference, between the desire that charges performing and the interests which manage art’s appearance and representation. And, for performers, it is precisely the search for a passage out of representation into its excess that provides performing with its unreasonable reason. Recognising this as precisely what drew her into her exploration of mutability, Chadwick showed her acute perception of what she was putting into play with ‘Carcass’:

“I imagined it would be like an emblem of death and decay but what I hadn’t anticipated was the fact that there would be this fermentation process.”<sup>31</sup>

Yet, as the artist herself said after the event, pointing up both the indexicality of taste and the irreconcilable difference between the commitments of performing and representing:

“You could smell it, couldn’t you, as you approached The Mall... farm-yardish, really good compost. I don’t think it was offensive.”<sup>32</sup>

And certainly such smells are familiar enough on The Mall, perhaps London’s leading ceremonial route, used as it is to the countless hooves and droppings of military and royal horses, stabled hard by the I. C. A. itself. But, in the ‘pure’ claustrophobia of an art gallery, the appearance of the rawly visceral was taken as a threat to (‘good’) ‘taste’ (in and as ‘art’...) itself. Art that, in its weakness can never go on the offensive, here became offensive in its very patency (what it exposed about art’s relation to the site of its embodied performing) to the powerful interests that had let it out on license and now returned it to nothing but waste. In its elision of art and waste matter, Chadwick’s gest offered, performed, art as that processing which can (did) effect a transition from one ‘state’ into another (art as conversion). But in this installation, by a happy ‘accident’, the conversion was extended to the gallery when it became the unavoidable receptacle for the carcass’s voiding. Taking the installation itself as a metaphor for art’s plight – the unstoppable entropic decline, the (usually) slow wasting away, to which every gest (and all life) is condemned – the gallery gave itself away by displaying itself as the instrumentally governed controller of this disappearance.

The virtue of ‘Carcass’s’ performance lay in its making the conversion process visible through its grasp and rendering of speed. We, and the gallery-as-live-institution, as a *bios*-processing machine, became real-time witnesses of and participants in the fate of every body-as-carcass, including our own and that of art. And the installation’s title – ‘Carcass’ – not only reminds us that this fate has been a recurring focus for artists, but also puts itself into a dialogue with specific preceding gests whose images sought to render and to insert themselves into the unforgiving region between life and death. Thus, while crucifixion has been a necessarily unavoidable subject in the image-making of art associated with and participating in the construction and representation of Christian belief and practice, a range of

<sup>31</sup> Helen Chadwick interviewed by Mark Haworth-Booth in ‘Stilled Lives’, Portfolio Gallery, Edinburgh, 1996 (no pagination).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

supposedly secular images also explores this theme with only the slightest displacement. In Rembrandt's 'The Slaughtered Ox' (1655), the hung and split carcass, though not horizontal to the picture plane, clearly echoes the body's form under crucifixion, while the folds of the ox's slashed skin mime torn clothing draped from a suspended body. Soutine returned repeatedly to the corpse (of animals, fishes and birds) as a constituent of both his 'still lifes' and full-frontal renderings of slaughtered cattle (see particularly his 'Side of Beef' (1920) and 'Carcass of Beef' (1925)). Several of Soutine's portrayals of human subjects are, similarly, closely related to the imagery of the hung-body, both in his vertical rendering of them in a shallow dense non-perspectival space and in the intensity and dominance of their reds and flesh colours (e.g. 'The Page Boy at Maxim's' (1926), 'Room-service Waiter' (1928), 'Chambermaid' (1928-9)). In these renderings (remembering that rendering is both a process of 'giving back' and of conversion by melting), 'art' fixes them so that, unless they are destroyed, their wasting away, unlike Chadwick's installation, occurs very slowly as that almost unnoticeable deterioration of a dying-away. And the unrepresentable fluidity of this conversion, our embodied becoming as ceaseless transformation, is a recurrent 'subject' of Bacon's paintings. All the body's constituents, from the relatively hard to the flowing, are rendered interchangeable but fixed, both lively and dead, in that strange no-where of transition achieved by Bacon's brush-play. And where he includes a carcass (as in 'Painting' (1946) and its re-rendering in 'Second Version of 'Painting 1946' (1971), and again in one of the recurrent pope-images ('Figure with Meat' (1954)), it is painted to make direct reference to the crucified body.

