THE SUBLIME

Edited by Simon Morley

Documents of Contemporary Art

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Whitechapel Gallery

Documents of Contemporary Art

In recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding of art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

The Documents of Contemporary Art series emerges from this context. Each volume focuses on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence in contemporary art internationally. Edited and introduced by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each of these source books provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives defining a significant theme or tendency.

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UNKNOWN

THE ABSTRACTIONISTS FELT A BEAUTIFUL THING IN PERCEIVING HOW THE MEDIUM CAN, OF ITS OWN ACCORD, CARRY ONE INTO THE

AFTER HIKING MILES INTO THE WILDERNESS AND DISCOVERING MY FIRST REAL WATERFALL, I IMMEDIATELY BEGAN LOOKING FOR THE PUMPS AND CONDUIT THAT MAKE IT WORK

Fred Tomaselli, Interview with Siri Hustvedt, 2007

Simon Morley
Introduction//The Contemporary Sublime

The essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and speech, transcend the human. What, if anything, lies beyond the human – God or the gods, the daemon or Nature – is matter for great disagreement.
– Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976)[1]

The Sublime Now

Today we are constantly learning of new realities too vertiginously complex, it seems, for us ever fully to encompass them in our mind. Astronomers now believe, for example, that the visible universe contains an estimated 100 billion galaxies and that each galaxy also consists of billions of stars emitting rays in myriad variations of colour from glimmering cool reds to radiant hot blues and whites. 'Wow' often tends to be our initial lost-for-words response to such intimations of otherness or infinity. Under the aegis of the sublime – a concept in evolution since the classical era – this anthology explores the range of recent artistic theory and practice that attempts to articulate such moments of mute encounter with all that exceeds our comprehension. It investigates what a contemporary sublime might be and what it might mean in today's world.

The texts selected here seek to describe or analyse what takes hold of us when reason falters and certainties begin to crumble. They are about being taken to the limits. The sublime experience is fundamentally transformative, about the relationship between disorder and order, and the disruption of the stable coordinates of time and space. Something rushes in and we are profoundly altered. And so, in looking at the relevance of the concept to contemporary art, we are also addressing an experience with implications that go far beyond aesthetics.

The concept of the sublime became important in the eighteenth century when it was applied in relation to the arts to describe aspects of nature that instil awe and wonder, such as mountains, avalanches, waterfalls, stormy seas or the infinite vault of the starry sky. Today, however, rather than nature the incredible power of technology is more likely to supply the raw material for what can be termed a characteristically *contemporary* sublime. Moreover, the experience of modern life itself has been viewed by such thinkers as Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson in terms of the sublime, as the extreme space-time compressions produced by globalized communication technologies give rise to a perception of the everyday as fundamentally destabilizing and excessive. Awe and wonder can quickly blur into terror, giving rise to a darker aspect of the sublime experience, when the exhilarating feeling of delight metamorphoses into a flirtation with dissolution and the 'daemonic'.

The works of contemporary artists as diverse as Anish Kapoor, Mike Kelley, Doris Salcedo, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Fred Tomaselli can all usefully be considered within a conceptual framework provided by the concept of the sublime. But the roots of such preoccupations lie in the period after World War II, when the desire to evoke sublime feelings of transcendence and exaltation took on particular importance for the Abstract Expressionist generation of artists in North America as well as artists such as Yves Klein in Europe. Then, after a period when the concept slipped largely from view, in the 1980s a new wave of postmodernist sublimity swept over the art world, largely provoked by a general dissatisfaction with the potential trivialization of art in the Pop aesthetic, on one hand, and on the other, its over-intellectualization in Minimal art and conceptualism. In the installations of American artist James Turrell, for example, the intensification of sublime experience through the evocation of spatial immensity, as formulated by Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, took a new direction through investigating the more fully immersive effects of space and light. Also in North America, Bill Viola was pushing the new medium of video towards powerful evocations of extreme states of mind, while Mike Kelley was exploring, in both disturbing and witty multi-media installations, the darker side of the sublime. Elsewhere, artists such as Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer and, later, Doris Salcedo, have addressed the sublime's connection to traumatic historical events, while more recently from beyond the West artists such as Hiroshi Sugimoto and Zhang Huan have brought new perspectives to the underlying issues at stake in discussions of sublimity.

The theoretical underpinnings for such discussions were provided by Jean-Francois Lyotard's influential essays 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde' (1984) and 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime' (1982) which first appeared in *Artforum*. They announced the centrality to the theory of postmodernism of Kant's concept of the sublime. Lyotard's texts subsequently spawned a voluminous debate, and in 1985 'Les Immatériaux', an exhibition curated by Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, brought these ideas to a wider public. *Du Sublime*, an important collection of texts edited by Jean-Francois Courtine, appeared in 1988, adding to the contemporary philosophical context, and in 1993 this was translated into English. In 1999 the painter/writer Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe published *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, addressing what he called a 'technological sublime', and in 2002 a series of essays edited by Bill Beckley titled *Sticky Sublime* endeavoured to catch something of the rich diversity fo approaches to the subject. The continuing interest in the sublime is evident in the

Tate's research project devoted to the sublime which has brought together artists, writers, poets, composers, art historians, philosophers, scientists, theologians and curators in a series of events, for example a symposium in 2007 at Tate Britain, London, to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Edmund Burke's classic text on the subject. There have also been several major exhibitions addressing the subject directly or indirectly during the last two decades. For example, in 1993 'The Sublime Void (on Memory of the Imagination)', featuring over twenty artists, took place at the Musée des Beaux Arts, Brussels. 2004 saw 'The Big Nothing' at the ICA Philadelphia, which, to quote its press statement, investigated 'the void, the ineffable, the sublime, refusal, nihilism, zero'. In 2007 'On the Sublime', featuring the work of Rothko, Klein and Turrell, was hosted by the Guggenheim Museum in Berlin, while in 2009 'Various Voids: A Retrospective' at the Centre Pompidou assembled a host of international artists in a survey covering the last fifty years and, like the ICA Philadelphia show, placed the sublime within the context of broader cultural debates concerning the limits of representation.

A Short History of the Sublime

The word 'sublime' may seem rather outmoded – etymologically it comes from the Latin *sublimis* (elevated; lofty; sublime) derived from the preposition *sub*, here meaning 'up to', and, some sources state, *limen*, the threshold, surround or lintel of a doorway, while others refer to *limes*, a boundary or limit. In the Middle Ages *sublimis* was modified into a verb, *sublimare* (to elevate), commonly used by alchemists to describe the purifying process by which substances turn into a gas on being subjected to heat, then cool and become a newly transformed solid. Modern chemistry still refers to the 'sublimation' of substances but of course without its mystical alchemical connotation, whereby purification also entailed transmutation into a higher state of spiritual existence.

'Sublime' begins to acquire its modern resonances in the seventeenth century when it appears in the translation of a fragmentary Greek text on rhetoric by the anonymous Roman-era author known as Longinus. The first translation of this work, *Du Sublime* (1674), by Nicolas Boileau, signalled a new interest in the investigation of powerful emotional effects in art. Longinus had declared that true nobility in art and life was to be discovered through a confrontation with the threatening and unknown, and drew attention to anything in art that challenges our capacity to understand and fills us with wonder. The sublime artist was, according to Longinus, a kind of superhuman figure capable of rising above arduous and ominous events and experiences in order to produce a nobler and more refined style.

From the mid eighteenth century, however, the word began to be used in a different context that reflected a new cultural awareness of the profoundly limited nature of the self, and which led artists, writers, composers and philosophers to draw attention to intense experiences which lay beyond conscious control and threatened individual autonomy. Closely associated with the Romantic movement, the concept of the sublime began to be employed by those who wished to challenge traditional systems of thought that were couched in the old language of religion, a rhetoric that now seemed founded on outdated conceptions of human experience. They hoped, as the contemporary philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has characterized it, to explore 'the incommensurability of the sensible with the metaphysical (the Idea, God)'.[2]

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke noted that there were certain experiences which supply a kind of thrill or shudder of perverse pleasure, mixing fear and delight. He shifted the emphasis in discussions of the sublime towards experiences provoked by aspects of nature which due to their vastness or obscurity could not be considered beautiful, and indeed were likely to fill us with a degree of horror:

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully is Astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror ... No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear, being an apprehension of pain or death, operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too ... Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime.[3]

Burke was interested in what happens to the self when assailed by that which seems to endanger its survival. He also moved the analysis away from the sublime object and towards the *experience* of the beholder, thus making his enquiry a psychological one. The sublime, declared Burke, was 'the strongest passion', and he belittled the importance of the beautiful, claiming that it was merely an instance of prettiness. The sublime experience, on the other hand, had the power to transform the self, and Burke, like Longinus, saw something ennobling in this terror-tinged thrill, as if the challenge posed by some threat served to strengthen the self.

