

## TO GIVE...

### 1) GIVEN: THE PRE-POSITION... Questioning givens

Might there be a 'given' in advance of the 'givens' that define the position, the place, the ground from within which the would-be artist undertakes her or his making, something(s) taken-for-granted that seems to float free of attachment to an artist's 'spot'?

Responses to the arts and artists, the ways respondents try to account for their thoughtful feelings about them and articulate their understandings of their places in culture and our lives, are deeply implicated with and often dependent upon the use of the verb 'to give'. Artists are often represented as 'gifted', as possessing a 'gift', and the things they make are also seen as 'gifts', 'given to' society; the artist/art-thing (gest) relation, the gest/audience relation, the art/culture relation, seem to exemplify aspects of the 'gift relationship'. Some kind of 'giving' appears to be intrinsic to what we take art to be doing and how we might 'receive' it. The arts' subsumption within 'to give' is perhaps a 'given' for us.

Yet, essential to contemporary performing's quest since the emergence of the moderns' project has been the putting into question of the 'givens' traditionally taken for granted about the arts' life, place and possibilities within culture (the 'grant' of the 'for granted' here also making reference to what is taken as a 'given'). Art's performances are infused by questioning, a questioning directed outwards (to world and tradition) and inwards (to self – the subject-that-is-not-one - as quest). Emerging from this self-and-other questioning are uncanny things which are both performances of and residues from this questioning of the 'givens'. But the gest-as-question could only be an 'answer' to its own self-questioning outside of any question-and-answer relation which we take for granted in everyday life. The gest as both question and answer is offered as a display of the good of art's self-questioning, an affirmation on each performing occasion of art's offer of itself as a celebration of self-questioning. The would-be-art-gest hopes to be discernible in and as the singularity of this display. If there is an 'answer', it might be found in and as the gest's celebration of art, its attempt to keep art open, patent.

The gest's 'answer' to its own questioning is, at most, a display of a hoped for possibility, a hope that the 'thing-itself' might just be responded to as a gest-for-art, rather than something else, something compromised by being mixed up with non-art interests. Performing is not interested in asserting, rehearsing or repeating 'givens', but rather in seeking to discover whether something put forth in hope and faith could still be responded to as art. It hopes to be the bearer of art, the transferer of that 'something' in the art-things handed on to us from the past, the something-else that made them art. In spite of their conviction that there is an unbridgeable chasm between yesterday's art-things and practices and the demands of their own performing moments (with the consequence that yesterday's means cannot be repeated), contemporary performers (and their modern antecedents) are still convinced of the transferability of whatever it might be that makes some 'thing' a thing-for-art.

A possible (would-be) artist finishes a performance. Something is left behind as the performing's residue, its remains. It may or may not be an art-thing. The relation of intimacy, that passionately disinterested questioning that defines practice, ceases. Cessation is marked

by a transforming detachment in which the residue becomes something other for the performer, something now abandoned by the becoming-self. Often this abandonment is followed by its being offered to others, an offer without expectation of a return. Perhaps, crucially for art, 'to offer' is different from 'to give'.

### **Offering Otherness**

As offer, lacking the expectation of return, a would-be-art-thing may forestall its being drawn into the exchange relation of the gift. But the very processes of making and offering something as possibly art engages the issue of giving in another way too. For to take on art, whether as performer or audience, is to bring into play assumptions about both what art is or might be quite apart from one's own thought-feelings for art, one's own very personal responses to and investments in its possibilities. It is these assumptions which 'give' art to us, provide a space within which we can recognise and develop relations with its things; they are what we tend to take as given about art in advance of meeting any specific would-be-art-thing. As they are what open up and shape art's region for us in the 'first place', some will be unspoken and unquestioned, firmly fixed, hard to shake. They are the pre-condition of us having any kind of relation to art. As the 'given' of art for each of us, they are its pre-positioning. Each such advanced fixing and framing acts as a pre-position: a positioning of art's possibilities for us in advance of coming to terms with any particular thing, including all those things that have already been given a position by others as definitely art-things.

Indeed most of the things we approach in the expectation of art appear to us through this double positioning. Unsurprisingly there is considerable overlap between the embedded personal 'givens' enabling us to recognise and respond to art, and the 'givens' of those cultural organisations and processes framing and representing art for us (whatever it is that enables us to enclose a thing in a region we grasp as peculiar to art). Our own personal art-horizons and zones are continually reinforced, maintained and shifted through the ways things are set up for, represented to, us as 'essentially' art-things. And so pervasive is the machinery of art-representation now that performers and responders (potential audiences) circulate largely within the terms on which it mediates the arts.

Yet it is the very putting into question of these 'givens', of the way art is represented to us as something whose 'being-becoming' is already 'given' in advance (and thus appears to us as fundamentally unquestionable), that has been the precise point, the abiding and driving concern, of the modern commitment, of those who sought to realise their vision of a distinctly modern art – an art-in-difference: 'yes' to art, but 'no' to the 'givens' of art of which they were in receipt. Offered out by its performer, the thing's only possibility of living-on lies with respondents recognising it as an 'art-thing' *precisely in and as its difference(s)*. But the responsive recognition that may position the thing as now an art-thing is not a return to the performer of something commensurable with whatever went into its emergence.

The performer's hope in effecting the thing's detachment (having done with it) is that it will become discernible, incommensurable, free-standing, inertly able to side-step any common measure that might seek to make it equal to, substitutable by, *representable by*, something else standing in for it. And perhaps it is the subsequent emergence of some kind of agreement by others about its near-discernibility that will enable it to begin its life as an art-thing for the culture (rather than a thing belonging only to abandonment). However, the possibilities of others' relations to it depend on the qualities of intense attention which it draws out of them, thus enabling them to gather it to the plane of their own specific relation to art. Each potential respondent's moving plane of possible engagement is a complex of touched senses, art-and-

life-knowledges-feelings-memories, openings, closures, and highly wrought and barely articulable response-repertoires. A potential art-thing's discernibility is always felt out and placed in a context of both firmly fixed aesthetic response-judgments and a vague unboundaryable penumbra of thought-feelings. For respondents, some 'thing' becomes an art-thing because it is never completely discernible, never autonomous, never 'in-and-for-itself'. It always overlaps and shares something with all those other more or less familiar things already constituting art for the respondent(s). Yes - there will be specific aspects of the thing-as-art-thing that enable it to be taken in its discernible unicity, but this is inevitably a compromised partial unicity, a split unicity. Response, in its fusion of feeling and judgment, can only assign discernibility through a reciprocal process of gathering within which the discernible takes its place. And, until the rise and sway-holding of the modern movements, this gathering was almost entirely taken for granted. Would-be artists and potential respondents took as an almost-given the received 'tradition' of art-defining norms and criteria for assigning 'aesthetic value'.

Across the arts changes were gradual and judgments about discernibility were made within boundaries largely patrolled and enforced according to the dominant institutions of patronage. Institutional judges and decision makers made their selections about what should be collected for 'saved tradition' from within, and thus reinforced, these 'givens'.

But, for the nascent modern movements, it was the absolute necessity of questioning tradition as a 'given' that defined their emergence and began to open out a plane for very different trajectories of performing. For them perhaps the only 'given' was an inchoate sense of the feeling-zone within which some 'thing' that might yet be art could get under way. This region was constituted through the passionate belief in and commitment to art's possibility, the exploration of the possibility that there could still be art, despite (or because of) the radical socio-economic and cultural changes defining modernity. It was this alone that was to be carried from the art of the past ('tradition(s)'): whatever it was in past art's things that, however slightly or faintly, managed to escape those norms and thus offering to the present the possibility of something other than what already is. There was only one way to examine that possibility: to develop modes of performance that, careering away on unique trajectories, revelled in the exploration of the limits of their own immersion in their medium, and to do this in ways that showed they were on behalf of nothing but art. Nothing is 'given' except the would-be artist's need to find out if art could still be made. The things that came out of these explorations were the artists' abandoned offerings.

Art's 'essence' (what was to be sought at all costs) for nascent modernity thus lay in whatever it was in the arts' things that leapt beyond the moments of their making. So art's difference, what it offered as a site of possible experiential transformation, would emerge from the ways its things might disclose this otherness of 'not-yet'. The modern movements predicated themselves and art's possibilities on this hazard of otherness. Their risk was that, in putting making-for-art exclusively under the sway of the search for the outside of 'what is', nothing might come of the venture. Art, they hazarded, could only come into its ownmost through this drive to make something that, being only of, for and about itself, could not be gathered under or co-opted to external interests and representatives. Art could only persist (finally become itself) if it were able to offer things that performed their difference by making their otherness the be-all and end-all of the performing. The hope was (and still, mostly, is...) that the things would become art-things precisely in and as the ways they attracted and held respondents' attention to the plane of their own becoming as a careering away into the elsewhere of a not-yet.

Thus the modern movements radically reduced what could be taken for granted, trusted, assumed, in the course of developing a relationship with a possible art-thing. In some ways the inner urge of the Rimbaudian drive to be ‘absolutely modern’, or Pound’s ‘make it new’, has resulted in practices generating things that challenge recognition itself. They make the reliance on memory, as a comfortable resource of assumptions enabling us to position and fix both the thing and, simultaneously, the qualities of our responses to it, largely irrelevant. Or, at the least, different memory zones might need to be called into play than those habit calls up in aesthetic response. The things offer us a very particular kind of challenge: to try to re-create for ourselves, through engagement of the surfaces they offer, some of the paths followed by the performer in striving to reconcile discernibility and art; to exemplify, show, art’s otherness through making something discernibly one’s own (while admitting that this ‘one’ – the modern subject as a plurality – is already a manifold, and that this ‘own’ has nothing to do with the propriety of property, of something that one possesses... *rather it manifests the ways the one-as-many has been possessed by that same unknowable manifold*).

Now, still trying to trace paths through modernity’s afterwards, performers know that the task of holding art and discernibility in some kind of generative tension is itself entangled in and subverted by the machinery of the arts’ representation. These attempts to fuse art and the performer’s discernibility in abandoned offerings, caught up as they are in and by this very abandonment, leave themselves wide open to the only thing which can guarantee them some kind of perpetuity – appropriation. Un-appropriated they would disappear without a trace; appropriated they are suborned, elaborately re-clothed and pressed into cultural service as mundane representatives of power and mastery (over art...).

## **2) GIVEN: THE EXTREMITY...**

### **Becoming Beyond**

Perhaps what is now ‘given’ (what makers take-for-granted) about making-for-art under modernity’s afterward is the necessity of becoming-extreme, of making for an extreme. And this extreme is opposed by another extreme - our being unavoidably under the sway of and swept away by extreme electronic representation. Being our ‘condition’ or ‘circumstance’ the latter infuses us, makers and respondents alike, as a seemingly immovable unyielding given. It appears as the ‘state we are in’ and, as such, seems already to have defeated any attempts to move through and beyond it. The enabling-powering that defines its ‘rule’ (the politico-economic control of the machinery that extracts and routinely distributes its prime ‘means’ - the flow of electronic power) seems to set the absolutely given terms of everyday life within which all activities, making-for-art included, occur. It seems to exclude any possibility of moving to an ‘elsewhere’ which would perform or show an alternative extremity. The routine availability of powering in its now manifest form of extreme electronic representation is our taken-for-granted condition, the ‘given’ of our everyday-becoming. This ‘given’ permeates making-for-art along with all other activities. In considering making-for-art’s relation to the extremity towards which it seeks to make its way - the ‘otherness’ of Art’s Body - we shall have to constantly recall this ‘given’ as making’s defining challenge.

Thus making’s movement outwards is not just towards any extreme. It is bound only for an extreme where a gest-for-art might, in making itself felt, come into its own, thus becoming what it set out to be – nothing more nor less than a gest-beyond. But this ‘beyond’ has to be

recognised as a no-place where everything that has fixed makers into the givens of culture has to be set aside, placed in suspension, in the course of making. Art's 'beyond' is extra-cultural: making has to go through and release itself from the cultural binds that hold it in place. And the aeon-defining form of these binds - that which exposes what the culture 'is' - is the systematic machinery of extreme electronic representation *on which all powers now rely for their self-maintenance*. This is surely the riveting tension which holds making-for-art in its grip. Making can only essay its project, try to separate itself off and leap away from its appropriation by the machinery of representation, by partaking, participating, sharing, in those very processes of representation. Making becomes the site where the irreconcilable extremes constitute their conjunctive disjunction. Such is making's plight-as-predicament: the 'inside' of representation' is already deeply within *it*.