Chadwick's installation aligned itself with these (and many other) gests, even while siting itself in a distinctive performance zone. And, in a sense it drew these other pieces towards its own way of performing and imagining by shifting the 'ground', the terms, on which it insinuated art and the corporeal. If painting's relation to the dying and the dead body had been to share, paradoxically, the latter's stillness, while showing and celebrating painting's 'liveliness' in the face of its other, then Chadwick's move from the inert two-dimensional image to the living breeding installation seemed to reverse this process. For dying was shown as an absolutely and unstoppably lively process of conversion by mutation. Art, temporarily, became the occasion where this process was released, spectacularly, into the public arena. By metaphorising three (at least) bodies (art's, ours, and the vitrine itself as 'body') into the 'one' of the installation, the 1986 'Carcass' performed an imaginative leap beyond the spectacle of dissection modelled by Professor Tulp for Rembrandt's telling painting of 1632. The 'Body' under investigation was no longer that of a deceased convict whose tautened musculature awaited, under the eyes of the paying audience and seemingly forever, the man of science's - the all-powerful anatomist's - cut, but was rather Art's and our very 'own' body (though we 'know' only too well that we never do 'own' the life that charges our 'own' bodies). It was a never-still body whose frail skin, rendered transparent by Chadwick, precariously protected, but always only temporarily, life-processes that art here showed to be quite independent of anything we (whether as anatomist, artist or respondent... or all three combined) could do about it. Here art showed, performed, life as going on in spite of, beside, and through itself. According to the temporary terms of its performative context, 'Carcass' offered art in its becoming, as the performance of a conduit through which something of life, living's liveliness, passes. And, in the teeth of the Faustian pact, this same living pays art the compliment of 'tarrying awhile', taking a detour through and almost coming to rest, perhaps even wasting a little of its passing, within it.

If performing is an unending (so far...) exploratory celebration of the relation - as a becoming-in-between - of our inside(s) to our outside(s), then Chadwick found ways of

showing and confirming that, for the contemporary performer, this relation cannot be interestingly fixed within the rhetoric of 'expression'. Complementing the performative element of 'Carcass', she found ways in other specific gestures both of disclosing the intrinsic ties between the body's wasting processes and art's potential, and of revealing, performing, the absolute break between interior 'digestion' (the interplay of bio-chemico-physico- and imaginative-phantasmic-processes) and the gesture's emergence as a worldly 'something', a 'whatever'. Taking the universal function of urination (the euphemism of 'passing water' conceals that it is we who are passing away through it...) in its physico-chemical interaction with natural material (snow), she created a series of 'sculptures' in bronze and cellulose lacquer, the 'Piss Flowers' of 1991-92. The resulting solid worldly objects were developed from casts of the melting-converting effects of the forceful evacuation of warm urine on snow. The edges of the casts were shaped to mime, very simply, a flower's petals. Their surface contours were formed from the crystalline protuberances that were the relics of the urine's action. And the floral motif was emphasised by the snowy remnants' far from accidental simulation of a flower's pistil – its female sexual organ, including the 'style' with its simultaneous phallic appearance. The different sculptures, emerging from 'pure' waste's interaction with 'pure' white snow, but rendered into a different kind of 'purity' here through art's, rather than nature's, pristine whiteness, were thus offered as strange hermaphrodites. It was as if, through these never before seen 'becomings', art was 'peopling', enlivening, an unknowable (and certainly unrepresentable) region somewhere between nature and culture, between wasting away and emergence.