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), also set out to explore what happens at the borderline where reason finds its limits. He characterized three types of sublimity: the awful, the lofty and the splendid, and continued and deepened the shift of focus initiated by Burke, by asserting that the sublime was not so much a formal quality of some natural phenomenon as a subjective

conception – something that happens in the mind. He thereby shifted the analysis towards the impact and consequence of the sublime experience upon consciousness, and argued that the sublime was essentially about a negative experience of *limits*. It was a way of talking about what happens when we are faced with something we do not have the capacity to understand or control – something excessive. Behind Kant's discussion lay a keen sense of the independence of nature, whose sheer complexity and grandeur continuously exceeds any human ability to control or understand it. This sense of the sublime may be initiated by the terrifying aspects of nature such as Burke describes, or be provoked by an experience so complex that our inability to form a clear mental conception of it leads to a sense of the inadequacy of our imagination and of the vast gulf between that experience and the thoughts we have about it. We are made aware, Kant observed, that sometimes we cannot present to ourselves an account of an experience that is in any way coherent. We cannot encompass it by thinking, and so it remains indiscernible or unnameable, undecidable, indeterminate and unpresentable.

'The feeling of the sublime', wrote Kant, 'is at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation of reason, and a simultaneous awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of sense of being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law.'[4] Thus because the sublime addresses what cannot be commanded or controlled, it is grounded in an awareness of lack. And as a consequence of this awareness of an inaccessible form of excess, argued Kant, we come to a recognition of our limitations, and so transform a sense of negative insufficiency into a positive gain: such experiences serve to establish our reasoning powers more firmly within their rightful, although diminished, domain.

Several other important nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers also contributed to the evolution of modern concepts of the sublime. Friedrich Schiller claimed in *On the Sublime* (1801) that while the beautiful is valuable only with reference to the human being, the sublime is the way the 'daemon' within man reveals itself.[5] Friedrich Hegel, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1827) also contested Kant's essentially negative interpretation. He saw the sublime not so much as a voiding of the power of reason but as a moment of fusion with the Absolute in which the beautiful is fulfilled, and declared that sublimity was the way by which the divine manifested itself in the natural world.[6] In a similar vein, Arthur Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), explored the fissure that lies at the heart of being, and envisaged a self that can in certain situations observe itself in the very act of confronting a fearful inner abyss, and by so doing attain a certain dark grandeur.[7]

Friedrich Nietzsche extended these arguments to a point where he urged the abandonment of reason altogether. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) he cast the truly sublime individual as someone willing to abandon the safe dream of 'Apollonian' rationality, where all is light and sanity, in order to embrace instead 'Dionysian' intoxication – the frenzy of the God of wine and madness.[8]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud deepened these varied perspectives in two important ways, although without directly addressing the philosophical context. In his concept of 'sublimation' Freud argued that in order to find psychic stability the 'normal' ego necessarily bases itself upon the suppression of undesirable urges and traumatic memories, and these are transformed into 'purer' and more morally and socially acceptable forms. Freud also identified the continuing encounters of the ego with such destabilizing, only partially repressed, psychological forces as generating what he called the 'uncanny', which he characterized as a feeling of unsettling ambivalence, a kind of fear originating in what is known of old and long familiar things.[9] Indeed, to many thinkers of the early and mid twentieth century the conditions of daily life within modern technological society could seem one continuous and disturbingly uncanny or sublime experience, causing what the German writer Walter Benjamin termed a disorienting psychic condition of traumatic 'shock', with hugely destabilizing consequences not only for the individual but also for society.[10]

Meanwhile from his different psychoanalytical perspective Carl Jung explored through his study of mystical and alchemical texts the connotations of sublimity in its earlier sense. From the procedures of such proto-scientific works he drew analogies with the progress of the psyche towards greater self-awareness, or as he termed it, 'individuation'.[11] The 'dissident surrealist' Georges Bataille also sought a way to express in modern terms the experiences described in traditional mystical texts. Drawing on Nietzsche, he declared that in such documents we witness the recording of moments when the self is forced to 'remain in intolerable non-knowledge, which has no other way out than ecstasy'.[12]

The Sublime and Contemporary Culture

The dominant assumption behind contemporary thought, grounded in the Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist theory that came to control discussions of contemporary art during the 1970s and 1980s, is that culture and cultural values are socially constructed rather than deriving from some timeless essence. In other words, cultural signs, codes and representations are understood as *producing* our life-world and making it meaningful. In this context the importance of the concept of the sublime for contemporary discussions on art is that it addresses an unresolved problem within this social constructionist argument. For while we may no longer believe in eternal essences or values, we

still often sense that our lives are fashioned by forces beyond our control, which underpin and drive acts of thinking or representation.

For those who assert that our lives cannot be accounted for within a paradigm which states that we exist within a life-world produced wholly from cultural signs and systems, the sublime defines the moment when thought comes to an end and we encounter that which is 'other'. As a consequence, discourses on the sublime pose more questions than they answer. What, for example, is happening psychologically within the force-field of the sublime experience when formal and objectively ordered social time is destabilized by some unstructured, informal and subjective 'moment' of heightened experience, a heightened time during which the self is radically altered by something that presses on us from beyond our normal reality, challenging the assumptions upon which such a reality is based. And what might the social and political consequences of this experience be? If this experience is enacted within the dialectics set up between 'nature' on the one side, and 'culture' on the other – with the sublime signifying the unconstrained and unconditional power of nature (desire, void, loss of self) – then to what extent is succumbing to its allure also a way of accepting our domination by and subjection to nature? Or to put it another way, to what extent is the sublime ultimately about embracing the death drive?

One way of understanding what is at stake behind the varied discussions of the sublime contained in this collection, therefore, is to see them as attempts to find ways of expressing or discussing experiences of self-transcendence which are not dependent on a pre-modern concept of essences – notions of a higher and essential reality – nor on scientifically verifiable criteria. Despite the fact that we are increasingly caught within an electronically implemented global system of control and consumption, the concept of the sublime aspires to the possibility of some kind of authentic experience of self-transcendence.

Not surprisingly, discussions of the sublime in contemporary art can be covert or camouflaged ways of talking about experiences that were once addressed by religious discourses and that remain pertinent within an otherwise religiously sceptical and secularized contemporary world. But contemporary thinkers and artists largely reject traditional conceptions of a self or soul or spirit that moves upwards towards some ineffable and essential thing or power. Instead, the selected texts tend to follow downward or deflationary curves, and the contemporary sublime is mostly about *immanent* transcendence, about a transformative experience that is understood as occurring within the here and now.

These downward curves go in two different directions, however. One strives to re-envisage the contemporary self as existing in the light of some unnameable revelation that arises in the gap between a socially-constructed and alienating reality on the one hand and unmediated life on the other. In contrast, the other direction is more motivated by a resigned sense of inadequacy, and addresses our failure when faced with all that so blatantly exceeds us. It invites a kind of stoic resignation.

But one of the major problems with trying to produce an anthology of texts on the sublime is that contemporary artists as a rule shy away from describing their work in such terms. The reasons for this are not hard to find. During the twentieth century the heady rhetoric of the sublime was often employed by totalitarian regimes in order to seduce the masses – think, for example, of Albert Speer's 'cathedrals of light' choreography designed for the Nazis' Nuremburg rallies, a paradigmatic employment of sublime effects. Furthermore, the vulgar and debased coinage of advertising and the mass media nowadays often profits from the characteristic tropes of sublime transcendence, and in advertising 'subliminal' messages or ideas exploit Freud's insight into the way the ego can only ever superficially shield itself from more primal needs and urges. Trivialized and knowingly kitsch devices trading on the ersatz experience of the sublime are thus pervasive in contemporary society, and are designed to stimulate an increasingly jaded consumer. The discourse of the sublime is therefore tainted by association with both malevolent politics and inauthentic mass culture. Not surprisingly, contemporary artists are often wary of attributing to their practices lofty or grandiose intentions that may seem polluted by such associations. Instead, they prefer to focus on more tangible aspects of what they do, leaving the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions.

Critics, art historians and curators, on the other hand, are often less cautious, as are editors of anthologies. As a consequence of this situation you will find a number of texts that do not use the word 'sublime' at all, but which, in the editor's estimation at least, can fruitfully be understood within the field of ideas that the concept of the sublime generates.

Mapping the Contemporary Sublime

Broadly speaking, four approaches to the sublime can be identified within contemporary art and theory. These derive from Longinus, Burke, Kant and Schiller. From Longinus comes an emphasis on the transcendence of reality through the heroic act; from Burke, the idea of the sublime as an experience of shock and awe and as a destabilizing force; from Kant, the notion of the sublime as revealing a reality that is fundamentally indeterminate, undecidable and unpresentable; and from Schiller, a reading of the sublime as ecstatic experience.