Once making-for-art grasps this, while realising that there is no 'coming to terms' with it, then it senses innately as it feels its way away that it has to find and make a way of becoming extremely art-full (to be as full of nothing but art as it can be...). Its project becomes that of finding how to give away the 'given' (extreme electronic representation) that defines it. It faces itself with the challenge of giving away the very secret that keeps it penned in and that its everyday performance relies on for its possible 'presence' in the encasing culture. *Somehow it has to find singular ways in its gests of exposing and fragmenting this given while remaining reliant on those very same representing powers that it engages to draw (attract, charm, seduce...) others under its sway.*

Performing is driven, then, to make a thing that is defined primarily by the tension which marks its everyday life - the possibility of its living-on in hope for art's sake... but only just. It has to find ways of exasperating, of turning out of themselves, the very things - representation's pre-formed channelled energies - on which it is absolutely reliant for some kind of 'life'. It lives on in and as the simultaneity of this contradiction. In taking up this challenge it tries to show that it can 'move' beyond non-art things and ways only by celebrating, *however incidentally*, the very thing-processes whose effects it seeks to displace, decreate, scatter, and, finally, dispense with. If it gets to the 'outside', somewhere in the vicinity of Art's Body, the very gests which carry it away will be simultaneous acknowledgments of its failure to leave them behind. Powering's designed energies will, secreting their traces in the gests' surfaces, continue to 'help' making-for-art on its way. This may be the double irony to which it condemns itself: it holds on to power even while scattering it in its brief foray into the outside. Making may establish its gests as the semblance of a region *where art is all that happens, all that appears (to be the case), while powering's forms continue to sustain its bare life*. It seems that the 'life' that is 'given' to it, the granting term of its survival (living-on), is both a half-life and a double-life.

Under this grant art can only happen now if the performing makes a mark, however slight and marked by its collusion with representation's means, not previously registered on Art's Body. The slight hope of such Body-marking would be to change, however slightly (perhaps barely noticeable initially), how the Body *appears, what it appears to be about*. It can only offer the semblance of Art's mark, a mark that seems to invite and cajole one into the outward-bound leap while also revealing that it accepts the impossibility of a successful arrival: making's deliriously tragic state and fate as a celebratory mourning. The gest becomes something that is not not-art but nor can it make any claim to be nothing-but-art. Its only hope is to become art-full without being fully art, for to become just art the mark would have to make it to Art's Body unaided by representation, to re-form that Body everso slightly by art's ways alone. In the tussle between the alternating extremities there are no winners and Art's Body is the

perennial loser. To become art is to make it beyond what we have taken the marks of art to be: extreme art – each mark marking both its own extremity and that of Art's Body.

Of course this is an unbearable region for culture. It reminds us cultured beings immediately of all those possibilities of becoming which we believe we (potentially) are but which we can never quite live up to. Culture's every move in relation to art is thus to domesticate, re-house, and represent it according to whatever prevailing interests dominate the socio-political economy. Above all, culture seeks to ensure that the arts be given a secure place within the fold in order that they can be controlled as interests demand. Art's extreme has to be re-fashioned, represented, as extremely cultured, as the very exemplar of culture *rather than its other*.

Yet to be modern, utterly contemporary (a response to the difference of the moments of its becoming-passing), making-for-art knows that it has to try desperately to hold to its singular aim: to the possibility of its being entirely for, of, about, and in itself. Nascent modernity, recognising that it had no intrinsic debts to anything outside itself, glimpsed this possibility and set about exploring and celebrating it. Temporarily loosing itself from controlling obligations (previously unavoidable in the name of survival), it took the freedom to become itself as its dark-and-light motif, grasping at it even as it began to be re-appropriated by the rapidly expanding culture-machines. But in the teeth of the latter, survival soon became the abiding problem for performing again. Pledging itself to autonomy's extreme is both its promise and its disaster. To try to hold on to the extreme ideal in the face of the swamping concerns of the everyday leaves making adrift in a not-quite zone, shredded by the simultaneous conflicting temptations and demands of both autonomy and culture.

In this in-between zone, proximate to culture's unmarked threshold, something-like-art, *art's semblance*, can still just about occur even in the very process of its endless re-couping and re-positioning by everyday concerns. Now and again something tumbles outwards and beyond, leaving us fascinated but troublingly adrift. Disastrously for the everyday it has managed somehow to cling to particles of its pledge. How long it can maintain itself there on and as art's behalf is always anybody's guess.

### **Everyday Life Can't Make it Out**

Here, right where we are, the everyday under modernity and its afterwards is the measured and self-measuring time-space of a means-transformation without end. Always already under way, some(many)times with sudden catastrophic violence, but, aside from any recognisable rhythm, forever in an inexorably manic shuttling movement consisting of jags, breaks, leaps, jerks, crashes, slides, slippages, ac-and-de-celerations, it sweeps us along all unknowingly. Entirely unanticipatable this movement can only ever be mapped retrospectively, and even then only in minuscule slivers according to the perspectively fixed interests of the many furiously busy mappers. Wherever one (as perspectival mapper) observes and records after-the-event there are always devastating movements taking (destroying) place (as we now take it to be) off to an elsewhere unbeknownst. The things that undermine and make all the difference in the world are always aside(s) from our ability to grasp them in their emergence and effects. Caught up in this maelstrom, unseeable to us in its very closeness, we live through it in our prepossessed ultra-slow motion as the given, the taken-for-grantedness of the ordinary – everyday life.

We are the unanticipated shaken consequences of quakes we do not feel till (often) long after they have torn up and fragmented what we thought of as 'our place' (our security, our home).

In the face of this unseen juddering break-up-and-reconstitution we try to impose whatever temporary consistencies and routines we can, while suspecting deep (and now perhaps not so deep) down that our ‘working knowledges’ give us little more than an ideational solace which is far removed from the painful troubles of every day’s living-through. Having nothing else to look forward to (after all techno-capitalism has no goal other than self-perpetuation) or, now, to fall back upon (our rationalisms’ disillusion jerkily but surely dispatching the anachronisms of our spooky faiths), we stagger on, symptoms not of a demonstrable chaos (after all chaos is itself being corralled as a theorisable enlightenable regioning process-state), but of a generalised proliferation – proliferation being the unceasable movement of the growth-collapse-decay of everything. It occurs in the mutual inter-penetration and passage of things through, across, behind, below, around, about, each other, at n-different inter-weaving accelerating decelerating speeds, from the infinitely slow to the instantaneous-immediate of seemingly no-time-at-all. Unfocussable because untotalisable, this inter-flow is identityless. It can only be registered (from within the occasional quaked fracture across which we have to leap before we can look) as the vaguest coalesced fuzzy background hum within which we are ourselves but one lot of disparate constituents.

Tearing ourselves away from the necessary concerns of everyday life and catching traces of the infusing vibratings, all we can manage with the means that define us is to pay attention to specific things; we abstract and frame details that can never be given a fitting place (their place) within some embracing context. We cannot make it out.

Tinged by a half(or more)-buried foreboding perhaps, we turn back with relief to the big everyday things that perforce absorb us. Occasionally some of the arts’ barely recognisable things may divert us temporarily. And even more occasionally one of these may tip us out of culture and ourselves and expose us to the otherwise unseen unheard unfelt vibrations of the extreme outside. This is art on the way to fulfilling its pledge through our take-up of its offer of the merest delirial movement. All too quickly the demands of the everyday drag us back in and onto culture’s steady-as-she-goes plane. Soon it is almost as if nothing had taken place. Whereas in effect - *art’s only effect* - it was art’s little Nothing that had taken place away entirely, for its and our sake alone.

### 3) WHAT GIVES...

Given...yes, but who or what gives and what is given?

Twisting Duchamp to our current purpose and to point the way, we might offer,

‘Given: 1<sup>st</sup> the appropriating money flows

2<sup>nd</sup> the enfolding ‘enlightening’ language gases’,

and then explore how his relation to the ‘given’ can guide us towards the plight of making-for-art now.

How are the arts being ‘given’ to us today? On what terms do the arts’ representing institutions and mediating processes give them to artists and audiences alike?

And what is expected of audiences in return for fulfilling their side of the gift-exchange contract? Perhaps ‘nothing more’ (although this might already be almost everything) than a generalised acceptance that what is being given in art’s name, as art, is indeed art – *that art is nothing more nor less than what its representers frame as such*. With this acceptance (of the terms on which ‘art’ is given to ‘culture’) as their ‘return’ (what they give back to maintain

the exchange relationship) audiences fulfil their side of the contract. This mutual solidarity enables endless confirmation and reproduction of the gift cycle. But is there anything outside of, before, this contract?

### **Before the Contract ... Something Particular**

If we could suspend the contract temporarily, remove the hinge, the bridging ‘work’, mediating art’s ‘givens’ to us, could there still be something ‘there’ before, outside of, the contract? Could there be a pre-position, a predicate, some inchoate not-quite-fixable force-site, that might disclose its potential to vivify nothing but an art-thing? And might this ‘something’ turn out to be not some abstract generalisable essence or quality, but, rather, something absolutely specific to particular things? Could there be an extra-contractual, extra-mural ‘something’ that comes across to us from a particular thing?

Perhaps this is what artists stake everything on: a ‘something particular’ enabling recipients to relate to the would-be-art-thing only and precisely in and as its discernibility, its finally ungatherable separation from everything else. Maybe this is what Duchamp was referring to in his term ‘the art coefficient’, the subjective mechanism which produces art in a raw state, ‘*a l’état brut*’ – whatever it is in the thing that enables others to approach it as an art-thing and nothing else.<sup>1</sup> And there is, of course, Duchamp’s continuing relation with ‘Given...’...

### **Unhingeing the Given**

Given, then,

*‘Étant donnés: 1 la chute d’eau  
2 le gaz d’éclairage’* (Marcel Duchamp)

(‘Given: 1<sup>st</sup> the waterfall  
2<sup>nd</sup> the illuminating gas’)

‘Given...’ first appears as a note in Duchamp’s ‘The Green Box’, the collection of notes, sketches, plans and asides (what Lyotard calls ‘...reflections or indications of manufacture’),<sup>2</sup> accompanying ‘*La Mariée...*’ (The Large Glass) of 1912. It relates to possible elements in the bottom half of ‘The Large Glass’, the batchelor surface/space. It then arcs across Duchamp’s creative span to reappear as the title of his last piece (1966), thus drawing our attention directly towards both the relations between the two pieces and the themes, issues and polarities which his making insistently probed. Indeed, remembering Duchamp’s involvement with hinges and hingeing specifically embodied in ‘Door, 11, rue Laney’ (1921) (the single door hinged between two openings which could be simultaneously both open and closed), it might be suggested that the bare text of ‘Given...’ itself acts as a hinge between his two oeuvre-defining installations, sweeping up all his other offerings in its back-and-forth arcing. As text, ‘Given...’ seems, as Lyotard shows,<sup>3</sup> to be offering us something according to a logic of implication, as ‘if x then y’. The text of ‘Given...’ implies that, if we take for granted, as unequivocally given, firstly, the waterfall and secondly, the illuminating gas, then something else must follow. But what?

In ‘The Green Box’ the text of ‘Given...’ is one element in a sequence of jottings, aide-memoires, para-stories, near-recipes, all bearing less-than relations to ‘The Large Glass’, and none being direct implications, out-drawings, from that text. Similarly, as title of the the last

<sup>1</sup> M.Duchamp, ‘The Creative Act’, in Sanouillet, M. and Peterson, E., ‘The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp’, pp.138-9.

<sup>2</sup> See J-F. Lyotard, ‘Duchamp’s Transformers’, Lapis Press, Venice, USA, 1990, p.137.

<sup>3</sup> op. cit., pp 70-3



piece, ‘Given...’, the text is not in advance of the piece, a condition for it, *it is, rather an integral part of it*. Nothing flows unquestioningly from its terms. Yes, there is a waterfall and an illuminating lamp within the piece’s *mise-en-scène*, but the title offers us nothing that might flow from this conjunction. Perhaps the guiding word itself - Given - invites us to look back ‘behind’ it to consider what it itself might be seeking to rest on, what is silently and invisibly ‘given’, as its pre-position, that gives, makes a gift of, way to it. What is given already in the offer and title of ‘Given...’?

Writing on behalf of what might be involved in ‘coming to writing’ (writing as a making-practice), Hélène Cixous turns back to the site of making to draw our attention to this pre-position that seems to be always already in the art-thing. She offers us a thread that might take us into the unlightable zone of the extra-textual ‘givens’ that may have made way for Duchamp’s specular site of illumination and flow:

“The text always comes to me in connection with the source...And the source is given to me. It is not me. One cannot be one’s own source. Source: always there. Always this vividness of the being who gives me the there. Which I can’t stop searching for; I see it furiously with all my forces and all my senses.”<sup>4</sup>

Although it is always ‘there’, then, source is not some intra-psychic fixed location but rather *that which is continuously or fragmentarily being-given, alongside, accompanying, the plane of one who writes/makes*. Echoing (as is now so common in diverse ways among writers who have come after and partially from him) Rimbaud’s ‘I is another’, it is something other, split off from the one who would write/make, for ‘one’ and ‘source’ are not the same, do not coincide. The one is always two but the one does not contain its ever-present second, its other; it has no hold over it. For Cixous its givenness, and thus what it might imply for the one who writes/makes, can only be approached, come upon, through an intense search. The search, never sure of success, seems to be the activity of writing/making. It is the making of a relation, for it is what connects the ‘me’ (whatever unlocalisable complex that is...) of the one who writes to its other(s). One only comes to writing/making by coming upon one’s other(s) over there (yet right here), to which one can relate but never become. It/they may be given to the one who seeks but only as perennially other(s). Writing/making can only be a connecting-to and never an integration-with *a source that remains implacably other, but still given*.