'Cacao' (1994), a gallery-installation constituted by a large electrically powered vat of simmering bubbling liquid chocolate, suspended itself in a different 'in-between'. Suffusing the atmosphere with the seductive smell of warm chocolate, it seemed to transform the gallery into a 'kitchen' (or a sickeningly(?) sweet factory...), and to thus be proposing, simultaneously, in and as its performance, that 'art' was a form of sweet nutrition, of delightful sustenance. But, in the very endlessness of its simmering, it was condemned to hang forever between preparation ('always already') and consumption (the 'not yet' of a forever deferred 'real' visceral satisfaction). As nothing but mediation, its performance was the offer of art as the potential of a 'hanging-back', a sensual (visual, nasal (– smell as the least theorisable-representable of our senses)) 'feast' in advance of, holding itself aloof from, actual ingestion. Its consumption of real energy was entirely in the service of a process without a product, a process whose only hope was the generation of, always unanticipatable, felt imaginative responses. Thus, by offering itself as only potential, it took on wasting. In the unending movement of its bubbling (likened by various commentators to a 'fountain'...), miming nature's volcanically-powered hot springs, it performed 'art' as a permanent wasting-away, a celebrant of entropy's inevitability. But in a double movement, its turning around and implication in wasting also suggested something very different that associated it with, and perhaps complemented, the earlier 'Piss Flowers'. Both in the appearance (colour and movement) of the molten substance, and through Chadwick's choice of title, 'Cacao' also allied itself with the excremental. For, as word, cacao, not only seeds 'chocolate' but also contains both the French word 'caca' (shit, stool...) and the Latin word 'caco' (first person present of 'cacare' – to defile with excrement...). And, as our familiarity with cacophony (the 'other' of euphony) reminds us, caco- is a prefix for the bad, the diseased, the wild. In this Ubuesque gesture the installation thus seemed to turn back on itself, suspending itself and us between smell and appearance, hung out between different wasting matters.

### **Slipping away from Representation**

And making for, towards, just such ‘betweens’ has been the post-‘Fountain’ lot of contemporary art-making. The slow but spreading realisation that performing’s plight - clinging to art within a culture for which art was excess to requirements - demanded idiosyncratic conjunctions of imagination and tactic, has become intrinsic to performing’s know-how. Realising that what it was trying to do was, precisely, to perform that which was other to the commonsense culture sustaining everyday life, performing has recognised, and has sought to show this recognition in its performances, that its performing-destiny was bound up absolutely with wasting. The range of gests considered here shows this as a continuing, unavoidable, demand for all performing. Across the arts performing is haunted by the need to confront this at some ‘level’ of its project. Each of the above gests, in their context-specific ways, focussed this ever-present demand by making it at least one of their ‘themes’. Each, through the particularity of its subject-matter and its ‘way’ of rendering this materially, made explicit art-making’s necessary triangulation of imagination, tactic, and waste. Each seamlessly intricately ‘tactic’ with ‘subject’ and ‘content’. Taken ‘together’, they real-ised (made real as a founding condition of performing) that the newly emergent and rapidly dominant institutional patronage of art now setting the terms of art’s, and thus performers’, survival, demanded different responses from performing. Somehow every performance has to find a way of responding to the systematic forms of representation that will constitute the only ‘opportunity’ for its ‘survival’. To have a chance of ‘living-on’, of having a ‘cultural future’ (however slight or brief), means both accepting the rule of institutionalised representation, while simultaneously trying to insert something into its gests which will be beyond representation’s control.

Tactic’s role has thus emerged as the search for ways of supporting the essayed leap towards otherness. It tries to seal into performing’s gests elements that might just be able to resist the forms of transformation entailed in the gests’ inevitable institutional destiny. It wants to imbue the gest with a kind of quiescent, silent, resistance to a machinery of representation whose range, speed, complexity, and ties to institutional power already place it beyond existing systems and conventions of political and economic control. The tactical challenge is to explore the possibility of holding to the still, quiet, minute, disappearing and useless ‘voice’ of art, in ways which might just hold-off, defer, divert, however briefly and slyly, the absolute appropriation that is every gest’s coming fate. Once absorbed by and transformed into institutional ‘knowledge’, now mediated globally through the common currency of info-imagery, can this ‘voice’, this ‘figuring’, avoid the domestication, the rendering ‘ordinary’, entailed in appropriation by the archive? This is the challenge which tactic takes on. Somehow it has to find out if there is still a chance, a hope, for performing, and thus showing to others, the difference that the passive resistance of art-as-potential might just make to everyday becoming. Its hope has to rest on fragments of disappearance and recession which might avoid, though all too briefly, their conversion into materials of power.