The texts comprising the seven sections deal with the sublime according to the following categories: *The Unpresentable*, *Transcendence*, *Nature*,

Technology, *Terror*, *The Uncanny* and *Altered States*, *The Unpresentable* features the theory that underpins debates about a specifically 'postmodern' sublime. Here the reader will encounter some of the most influential thinkers in cultural theory. In *Transcendence*, on the other hand, a more traditional version of the sublime often persists. Whether from an overtly spiritual perspective, as in the essays by David Morgan or Lynn Herbert, or from a more broadly metaphysical or psychological one, such as discussed by Jean Fisher, this section reveals a sublime that is about finding a higher, more exalted and 'real' level of being. *Nature* turns us back to the roots of much contemporary art in notions of romantic sublimity, identifying the natural world as a primary source of such experiences, while *Technology* looks at how to a large extent it is now the man-made world of machines that produces in us many of the kinds of emotional states once associated with nature. *Terror* turns to the darker side of the sublime, looking at how we are within its grasp 'turned upside down and torn apart', as Thomas McEvilley puts it, and how the sublime is dangerously implicated in our violent recent history and contemporary society. *The Uncanny* picks up on aspects of the terror-sublime, emphasizing the conditions whereby in addressing the experience we are also confronting a strange and often unsettling otherness. In *Altered States* the full power of the sublime to thrust us into a condition in which we are no longer ourselves but radically transformed, even to the point of entering a new kind of reality, shows how contemporary artists and thinkers are increasingly interested in exploring the outer limits of what it means to be human.

Within each of these sections are recorded three levels of encounter with the sublime. The first attempts to evoke the actual experience of the sublime through the medium itself. The second consists of discourses through which the sublime experience is described or delineated. The third presents theories about the meaning of the sublime. Several recurring points of reference and methodological approaches run through the texts, forming a kind of counterpoint to the main structure. For example, a leitmotif threading through many of the texts is a reference to the American artist Barnett Newman's seminal text from 1948, 'The Sublime is Now', which has had a remarkable critical afterlife, and in particular informs Jean-François Lyotard's influential discussion of the postmodern sublime. Methodologically, the sublime may be invoked performatively in some texts, while at the other extreme it will be analysed through the abstract and detached lens of philosophy. Several texts can clearly be located within a residually religious, mystical or spiritual discourse, while others take a more sociological and even Marxist perspective in exploring the centrality of the concept of the sublime to postmodern culture as a whole. Some texts approach recent history as itself a sublime experience, while others address problems posed by science and technology. All these perspectives are deepened by the application of psychoanalytic theories, and by revisions of received knowledge and belief arising from feminist, ethnic and non-western critique. Ultimately, the sublime is an experience looking for a context. In the pre-modern period, this context was mostly provided by religion. From around the Romantic era onwards, some forms of art took on this role. And more recently, spectacle and mass media have given the sublime a new if not unproblematic home. The sublime is an experience that can serve many interests; it is now for us to decide what it holds for the future.

1 Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 3.

2 Philip Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Sublime Truth (Part 1)', *Cultural Critique* (Spring 1991) 26; reprinted in Jean-François Courtine, ed., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

3 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) Part II, Sections I–II; ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 53–4.

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790); trans. J.J. Meredith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 106.

5 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Sublime* (1801); trans. Julius Elias (New York: Ungar, 1966).

6 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (one-volume edition, Berlin, 1827); trans. Peter C. Hodgson, et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).

7 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1819) vol. III; trans. Jill Berman (London: Everyman, 1995).

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872); trans. Shaun Whiteside (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994).

9 Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' (1919); trans. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth Press/Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955).

10 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936); in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 217–51.

11 Carl Jung, in *Jung on Alchemy*, ed. Nathan Schwartz-Salant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

12 Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieur* (1943); trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, *Inner Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988)

If we are living in a time without a legend or mythos that can be called ***sublime***, if we refuse to admit any exaltation in pure relations, if we refuse to live in the abstract, how can we be creating a sublime ***art?***

Henri Michaux
To Draw the Flow of Time//1957

[...] I was myself to discover what an awful, convulsive experience it is to change one's tempo, to lose it suddenly,[1] to find another in its place, an unknown, terribly fast tempo that one does not know how to handle, that makes everything different, unrecognizable, insane, that causes everything to overshoot itself and flash by, that cannot be followed, that must be followed, where thoughts and feelings now proceed like projectiles, where inner images, as much accentuated as accelerated, bore and drill with violent, unbearable insistence, objects of an inner vision from which it is no longer possible to detach oneself, luminous like burning magnesium, agitated by a to-and-fro movement like the slide of a machine tool, infinitesimal, and which vibrate, shudder and zig-zag, caught up in an incessant Brownian motion, images where the straight lines invested with an upward momentum are naturally vertical, cathedral lines, that have no upper limit but go on mounting indefinitely, where the broken lines in a continual seism crack, divide, crumble and shred, where the curved lines get lost in extravagant loops, twists and twirls, infinitely intricate lacework patternings, where objects seem set in tiny, dazzling troughs of boiling iron, where parallel lines and parallel objects indefinitely repeated and all the more forcefully the more one observes it, shatter the mind of him who vainly wishes to get back to himself in the general pullulation.

Images marked by streaming, sparkling, extreme seething, in which all remains ambiguous and, although glaringly evident, escapes being determined once and for all, and in which, although the frolics remain circumscribed within the visual field, one knows that one is under the sway of berserk trills, piercing whistles, grotesque cacophanies, and scales run amok and as though berserk.

Torn from one's tempo, in the storm of infinitesimal frenzied waves, or in the hell of equally sudden, smasmodic and insane impulses, one cannot imagine the inhuman speed ever ceasing ...

1 Through the action of mescaline and lysergic acid.

Henri Michaux, extract from 'Vitesse et tempo', *Quadrum*, no. 3 (Brussels, 1957); reprinted in *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*, ed. Catherine de Zheger (New York: The Drawing Center/Merrell, 2000) 8–9.

Barnett Newman
The Sublime is Now//1948

The invention of beauty by the Greeks, that is, their postulate of beauty as an ideal, has been the bugbear of European art and European aesthetic philosophies. Man's natural desire in the arts to express his relation to the Absolute became identified and confused with the absolutisms of perfect creations – with the fetish of quality – so that the European artist has been continually involved in the moral struggle between notions of beauty and the desire for sublimity.

The confusion can be seen sharply in Longinus, who, despite his knowledge of non-Grecian art, could not extricate himself from his platonic attitudes concerning beauty, from the problem of value, so that to him the feeling of exaltation became synonymous with the perfect statement – an objective rhetoric. But the confusion continued on in Kant, with his theory of transcendent perception, that the phenomenon is *more* than phenomenon; and in Hegel, who built a theory of beauty in which the sublime is at the bottom of a structure of *kinds of beauty*, thus creating a range of hierarchies in a set of relationships to reality that is completely formal. (Only Edmund Burke insisted on a separation. Even though it is an unsophisticated and primitive one, it is a clear one and it would be interesting to know how closely the Surrealists were influenced by it. To me Burke reads like a surrealist manual.)

The confusion in philosophy is but the reflection of the struggle that makes up the history of the plastic arts. To us today there is no doubt that Greek art is an insistence that the sense of exaltation is to be found in perfect form, that exaltation is the same as ideal sensibility – in contrast, for example, with the Gothic or baroque, in which the sublime consists of a desire to destroy form, where form can be formless.

The climax in this struggle between beauty and the sublime can best be examined inside the Renaissance and the reaction later against the Renaissance that is known as modern art. In the Renaissance the revival of the ideals of Greek beauty set the artists the task of rephrasing an accepted Christ legend in terms of absolute beauty as against the original Gothic ecstasy over the legend's evocation of the Absolute. And the Renaissance artists dressed up the traditional ecstasy in an even older tradition – that of eloquent nudity or rich velvet. It was no idle quip that moved Michelangelo to call himself a sculptor rather than a painter, for he knew that only in his sculpture could the desire for the grand statement of Christian sublimity be reached. He could despise with good reason the beauty cults who felt the Christ drama on a stage of rich velvets and brocades

and beautifully textured flesh tints. Michelangelo knew that the meaning of the Greek humanities for his time involved making Christ the man into Christ who is God; that his plastic problem was neither the mediaeval one, to make a cathedral, nor the Greek one, to make a man like a god, but to make a cathedral out of man. In doing so he set a standard for sublimity that the painting of his time could not reach. Instead, painting continued on its merry quest for a voluptuous art until in modern times the Impressionists, disgusted with its inadequacy, began the movement to destroy the established rhetoric of beauty by the impressionist insistence on a surface of ugly strokes.