Perhaps, then, Duchamp’s ‘Given...’ (as word and part-title) points us towards his other, the source given but ungraspable, towards which he directs his searching project. Treating this as an exemplary move, we might also say that making-for-art is re-defined by Duchamp as a very particular kind of search – one that takes the search for the other that is one’s given source as the ‘means’ for trying to find out (each time differently) whether art is still possible. In his short essay ‘The Creative Act’<sup>5</sup> Duchamp qualifies his remarks about the artist as a ‘mediumistic being’ by describing this being as someone who ‘from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing’. It seems here that this seeking for the outside (Cixous’s ‘source’ that ‘is not me...’) is the medium, the *meatus*, through which something of this source might pass, the art-thing then becoming the residue that registers the search. For Duchamp the specificity of the ‘art coefficient’ lies in the arithmetical-like relation ‘between the unexplored but intended and the unintentionally expressed.’<sup>6</sup> In the struggle of moving

<sup>4</sup> H. Cixous, ‘“Coming To Writing” and Other Essays’, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 138-40.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

from intention to realisation, a link goes missing in the chain of actions and reactions, revealing the maker's inability 'to express fully his intentions.' What results from side-stepping this disruption of intention is a displacement and a substitution of what has been displaced – it is the 'personal art coefficient'. It seems to show the source's unanticipatable ability to reveal, to offer us, a glimpse of itself as other, as beyond.

And yet at the same time, is not this disruption exactly what the would-be artist hopes (even expects) will happen? Performing can only be entered on in the hope that something will indeed 'happen' that is outside the performer's strict control, something that seems to guide mind-and-hands (for it is an embodying something) along channels not previously taken. Performing is dependent upon recognising these channels and being receptive to what they may be carrying. Performing's rhythms and habits are frequently instituted in the almost certainly misplaced hope, if not belief too, that they enhance both the chances of this other's emergence as well as its recognition and receptivity to it.

So performing-as-search faces the paradoxical task of setting itself up, in part, as a search for release from the very controls which seem to be necessary to direct any kind of focussed seeking in the first place. In doing this it inevitably puts itself on the line, for it risks losing its bearings in and its hold on the search. Searching for the other 'over there' risks the collapse and dissolution of the one that is condemned to remain 'right here'. Perhaps that is why the comforts of repetition (where more and more is taken for granted, no longer to be questioned in performing's development) are so attractive and hard to keep at bay. For treating performing's habits as givens allows it to proceed by deferring risks of dissolution. In desperate times (and when are they not...) they give the would-be maker something to cling to.

Duchamp developed his vision of art practice at a time when it still seemed to be possible to institute an autonomous art, to hold to a way of approaching making which enlarged the arts' possibilities through and as their self-questioning. The project's implicit telos was to make art discernible and separate from invading interests. Whether this project-for-art is still relevant to or can be maintained in a culture characterised by a general aestheticisation, where the arts are appropriated by other interests, remains a still (just about) open question. But, in putting unavoidable questions before us, Duchamp's objects and vision remain as pointed and exemplary reminders of what is at stake for the arts in their contemporary plight. Of course the struggle to realise one's 'personal art coefficient' in things that are doubly discernible (firstly as distinctively art's things and secondly as art things differing from all other art things) still defines and frames the performance of would-be-artists. Yet the realisability of these conjoint autonomies remains in question.

### **Evasive Tactics in the Hinge**

The possibility of maintaining the offer of would-be-art-things outside the boundaries of the absorbing interests, in the vague hope of finding, generating and sustaining non-institutional responses is negligible. For the project's radically reflexive questioning of the realities of the arts' and the self's situations has somehow to take on the issues of its own representation, appropriation and the (im-)possibility of avoiding the latter. As was suggested in the earlier discussion of autonomy, performing has necessarily to become increasingly bound up with tactics of avoidance and evasion. The gestures performing generates will be offerings that show this struggle as their defining constituent of the things. They will certainly not be things simply offering pleasures and comforts (alongside all the other aestheticised products of the culture) because, intrinsic to their offer will be the necessity for a respondent, an audience, to

revivify them through finding and reconstituting the awkward questions about their own possibility that they embody. If nothing is given to practice other than the defining desire to generate some fragment of autonomy in the face of absorption, then the gests emerging from it must be challenges to what the machinery of absorption takes for granted.

Perhaps Duchamp's hinge and hingeing, defining the movement of his own practice, can be brought to bear on the situation of contemporary performing across the arts. For, if art's legacy, its pledge and its given, has been the hopeful offer of something separating the art-thing from the other things of the world, then, irrespective of socio-historical context, its inner drive (its moving plane) has always sought in however small a way to take itself beyond a culture's binds and bounds. Although inevitably beholden to the demands of and caught up within complex relations with sponsors, patrons, purchasers, taste-makers, place-makers, academics and journalists, the movement of its plane insistently seeks to release some elements of its gests from their controlling constrictions.

If the modern movements cohered around their realisation of this drive to self-questioning autonomy, making it explicit as art's point, we are legatees of the subsequent history of this vision. If it still remains our point of reference for art's possibility, then we now face the challenge of reconciling it with those transformations of everyday life effected within an explicitly self-aestheticising techno-capitalism. In this way art is the entrance/exit that hinges itself, is the hinge, between culture and meta-culture. It is condemned and condemns itself to arc endlessly back and forth between cultural conciliation and the beyond-measure of its own extra-cultural region. Perhaps it hovers, for most of the time, between the arc's two limits, caught up in the paradoxes and conflicting forces that define performing's confused and confusing fate. But when it swings to either limit of the arc it is, like Duchamp's door, simultaneously open and closed. At the two edges the arcing plane of practice either shuts out culture in opening on its outside, or closes off its 'beyond' while opening itself to the allure of culture's seductions (falling prey perhaps to the conjoint constrictions of taste and style so crucial to general aestheticisation). The trajectory of every performance is an always unanticipatable ambiguous movement within the arc. What is at stake in the movement is the possible emergence of elementary particles of art spinning off and out of culture's controls, particles that are not graspable by or placeable within existing cultural frames of reference and discourses. They confound in their very dissimilarity, just as the things of Duchamp did (and do). Unassimilable they can only be brought back in as disturbing aliens - on their own terms or not at all. No matter how familiar they appear to be in the places allocated to them, boxed in as they invariably are by archiving discourses intent on fixing, justifying and cultivating implications, they remain *unheimlich*, uncannily there but not 'at home', in a time (their own) out of synchrony (Duchamp's '*La Mariée...*' as a 'delay in glass'...<sup>7</sup>) with the clock-time of daily life.

Approaching performing as this hinged back-and-forth arcing, Duchamp's own arcing (the struggle for release from the dominance of the retinal and the 'stupidity of the eye'; his attachment to and separations from the demands of the art world (patrons, galleries, peers)) exemplifies other aspects of performing's contemporary plight. In his succinct and acute exploration of the transition and transformations between 'The Large Glass' and 'Given...', Lyotard situates Duchamp's making-thinking in ways that affirm precisely the continuing pertinence of his legacy to this plight.

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<sup>7</sup> For a marvellous fictional response to Duchamp's 'The Large Glass' that extends its significance through all our days casting its arcing parabola far ahead of us still, see Gabriel Josipovici, 'The Big Glass', Carcanet, Manchester, Manchester, 1991.

As inheritors of the modern arts' plane of becoming – a plane of movement towards nothing but art-in-and-for-itself – we have no substitutes available to us other than the decline and disappearance of this very movement. It is a decline which has been hastened by the inexorable absorption and erosion of the arts by the machineries of mass entertainment. The choice is between a 'pointless' art (its non-point being its endless movement away-from-here) and art-lite, a comfort zone of absorbable things gathered up and systematically managed and represented as indiscernible alongside other leisure products (including, of course, the museumised, archived, academicised traditions of the arts). It is Duchamp's peculiar prescience to have shown us, both in his things and his responses to the cultural context of representation, *what performing might have to do to keep alive the modernist commitment to 'make it new' under dramatically changed conditions: how to strive to be about, to be on behalf of, nothing but art-as-other-than-what-is, and this in a culture where the struggle to construct and manage the representation of 'what is' defines a, if not the, prime site and relations of power.* The arts are unavoidably entrapped by and swept along in this struggle.

How to affirm art's possibility (centrifugal/other/beyond), while living through the realities of being sucked centrewards (centripetal – towards a never still unfixable virtual centre) at unimaginable (electronic) speeds?

### **Making Toward the Dissimilar**

Whilst this may point to the defining paradox of practice it is not a question which might be answered by the provision of some kind of handy guide to tactics, for art is exactly a realm of the unruly, the unruly. There cannot be the 'one' of a strategy, only multiple, situationally specific tactics. There will only ever be singular responses, particular things, distressed and distressing sore thumbs sticking out, distinguishable from their 'colleagues' by the trouble they cause their gatherers: attractive enough to be coveted by power but absolutely unassimilable, in chains but careering off to regions beyond and subversive of the discourses of both everyday life and techno-expertise. They cannot be offers of openness, of self-revelation (they are thus not 'expressions' of some romantic buried but emptyable self-hood), because that would be to lay themselves open to rapid assimilation. Drawing us into their plane of movement (more like a flying carpet) by some attraction fatal for our everyday securities, they hold us non-plussed, for they do not add anything to what we already think we know and love (about art, ourselves and the world). Perhaps it is some quality of their inaccessibility that attracts in a culture where the machineries of representation strive to project themselves as seamless donors of the unequivocal. We may suspect that we can only get a fleeting glimpse of the otherness which they draw us towards, because their very discernibility arises from their being beyond the conventions of the discourses that have been so finely honed by the techno-experts of aesthetic placement. However briefly, they occupy, make their mark as, tiny sites beyond culture's patrolled margins before being dragged back and partially absorbed into the flow of cultural exchange.

Their discernibility turns, then, on their dissimilitude, their being unlike those things (most art-things) subjected to the culture's complex possessing and placing rhetorics. Once brought to book, culture's objects are rendered similar, familiar and comfortable. Assimilated to the machineries of cultural power they are put to work on culture's behalf, primarily as representatives of the culture's endless reconstruction of itself as the endower of a benign heritage. Reconstituted they stand as documents of its 'enlightened' tolerance (an 'enlightenment' that may be read, remembering Marcuse, as simultaneously 'repressive').

Under such circumstances it is almost impossible to engage any of these assimilated things in and for themselves, for their dissimilitude will have been elided by the generalising concerns of the gathering discourses. Each thing is turned into an exemplary category member, to be engaged and assessed not for its difference *but for what it typifies*. This is how the machinery of culture works on and with its aesthetic objects to ensure they represent it and do not stand separate in an elsewhere beyond its control.

And this sets the scene and the challenge for all kinds of making-for-art under modernity and its afterwards. For the pressures to make within the terms of institutional requirements, rhetorics and categories are enormous. In spite of the ethic of dissimilitude and otherness around which the modern project initially cohered (a very precarious coherence...), its subsequent history has been slowly reconstituted around the reciprocal relation between style and taste. Performers, trying to sustain their performing commitment around the legacy and promise of the modern movements, soon find that their searches for their founding differences (origin-ality) are drawn into the public life of aesthetics through the institutional demand for recognition and consistency. New recruits (new differences) are always needed but, once within the mesh, the pressures to repeat inevitably tend to define the frame of practice. Beginning again, and again, and again... is exceptionally difficult to sustain, especially when it tries to take on, to distance itself from, to outwit, the rule for that framing.

### **Holding to Subjectivity's Dissolution Under the Demand for Consistent Production**

Participating in the inexorable global institutionalisation during the twentieth century, these art-representing institutions had first to ensure their own survival through the cultivation of stable taste-publics (as culture consumers), for whom responding to the arts would become a relatively routine component of their everyday life. Consistency of output (making art-like things) could only be ensured through a quasi-industrial model of production in which repetition was the inevitable outcome: whatever the medium, establish your difference, then repeat it through variations. Only this way could a mini-mass taste for the arts be sustained. Appreciation (taste) is sustained by persuading consumers to become architects of their own 'unique' taste profiles. But this apparently art-like freedom of self-constitution by each art-consumer is achievable only via the rhetoric-saturated materials (gests) managed and represented by the institutions themselves. The latter's accounting and valuing procedures – their telling of the modern 'story' – had, for their own survival, to give primacy to the achievement of a style, recognisable and thus defining and self-confirming through the consistency of its repetition. The stories themselves, so important for the sustaining life of the institutions (making gests reasonable, connectable and meaningful (full to bursting with meaning) and thus accessible) need to perform reasoned connectedness in order to convince and persuade. Stabilising taste, and thus generating consistent consumers, depends critically (and criticism is intrinsic to the process) on the distribution of a firm knowledge-base about the arts on which the appreciation and response (sampling/purchasing their pleasures and provocations) can be fixed for the longer term. Repetition with variations becomes the rule of style, backed up by consistency of production (one novel/volume/exhibition/concert tour/production/performance etc. every two years, give or take...), by which performers' gests are assessed for representation and placement. To keep performance open as a site-beyond requires, at the very least, a thoughtfully sensual, and hence always paradoxical, struggle.