To preserve art’s difference, its otherness to the taken-for-granted structures and strictures of commonsense, means ‘taking on’, with a view to side-stepping, the inordinate power vested in the work of archiving, the way knowledge-as-information is used to secure, to fence-in, commonsense. Contemporary info-culture’s commitment to archiving its own passing is a necessary constitutive of its overwhelming need to try to account for, and thus justify, its own trajectory. It does this through collecting and accounting procedures whose role is to document, to represent, all those elements of everyday life the control of which is critical for the maintenance and implementation of existing systems of power. Such accounting constitutes the active performance of a cultural ‘memory machine’. Keeping this machine

going is an utterly ordinary routine activity in which we are all required to participate. We supply the information required, either directly or through the monitoring and recording processes that 'observe' and represent what we 'do' and 'are'.

Obviously the gests and performances of art are, like everything else, caught up in this unstoppable empirical, but essentially nostalgic, self-accounting process. But this driven attempt to self-ground itself, through an ever-expanding archive of its own apparent genesis and movement, cannot disguise the gap between the inordinate energy devoted to this socially organised self-monitoring, and the disastrous quality of its trajectory. For the latter still, as it ever has done and in spite of technoscience's awe-full instrumental and analytical accomplishments, careers on, a roller-coaster, resolutely beyond control, in a constitutional but terminal blindness. As constituents caught up in and whirled along in the maelstrom of this careering, art's collected gests, along with all the other technically superseded products and processes, pile up in the melancholy archive where they function as story-loaded reminders of now irrecoverable hopes. Here and there tiny flashes of otherness, of potentiality, emanating from elided zones of its sequestered shards, burst through the surrounding permeating narratives to remind us that things could be, just, different, that living-on might 'become' differently ... But not now, not here, not yet. When they do manage to slip away, through little chinks in the system's always fraying edges, or themselves force little holes in culture's seams, they can only point, from their strange vantage point beyond, to an as yet unenvisageable possibility to come. And, precisely because of the strangeness of this unenvisageability, its being beyond commonsense, what their potential might display may be very hard for most of us to recognise.

But, perhaps from performing's 'standpoint', trying to survive in and as its difference 'over there', it is just these scintillations, joyfully disquieting evidence of a fleeting transcendence, that continue to provoke performers to aspire to an at least granular otherness. Goaded by precedent art things, performing tries to make towards things which, while tied absolutely to the context of their generation, may just secrete vaguely flickering traces of a still ungraspable otherness. In order to continue performing, performers have to cling to this as a real possibility. Their only hope, a necessarily blind faith, is that something can be sent forth which, tearing itself off from the performing context, and the waste in which it is embroiled, drifts away towards an unknowable future where its other trace may just be picked up. But, in trying to sustain their hope in the face of the gest's unknowable destiny, performers are condemned to live out, to endlessly re-enact, the paradox embedded in the culture's archiving of art. For the only things that can have the chance of a future scintillation of otherness are those which have already been collected and archived, according to interests and demands (the invested judgments) arising from the present institutional context of aesthetic response. And these are irreconcilable with performers' commitment to make towards art's otherness, its 'othering' life. Given that only a minuscule proportion of those things offered by performers ends up accredited and preserved as 'art' in the culture's art collections and performance-reproduction sites (what is handed down to us as representing 'art-as-such'), then most of what performers generate in art's name is cultural waste matter. It disappears without trace. This defines, sets the terms of, making-toward-art now.