The impulse of modern art was this desire to destroy beauty. However, in discarding Renaissance notions of beauty, and without an adequate substitute for a sublime message, the Impressionists were compelled to preoccupy themselves, in their struggle, with the culture values of their plastic history, so that instead of evoking a new way of experiencing life they were able only to make a transfer of values. By glorifying their own way of living, they were caught in the problem of what is really beautiful and could only make a restatement of their position on the general question of beauty; just as later the Cubists, by their Dada gestures of substituting a sheet of newspaper and sandpaper for both the velvet surfaces of the Renaissance and the Impressionists, made a similar transfer of values instead of creating a new vision, and succeeded only in elevating the sheet of paper. So strong is the grip of the *rhetoric* of exaltation as an attitude in the large context of the European culture pattern that the elements of sublimity in the revolution we know as modern art, exist in its effort and energy to escape the pattern rather than in the realization of a new experience. Picasso's effort may be sublime but there is no doubt that his work is a preoccupation with the question of what is the nature of beauty. Even Mondrian, in his attempt to destroy the Renaissance picture by his insistence on pure subject matter, succeeded only in raising the white plane and the right angle into a realm of sublimity, where the sublime paradoxically becomes an absolute of perfect sensations. The geometry (perfection) swallowed up his metaphysics (his exaltation).

The failure of European art to achieve the sublime is due to this blind desire to exist inside the reality of sensation (the objective world, whether distorted or pure) and to build an art within a framework of pure plasticity (the Greek ideal of beauty, whether that plasticity be a romantic active surface or a classic stable one). In other words, modern art, caught without a sublime content, was incapable of creating a new sublime image and, unable to move away from the Renaissance imagery of figures and objects except by distortion or by denying it completely for an empty world of geometric formalisms – a *pure* rhetoric of abstract mathematical relationships – became enmeshed in a struggle over the nature of beauty: whether beauty was in nature or could be found without nature.

I believe that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer, by completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty and where to find it. The question that now arises is how, if we are living in a time without a legend or mythos that can be called sublime, if we refuse to admit any exaltation in pure relations, if we refuse to live in the abstract, how can we be creating a sublime art?

We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions. We do not need the obsolete props of an outmoded and antiquated legend. We are creating images whose reality is self-evident and which are devoid of the props and crutches that evoke associations with outmoded images, both sublime and beautiful. We are freeing ourselves of the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, myth, or what have you, that have been the devices of Western European painting. Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or 'life', we are making them out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history.

Barnett Newman, 'The Sublime is Now', *Tiger's Eye* (December 1948); reprinted in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992) 171–3.

Jean-François Lyotard
The Sublime and the Avant-Garde//1988

I

In 1950–51, Barnett Baruch Newman painted a canvas measuring 2.42 x 5.42 metres which he called *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. In the mid 1960s he entitled his first three sculptures *Here I, Here II, Here III*. Another painting was called *Not Over There, Here*, two paintings were called *Now*, and two others were entitled *Be*. In December 1948, Newman wrote an essay entitled *The Sublime is Now*.

How is one to understand the sublime, or, let us say provisionally, the object of a sublime experience, as a 'here and now'? Quite to the contrary, isn't it essential to this feeling that it alludes to something which can't be shown, or presented (as Kant said, *dargestellt*)? In a short unfinished text dating from late 1949, *Prologue for a New Aesthetic*, Newman wrote that in his painting, he was

not concerned with a 'manipulation of space nor with the image, but with a sensation of time'. He added that by this he did not mean time laden with feelings of nostalgia, or drama, or references and history, the usual subjects of painting. After this denial [*dénégation*] the text stops short.

So, what kind of time was Newman concerned with, what 'now' did he have in mind? Thomas B. Hess, his friend and commentator, felt justified in writing that Newman's time was the *Makom* or the *Hamakom* of Hebraic tradition – the *there*, the site, the place, which is one of the names given by the Torah to the Lord, the Unnameable. I do not know enough about *Makom* to know whether this was what Newman had in mind. But then again, who does know enough about *now*? Newman can certainly not have been thinking of the 'present instant', the one that tries to hold itself between the future and the past, and gets devoured by them. This *now* is one of the temporal 'ecstasies' that has been analysed since Augustine's day and particularly since Edmund Husserl, according to a line of thought that has attempted to constitute time on the basis of consciousness. Newman's *now* which is no more than *now* is a stranger to consciousness and cannot be constituted by it. Rather, it is what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, it is what consciousness cannot formulate, and even what consciousness forgets in order to constitute itself. What we do not manage to formulate is that something happens, *dass etwas geschieht*. Or rather, and more simply, that it happens ... *dass es geschieht*. Not a major event in the media sense, not even a small event. Just an occurrence.

This isn't a matter of sense or reality bearing upon *what* happens or *what* this might mean. Before asking questions about what it is and about its significance, before the *quid*, it must 'first' so to speak 'happen', *quod*. That it happens 'precedes', so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens. Or rather, the question precedes itself, because 'that it happens' is the question relevant as event, and it 'then' pertains to the event that has just happened. The event happens as a question mark 'before' happening as a question. *It happens* is rather 'in the first place' *is it happening, is this it, is it possible*? Only 'then' is any mark determined by the questioning: is this or that happening, is it this or something else, is it possible that this or that?

An event, an occurrence – what Martin Heidegger called *ein Ereignis* – is infinitely simple, but this simplicity can only be approached through a state of privation. That which we call thought must be disarmed. There is a tradition and an institution of philosophy, of painting, of politics, of literature. These 'disciplines' also have a future in the form of Schools, of programmes, projects and 'trends'. Thought works over what is received, it seeks to reflect on it and overcome it. It seeks to determine what has already been thought, written, painted or socialized in order to determine what hasn't been. We know this

ocess well, it is our daily bread. It is the bread of war, soldiers' biscuit. But this itation, in the most noble sense of the word (agitation is the word Kant gives to the activity of the mind that has judgement and exercises it), this agitation is only possible if something remains to be determined, something that hasn't yet been determined. One can strive to determine this something by setting up a system, a theory, a programme or a project – and indeed one has to, all the while anticipating that something. One can also enquire about the remainder, and allow the indeterminate to appear as a question mark.

What all intellectual disciplines and institutions presuppose is that not everything has been said, written down or recorded, that words already heard or pronounced are not the last words. 'After' a sentence, 'after' a colour, comes another sentence, another colour. One doesn't know which, but one thinks one knows if one relies on the rules that permit one sentence to link up with another, one colour with another, rules preserved in precisely those institutions of the past and future that I mentioned. The School, the programme, the project – all proclaim that after this sentence comes that sentence, or at least that one kind of sentence is mandatory, that one kind of sentence is permitted, while another is forbidden. This holds true for painting as much as for the other activities of thought. After one pictorial work, another is necessary, permitted or forbidden. After one colour, this other colour; after this line, that one. There isn't an enormous difference between an avant-garde manifesto and a curriculum at the École des Beaux Arts, if one considers them in the light of this relationship to time. Both are options with respect to what they feel is a good thing to happen subsequently. But both also forget the possibility of nothing happening, of words, colours, forms or sounds not coming; of this sentence being the last, of bread not coming daily. This is the misery that the painter faces with a plastic surface, of the musician with the acoustic surface, the misery the thinker faces with a desert of thought, and so on. Not only faced with the empty canvas or the empty page, at the 'beginning' of the work, but every time something has to be waited for, and thus forms a question at every point of questioning [*point d'interrogation*], at every 'and what now?'

The possibility of nothing happening is often associated with a feeling of anxiety, a term with strong connotations in modern philosophies of existence and of the unconscious. It gives to waiting, if we really mean waiting, a predominantly negative value. But suspense can also be accompanied by pleasure, for instance pleasure in welcoming the unknown, and even by joy, to speak like Baruch Spinoza, the joy obtained by the intensification of being that the event brings with it. This is probably a contradictory feeling. It is at the very least a sign, the question mark itself, the way in which *it happens* is withheld and announced: *Is it happening*? The question can be modulated in any tone. But

the mark of the question is 'now', *now* like the feeling that nothing might happen: the nothingness now.

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe this contradictory feeling – pleasure and pain, joy and anxiety, exaltation and depression – was christened or rechristened by the name of the *sublime*. It is around this name that the destiny of classical poetics was hazarded and lost; it is in this name that aesthetics asserted its critical rights over art, and that romanticism, in other words, modernity, triumphed.