A key element of modernity's legacy has been the primacy of the reflexive turn. To participate in and celebrate the hope of keeping open art's endless possibility requires the maker to carry through a conjoint exploration of self and art. As the insistent rule for

performing, this turning back (a movement which carries the practice simultaneously forwards on its own plane) through the folds of the self to find, draw out and show in the gestures what makes art unavoidable for the performer, has and has had complex consequences for performers and art. For, once under way, it generates a project of dissolution, a dissolution of both self and art that is only ever hindered temporarily by the gestures emerging from the process. The only given (its beginning and its point (end)) in this turning project is art's possibility – the chance-hope that an art-thing might emerge from it. But this can only ever lie up ahead as the 'somewhere' (the 'not-yet') that the project is reaching towards in the unfolding of its plane. Apart from this possibility - the unreasonable reason for the practice – there are no edges, borders, spaces, colours, words, sounds, gestures, that cannot be explored, gone through, under the arts' auspices, the only proviso being that whatever emerges does so as art and not life (not the taken for granted things and processes sustaining everyday life).

The entire pointless point of the emergent thing, then, is to show the unbridgeable gap between art and life. For an emergent gesture to issue, the performer has to have dissolved the conventional binds and attractions of both life and the past things of art. What making-for-art thus discovers in the pursuit of this emergent something is that the unities and identities, upon which everyday life relies and is dependent for its stability and continuity, are not only not necessary for art's emergence they may well inhibit it.

Returning, for all practical purposes, to everyday realities, the performer, fractured and fragmented on making's plane, reassumes (more or less) the 'one' dissolved in the making. But, once lost, temporarily put aside, in performing's course, this 'one' can never be quite the same again. For the dissolution of the self-as-controlling-continuous-subject partially constituting performance, is a devastating and lasting consequence of the urge to follow through and keep vital the charge of modernity. Makers have to find ways of living with their latent but often manifest plurality. The two of Rimbaud's 'I is an other' collapses into 'I is a many, legion...', with no guides for holding the many together, other than the grammatical fictions of everyday life. According to and reinforcing the consequences of everyday discourse, culture gathers and presents gestures under the names of their performers, as the products of singular subjects. Yet the experience of performing shows just how fragile this singularity is. Moreover this experience now receives support from a range of contemporary philosophies which, in different ways, show how hard it is to maintain an ontology of the singular human subject as the ground of being. Performing under the auspice of the requirement to show, through things made, what 'originates' 'one', a performer may find it impossible to identify 'origin' with any 'one'.

Perhaps the origin-ality, partially as a result of the experience of modern aesthetic performance, gradually mutated into something different to our convention of attributing it to the authentic difference made by a whole subject in a singular dialogue with past-present art. However vague our sense of the alternatives, we find it increasingly difficult to hold to that sense and use of the personal pronoun that would find a singular being, some kind of coordinating one-charge, as the final referent for the first person singular of everyday usage. Reinforced by the constructions of the sciences (both the natural and their 'human' off-shoots), performers are much more likely to explore and celebrate the consequences for performing of their incalculable manyness. They know that in the last analysis (which never does arrive) no 'one' can be held responsible for their art-somethings.

But culture can't stomach, can't afford to countenance, such dissolution and fragmentation. Faced by its coordinating and identifying machinery, those who would make for art now have

to find ways of coming to terms with this machinery's overwhelming need to hold and represent the arts as products of nameable identities, attached to coherent biographical stories. Once identified through their different sameness as potential recruits, would-be artists and their gests are sucked up by this centripetal vacuuming force and whirled to the institutional centre. And, not being a place but only a collection of tacit rules and assumptions, it can appear, be at work, anywhere. A performer's 'many' (the plural self as a 'selving'...) can only be reconciled with institutional needs at the cost of radical reduction. This entails a perhaps tacit agreement to abide by the rules of public identity construction and the attachment of a publicly recognisable 'person' to a collection of art-things. Becoming singularly presentable, as just this nameable 'one', provides the ground for subsequent history construction and attributions of authorship and identity. Being represented to possible publics by the machinery of aesthetic production is the return for acceptance of the machinery's identity-construction work. It is hard to avoid in the light of the economic and symbolic rewards – the conventional ones for work in the culture – which may accrue. Without representation and institutional support the performer is certainly condemned to invisibility and inaudibility. But the price exacted by the representation of each 'one's' difference is the requirement for consistent production of an accountably coherent oeuvre – the output of a singular vision developing a personal language gatherable under the umbrella of style.

Perhaps performers committed to modernity's self-critical vision could reconcile themselves with this cultural demand just as long as Romanticism's ontology of the coincidence of being with the self-conscious and singular human subjectivity (invariably attired in some kind of male garb) remained convincing. But, as the unstoppable global dynamic of a self-transforming capitalism in its alliance with techno-science began to sweep all cultures along in its wake, so did it practically accomplish the steady and still continuing destruction of all forms of identity. The relativism of the natural and human sciences (themselves key contributors to this dynamic), together with the 'linguistic turn' in twentieth century thought with its consequences for understanding the human subject, combined to provoke suspicion about the continuing relevance of the Romantic-modernist assumptions about this subject. Indeed the modern movements across the arts, through their explorations and makings, have both contributed to the weakening of the unitary subject and begun to open other possibilities from within the 'manyness' that they celebrate. It is they who have constantly made telling challenges, in and as their gests, to analytic conventions of understanding and representation, to what we have taken 'subjectivity' (with its supposedly constitutive processes, such as perceiving/feeling/imagining, and its relation to language) to 'be'. In a culture ordered through representation the very 'present'/'presence' of the 'subject' and her/his 'things' is at stake, is put into question, in those things.

It is in this context that the constraints and requirements of institutional patronage, management and representation of art-making serve to point up the discrepancy between their own needs and the insistent concerns and themes of practitioners across the arts. For self-questioning performance necessarily situates itself beyond the bounds of institutional interests. Yet it is only through institutional provision that making-for-art is given some kind of larger 'place' (through the institutional re-presenting...) within the culture. Making and representing are in a direct tension, resolved only by a perhaps reluctant willingness (a 'no other alternative' willingness) among many performers to be absorbed into the representing machinery on the latter's terms. And this willingness carries unknowable, but possibly fatal, consequences for their longer term ability to sustain the very self-questioning practice, turning around the problem of possible autonomy, inaugurated by and partially defining the drive of the modern movements themselves.

In direct contrast, institutions have to shut out the kind of questioning (a questioning at the very edges of the culture's ontological and epistemological conventions) defining the arts' mode of becoming under modernity. Entirely bound to instrumental demands (turning essentially on their need for self-maintenance), institutions have to transform performers' gests into terms which not only offer no threat to themselves but also actively aid them in their long-term vision of self-maintenance. The terms of representation which they lay before artists give them absolute power over the placement and trajectory of the arts' gests, and, to preserve their own reason (instrumental), they have to neutralise these gests. Their central task is to transform would-be-art-things into cultural goods that can compete for attention and response alongside the plethora of such goods and services constituting techno-capitalism's promise to us. Art is reconstructed as a sub-division of the leisure and entertainment complex.

Yet the arts' little things are precisely 'about' the 'self's' and art's struggle to be and become an other to 'what is', to somehow show what it might be to live (as opposed to just survive) in the face of techno-capitalism's overwhelming power. Being on behalf of otherness and possibility takes them outside all institutional framings, for the latter can only work through the means by which techno-capitalism routinely maintains itself. The otherness towards which the arts seek to move everyday becoming, to draw the latter out of itself, has either to be neutralised, made comfortable (pleasurable and comforting) or to be placed so far away (in some sublime idealist heaven) as to be without any kind of threat to the routine orders of everyday becomings. To try to maintain performing and its gests as pledges of a still possible movement away-from-here is to live on within this irresolvable split. And it is to experience at first hand the unavoidable transformative powers of institutional representation. The latter become defining 'givens' of all attempts to keep alive modern practice's commitment to self-exploration on behalf of the arts' promise of otherness.

### **Performing's Sole Responsibility: Duchamp's Exemplary Pledge**

Perhaps attention to defining features of Duchamp's practice might help us to come to terms with what is at stake for performing now in the face of the cultural 'givens'. Not that he should become some kind of model to be 'copied' in some literal way – far from it... Rather his entire relation to performing and its upshots may be exemplary in very specific respects. For his stance (the trajectory of the plane of performing-relating that his gests constitute) anticipates with remarkable acuity the dilemmas and tensions of sustaining across the arts a vision of art as the possibility and pledge of otherness: performing's sole responsibility is to try to re-charge and focus, endlessly, the inevitably darkly weak light of art on that which is other than what is. Duchamp's own illuminating gas, far from enlightening spaces-times with which we are already familiar, opens onto sites, regions, of seeing-saying that are way beyond our literal grasp (and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future), yet which are ever so close to where we always already are: para-sites of (our) becoming that simultaneously underpin and undermine the conventional certainties ('givens'...) that guarantee the continuities and ordered sense of our everyday lives. The whole point of these 'givens' and their elaborate institutional supports (the power invested in the production and rhetorical manipulation of technical knowledges and information) is to seal off our commonsense from encroachments and disturbing eruptions of the beyond that is not-yet. For the latter may hold the ability to put us out (of ourselves) and become differently.

In what ways does Duchamp's performing show what it might take to hold to a pursuit of art's autonomy (to try to keep alive the hope of art, art-as-such, somehow living-on in the face of the 'givens')?



A particular kind of cunning silently informs every aspect of his performing; it defines his performances' plane, both how it moves and what he is moved to do, and is itself about the need for movement: it seems to insist that making-for-art can no longer settle down into the singularity of a 'position', a ground from which and on which some-art-thing can still be made to stand. Making-for-art, in other words, is homeless, always a kind of vagrancy, a hovering, in between the 'givens' of certainties, fixities and perspectives: unsettled and thus perhaps unsettling. This is to be its way of becoming in a culture where the institutional need is precisely to give the arts' gests identities, to pin them down and allocate them to coherent stories that complement the longer term interests of the appropriating behemoths. Each artist's hovering region(s) will emerge according to the conjunction of specific qualities of their seduction by art with their life situation (their shifting 'takes' on their sensuous auto-histories). Their engagement with performing will turn on who and what (both art and non-art persons and things) move them, draw them out of themselves and string them out along an endless passage constituted by the tensions between polarities, oppositions, complementaries, differences, isolated singularities. Vacillation (the plane's movement as just this hovering-in-between), far from being some kind of failure of nerve or vision, becomes a principled commitment in the face of the solid comforts and rewards of sticking with the one way (self-presentation through the development of a consistent mode of appearance (style)).

In Duchamp's case the cunning was bound up with his emergent vision of art's possibility and chance ('vision' here as a kind of cata- or para-aesthetic) through which he confronted his early intense involvement with visual art (especially painting) with his absorption by the inter-relation between erotics and mechanics. The challenges this threw down for him turned around the ways that the machine already fused vision (perception as both seeing and feeling) and thinking: making-for-art, as through and through sensuous, was inseparably inter-twined with the thought-ful logics of construction. If machinery sets the terms within which everyday life in industrial society and its afterwards is lived, including the places and receptions given to the arts, then the possibilities for art-making and responses to it will always be indebted and bound to the machine at some level.

But, for art to stay true to the possibility of autonomy and otherness, Duchamp recognised that it needed to both take on and show its difference to the productive-reproductive machinery of everyday life. And 'taking on' meant taking it elsewhere, out of itself, through drawing it into art's service. This required the artist to draw the machine back through itself, to turn it out of itself and deprive it of its means-identity. It had somehow to be re-assembled both as an end-in-itself and for art. Thus coopted into art's end, it might be an ally in moving us to art's other spaces where the reasoned deranging of all the senses could be set in motion; the machine's essential movement could be turned back through itself on art's behalf. In the face of the legacy of the machine (repetition, controllable speed, supposedly infinite reproduction of the same through absolutely programmed procedures of energy-application), art's responsibility to itself necessitated a response that would create an unbridgeable gap, however slight, between its gests and a machine's conventional procedures and products.