With this realisation intrinsic to performers' know-how, performing becomes a strange conjunction and disjunction of a hope to instil grains of art's difference into its gests, an absolute uncertainty as to the gest's destination, and a necessary resignation that the entire project, if it scintillates for no-one but the performer in the passing away of its performance, may already be detritus, excess to the culture's wants. Performers know not only that their performance is constituted through continuous waste-making (the abandonment and

destruction of materials along the way), but also that the likely destination of their offered gest is the culture's dump. Everything that, in the course of attempts to encapsulate what it is that making-toward-art goes through in constituting its performances, is routinely collapsed into that little word 'practice', is shadowed and haunted by the spectre of its own becoming waste.

Yet may this not be its saving grace? For if, for *poiesis*, the image-full dump consists, as Wallace Stevens offers, of absolutely everything – the nightingale and the old tin can (Manzoni's included) – then, for the performer astride it, the only responsibility is a beating-on-behalf-of. It is the performance that beats on for... For what?

'One beats and beats for that which one believes.

That's what one wants to get near.'<sup>33</sup>

Performers beat, it seems, for their belief in art as their specific idiosyncratic destiny, knowing that getting near, the possibility of approaching art's vicinity, is all that beating, performing, can hope for. Because, as performer, one never knows: one's know-how includes the para-knowing that one will never quite know whether one's made-thing, one's gest, does 'achieve' art's difference, does generate an art-thing 'as-such'. If one did already know, then performing's very performance would be redundant, for performing is precisely the quest for art's unknowable-not-yet. Perhaps this is already an acknowledgment that beating, now beating only itself for something that is other, is indeed already part of the dump. It's just that, for it, gathering everything to and as the dump as its only site, as the deposit (remembering Duchamp, the 'arrhes' potential?) from which *poiesis* draws everything, is the transformative – transliterative - gesture. For the purifying change occurs right there, between the things that are and will be 'on the dump'. It is in this midst that,

'One rejects

The trash.'<sup>34</sup>

The gest, in its fleeting passing, seeks to show that, for *poiesis*, as Jarry saw so clearly, everything can be turned into its other. And perhaps it is somewhere in the same vicinity that J.H.Prynne, more than thirty years after Stevens (and pointed up in the quotation at this chapter's head), located 'the purest central dogma in the history of trash'. Exemplified by the reconstruction of 'good taste' into 'billboard nostalgia', this may be the state, the state of the 'lying report' in its 'truth mostly formal', and its 'efficient causes', that, thanks now to the manipulation of info-imagery, still and ever more probingly and possessively, encompasses our quotidian becoming. The same vicinity, perhaps, but the content and the contours of the dump have been steadily transformed in the interim by our driven drift into a world borne along and underwritten by an electronically dependent and charged spectacular rhetoric. Its extraordinary penetration of and investment in the sliding bursting re-sealing textures of daily life, is managed and co-ordinated by the capital-technoscience combine. The unavoidable challenge performing thus faces is how to engage the consequences of finding itself in the midst of this superbly efficient waste-making machinery. As noted earlier, the latter excels in its hyper-productivity of redundancy and production for almost immediate supersession.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Wallace Stevens, 'The Collected Poems', op. cit. p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Seth Price concludes his virtual paper by reminding us that, '(P)roduction is, after all, the excretory phase in a process of appropriation'. Op. cit., no pagination. But if, as I propose throughout, making-for-art is not a mode of production or a form of work but rather an offering, then it may hope to hover in a different relation to appropriation's wasting work. But that creativity (as in the Maze prison as anti-decoration perhaps) may have intimate ties to waste matter is noted by Paul Peroni in his juxtaposition of the paintings of Dubuffet and Mary Barnes: paint-as-shit and shit-as-paint. See P. Peroni, 'Shits', 'Versuch, No. 1, Notes and Projects', London, 2011; [versuchjournal.blogspot.com](http://versuchjournal.blogspot.com)