It remains to the art historian to explain how the word sublime reappeared in the language of a Jewish painter from New York during the 1940s. The word *sublime* is common currency today in colloquial French to suggest surprise and admiration, somewhat like America's 'great', but the idea connoted by it has belonged (for at least two centuries) to the most rigorous kind of reflection on art. Newman is not unaware of the aesthetic and philosophical stakes with which the word *sublime* is involved. He read Edmund Burke's *Inquiry* and criticized what he saw as Burke's over-'surrealist' description of the sublime work. Which is as much as to say that, conversely, Newman judged Surrealism to be over-reliant on a pre-Romantic or Romantic approach to indeterminacy. Thus, when he seeks sublimity in the here-and-now he breaks with the eloquence of Romantic art but he does not reject its fundamental task, that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible. The inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens. In the determination of pictorial art, the indeterminate, the 'it happens' is the paint, the picture. The paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to witness.

To be true to this displacement in which consists perhaps the whole of the difference between romanticism and the 'modern' avant-garde, one would have to read *The Sublime is Now* not as *The Sublime is Now* but as *Now the Sublime is Like This*. Not elsewhere, not up there or over there, not earlier or later, not once upon a time. But as here, now, it happens that, ... and it's this painting. Here and now there is this painting, rather than nothing, and that's what is sublime. Letting go of all grasping intelligence and of its power, disarming it, recognizing that this occurrence of painting was not necessary and is scarcely foreseeable, a privation in the face of *Is it happening?* guarding the occurrence 'before' any defence, any illustration, and any commentary, guarding before being on one's guard, before 'looking' [*regarder*] under the aegis of *now*, this is the rigour of the avant-garde. In the determination of literary art this requirement with respect to the *Is it happening?* found one of its most rigorous realizations in Gertrude Stein's *How to Write*. It's still the sublime in the sense that Burke and Kant described and yet it isn't their sublime any more.

have said that the contradictory feeling with which indeterminacy is both announced and missed was what was at stake in reflection on art from the end of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries. The sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern. Paradoxically, it was introduced to literary discussion and vigorously defended by the French writer who has been classified in literary history as one of the most dogged advocates of ancient classicism. In 1674 Boileau published his *Art poétique*, but he also published *Du Sublime*, his translation or transcription from the [Greek text] *Perí tou hupsou*. It is a treatise, or rather an essay, attributed to a certain Longinus about whose identity there has long been confusion, and whose life we now estimate as having begun towards the end of the first century of our era. The author was a rhetorician. Basically, he taught those oratorical devices with which a speaker can persuade or move (depending on the genre) his audience. The didactics of rhetoric had been traditional since Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. They were linked to the republican institution; one had to know how to speak before assemblies and tribunals.

One might expect that Longinus' text would invoke the maxims and advice transmitted by this tradition by perpetuating the didactic form of *techne rhetorike*. But surprisingly, the sublime, the indeterminate, were destabilizing the text's didactic intention. I cannot analyse this uncertainty here. Boileau himself and numerous other commentators, especially Fénélon, were aware of it and concluded that the sublime could only be discussed in sublime style. Longinus certainly tried to define sublimity in discourse, writing that it was unforgettable, irresistible, and most important, thought-provoking – '*il y a à partir d'elle beaucoup de réflexion*' [from the sublime springs a lot of reflection]. He also tried to locate sources for the sublime in the ethos of rhetoric, in its pathos, in its techniques: figures of speech, diction, enunciation, composition. He sought in this way to bend himself to the rules of the genre of the 'treatise' (whether of rhetoric or poetics, or politics) destined to be a model for practitioners.

However, when it comes to the sublime, major obstacles get in the way of a regular exposition of rhetorical or poetic principles. There is, for example, wrote Longinus, a sublimity of thought sometimes recognizable in speech by its extreme simplicity of turn of phrase, at the precise point where the high character of the speaker makes one expect greater solemnity. It sometimes even takes the form of outright silence. I don't mind if this simplicity, this silence, is taken to be yet another rhetorical figure. But it must be granted that it constitutes the most indeterminate of figures. What can remain of rhetoric (or of poetics) when the rhetorician in Boileau's translation announces that to attain the sublime effect 'there is no better figure of speech than one which is

completely hidden, that which we do not even recognize as a figure of speech?' Must we admit that there are techniques for hiding figures, that there are figures for the erasure of figures? How do we distinguish between a hidden figure and what is not a figure? And what is it, if it isn't a figure? And what about this, which seems to be a major blow to didactics: when it is sublime, discourse accommodates defects, lack of taste, and formal imperfections. Plato's style, for example, is full of bombast and bloated, strained comparisons. Plato, in short, is a mannerist, or a baroque writer compared to a Lysias, and so is Sophocles compared to an Ion, or Pindar compared to a Bacchylides. The fact remains that, like those first named, he is sublime, whereas the second ones are merely perfect. Shortcomings in technique are therefore trifling matters if they are the price to be paid for 'true grandeur'. Grandeur in speech is true when it bears witness to the incommensurability between thought and the real world.

Is it Boileau's transcription that suggests this analogy, or is it the influence of early Christianity on Longinus? The fact that grandeur of spirit is not of this world cannot but suggest Pascal's hierarchy of orders. The kind of perfection that can be demanded in the domain of *techne* isn't necessarily a desirable attribute when it comes to sublime feeling. Longinus even goes so far as to propose inversions of reputedly natural and rational syntax as examples of sublime effect. As for Boileau, in the preface he wrote in 1674 for Longinus' text, in still further addenda made in 1683 and 1701 and also in the *Xth Réflexion* published in 1710 after his death he makes final the previous tentative break with the classical institution of *techne*. The sublime, he says, cannot be taught, and didactics are thus powerless in this respect; the sublime is not linked to rules that can be determined through poetics; the sublime only requires that the reader or listener have conceptual range, taste and the ability 'to sense what everyone senses first'. Boileau therefore takes the same stand as Père Bouhours, when in 1671 the latter declared that beauty demands more than just a respect for rules, that it requires a further 'je ne sais quoi', also called *genius* or something 'incomprehensible and inexplicable', a 'gift from God', a fundamentally 'hidden' phenomenon that can be recognized only by its effects on the addressee. And in the polemic that set him against Pierre-Daniel Huet, over the issue of whether the Bible's *Fiat Lux, et Lux fuit* is sublime, as Longinus thought it was, Boileau refers to the opinion of the Messieurs de Port Royal and in particular to Silvestre de Saci: the Jansenists are masters when it comes to matters of hidden meaning, of eloquent silence, of feeling that transcends all reason and finally of openness to the *Is it happening*?

At stake in these poetic-theological debates is the status of works of art. Are they copies of some ideal model? Can reflection on the more 'perfect' examples yield rules of formation that determine their success in achieving what they want,

is, persuasiveness and pleasure? Can understanding suffice for this kind of lection? By meditating on the theme of sublimity and of indeterminacy, editation about works of art imposes a major change on *techne* and the institutions linked to it – Academies, Schools, masters and disciples, taste, the enlightened public made up of princes and courtiers. It is the very destination or destiny of works which is being questioned. The predominance of the idea of *techne* placed works under a multiple regulation, that of the model taught in the studios, Schools and Academies, that of the taste shared by the aristocratic public, that of a purposiveness of art, which was to illustrate the glory of a name, divine or human, to which was linked the perfection of some cardinal virtue or other. The idea of the sublime disrupts this harmony. Let us magnify the features of this disruption. Under Diderot's pen, *techne* becomes '*le petit technique*' (mere trivial technique). The artist ceases to be guided by a culture which made of him the sender and master of a message of glory: he becomes, in so far as he is a genius, the involuntary addressee of an inspiration come to him from an 'I know not what'. The public no longer judges according to the criteria of a taste ruled by the tradition of shared pleasure: individuals unknown to the artist (the 'people') read books, go through the galleries of the Salons, crowd into the theatres and the public concerts, they are prey to unforeseeable feelings: they are shocked, admiring, scornful, indifferent. The question is not that of pleasing them by leading them to identify with a name and to participate in the glorification of its virtue, but that of surprising them. 'The sublime' writes Boileau, 'is not strictly speaking something which is proven or demonstrated, but a marvel, which seizes one, strikes one, and makes one feel.' The very imperfections, the distortions of taste, even ugliness, have their share in the shock-effect. Art does not imitate nature, it creates a world apart, *eine Zwischenwelt*, as Paul Klee will say; *eine Nebenwelt*, one might say in which the monstrous and the formless have their rights because they can be sublime.

You will (I hope) excuse such a simplication of the transformation which takes place with the modern development of the idea of the sublime. The trace of it could be found before modern times, in mediaeval aesthetics – that of the Victorines for example. In any case, it explains why reflection on art should no longer bear essentially on the 'sender' instance/agency of works, but on the 'addressee' instance. And under the name 'genius' the latter instance is situated, not only on the side of the public, but also on the side of the artist, a feeling which he does not master. Henceforth it seems right to analyse the ways in which the subject is affected, its ways of receiving and experiencing feelings, its ways of judging works. This is how aesthetics, the analysis of the addressee's feelings, comes to supplant poetics and rhetoric, which are didactic forms, of and by the understanding, intended for the artist as sender. No longer 'How does one

make a work of art?', but 'What is it to experience an affect proper to art?' And indeterminacy returns, even within the analysis of this last question.