### **Taking the Machinic Elsewhere**

This was exactly what Duchamp's engagement of the machinic sought to confront. Eschewing all para-political/social affiliations (such as those that in different ways inflected Italian and Russian Futurisms), Duchamp specifically distanced himself from any celebration of the machine's instrumental potential through some alliance with its supposed 'progressive' virtues (productive efficiency, the speed consequent on revolutionary energy use). Rather,

following the suspension of his early painterly explorations of the representation of the human body in movement, he took on the machinic in a very different way. For he saw that its challenge to both art and to human life lay not in its effects and appearance, but in its underlying logic – the conversion of energy into movement and thus the production of speed as controlled strength. Coming to terms with the machine (and thus with technology) as an artist for art, meant both distancing oneself from these effects and entering into its routine performance and accomplishments *from a position that was other than that of an ally*. Specifically it meant getting inside the machinic, parasitising it, to take it somewhere else, somewhere beyond engineering's dreams, a somewhere that was only that of art, where art could de- and re-form the machine entirely according to its own desires.

For the machine epitomises the development of instrumental reason as a practical accomplishment – it is the real-isation, the making real of means-thought-without-end. Never an end in itself, it is to one side of all ends and values (except those already subordinate to the demands of reproduction such as 'efficiency'). As a thought-construct the machine is pure function that in practice can be re-formed infinitely to serve the production of any end. And when Duchamp began his exploration of mechanics on art's behalf machinery was still at work almost exclusively in these essential functional terms. With the subsequent transition to a global and post-industrial techno-capitalism the role of the machine was complexified as it moved from being primarily the means for reproduction of consumer goods to *becoming itself integrated into such goods*. It was the key means in the accelerating aestheticisation of everyday life (the extension and reconstitution of needs into desires and desires back into needs through the endless directing of consumer taste towards the designed comforts and pleasures of the attractive). In his own interweaving of mechanics and erotics (an eroticising radically other to that guiding consumer seduction) Duchamp, anticipating this global revolution in the role of the machine, sees precisely the ways that it is always already bound up with the life of the human body and its sensuous potential. He recognises that the machine's real 'life' is as an agent of constant reformation of our experience and re-valuing of sensuous becoming. We are now explicitly re-shaped, re-cast by the machine according to its own performance requirements. *Our sensuously thoughtful becoming is utterly machine-dependent*.

Further, Duchamp understood that the possibility of mechanics is language-dependent in very specific ways via the calculative logics of techno-scientific pragmatics. To take the machine into art's elsewhere meant taking on calculative language from within in order to divert, dissolve and re-float it according to art's utterly different desires. This diversion of language, integral to the setting up of 'The Large Glass', is woven into and across all Duchamp's subsequent making. In his distinctive re-routing of the visual in the visual arts, he shuttles seeing and reading back and forth across each other, thus drawing us into that region where sense-making and the sensuous collapse into each other. The pun, in its simultaneous aural, legible and visual combinations, becomes his most succinct means for boundary-dissolution. It acts as the hinge whose arcing mutation never lets us establish a point where the seen can be clearly distinguished from the read: the space-time of his cata-aesthetic is a 'boundaryless somewhere' where thought comes into its own sensuality, and the sensuous is thought-infused. Within this 'somewhere' there are only the shifting thresholds made by our own criss-cross tracking around its unfixables. And Duchamp's specific way of congealing the sensuous and thought on art's behalf anticipates and opens up a zone which has been subsequently traversed and colonised by makers across the arts.

As the institutional position of performing has subsequently shifted, performers have felt a vital need to find ways of continuing to try to make according to art's autonomous end in the face of institutional requirements. It is in this context of the everyday dilemmas faced by performers that Duchamp's unique combination of engaging and exploring the interface of body-machine-language-perception *as a matter of celebratory tactic* has been, and still is, exemplary. Some of the implications for tactics in contemporary performing can be recognised in his 'dissimilating' mechanics, his 'mechanics of machination'.<sup>8</sup> For, as Lyotard shows, in its dissimilating this is a strange mechanics that distances itself from replication, continuity and consistency, precisely the attributes for which the machine is commonsensically celebrated and developed. The 'machine' infecting and under-writing (though not with any foundations) his gests, including their accompanying texts, generates nothing productive. His machines 'know no consequence',<sup>9</sup> though they may have uncountable effects in the ways in which, as gests, they move their respondents and contribute to shifts in the terms on which the arts and their gests are engaged.

Duchamp's machinic-thing can draw one into the half-or-multiple worlds of think-feel through the outrageous perversions they visit upon the givens and continuities of instrumental thinking – thought ordered by consistency of meaning and connective application (association/overlap between the parts). As 'misrecognisable inventions',<sup>10</sup> they retreat in the face of instrumental thought. In their strangeness they play between eros, humour, fate's joyful cruelty, and indifference, the latter seeming to involve a kind of withdrawal (though not into some hidden part of an assumed singular self). But the cunning in play here is non-cumulative. It is not the traceable cunning of any explicit means-reasoning aiming for an end beyond/after itself. Rather, it is in the service of each machine's singular pointlessness (its being other to productivity). And, while the cunning may sometimes seem to carry overtones of covert operations, as in the extension of craft into the crafty, there is nothing secretive about his dodge-ful arting. Our 'problem', once his gests draw us towards and into themselves, is rather that we necessarily begin our approach to them and the ways they pose the question of their art-ness from within consistent forms of thinking. Implanted within the machine, Duchamp's cunning lies partly in the ways it draws us out of the means-thought within which we conventionally approach and evaluate the performance of machines. However much we might be attracted by his inventions, the weighted comforts of habit tend to hold us within the conventions of thinking and response that work, more or less, for us in everyday life. Disestablished and eschewing productivity<sup>11</sup> Duchamp's machines are answers to no problems.

They are rather 'spontaneous affirmations: they know no consequence'.<sup>12</sup> Though they do, as noted, have effects, such effects are, however, without truth-values. Their effects are 'uncontrolled in that the machines do not imply any kind of outcome according to a conventional logic of 'if...then' or 'given...'.<sup>13</sup> They are 'about' another relation to power/potency, one perhaps that seeks to hold to a 'power' of attraction through a process of de-potentialisation in which the (undoubted) effects generated are by chance. Their force/charge/potency follows no mappable track, but is effective through jumps, asides, alternations, reflexes, drops, that cross the gaps for no good reason between elements that

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<sup>8</sup> See Lyotard, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., see passage pp. 65-73.

have no single implied determining connection. Complementing this sense of making's valuing of 'chance' in his comments on the 'marvellous' play of chance in Raymond Roussel's narration, Christopher Middleton proposes that the aleatory, when affirmed as a 'positive value... may indeed turn out to be a lucky chance... It calls for readiness and patience. A detail that slipped into a poem may be only later recognized as an integral part of a pattern.'<sup>14</sup> For it is we who enact and constitute the effects of chance. We bring off, and thus become, the conduits for these little leaps and tumbles – the machines in their infinite a-productivity only draw us towards, precipitate us at, the non-place, the threshold, where we are required to re-charge them if they are to be effectual. They move us to keep them moving by providing us with possibilities that are structured by no necessary mutual implications. Unlike the machines with which we are all too familiar and which control us (mold, shape, hold us to their precise needs) just when we think we are most in control of them, Duchamp's machines (and all gests offering themselves as para-machines) decline control while retaining their charge (potency). And of course their prime, their only, need is for us to activate their potency in its singularity (in their detachment from everything but art) each time for ourselves and for art.

Yet perhaps what Duchamp's machines alert us to, on art's behalf, is to be wary of too easy a transfer of the discourses of potency to the arts' gests, and especially of potency as that 'power' (with which we are familiar but barely understand) 'at work' in the constitution of our ordinary social relations. The 'ability' of the arts' gests to move us is frequently referred to, in the aesthetic discourses representing them to us, as their 'power'. But 'power' used in that way glosses the complex of processes that constitute anyone's relation to a gest, for that relation is animated precisely by that which the 'anyone' brings to the gest. The 'power' does not lie in the thing but rather in the way that the engaging subject places her- or himself in its care through an active 'giving up' (pointed to in Coleridge's 'willing suspension of disbelief'). Without this revivifying through abandonment, the thing would lie there weakly inert.

An art-thing's charge, then, what it holds back in readiness as a latency-in-waiting (echoing Heidegger's 'standing reserve' though in an utterly different relation to 'use') that is under no-one's control, can only be drawn forth by another, a respondent, each time on their own terms and their own behalf. Its potency, if potency this be, is permeated by an unutterable weakness. It can have no 'effects' until it is resuscitated, brought back from its state of suspended animation, by another who must both want and be able to bring some kind of infusion, some re-charging, to it. And even this vivifying potency is not to be drawn from commonsense orders of power, because its very movement (this infusing of the gest by the respondent) is one that requires it to give over its self-control to the gest. Infused, the latter, in its turn, reciprocally cedes some of the charge of its reserve (its compressed but so far withheld intense weakness) as its offer to the sharing responder. Potency here becomes such only in its offering itself up, its giving itself away, its own loss – the willed strength to abandon its own willing.

Perhaps the space-time, the zone of becoming, where the gest meets a willing respondent, is the inauguration (always as if for the first time) of a mode of reciprocal becoming in which power-as-control-of-relating is dissolved in favour of a relation of an entirely different order, though the word 'order' itself hides the fragility of a relation which is without 'givens' and may be continually reconstituting itself through dis-ordering jump-cuts, fragmentings and

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<sup>14</sup> C. Middleton, in 'If from the distance', op. cit., p. 29.

unanticipatable re-fusings. Wherever making-for-art seeks to assert its own autonomy it is perceived as a threat to existing orders, as the history of its continuing exclusion, banishment, confiscation, concealment, and destruction attests. So it may be that the discourses of power (we can think for example of the ground on which the rhetorics of ‘mastery’, ‘old masters’, and even ‘masters degrees’ (let alone doctorates...)) are constituted, tied as they invariably are to the institutional interests in controlling the definition and valuation of aesthetic phenomena, are rendered irrelevant by the very terms through which the would-be-art-thing and the would-be-respondent coalesce. At the very least, bi-polar models of power, such as the zero-sum relation, where one gains power in direct proportion to the loss of an other, are little help in approaching the relation between the gest’s offer and a willing respondent (though they may both partially define, and themselves be put to work practically in sustaining institutional interests).

Becoming an aside to power (as it shaped the everyday relationships sustaining capitalism) figured the modern movements’ struggle for autonomy. Always ending in defeats, abductions, appropriations, and absorptions, it was a struggle-in-weakness. But weakness, as a negative pole, keeps performing tied to power, whereas art, going off the tracks for autonomy’s sake, tries to show the promise of other ways of relating. By re-aligning (in the elsewhere of this performing, and on behalf of nothing but art) the relation between eye and mind, between the sensuous-percept and thinking-beyond, Duchamp draws us away from the bi-polarity of power-weakness. And he does this through his interruption of and challenge to the potency of the optical. He recognised that sight, everyday seeing, was the prime unifying force defining conventional understandings of human potency. In its tendency to construct a partial synthesis of desire and need, a unified field, via the perspective as ‘seen’ from a single point, sight was the agent of identity. He could see that what seemed like a ‘natural’ occurrence (the transfer of the seen to a two dimensional surface) was a convention (see for example Duchamp’s note on perspective in ‘The Green Box’<sup>15</sup>). Yet sight’s ‘work’, as a powerful unifying process/medium, seemed to occur automatically, immediately, without delay. It was precisely this instantaneity, the apparent source of retinal power, that had to be hindered, delayed, in ways which would raise the question about what an art-thing might be now.

Recognising that painting prior to Courbet and impressionism had always had religious, philosophical and moral (in other words non-visual/retinal) dimensions towards which the visual drew the viewer, Duchamp distanced himself from the everyday primacy of the retinal in emergent modern painting (what he called the ‘retinal shudder’<sup>16</sup>). For him gests were mixtures, hybrids-for-art, in which visuality itself was only one component. It was this hybridity that he celebrated and maintained while suspending the ideational-moral components that had infused and positioned painting before modernity’s emergence. The detachment of painting from pre-modern controls presented a radical challenge to an artist practicing within a vision of art’s autonomy, for it raised the question of what this autonomy might offer to others: what might the good of autonomy stand for?

### **Abject Irony as a Potential Other to Power**

His displacement of the ‘retinal’ was reinforced by his conviction that the repetition, to which painting seemed so prone, was to an overwhelming extent an effect of the market’s’ conjoint management of both painters’ makings and the construction of taste. The non-retinal

<sup>15</sup> See Sanouillet and Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> See P. Cabanne, ‘Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp’, Thames and Hudson, London, 1971, p. 39.

dimension of a supposedly autonomous painting practice would rapidly be filled by styles responding to the institutionally structured tastes of audiences/purchasers. To maintain one's (and art's) autonomy it was essential to avoid, as far as possible, the demands of the managed economy of art. The apparent weakness of the might-be-art-thing was thus shifted ever so slightly sideways out of alignment with the institutional power axis. No longer the simple negative of power's positive, the thing might just sustain itself as an offer, not through an alliance with taste-making *but via assertions of indifference* - its dis-affiliation from the interest-grounded ideas that always tended to pull performing back towards established audiences and their manageable tastes.