To make-for-art, while embedded in this context, is to be perennially confronted by the paradox of art under modernity: how to make some thing that is absolutely of (and thus consumed by) its ‘moment’, while simultaneously hoping to instil in it a transcendent fragment that will carry it beyond its moment – both backwards to gather it with past art, and forwards to enable it to offer something of art’s difference to a culture-to-come. And performing knows full well that such a gathering is dependent upon the very aestheticising machinery that is itself a constituting force within the production of redundancy. Caught up in the drive to supersession, it may be that those things that are gathered in and institutionally accredited as art’s representatives are, in this very process, condemned to be nothing more than representatives (examples) of their moment. For, in the over-riding need to make ‘taste’ and market-sustenance coincide, the entire thrust of cultural accreditation (the institutional work of gathering-in) is to find things that define and are thus representatives of their already superseded moment. Possible transcendence – otherness – is irrelevant to a representing and productive machine that needs endlessly to assert and show the primacy of a ‘now’ as an empirical guarantor of its own ruthless perspicacity. The content and representation of its gathering-in have to attest to the thoroughness of its own calculatively methodic procedures in accounting for and representing the ‘present’ state of the arts.

Every carefully selected entry into its collection (its marketed display) is thus set forth, put to work, first of all as an example; it is endowed with a typicality by becoming a member of the ‘class’ of something like the ‘best of its type we can find currently’, where what are offered and represented as this ‘best’ have, above all, to meet the needs of accountability and marketability. They have to be incorporatable into the current practical and analytical interests of aesthetic interpretation. In so doing they face the immediate threat of becoming mere remains, left-overs, of a moment that has already passed away. Judged and chosen as being, and thus defining, ‘of-their-time’, their secretion of something other than this moment is an irrelevance. Performing is thus inevitably caught up within the primacy of this demand. It is extraordinarily difficult, perhaps impossible, to shape and sustain a site for performing which seals one off from the pressuring demands. The perennial and paradoxical challenge is to situate making as a specific response to current ‘conditions’, to ‘now’, but to effect this through a gest that offers itself as potential, as casting itself towards a not-now, an elsewhere that is yet to come. Performing gets swept along by the tension of this dynamic. And under the exorbitant institutional pressures to place oneself under the requirements of representation, to be seen, represented, as an example, may be deemed preferable (this is the hazard, bet, chance, confronting every performer...) to the alternative of no exposure, of instant return to conventional waste. Besides, there is always the chance that grains of otherness may be secreted unbeknownst in the thing, to emerge only later in some unknowable future. Wherever and however performing derives its quest (from its seduced relation to other art (rather than culture), to an obsessive attachment to the possibility of a gest’s concrete difference towards which it tries to make), its search is for gests that might just survive in between a marketable ‘now-here’ and the nowhere of a completely unanticipatable not-yet.

Performing, struggling to live on within this ‘in-between’, confirms its contemporary hybridised fate. Pulled back and forth across disjunctive visions of excess, its path is formed according to the balance it strikes between them. Drawn into institutional representation and the demand for hyper-productivity, performing has to operate under the threat of redundant excess – becoming discardable waste. In making for the demands of a ‘now’ that is already superseded, part of the past in the very moment of its becoming, it aligns its gests with the

routinely produced meaning-excess sustaining the culture. Yet, in trying to hold to art, to what ‘in the beginning’ (and still, hopefully...) drove it to distraction (to distract itself into trying to make art), each performance aims to send forth a gest which is in the service of a very different excess. For it aims precisely for the excess which marks art out as other to, outside, everything else – the unassimilable thing: excess of and by dissociation, by excising its ties to the doings of culture.