III

Baumgarten published his *Aesthetica*, the first aesthetics, in 1750. Kant would say of this work simply that it was determinant usage, when the understanding organizes phenomena according to categories, with judgement in its reflexive usage when, in the form of feeling, it relates to the indeterminate relationship between the faculties of the judging subject. Baumgarten's aesthetics remains dependent on a conceptually determined relationship to the work of art. The sense of beauty is for Kant, on the contrary, kindled by a free harmony between the function of images and the function of concepts occasioned by an object of art or nature. The aesthetics of the sublime is still more indeterminate: a pleasure mixed with pain, a pleasure that comes from pain. In the event of an absolutely large object, the desert, a mountain, a pyramid – or one that is absolutely powerful – a storm at sea, an erupting volcano – which like all absolutes can only be thought, without any sensible/sensory intuition, as an Idea of reason, the faculty of presentation, the imagination, fails to provide a representation corresponding to this Idea. This failure of expression gives rise to a pain, a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined or presented. But this pain in turn engenders a pleasure, in fact a double pleasure: the impotence of the imagination attests *a contrario* to an imagination striving to figure even that which cannot be figured, and that imagination thus aims to harmonize its object with that of reason – and that furthermore the inadequacy of the images is a negative sign of the immense power of ideas. This dislocation of the faculties among themselves gives rise to the extreme tension (Kant calls it agitation) that characterizes the pathos of the sublime, as opposed to the calm feeling of beauty. At the edge of the break, infinity, or the absoluteness of the Idea can be revealed in what Kant calls a negative presentation, or even a non-presentation. He cites the Jewish law banning images as an eminent example of negative presentation: optical pleasure when reduced to near nothingness promotes an infinite contemplation of infinity. Even before Romantic art had freed itself from classical and baroque figuration, the door had thus been opened to enquiries pointing towards abstract and Minimal art. Avant-gardism is thus present in germ in the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime. However, the art whose effects are analysed in that aesthetics is, of course, essentially made up of attempts to represent sublime objects. And the question of time, of the *Is it happening?*, does not form part – at least not explicitly – of Kant's problematic.

I do, however, believe that question to be at the centre of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757. Kant may well reject Burke's thesis as empiricism and physiologism, he may well borrow from Burke the analysis of the characterizing contradiction of the feeling of the sublime, but he strips Burke's aesthetic of what I consider to be its major stake – to show that the sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening. Beauty gives a positive pleasure. But there is another kind of pleasure that is bound to a passion stronger than satisfaction, and that is pain and impending death. In pain the body affects the soul. But the soul can also affect the body as though it were experiencing some externally induced pain, by the sole means of representations that are unconsciously associated with painful situations. This entirely spiritual passion, in Burke's lexicon, is called terror. Terrors are linked to privation: privation of light, terror of darkness; privation of others, terror of solitude; privation of language, terror of silence; privation of objects, terror of emptiness; privation of life, terror of death. What is terrifying is that the *It happens that* does not happen, that it stops happening.

Burke wrote that for this terror to mingle with pleasure and with it to produce the feeling of the sublime, it is also necessary that the terror-causing threat be suspended, kept at bay, held back. This suspense, this lessening of a threat or a danger, provokes a kind of pleasure that is certainly not that of a positive satisfaction, but is, rather, that of relief. This is still a privation, but it is privation at one remove; the soul is deprived of the threat of being deprived of light, language, life. Burke distinguishes this pleasure of secondary privation from positive pleasures, and he baptizes it with the name *delight*.

Here then is an account of the sublime feeling: a very big, very powerful object threatens to deprive the soul of any 'it happens', strikes it with 'astonishment' (at lower intensities the soul is seized with admiration, veneration, respect). The soul is thus dumb, immobilized, as good as dead. Art, by distancing this menace, procures a pleasure of relief, of delight. Thanks to art, the soul is returned to the agitated zone between life and death, and this agitation is its health and its life. For Burke, the sublime was no longer a matter of elevation (the category by which Aristotle defined tragedy), but a matter of intensification.

Another of Burke's observations merits attention because it heralds the possibility of emancipating works of art from the classical rule of imitation. In the long debate over the relative merits of painting and poetry, Burke sides with poetry. Painting is doomed to imitate models, and to figurative representations of them. But if the object of art is to create intense feelings in the addressee of works, figuration by means of images is a limiting constraint on the power of emotive expression since it works by recognition. In the arts of language, particularly in poetry, which Burke considered to be not a genre with rules, but the field where certain researches into language have free rein, the power to move is free from the verisimilitudes of figuration. 'What does one do when one

wants to represent an angel in a painting? One paints a beautiful young man with wings: but will painting ever provide anything as great as the addition of this one word – the Angel of the *Lord*? and how does one go about painting, with equal strength of feeling, the words 'A universe of death' where ends the journey of the fallen angels in Milton's *Paradise Lost*?'

Words enjoy several privileges when it comes to expressing feelings: they are themselves charged with passionate connotations; they can evoke matters of the soul without having to consider whether they are visible; finally, Burke adds, 'It is in our power to effect with words combinations that would be impossible by any other means.' The arts, whatever their materials, pressed forward by the aesthetics of the sublime in search of intense effects, can and must give up the imitation of models that are merely beautiful, and try out surprising, strange, shocking combinations. Shock is, *par excellence*, the evidence of (something) *happening*, rather than nothing, suspended privation.

Burke's analyses can easily, as you will have guessed, be resumed and elaborated in a Freudian-Lacanian problematic (as Pierre Kaufman and Baldine Saint-Girons have done). But I recall them in a different spirit, the one my subject – the avant-garde – demands. I have tried to suggest that at the dawn of romanticism, Burke's elaboration of the aesthetics of the sublime, and to a lesser degree Kant's, outlined a world of possibilities for artistic experiments in which the avant-gardes would later trace out their paths. There are in general no direct influences, no empirically observable connections. Manet, Cézanne, Braque and Picasso probably did not read Kant or Burke. It is more a matter of an irreversible deviation in the destination of art, a deviation affecting all the valencies of the artistic condition. The artist attempts combinations allowing the event. The art-lover does not experience a simple pleasure, or derive some ethical benefit from his contact with art, but expects an intensification of his conceptual and emotional capacity, an ambivalent enjoyment. Intensity is associated with an ontological dislocation. The art-object no longer bends itself to models, but tries to present the fact that there is an unpresentable; it no longer imitates nature, but is, in Burke, the actualization of a figure potentially there in language. The social community no longer recognizes itself in art-objects, but ignores them, rejects them as incomprehensible, and only later allows the intellectual avant-garde to preserve them in museums as the traces of offensives that bear witness to the power, and the privation, of the spirit.

IV

With the advent of the aesthetics of the sublime, the stake of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to be the witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy. For painting, the paradox that Burke signalled in his observations on the power of words is that such testimony can only be achieved in a determined fashion. Support, frame, line, colour, space, the figure – were to remain, in Romantic art, subject to the constraint of representation. But this contradiction of end and means had, as early as Manet and Cézanne, the effect of casting doubt on certain rules that had determined, since the Quattrocento, the representation of the figure in space and the organization of colours and values. Reading Cézanne's correspondence, one understands that his *oeuvre* was not that of a talented painter finding his 'style', but that of an artist attempting to respond to the question: what is a painting? His work had at stake to inscribe on the supporting canvas only those 'colouristic sensations', those 'little sensations' that of themselves, according to Cézanne's hypothesis, constitute the entire pictorial existence of objects, fruit, mountain, face, flower, without consideration of either history or 'subject', or line, or space, or even light. These elementary sensations are hidden in ordinary perception, which remains under the hegemony of habitual or classical ways of looking. They are only accessible to the painter, and can therefore only be re-established by him, at the expense of an interior ascesis that rids perceptual and mental fields of prejudices inscribed even in vision itself. If the viewer does not submit to a complementary ascesis, the painting will remain senseless and impenetrable to him. The painter must not hesitate to run the risk of being taken to be a mere dauber. 'One paints for very few people', writes Cézanne. Recognition from the regulatory institutions of painting – Academy, salons, criticism, taste – is of little importance compared to the judgement made by the painter-researcher and his peers on the success obtained by the work of art in relation to what is really at stake: to make seen what makes one see, and not what is visible.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborated on what he rightly called 'Cézanne's doubt' as though what was at stake for the painter was indeed to grasp and render perception at its birth – perception 'before' perception. I would say: colour in its occurrence, the wonder that 'it happens' ('it', something: colour), at least to the eye. There is some credulity on the part of the phenomenologist in this trust he places in the 'originary' value of Cézanne's 'little sensations'. The painter himself, who often complained of their inadequacy, wrote that they were 'abstractions', that 'they did not suffice for covering the canvas'. But why should it be necessary to cover the canvas? Is it forbidden to be abstract?