The alternative offered by Duchamp was that *the detached thing could lie there in a state of abjection*. Through its indifference it placed itself (and art) outside everyday concerns. From the pragmatic perspectives of everyday life the thing could only be seen in its abjection (prostrate, helpless, irrelevant – the epitome of weakness). But Duchamp effected a slight but significant transformation of its abjection by tingeing it with irony. Its very indifference marked an acknowledgment that the take-up of its offer depended upon accidents over which it had no control. *The thing stood for the embracing of chance*. The others (joyful respondents) it was prepared to wait for might never arrive. And this was a possibility that had to be taken into account in the performing process. Of course it could only begin in weakness because it was intended for, aimed at, nothing (no-one) but the sublime indifference of art's hoped-for autonomy. It was defined by and imbued, in advance of any reception, with its own intrinsic reserve. Yes, it did indeed offer itself – but only on behalf of art. Characterised by a certain withholding the gest can only lie there waiting, in a tensely relaxed but potentially fertile conjunction of coolness and helpless withdrawal (abjection). The might-be-respondent, drawn towards the gest by the strangeness of this tension (a conjunctive-disjunction of irony-tinged abjection), could then pass by way of it into the detachment of the gest's withdrawn region, that other place to one side of those places with which we are all too familiar, the everyday place-times where the singular perspective of an always totalising power seeks endlessly to play on, control and magnify our little weaknesses.

But to effect this passage, to become an engaged respondent, one had, perhaps, to perform similar detached abjection, by giving oneself up to the gest while holding the slightest detachment in reserve. Once one has allowed one's abject self to be played through by the gest's sensuous a-logics, the reserved detachment can be brought into play as a probing extender-enhancer of the gest's offer. In motion, under way, its plane of movement might draw the abject self into a delirial dispersion. Perhaps the nascent region of possible cata-aesthetic-relating inaugurated by Duchamp's gests, was one where the becoming-art-thing offers a helpless challenge (...it flutters down the gauntlet...) to those ways of engaging the world which insist upon conscious self-control of thought-feeling with the aim of mastery over it. Precisely because it is detached, about and for art's possibility alone (as an always open question), all attributions of value and significance that lead outside art (valuing the thing for something outside itself-as-art) are beside its point (for art). This is Duchamp's weakly mute challenge to both making-for-art and the means of its cultural reception and appropriation. In effect his gests, his combines, moved themselves beyond the terms of conventional challenging, for they were backed up by nothing but their own lack – they could offer no resistance to appropriation other than withholding. They stand out as a kind of lying-low, in the (passive) hope that their exemplary abjection might, at some stage, be mimed and matched on art's behalf, but always through singular responses to the specific context of performance.

Duchamp's own performing and its gestic offers this exemplary model to would-be makers. To hold to art's possibility, to make for it, it is necessary to recognise that, in grappling with the medium-specific problems of performing (retinal, aural, literal, tactile, and so on), the performer is also taking on art-in-general and each time anew. This necessitates showing again each time (without end) the specificity of art's difference: its otherness to what is (everyday life). The gestic is inherently double, both nothing-but-itself and, simultaneously, art's representative. But this is representing with a difference (a less-than-representing), for it is not standing in, substituting, for some 'independent' thing/body called 'art' (art being nothing but its particular things). *It is, perhaps, the disclosure of representing itself: displaying, in its being-performed, the beforehand, the pre-position, that representation requires in order to get going* (what it needs to stand on, in order to take over us and the world as we know it). Performers' materials and media, in their very concreteness, stand on their own as responses to the 'spot-as-predicament' the performer, through her or his feelings for art, is in. Yet the only point of offering such materials is to take one beyond them for art's sake, to art's elsewhere, an elsewhere that is quite beside culture's point. To pass through them is to pass away (from culture into an apo-culture). Art's alluring weakness is exactly its offer of a plane of becoming-discultured; but, to decline into this strange zone, one requires that slight detachment from the materials (that are the only reason for engaging the gestic in the first place) which might enable the break-out-and-away that art is (as potential).

As with all extreme goals, Duchamp's exemplary model (a model that never turns into a plan) is almost unreachable, and, even if reached, subject to instant dissolution. Performing, whatever its instinctual desires, is entangled continually in compromises which draw its gestic back into culture's folds, thereby diminishing their chances of the desired break into art's difference. Most of the time most gestic drift, or are pushed around, in an in-between region, a limbo under the constant threat of being pulled back and hemmed into culture's baroque folds. In this half-state they afford only occasional glimpses through to art's possibilities. But this plight, this form of living-on (bare survival) in-the-hope-that, is perhaps the arts' current fate – the most they can manage under conditions of seductive appropriation by alien domesticating forces way outside their concerns.

#### **4) MAKING-TOWARD-ART OFFERS TO GIVE ITSELF AWAY**

##### **Art's About Outing...**

Out of date, out of place (site and sight), out of work, out of mind, out of luck - out of art, art's out: the untimely - an unimaginable non-relation to time's place, place's time - the out of art, the out of arting - art as outing. Art's outing: a performing that seeks simultaneously to out something and to go on an outing, a journey heading and bodying towards out - the out of every thing, of every where. It never quite arrives, for the out it seeks is always just beyond it, *in the infinitive*. When it reaches its limit, so proximate to the infinitely distant out, what it offers is this infinitive: to give itself away, and a way.

Seeking the out-of-date (rather than the out of the out-of-date) we tend to think only, in our familiar timely terms, of future and past, progression and regression, forgetting that to become out of date, to get to the outside of our time, demands suspension of our conventions of presencing and a dissolution of the sequencing within which we conventionally lock ourselves while sticking resolutely to the challenges set by the very date of the making itself. And perhaps this is the loss that art seeks: it wants to lose the present that ties, binds, and mediates between past and future, in order to become not non-linear but the outside of time's line. Yet this out would be neither timeless nor untimely, but just still. It would be where stillness stands in (while

lacking any ground to stand on) for time – Faust’s bargain. Art’s hope is that the out it seeks would be where it might coincide with the utterly still. For it senses that it is in and as this stillness that, seeking to become nothing but itself by performing away to itself, on its own and in its own way, it might just come into its ownmost: to be as still as possible in order to get to out, and to get out in order to be just still - this is the spiral of its unbecoming. Casting beyond its here and now it hazards that it is in the still of the out that it will be able, at last, to put itself about, able to be still and still be able – just potential. It is where it can be out and about, about whatever demands are made of it and about nothing but about.<sup>17</sup>

But in that very (infinitely slow and unplaceable) movement it will be simultaneously all about us. Or it would be if only we (yes, but which we?) could finally become an us, a single we transforming itself into an us. Then it might be just about us, only us but only just. If only! Always only if - alone and conditional. And always only on condition that there is a we to come. This, at the last, is art’s only hope, its final (under current circumstances...) offer. It performs toward a not-yet-we.

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'There's still time for us, perhaps.'

'But, to approach this still, we'd need to attach ourselves to time's decline, to give ourselves over to time's emit, its sending itself off and away.'

'Where this away must be the dissolution of way too, for if time could undo itself it would take our way with it.'

'So there'd be no there either.'

'As time frittered itself away, wasted itself, our way would dissolve.'

'Any way's disintegration. So the still you're after would be pointless.'

'I'm only after still because it's all that's before me; it's not a destination you know, just the fate of every destination.'

'When we get there it's never quite what we want; something's missing.'

'What's missing is the quite and the still.'

'To be quite still.'

'Never to be through with things.'

'Or to not be either. Rather to have them all about us in their own specific still becomings.'

'That way we might participate with them in a passing-out of becoming...'

'...a passing-out, perhaps, in which we might just brush up against the outer edge of out, for I suspect that we'll never quite pass through it.'

'You're right. However close we feel we get to it, out always seems to manage to evade us and pass us by on and as the, our, other side.'

'That's us - condemned forever to remain passed becomings.'

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If I try to stand in for the art-thing, to be where it seems to be, to stand in what appears to be its place, then I become several falling - a falling-together that falls short of a we, a falling-alongside that falls towards away-from.

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<sup>17</sup> The relation between making-for-art and time with reference to the rhetoric of transcendence and the eternal is taken up again in the last chapter in the course of an exploration of Messiaen's 'Quartet for the end of Time'.



Art's melancholy, but absolutely given, task, its sole responsibility, is to burn its bridges in the face of its ardent pursuers. As it goes away-from-here it wants to delay its pursuers, however fleetingly, to put them off the scent in the very process of giving them a whiff of it.

Perhaps we are the 'what' that takes place without any you, me, I or us. This most concrete 'what' does without us entirely, needing no subject: it is never we who take place. We are unable to take, to gather ourselves into and onto, that 'there' where a we might possibly emerge. But the 'what' that passes through us, animates us, only takes place as the absolute unsettling of place, as the endless undoing of place. Beyond any and every ground that is temporarily secured for ourselves there is this unbecoming, self-dissolution of place. Yet on this side, in the 'here' that we recognise and treat as 'our' living present, language, fencing off the wild, suspends us within the spacey openness of its surface strings and gives us both the illusion of a temporary security and of having come from somewhere infinitely deep. The all-surrounding wild is where everything disappears completely, recycled as the pure energy of passing, of coming-going, while language holds onto a tiny something (our trail-mix) that puts us into circulation and keeps us circulating: it effects an opening, an opening-out-onto, that cuts out tiny bits of the wild and suspends them within its spiralling tendrils.

### **Making-Out in the Shade of the Vague**

Art's gests, pitching themselves towards the wild and away from language's tendrils, where they remain overloaded and saturated with others' meanings, seek to withdraw into their own elsewhere: to withhold meaning in order to enter the site-less realm that envelops meaning, that puts it in its place. This realm is what surrounds us: our surroundings, unpossessable and fading away into nothingness. As the collapsing 'I', becoming an anonymous several, moves away from meaning's securities, it approaches, without ever reaching or touching, surroundings whose effects we are. From threshold to horizon, the contours of what surrounds yet withdraws from us shape the outer limits of our becoming. The task that these surroundings then insinuate for us is not 'to give meaning to' them but *to find ways of opening onto their de-meaning, to their essential vagueness, to what seems to be the vague-as-such. And yet there can be no vague 'as such' because it remains beyond definition: it is the beyond of definition's limit. The vague undoes all definition.* In withdrawing from meaning, art invites us to give (something of) ourselves up to this (inessential) vague, to face up to and to encounter that which both dissolves our own limits and is simultaneously beyond them.

For Celan, "He who speaks truly speaks the shade"<sup>18</sup>; shade, the retreat of light, is the place (the spoken place and the place shown only in the speaking (writing-reading)) where the shadow of truth passes. And perhaps we can approach the poem, in its attempt to stand within the shade of truth and on behalf of truth-as-shade, as exemplifying what all art gests do, irrespective of their constitutive materials and 'languages', in seeking to show and offer their own truths. For we might have to prepare ourselves for the possibility that art's truth is on the shady side, and that its gests seek their own ways of entering and drawing us towards this shade. If so, they are inviting us necessarily to attend to them in very different ways to those which characterise our means to and criteria for truth in everyday life (an everyday life that is now dependent upon and saturated by the processes and discourses of technoscience). Art's trajectory away from our familiar senses of truth-as-(en)light(en)ment may thus call for forms of attention which are very different to those we conventionally pay to the 'things' of our commonsense worlds.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Celan, 'Selected Poems', trans. Michael Hamburger, Penguin, London, 1996; see the poem, 'SPEAK, YOU ALSO'.

If our understanding of things emerges from the ways we cast light on them, then it may be that art is not some thing to be understood. For, it is the very point of our enlightening gaze to dissolve shadows and to bring into the open what they conceal. The dark of art, its offer of truth-as-shade, would immediately disappear under this gaze. We might remember too that much of what we gather as critique/criticism, in its efforts to 'understand' the art-thing and mediate its 'meanings' to us, writes from within this enlightening frame.