Already set on course by the hopeful doubt that defines the self-questioning project, making is wracked by alternating extremes. Hoping for art, the doubt is drawn through itself in the sway of a euphoria and a dysphoria whose apparently random interactions, while shaping the performing process, seem to have little to do with the specific excesses towards which performing is heading. For, irrespective of the performing experience, the only thing at issue in its resulting gest is the socially organised diagnosis of its possible excess. And, as diagnosis is carried out within and according to alien interests, the possible rewards of participation are difficult to ignore. Selection and ensuing participation do at least guarantee a temporary visibility and accessibility. To make-for-art, for what is precisely not-representation but its very excess, risks not only institutional exclusion but the real isolation entailed by this practical solipsism. Yet to try to broach the terms of a generative disjunction in which each is given its necessary weight, is to risk both self-cancellation and dissolution through a babelic contradiction. And always, lying in wait at the culmination of each gest, is its possible reception as all too ordinary waste; in performing, where much may indeed be cast off and destroyed, it is the performer who decides what is to be converted into mundane rubbish in the duration of the performance. But once a gest is sent forth, such judgments are made elsewhere according to foreign criteria.

Stuttering on in this tight unrelenting spot, this ever-turning no-point, performing becomes the site where the struggle between different relations to waste is endlessly rehearsed and re-enacted. Yet, wherever it still tries to make for art alone in spite of inhabiting this disaster, knowing that there is nowhere else to go, performing goes on in a hope peculiar to and partially defining it. And this going on, each time searching for its own differentiating way, entails an unavoidable engagement with the ordinariness of everyday life. For like everything else, all ‘activity’, it is immersed in the latter’s routine and unquestioned renewal under technoscientific representation. The ‘ground’ (virtual only...) ‘supporting’ this taken-for-granted world is constituted through the latter’s projection of time and space (and thus our becoming through them), as ‘given’ external and measurable co-ordinates, by means of which the becoming and the identity of everything else can be fixed and placed. Even though time and space may be formulated as dimensional, the practical assumption is that these are knowable, representable, and unshakeable (though haunted by a disturbing relativity). The production of the relevant knowledge is assumed to be just a matter of the conjunction of appropriate resources and applied work.

Thus all making-toward-art, because it is surrounded by this work and its effects, has to find, set up, the terms of its own ways through them. For though performing is condemned to their midst, art may only be found in their beyond. To have even the slightest chance of reaching out towards, glimpsing, touching, and returning with traces of this beyond, performing must find ways of releasing itself and slipping away from the binds of knowledge-work. Its struggle is, as ever, with what ordinarily binds us all into a world-in-common, the everyday knowledge that constitutes a shared, mappable, taken-for-granted time-space. Currently and for the foreseeable future this is the time-space of pan-electronic representation. And it is this struggle that shows just how fundamentally performing is bound up with waste.

In order to slip away from representation performing has to lay waste to time and space as we currently know and use them. It has to perform this scattering in order to turn its own becoming out of the conventions of external co-ordinates and the everyday knowledges resting upon them. Performing thus has to perform (and thus to lodge its traces in the gest it aims to offer) a passing out. Passing out of the measurable, it aims to be absolutely precise, concrete, about the obscure, the vague, the intrinsically fluid, the too close and too distant - all the phenomena and processes which endlessly equivocate and undo the perceived felt and interpretable 'clarities' of our taken-for-granted knowledges. Its point is to try to show these in their very difference from what we assume we can and will grasp and render (represent) through our shared and repeatable everyday conventions. To this end, performing is committed to trying to get to a gest that is a one-off. It aims to be unrecognisable to and irreconcilable with the conventions that set up the parameters of 'life' under representation's rule (after all no-one 'knows' what (or if) 'life' 'is'...).