The doubt which gnaws at the avant-gardes did not stop with Cézanne's 'colouristic sensations' as though they were indubitable, and, for that matter, no more did it stop with the abstractions they heralded. The task of having to bear witness to the indeterminate carries away, one after another, the barriers set up by the writings of theorists and by the manifestos of the painters themselves. A formalist definition of the pictorial object, such as that proposed in 1961 by

Clement Greenberg when confronted with American 'post-plastic' abstraction, was soon overturned by the current of Minimalism. Do we have to have stretchers so that the canvas is taut? No. What about colours? Malevich's black square on white had already answered this question in 1915. Is an object necessary? Body art and happenings went about proving that it is not. A space, at least, a space in which to display, as Duchamp's 'fountain' still suggested? Daniel Buren's work testifies to the fact that even this is subject to doubt.

Whether or not they belong to the current that art history calls Minimalism or Arte Povera, the investigations of the avant-gardes question one by one the constituents one might have thought 'elementary' or at the 'origin' of the art of painting. They operate *ex minimis*. One would have to confront the demand for rigour that animates them with the principle sketched out by Adorno at the end of *Negative Dialectics*, and that controls the writing of his *Aesthetic Theory*: the thought that 'accompanies metaphysics in its fall', he said, can only proceed in terms of 'micrologies'.

Micrology is not just metaphysics in crumbs, any more than Newman's painting is Delacroix in scraps. Micrology inscribes the occurrence of a thought as the unthought that remains to be thought in the decline of 'great' philosophical thought. The avant-gardist attempt inscribes the occurrence of a sensory now as what cannot be presented and which remains to be presented in the decline of great representational painting. Like micrology, the avant-garde is not concerned with what happens to the 'subject', but with: 'Does it happen?', with privation. This is the sense in which it still belongs to the aesthetics of the sublime. In asking questions of the *It happens* that the work of art is, avant-garde art abandons the role of identification that the work previously played in relation to the community of addressees. Even when conceived, as it was by Kant, as a *de jure* horizon or presumption rather than a *de facto* reality, a *sensus communis* (which, moreover, Kant refers to only when writing about beauty, not the sublime) does not manage to achieve stability when it comes to interrogative works of art. It barely coalesces, too late, when these works, deposited in museums, are considered part of the community heritage and are made available for its culture and pleasure. And even here, they must be objects, or they must tolerate objectification, for example through photography.

In this situation of isolation and misunderstanding, avant-garde art is vulnerable and subject to repression. It seems only to aggravate the identity-crisis that communities went through during the long 'depression' that lasted from the thirties until the end of 'reconstruction' in the mid-fifties. It is impossible here even to suggest how the Party-states born of fear faced with the 'Who are we?', and the anxiety of the void, tried to convert this fear or anxiety into hatred of the avant-gardes. Hildegarde Brenner's study of artistic policy

under Nazism, or the films of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg do not merely analyse these repressive manoeuvres. They also explain how neo-Romantic, neo-classical and symbolic forms imposed by the cultural commissars and collaborationist artists – painters and musicians especially – had to block the negative dialectic of the *Is it happening?*, by translating and betraying the question as a waiting for some fabulous subject or identity: 'Is the pure people coming?', 'Is the Führer coming?', 'Is Siegfried coming?' The aesthetics of the sublime, thus neutralized and converted into a politics of myth, was able to come and build its architectures of human 'formations' on the Zeppelin Feld in Nurenberg.

Thanks to the 'crisis of overcapitalization' that most of today's so-called highly developed societies are going through, another attack on the avant-gardes is coming to light. The threat exerted against the avant-garde search for the artwork event, against attempts to welcome the *now*, no longer requires Party-states to be effective. It proceeds 'directly' out of market economics. The correlation between this and the aesthetics of the sublime is ambiguous, even perverse. The latter, no doubt, has been and continues to be a reaction against the matter-of-fact positivism and the calculated realism that governs the former, as writers on art such as Stendhal, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Apollinaire and Breton all emphasize.

Yet there is a kind of collusion between capital and the avant-garde. The force of scepticism and even of destruction that capitalism has brought into play, and that Marx never ceased analysing and identifying, in some way encourages among artists a mistrust of established rules and a willingness to experiment with means of expression, with styles, with ever-new materials. There is something of the sublime in capitalist economy. It is not academic, it is not physiocratic, it admits of no nature. It is, in a sense, an economy regulated by an Idea – infinite wealth or power. It does not manage to present any example from reality to verify this Idea. In making science subordinate to itself through technologies, especially those of language, it only succeeds, on the contrary, in making reality increasingly ungraspable, subject to doubt, unsteady.

The experience of the human subject – individual and collective – and the aura that surrounds this experience, are being dissolved into the calculation of profitability, the satisfaction of needs, self-affirmation through success. Even the virtually theological depth of the worker's condition, and of work, that marked the socialist and union movements for over a century, is becoming devalorized, as work becomes a control and manipulation of information. These observations are banal, but what merits attention is the disappearance of the temporal continuum through which the experience of generations used to be transmitted. The availability of information is becoming the only criterion of social importance. Now information is by definition a short-lived element. As soon as it is transmitted and shared, it ceases to be information, it becomes an environmental given, and 'all is said', we

'know'. It is put into the machine memory. The length of time it occupies is, so to speak, instantaneous. Between two pieces of information, 'nothing happens', by definition. A confusion thereby becomes possible, between what is of interest to information and the director, and what is the question of the avant-garden, between what happens – the new – and the *Is it happening?*, the *now*.

It is understandable that the art market, subject like all markets to the rule of the new, can exert a kind of seduction on artists. This attraction is not due to corruption alone. It exerts itself thanks to a confusion between innovation and the *Ereignis*, a confusion maintained by the temporality specific to contemporary capitalism. 'Strong' information, if one can call it that, exists in inverse proportion to the meaning that can be attributed to it in the code available to its receiver. It is like 'noise'. It is easy for the public and for artists, advised by intermediaries – the diffusers of cultural merchandise – to draw from this observation the principle that a work of art is avant-garde in direct proportion to the extent that it is stripped of meaning. Is it not then like an event?

It is still necessary that its absurdity does not discourage buyers, just as the innovation introduced into a commodity must allow itself to be approached, appreciated and purchased by the consumers. The secret of an artistic success, like that of a commercial success, resides in the balance between what is surprising and what is 'well-known', between information and code. This is how innovation in art operates: one re-uses formulae confirmed by previous success, one throws them off-balance by combining them with other, in principle incompatible, formulae, by amalgamations, quotations, ornamentations, pastiche. One can go as far as kitsch or the grotesque. One flatters the 'taste' of a public that can have no taste, and the eclecticism of a sensibility enfeebled by the multiplication of available forms and objects. In this way one thinks that one is expressing the spirit of the times, whereas one is merely reflecting the spirit of the market. Sublimity is no longer in art, but in speculation on art.

The enigma of the *Is it happening?* is not dissolved for all this, nor is the task of painting, that there is something which is not determinable, the *There is* [*Il y a*] itself, out of date. The occurrence, the *Ereignis*, has nothing to do with the *petit frisson*, the cheap thrill, the profitable pathos, that accompanies an innovation. Hidden in the cynicism of innovation is certainly the despair that nothing further will happen. But innovating means to behave as though lots of things happened, and to make them happen. Through innovation, the will affirms its hegemony over time. It thus conforms to the metaphysics of capital, which is a technology of time. The innovation 'works'. The question mark of the *Is it happening?*' stops. With the occurrence, the will is defeated. The avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation.

Jean-François Lyotard, extract from *L'Inhumain: Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988); trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) 89–107. First published in *Artforum* (April, 1984).

Jacques Derrida
Parergon[1]//1978

[...] One can hardly speak of an *opposition* between the beautiful and the sublime [in Kant's *Critique*]. An opposition could only arise between two determinate objects, having their contours, their edges, their finitude. But if the difference between the beautiful and the sublime does not amount to an opposition, it is precisely because the presence of a limit is what gives form to the beautiful. The sublime is to be found, for its part, in an 'object without form' and the 'without-limit' is 'represented' in it or on the occasion of it, and yet gives the totality of the without-limit to be *thought*. Thus the beautiful seems to present an indeterminate concept of the understanding, the sublime an indeterminate concept of reason.