To stand any chance of coming to terms with, of finding, this shadowy shadowing truth, we may thus need to listen to and consider the implications of Celan's quote from Malebranche, for whom attention was "the natural prayer of the soul"<sup>19</sup> - but a prayer to what? What kind of attending might the *gest* be soliciting from us? To what can and must one *pay, give*, attention? Is attention something that we pay out to an other, or is the paying a giving of something precious to attention itself, a giving to attention what is its due? Something passes between, is handed over. Perhaps attention here is almost an outside, a beyond-the-I, an over-there to which one gives oneself over (or up) as this process of paying out. Attending to that which makes-for-art seems to require the self, the I, to give itself away, to become other(s), unclarifiable others that haunt, shadow, the I without ever coming out into the open. Thus, something regarded as essential to the sustenance of the self and the ordinariness of everyday life has to be given over to attention in the acceptance of art-as-shade. Of course, in paying attention I run the risk of nothing being returned, exchanged. But the hope that funds my payment is that, in its turn, attention will offer something (without any guarantee) that points, in hope, away from us (from me) as we now are. And this shady 'away-from', the not-yet-place just over there aimed at by the 'natural prayer', will not be graspable as something present to hand and thus amenable to our constructive sense-making. Rather, it invites us to sidle obliquely up to the dark of our own lack in order to find new ways of responding to and living with and through it. Attention, nevertheless, only and always goes through the poem's words, the *gest*'s images/sounds/materials, which, having a certain fixity, seem to be just there, awaiting us in their placelessness.

Celan sought the place in the word - the '*ort*' in the '*wort*'. It is the shrinking receding place where the you (the several you's) that he addresses in his poems stands, 'stripped by shade'. At this place in the word, *in the shade of and hidden by the word itself*, there are perhaps the inchoate beginnings of a forever shrouded order, of the possibility of relations among the multiplicity of you's standing within and waiting to be summoned from the word. To miss, to pass by, to avoid, to try to throw light on, to seek to destroy, this shade is to lose the possibility of coming to terms with the end, the always shadowed edges, of our being sourced. The many not-yet-places that we can vaguely sense as making up our swirling sourcing (the swarming that we 'are') begin to acquire a tentative and always temporary fixity in the incorporation of '*ort*' in the '*wort*'.

But our everyday truths, the truths that seem to be backed up by a vaguely sensed technoscience and empiricism guaranteed in their turn by myth, turn around the elimination of shade through a flattening out of everything in a cold obscene glare. How could we reconstitute the essential shade when everything that we do and are become what they are for us through this illumination?

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<sup>19</sup> Celan actually takes the quote from Walter Benjamin's essay on Kafka. See his wonderful and richly dense speech, 'The Meridian', delivered on the occasion of his receipt of the Georg Buchner prize and published in 'Paul Celan, Collected Prose', trans. Rosemary Waldrop, Carcanet, Manchester, 1999, p. 50.

The infinite challenge is to give back to things and ourselves the protection afforded them by the casting of shadows, the creation of shade, by what stands between us, them, and the sources of light: to re-cognise how all our ways of lighting our world may be blinding us to the shade intrinsic to our coming-going. In the burning dazzle of their glare they blind us and themselves to the way they shadow their own cold origins.

Yet we are warm beings seeking to become eu-beings, eu-becomings: warmth as the essential condition of being-well, just the right temperature. Euthermic but enclosed, shaded, protected from the insistent endless burn that exposes and destroys all surfaces - the cold burning light that can only ever fall on surfaces: *to bear ourselves as just still warm becomings - euphoric...*

(De-)creation's (art as a going back through the evolution of whatever-however-wherever-whensoever creatings) task is to make for this shade which is our only, our first and last, protection; it is a strange protection because within and through it not only do we engage our own darkness *but we are utterly exposed, laid bare*. From within this boundaryless here, making-for-art risks dissolution because it can never know if it speaks truly; it has to speak from the outside of our ordinary, convincing, certainties. Its 'speaking' (the modes of its whatever-de-creatings – all the performances entailed in making-for-art) seeks to "keep yes and no unsplit"<sup>20</sup> in order to give its saying "the shade". The place of shade, then, is within the unsplit yes-and-no. Exactly where the split would have been (here the gap is canopied by the little conjunction 'and' that unwittingly stands in for the nonce as shade's temporary dna code) shade takes its place. And yet, in this taking, place's specificity dissolves as shade retreats, weakly defiant in the face of all attempts at analysis; it will not lie down before us and become a surface to be divided up by yeses and noes. Shade is what withholds itself, what withdraws.

### **Tensions of Attending-to**

Shade demands that we pay attention to, create ways of living with and revealing the consequences for that living, the uncertainty of our own in-betweenness: between and yet within yes-and-no simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> Attention seems to come 'from within' but it is always in its becoming and going forth, its going towards something other, at the surface: it is the gapless groundless meeting region between inner and outer, enabling us both to go out of and beyond ourselves and yet be touched by what we are attending to. It is the enabler of the haptic.

Attending-to, then, is doubly constitutive, both of what is attended to (how in our attention it shapes up for us) and of the how of what we are becoming; it endows us with fragile states of becoming. How we attend, with what kind of commitment, intensity, focus, engagement, is the thread of (de-)creative performing, a thread made of twists, folds, shadows, emergings, disappearings, lines of continuity and sudden breaks, tensions and slacknesses. It has to be both rapt and carefree, allowing both the intensely focussed and the uneventful, the vague, the distracting, to pass through its sifting screens. The shadowy has to be able to come into its ownmost, not as a ground for a figure but as permeating absolutely the particulars, as indeed the unfigurable that makes all figures possible.

At once focussed and unfocussed, attention becomes an allowing, an 'open to', a becoming-patient, that makes allowance for the unfocussable; it enables a warming to where the appearance of things, the site of the meeting between inner and outer, involves a warming to some particular thing(s), the generation of a warmth from within that seeks to meet and touch the outer: a

<sup>20</sup> Paul Celan, 'Selected Poems', loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> For a literary exploration of shade's rendering of the visual both reticent and indeterminate see Junichiro Tanizaki, 'In Praise of Shadows', Vintage, London, 2001.

coming-to of response. Attention is the mark, the marking out, of what weighs on one, the weight of things felt at the surface. It sparks and holds what is intense within to that which (seemingly forever over there, beyond one's reach) one is intent upon. It is not the span of attention which is critical in either performing or responding but rather the unpredictable combination of intensity and openness.

Since attending is a striving to become-present-at, the drive to attend to one's own becoming, the intensity of the reflexive turn in performing, puts itself at risk. For the very practice of attending to the meeting points between the inner and the outer inevitably entails a disintegration of the 'one' that defines oneself in the quotidian. Attention can no longer be undivided where, in finding, coming across, perceiving (see, hear, touch, smell, taste), the others that are not simply within the one(self) but are made up together at the surface, it has to become plural; attention becomes a threading together of intensities made up of broken and continuous intertwined charges. These plural charges, unfixable under one name, show us that the one is an always temporary fragile convenience to ensure a continuity of least trouble at the surface of things. Splits are never far away.

In giving way to the multiple the one is confounded and attention itself becomes many, no longer the activity of a central guiding foresight or force-site but pluralised as dimensions, layerings, trackings that come-and-go, appear-disappear, fuse-disintegrate in their passage through. They are ways at variance, in tension, with each other; moving at different speeds, they sound each other out, barge into each other, modify each other in a merging-splitting as attention gropes its way up:

"Upward. Grope your way up."<sup>22</sup>

In practice then the artist becomes an attention-seeker, seeking not the attention of others for his/her thing or self, but *on the trail of attention itself*, as what absorbs the 'one' and which, in attending to its own intensive flow, becomes a many that will always defer the struggle to grasp 'it' as just an it. Watching and experiencing attention, disappearing in the very attentive process of trying to 'grasp' its multiple selves, gives way before itself while allowing these to flow on past, through and away. Intensive (but relaxed and open) attention sidelines and exceeds intention. Being intent simultaneously on both itself and others, attention begins by seeking itself as object (the only way attention knows how to begin), but soon finds itself being carried away and dismembered as its relation with the outer others begins to coalesce at the surface. Attention becomes a self-concealing in and as the course of its search for itself. In seeking it hides. It puts itself beyond any lighted search, simply unavailable to the light of our conventional search engines. The search finds, comes up with, its own shades; these are its protectors, its withdrawers, making it essentially shadowy. It is that unlocatable site where the one shades into the other(s) under the ruleless rule of indistinction.

To attend to its own shades, its umbral becoming, attention wanders in those regions where the shadowy never quite becomes total darkness; this neither-present-nor-absent, where limit, edge and boundary are confounded, becomes its threshold and its medium. This not-here, not-yet-place, is a somewhere-else where we cannot yet say that transgression has taken place, because, within the vagueness of shade, no observable crossable boundary comes to be, falls into place. Wherever attention is turned, is paid, towards its own tracking back it falls away into its own ever-receding medium - shade. Day shade, night shade, deadly shade, lively shade, whatever catches and drives it, attention can never put itself in a position to go beyond itself. It most truly

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

becomes 'itself' (its manyness) when it finds and offers to us the terms of its own inability to grasp its multiplicity. Art's truth, the where of its emergence for us as nothing but shade, lies in the terrifying comfort of this coming-to-terms, the extremity of a resigned joy. Yet, in spite of this essential failure, attention's constitutive lack, some of us for some of the time, and a few of us for much of the time, remain intent upon art: we gear our attention to watch out for it and watch over it.

### **Performing's Night Vigil**

Attention is bound up with keeping watch, with being vigilant. Art's intensive attention tends towards the vigil and the wake. But who is watching over what on whose behalf? And what is brought back from the vigil as the residual mark(s) of the watching that has taken place? Both for the performer and the receiver art's gest is the residue of the vigil, both a remainder and a reminder of something that never seems quite redeemable. In the vigil one stays awake while others sleep, keeping watch, the night-watch that others may sleep peacefully, securely. The vigil is a protective wake; it faces towards the shades on others' behalf; and the vigilant discover shades stretching round the clock:

"... dealt out between  
midnight and midday and midnight."<sup>23</sup>

This night-watch is different to the seeing of the day; it wants to come to terms with what cannot be seen by a seeing wrapped in and weighed down by the attention that has to be paid to the ordinary cares of the world. Daylight seeing, steering well clear of the self-loss required by art's peculiar intensive attention, constantly seeks to eliminate shade in order to clarify and make graspable the surface features it perceives through its standing back, its separation and detachment, from the thing seen.

If vigilance, night vigilance, is an intensive watching-out-for, then this out-look is a looking outwards towards and for the other. It is carried through both to catch a glimpse, a hint, of the other but also on the other's behalf - to bring the other into relation. For the other that the shade is, always lies in waiting over there, waiting to be brought out of itself, stretched out, unfolded and drawn towards us ever so slightly, in being brought to our attention. Vigilance works with and in the dark.

The vigilant performer, making-toward-art and and on her/his way back from the night watch, wants to return with a report, a re-mark, both of what was seen in and as the shade and also of how the vigil left its mark on the seeing itself, how attention in its intensity was marked by its openness to the shade. Vigilance hopes to return with a reminder that may not yet be a lesson, but which wants to show what has been felt-learnt in and as the vigil. Carried in from out there, it brings back an offering, a bearing that can never become a gift. In advance of all systems of exchange (gifting included), the offering can never be given as a present because it has emerged, come about, absolutely from without. Always both less and more than any present, it stands for and performs the outside of exchange, of all economy. What is borne vigilantly right up to the threshold of within is what is on offer.

### **Offerings Mark the Threshold**

Before the gift there is the offer which is outside, in advance of, all contracts, all exchange systems, and has no expectation of any return. It does not want to strike or be part of any bargain(ing). It is the fate of the offer to be left, deposited, at the threshold, where it must wait, perhaps interminably, to be taken up, taken within. The offer can be made but never given.

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

Whoever is truly offering departs before she can be turned into a giver or become part of and party to a bargain. On depositing the offering the offerer vanishes forever, becomes irrelevant to the offering's destiny. The sole question then hanging over the offering has nothing to do with its source, its origin, but concerns only its dedication: to what and whom might it be dedicated from now on?

To leave an offering at a threshold (and every offering marks its spot as precisely a threshold, an in-between), necessitates an abandonment before (it is their outside) any guarantees can be given about its reception. The performer has already turned tail before the object can become a gift. In putting it on its spot, performing is the undoing of giving as we take it, because the only kind of giving performed here is a giving away to and for nothing; the only kind of contract the performer might have is with this absence.

The spot (a non-place, a not-yet-place) where the offering is laid is on the edge: it constitutes the threshold of the everyday. Hovering very close to the latter, it brushes against it tangentially, defining its outside, reminding it that it has a beyond. This untimeable passing-by only becomes a place for the inside, becoming incorporated and enfolded, when the offer is taken up and the gest is borne within, defining the threshold anew as threshold, but this time in a slightly different place.

In bringing this original but originless gest back in from the threshold, the bearers are non-plussed by it. It is not an addition but a transformer, a reshaper - transliteral. But in order to retain its transforming potential it has to lead a double, a multiple, life, for its immediate fate is to be incorporated into the inside's representing exchange systems (including, possibly even beginning with, the economy of the gift exchange, where making-for-art and its gests are often spoken of and treated (in spite of their exchange values) as if gifted to the culture). Broken into bits for assessment by experts, it is allocated places across numerous sites. It becomes a 'knowable' to be assimilated into collections that define its parts through extant and external criteria. The originless whole drifts away through the gaps between these parts.