Self-generated within the conjunction of an untimely worklessness and a self-scattering displacement, it thus emerges from an elsewhere, an other-than-time. It hopes that a fragment of itself will remain 'over there' in this beyond, ensuring at least the possibility of a minimal separation from 'that which is'. It yearns for and seeks to set forth something that might just offer the parabolic trajectory which loops out and passes away, however briefly, into a transcendent outside, before returning to the givens of this world. The gest's very point is to set itself aside from, to foil, interpretation's fixing and placing work. But such a foiling and avoiding tactic acts as a direct goad to the machinery of interpretation, which sustains itself with a supreme self-confidence in its own ability to turn everything into 'knowledge'. All the analytical skills and wiles of the aestheticising machine are geared to ensnaring the gest's obscure becoming in the folds of representation, in order to make it appear reasonable, nothing out of the ordinary. This conversion into reason and sense thus attempts to abolish the hiatus, the disjunctive split, between performing and culture. The machine recognises all too clearly art's toxicity - the threat that art poses to culture and that performing thus poses to the production and stability of everyday knowledge. For, while absolutely intrinsic to performing, the wasting of time and space is potentially disastrous for the steadfast renewal of everyday life. Time-wasting entails an abandoning of the sense-making conventions and judgments through which the ordinariness of a world-in-common is maintained, through which the present is secured as livable through the routines of productive work. Likewise, space-wasting occurs when performing and its gests, through their uselessness, occupy spaces which could be filled with activities and their products whose use-value ensures a simple conversion into exchange-value. The latter is, of course, the guarantee of their potential contribution to the world-in-common. And this is why the machine is so committed to turning art's gests into exchange-values, making them instantly convertible into money and alternative products. And it is the machinery of representation which, through the dominance of its pan-global electronic waving-forth of 'meaning' by its strange fusion of time and space in a virtuality, is now the critical means to this maintenance of the ordinary.

If we are all swept along within and by it, how can the 'pan-', the info-cradle nurturing and sustaining all 'usage', be challenged let alone avoided? Only, perhaps, by performing that which is as alien to it as possible - only, therefore, by the severest artifice. That is, only by the gesting of some thing which, for representation, is a complete waste of its time-space, can a possible (and most likely only momentary) gap be cut between representation's surfacing lines (lines full-to-bursting with worldliness and with world-content that line us up without end) and their beyond. At least in such a gesting the attempt will be made to stick with, to try

to get at, that which endlessly donates the very possibility, the potentiality, of our surfaced becoming. And, for making-toward-art, this donation can only be shown in and through those materials - everything that matters to us – to which it clings in order to try to disclose our multiple texturing.

Across the arts, performing's know-how begins in the conviction that living and materialising are indissociable; it knows that it has to give absolute primacy to trying to secrete, in the gests it offers, feeling-traces that always leave meaning trailing behind in their wake. Clinging on for dear life to the particularity of its materials, performing tries desperately to show our textured becoming in its potentiality. In such a showing, performing may, perhaps, be describing its own limit. For surely it is these materials in which, in the (our) end and the (our) beginning, we are completely enfolded? Perhaps we need to pass through the actual, always materially particular, detour of art's wasting-away-for-Nothing in order to approach the vicinity of our potentiality. The bursting forth of the gest in its material particularity is all that matters to the performer in that strange transition (the transliterative leap) from the probing felt-thought of making-toward-art into the whatever-material – different for each performer and gest – that constitutes this 'all that matters'. And all performers know that, no matter how steadfastly they persist with their making-routines, the summons into unreason precipitating the burstings-forth, the break-outs, of the completely unanticipatable, is precisely what gives the materialised gest the strength of its constitutive weakness. Its essential elsewhere-calls are as likely, or maybe more likely, to come when time and space are being apparently 'wasted', when 'nothing' is happening (idleness, ennui, intoxication, reverie, alien-tasks, rest, sleep, a glance, a smell, a touch, a laugh, tears...), as from the activities constituting the everyday life of art-directed performing. Art's unlikely possibility rests in and on wasting's gift. But performers also know that, for them, their gests only become left-overs, remains, waste matter to be collected and disposed of, when their performing drive has come to the end of its tether with them. Only then do they put them out and offer them up for collection (whatever-recycling or -destruction) by the institutional collectors whose perverse collecting logics cut themselves off definitively from performing's life. Recall the call-and-response from the 'Call of the Freaks'....

“In the mornin’....  
In the evenin’, stick out yer can...’

36

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<sup>36</sup> See this chapter's opening quote and the accompanying footnote.