The fabulous qualities of incorporation, their seemingly inordinate capacity for appropriation and placement, will give the overwhelming impression of having received the object as a gift which they begin to circulate within their contract-bound exchange systems. Once it is transformed into a gift, the object will have all the appearances of something to which obligations and values accrue. Enculturing is allocation, place-giving; this is the first stage, the reciprocal representing moment, of reconstituting the gest as gift. It is endowed with attributes which it did not bring with it - the attributes show what life is like inside the threshold in the ways they add the inside's values to the object. This is the plus that puts the gest into circulation and, in the process, minimises the chances of non-plussedness disorganising our relation to the gest.

Yet what cannot enter into the contract as gift, what remains as the offer, is what cannot be added up or on to what is already in circulation: this 'what' is what leaves us non-plussed. It keeps the gest and us at the threshold, defining threshold for us, putting us and everything we hold as a plus into question. It is what, in the way the gest hovers before us, remains unsetttable, never allowing us to fix it or incorporate it into our known secured places, the places where we could feel completely comfortable, 'at home', with it. And if, drawn into its vigil, we become its unsettled attendants, we will return to it (again and again perhaps...) not for what the discourses of security and exchange tell us about it (tales all too familiar), nor because we like the places where they place it. Rather, we will return in order to try to find that threshold where neither we

nor the gest can ever settle down. For the overwhelming need defining our possibility (a need we may now barely recognise due to the weight of what, surrounding and permeating us, is designed to inhibit this need) is the need to be moved, and to move towards that other where we may encounter our own limits. In trying to meet this other we become, at last and fleetingly perhaps, our own threshold. Non-plussed we are no longer ourselves.

And over there... the strangeness that is lying in wait, for me... there where  
 “...there are  
 still songs to be sung on the other side  
 of mankind.”<sup>24</sup>

And how much of one's life is lived outside oneself, so much of it passing without our noticing that that is how we pass by ourselves, pass away? Art's task is to find and bring before us - *as if for the first time* - the terms of this unseen passing, at the same time showing us that it has always been our own and that we can reclaim it.

### **Regioning Surfaces... Performing Between Void, Place, and Dwelling**

In attempting to recover this passing-outside, every maker-for-art *becomes a local artist without ever being in place*; the recovery has to be close, proximate, near by, without ever being there. Being on the move, the task is to define in and as the gest, a region of becoming, unbecoming oneself to become an elsewhere, unstill but showing shifting contours of somewhere absolutely particular but unfixable, finally unmappable: to 'find' that unboundaried region, where the finding is itself the shaping of region. The moving through, the making of way, is the unfolding of a region while leaving the folds intact. What the undulations hide, preserve, can only be pointed to but never revealed.

Can this regioning, this making of way, carrying within itself some sense of contouring, simultaneously hold to what is utterly beyond it?

If regioning is a mode of placing that does not take place, precisely because it is a tentative dialogue with what is not yet a place (our place), then maybe the gest unfolds a 'where' that, hovering between presence and absence, anticipates, while withholding, the possibility of our dwelling somewhere. Maybe this endlessly regioning thing seeks to hold dwelling and void both at bay and together.

Does Juan Munoz, in his *'La Posa'* reflections<sup>25</sup>, draws us into the play of the relations between void, place and dwelling?

In considering the annual non-ceremonial making, occupying, and destruction of a wooden structure (that hints at but is not yet a house) by the inhabitants of the Peruvian village of Zurite, he raises the question of the first house. Although unspoken by Munoz we may assume that his address of the significance of this structure is offered as an implicit evocation of the matters of art – performing and its gests. For the peasants entering it for brief periods of reflection it is an occasion for intuiting origin, for remembering the possibility of the first house and its unfoundations in the nomadic: to dwell or to be dwell-less. What is intuited is the relation between place and void. Coming before, or to one side of, the confidence we place in dwelling

<sup>24</sup> Paul Celan, 'Selected Poems', op. cit., (from 'THREAD SUNS'), p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> See his essay, 'The Posa', in 'Juan Munoz, monologues and dialogues', James Lingwood, Museo Nacional, Madrid, 1997, p. 86.

and that our dwelling places in a specific place, the *gest* wants to remain unsettled and unsettling. For it too is the real-isation, the making out of an intuition, of the relation between (our) becoming and place. Perhaps it intimates that it is always too early to say that we can settle down, that, in spite of near universal settlement, we are no nearer to taking place truly. In posing (*'la posa'* ...recalls the *'pose'* in Celan's *'s'expose'*<sup>26</sup>) for itself, as the utterly unreasonable reason for its search, the question of what it is to pose and to be posed, to be in place, in a position, it re-turns to us our own questioning of what it might be to truly occupy a space, to be *that* local, to be proximate to ourselves? However positive we have been and are about our position(s), we remain mere land-grabbers, for we will never be able to place ourselves without turning back on what we have made of place and learning to ask what it and we might yet become. Maybe art is one of the very few remaining regions where the uncertainties of our relation to place, to placing, to posing and becoming-posed, are intrinsic to the quest.

In art the house of dwelling used to be 'tradition', and the problem for would-be-dwellers was to construct one's own place (a certain restricted 'roominess') within, quite separate but of it. Now we're not so sure. Certainly we're not sure what it is 'to dwell' - the on-rush of techno-capitalism unsettles and displaces everything. Dwelling (for example in the 'security' of a style, a singular vision) itself is on trial, resisted, deferred, pushed away even. But on behalf of what? Is any other site substitutable for that of dwelling within, however marginally, tradition's walls?

Perhaps, as suggested earlier, allegory, along art's, tradition's, borders, is the nearest thing to a site for performing that we have. It acts as a temporary stand-in for the conventions of placing to which we had become accustomed within the aesthetics of modernity, conventions that had already set up for us in advance some of the comforts arising from shared affiliations and senses of context and direction. In allegory the *gest* as image-surface-text-sound becomes the occasion to take us elsewhere, an elsewhere where neither we nor the object can ever dwell, for it is always at least two places at once. The *gest* has to be just what it is right there before us, but only in order that it can take us beyond itself to its 'real' point, its hoped-for destination; it needs to keep us hovering between its particulars and this absolute outside, its desired elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

Where a *gest* (a painting for example) is approached as allegory, what it 'has to offer' becomes uncertain, is made uncertain. The possible seductions and delights will not be the same; there may be no delights as we have 'conventionally' taken them. For allegory transports us to a groundless site where we can no longer trust either the model/motif as rendered on and as the surface (the *gest* as only, nothing more than, its surface), nor the artist who makes it there. Can we have a trustless art? Under allegory the question is how far we can trust surfaces; this is the question the allegorical 'surface' throws down before us about itself. Appearances (all the artist as surface-maker/line-writer can leave us) are there both to offer themselves and to hide; but what they hide is not a 'one' to be revealed, uncovered, in and as its primal authenticity that will simply displace and substitute for the surface. Rather, the drive of allegory, the energies that forced the surface to surface, seeks to carry us across the surface to the point where the surface dissolves itself on behalf of something else. Yet somehow the allegorical thing has to hold us at the surface in the very movement of trying to escape it to get to this elsewhere – it has to continue to fascinate us as nothing but the surface that it is. Its very point is to suspend us over, string us out between, its irresolvable undecidable duality. The surface has to make us ready to leave it, to become discontented with it in order that we may leap away from it towards its other, an other that has no place of its own. Allegories leave us with nothing to trust but ourselves,

<sup>26</sup> Celan's *'s'expose'* is explored further in 'To Perform'.

<sup>27</sup> For further discussion of allegory see the remarks in 'To Gest' concerning the paintings of Dumas and Luc Tuymans.



hanging in that pinched gap between the surface that used to delight but which has now relieved itself of us, and the elsewhere which the surface seems to propose and promise but which we have to construct for ourselves, never 'knowing' whether our constructions are in the 'right' place. And place and trust seem to be inextricably intertwined: beyond trust, place tends to disappear. Yet the allegorist's inescapable problem is that the surface, the place that is not one, will never go away. It is all we have.

### **Performing Within Impurity**

In the aftermath of modernity's drive to be purely art, that which was art alone, we are left to struggle with hybridity's impurity: that which, lacking all essence, all leastness, remains thoroughly mixed up. There may be seemingly vital connections between the bits, but it seems that we can never make them into a 'one', a 'whole' (except in the illusory 'wholes' of analysis's own framing work). Art comes to stand for (and stand by and in) its own impurity - learning gradually, perhaps, that it can never be itself and can never shut itself off, enclose itself. And, because the boundaries that seemed to separate it off from other things have slipped away, we can never know whether what we think we have grasped (of the thing conventionally called a 'work of art') is the art part or something other.

Lacking (or at least unable to be certain of finding) art-as-such, performers and their potential audiences have somehow to find ways of living within, questioning, and maybe celebrating this impurity, this now necessary taint.

That which has no essence, the gest which is never just art, is a coming together of fragments that somehow (and this 'somehow' is precisely the 'art part') cohere but around no centre. They come together just this once only in this very particular way: the way is unique, a one-off, but not a unity - it is a singular collection gelling only here this once. It becomes art only by being partly art. Yet it is still a perfect performance, because art is not available, seeable, recognisable elsewhere - it only ever becomes in and as each gest. It 'is' as the 'now-here' of this gest, of each 'this': unassimilable but still impure - made up of the differences of life which come together each time, just this once.

Cohering but without unity, the gest goes around, to one side of, the 'I', the supposedly singular 'origin' of the thing. Getting rid of the 'I', the way of the piece is a way through and out of the 'I', out of what we take the 'I'-word to name in quotidian use (a controlling, willing centre that somehow directs, takes charge, putting things both to work and into their places, and making these places coincide with its place: the 'I' of the everyday is taken to be that which performs this putting to work, and is responsible for the performance that makes two places into one). This 'I' regions in its making way. Regioning is the 'I's' way of presencing, and it always 'is' (it 'ams') only in and as a present which, precisely in its regioning, it inhabits, hollows out, as an 'inside'. In its continual becoming, the situated quotidian 'I', speaking away to itself and others, 'is' this withinness from where place is assembled, radiates, routinely without a second thought, to an unboundaried beyond. But the way of the gest leads towards the 'I's' oblivion. Perhaps Jasper Johns was gesturing towards this oblivion ( which may always be just to one side of specific 'feelings') when he said that he had attempted

‘to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I have done is not me – not to confuse my feelings with what I produced. I didn’t want my work to be an exposure of my feelings... so I worked in such a way that I could say that

it's not me.'<sup>28</sup>

Of course the 'I's' place of assembly can never coincide with art's place, no matter how 'deeply' this 'I' goes into itself, into its withinness, in the course of its second thoughts; second thoughts tend towards the analytical, seeking and hoping to lay out the 'ground' of and for the 'I's' first thoughts. If technoscience is the third thought and philosophy the fourth thought, then art is perhaps the fifth thought-feeling (thought going out of itself) that is the unbecoming, the decreation, of thought, the giving way of thought both to itself and to the felt. Art gives itself away as thought, giving itself over to what is not-thought, the not-yet-thought; it wants to become thought's dissipation, its lack-loss (a lack-loss that is neither thought nor feeling but an encounter which is the suspension of such distinctions, as in Celan's keeping yes-and-no unsplit...). We cannot say this suspension 'takes place' because it cannot be marked on any map of the 'I' or thought-ways, but rather it gets under way, becoming-suspending, in an encounter with the 'I's' other(s). Encountering becomes an in-betweening which, in its very indistinction (its collapsing of the categories of quotidian thought and experience), is the coming-to-unbecoming of the vague. And precisely because of its lack of definition, its coming to us as the irresolvable, we experience (we may have to fall back on this word in spite of its inadequacies) this vagueness *utterly concretely*. In its concreteness as that which confronts us as clarity's lack, the through-and-through vague undoes the securities of place (the trust in grounds) that enable the 'I' and 'we' to get by for the most part unquestioningly. Where allegory succeeds it does so precisely because its surface gathers us up into the irresolution of the vague. Dangled over something that is absolutely there, but only in and as its falling short of anything placeable, we drift into dis-ease.

The vague drifts and cuts us adrift, yet it is given an absolute precision by this exact and exacting gest. However, 'we' arrive (and in so arriving the 'we' of an identifiable community disappears) at the vague only through this specific piece: adrift in a specificity that holds us to the absolute particulars, the singular inflections, of the very-vague. Such inflections are the marks of art; in their inflecting they turn and bend back both upon art and upon and into us; they show, offer, art flexing its muscleless impowers so that we might just turn back into ourselves, but this time, each time, differently. If we follow the energies of inflection, its turns and twists along the dwindling dissolving paths, the gest may draw us to the opening where the offering of a giving up and giving away are all that is under way.

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted by James Rondeau in 'Jasper Johns : Gray', Yale University, New Haven, 2007, p. 24.