From this definition – definition of the beautiful as definable in its contour and of the sublime de-fined as indefinable for the understanding – you already understand that the sublime is encountered in art less easily than the beautiful, and more easily in 'raw nature'. There can be sublime in art if it is submitted to the conditions of an 'accord with nature'. If art gives form by limiting, or even by framing, there can be a *parergon* of the beautiful, *parergon* of the column or *parergon* as column. But there cannot, it seems, be a *parergon* for the sublime.

The colossal excludes the *parergon*. First of all because it is not a work, an *ergon*, and then because the infinite is presented in it and the infinite cannot be bordered. The beautiful, on the contrary, in the finitude of its formal contours, requires the parergonal edging all the more because its limitation is not only external: the *parergon*, you will remember, is called in by the hollowing of a certain lacunary quality within the work.

In *presenting* an indeterminate concept, in one case of the understanding, in the other of reason, the beautiful and the sublime produce a 'Wohlgefallen' which is often translated by 'satisfaction', and which I have suggested transposing into 'pleasing-oneself-in' for reasons already given and also to avoid the saturation of the 'enough' which does not fit. In the case of the beautiful, the 'pleasing-oneself-in' is 'linked' to quality, in the case of the sublime, to quantity.

Wherein one can already anticipate the question of the cise and the difference between the colossus and the column.

We had already recognized the other difference in another context: the pleasure (*Lust*) provoked by the sublime is negative. If we reread this sequence with a view to the *kolossos*, the logic of the cise, of the pure cut, of the without-cise, of the excess or of the almost-too-much-cise, imposes once more its necessity. In the experience of the beautiful, there is intensification and acceleration of life, feeling is easily united to the ludic force of the imagination and to its attractions (*Reizen*). In the feeling of the sublime, pleasure only 'gushes indirectly'. It comes after inhibition, arrest, suspension (*Hemmung*) which keep back the vital forces. This retention is followed by a brusque outpouring, an effusion (*Ergiessung*) that is all the more potent. The schema here is that of a dam. The sluice gate or floodgate interrupts a flow, the inhibition makes the waters swell, the accumulation presses on the limit. The maximum pressure lasts only an instant (*augenblicklich*), the time it takes to blink an eye, during which the passage is strictly closed and the stricture absolute. Then the dam bursts and there's a flood. A violent experience in which it is no longer a question of joking, of playing, of taking (positive) pleasure, nor of stopping at the 'attractions' of seduction. No more *play* (*Spiel*) but seriousness (*Ernst*) in the occupation of the imagination. Pleasure is joined with attraction (*Reiz*), because the mind is not merely attracted (*angezogen*) but, conversely, always also repulsed (*abgestossen*). The *traction* [*trait*] of the attraction (the two families of *Reissen* and *Ziehen* whose crossings in *The Origin of the Work of Art* and *Unterwegs zur Sprache* we must analyze elsewhere) is divided by the double meaning of traction, the 'positive' and the 'negative'. What the 'pleasing-oneself-in' of the sublime 'contains' is less a 'positive pleasure' than respect or admiration. That's why it 'deserves to be called negative pleasure'.

This negativity of the sublime is not only distinguished from the positivity of the beautiful. It also remains alien to the negativity which we had also recognized to be at work, a certain labor of mourning, in the experience of the beautiful. Such negativity was already singular, a negativity without negativity [*sans sans sans*], sans of the pure cut, *sans fin* of finality. The singular negativity of the *sans* here gives way to the *counter:* opposition, conflict, disharmony, counterforce. In natural beauty, formal finality appears to predetermine the object with a view to an accord with our faculty of judging. The sublime in art rediscovers this concordance (*Übereinstimmung*). But in the view of the faculty of judging, the natural sublime, the one which remains privileged by this analysis of the *colossal*, seems to be formally contrary to an end (*zweckwidrig*), inadequate and without suitability, inappropriate to our faculty of representation. It appears to do violence to the imagination. And to

be all the more sublime for that. The measure of the sublime has the measure of this unmeasure, of this violent incommensurability. Still under the title of the *counter* and of contrary violence, paragraph 27 speaks of an emotion which, especially in its *beginning* [*début*], can be compared to a shock (*Erschütterung*), to a tremor or a shaking due to the rapid alternation or even to the simultaneity of an attraction and a repulsion (*Anziehen/Abstossen*). Attraction/repulsion *of the same object*. Double bind. There is an excess here, a surplus, a superabundance (*Überschwenglich*) which opens an abyss (*Abgrund*). The imagination is afraid of losing itself in this abyss, and we step back. The abyss – the concept of which, like that of the bridge, organized the architectonic considerations – would be the privileged presentation of the sublime. The example of the ocean does not come fortuitously in the last 'General Remark on the Exposition of Reflective Aesthetic Judgement', not the ocean as the object of teleological judgements but the ocean of the poets, the spectacular ocean, limpid 'mirror of water' limited by the sky when it is calm, 'abyss threatening to swallow everything' when it unleashes itself. This spectacle is sublime. This same 'Remark' distinguishes the 'without-interest' (*ohne alles Interesse*) proper to the experience of the beautiful, from the 'counterinterest' which opens up the experience of the sublime. 'That is sublime which pleases immediately by its opposition (*Widerstand*) to the interest of the senses.'

The 'pleasing-oneself-in' of the sublime is purely or merely negative (*nur negativ*) to the extent that it suspends play and elevates to seriousness. In that measure it constitutes an occupation related to the moral law. It has an essential relation to morality (*Sittlichkeit*), which presupposes also violence done to the senses. But the violence is here done by the imagination, not by reason. The imagination turns this violence against itself, it mutilates itself, ties itself, binds itself, sacrifices itself and conceals itself, gashes itself [*s'entaille*] and robs itself. This is the place where the notion of sacrifice operates thematically inside the third *Critique* – and we've been constantly on its tracks. But this mutilating and sacrificial violence organizes the expropriation within a calculation; and the exchange which ensues is precisely the law of the sublime as much as the sublimity of the law. The imagination gains by what it loses. It gains by losing. The imagination organizes the theft (*Beraubung*) of its own freedom, it lets itself be commanded by a law other than that of the empirical use which determines it with a view to an end. But by this violent renunciation, it gains in extension (*Erweiterung*) and in power (*Macht*). This potency is greater than what it sacrifices, and although the foundation remains hidden from it, the imagination has the feeling of sacrifice and theft at the same time as that of the cause (*Ursache*) to which it submits.

First consequence: if the sublime is announced in raw nature rather than in art, the counterfinality which constitutes it obliges us to say that the sublime cannot be merely a 'natural object'. One cannot say of a natural object, in its (beautiful or sublime) positive evaluation, that it is contrary to finality. All we can say is that the natural object in question can be proper, apt (*tauglich*) for the 'presentation of a sublimity'. Of a sublimity which, for its part, can be encountered as such only in the mind and on the side of the subject. The sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form. There are natural objects that are beautiful, but there cannot be a natural object that is sublime. The true sublime, the sublime proper and properly speaking (*das eigentliche Erhabene*) relates only to the ideas of reason. It therefore refuses all adequate presentation. But how can this unpresentable thing present itself? How could the benefit of the violent calculation be *announced* in the finite? We must ask ourselves this: if the sublime is not contained in a finite natural or artificial object, no more is it the infinite idea itself. It inadequately presents the infinite in the finite and delimits it violently therein. Inadequation (*Unangemessenheit*), excessiveness, incommensurability are presented, let themselves be presented, be stood up, set upright in front of (*darstellen*) as that inadequation itself. Presentation is inadequate to the idea of reason but it is presented in its very inadequation, adequate to its inadequation. The inadequation of presentation is presented. As inadequation, it does not belong to the natural sensible order, nor to nature in general, but to the mind, which contents itself with *using* nature to give us a feeling of a finality independent of nature. Unlike that of the beautiful, the principle of the sublime must therefore be sought in ourselves who *project* (*hineinbringen*) the sublime into nature, ourselves as rational beings.

There is an effect of the colossal only from the point of view of reason. Such is the *reason of the colossal*, and such is its reason that no presentation could get the better of it [*en avoir raison*]. The feeling of the colossal, effect of a subjective projection, is the experience of an inadequation of presentation to itself, or rather, since every presentation is adequate to itself, of an inadequation of the presenter to the presented of presentation. An inadequate presentation of the infinite presents its own inadequation, an inadequation is presented as such in its own yawning gap, it is determined in its contour, it cises and incises itself as incommensurable with the without-cise: that is a first *approach* to the colossal in erection.

Because the sublime is not in nature but only in ourselves, because the colossal which derives from it proceeds only from us, the analytic of the sublime is only an appendix (*einen blossen Anhang*) to the aesthetic appreciation of natural finality. 'This is a very necessary preliminary remark', notes Kant at the opening of the 'Analytic of the Sublime', 'which totally separates the ideas of the

sublime from that of a finality of *nature* and makes of the theory of the sublime a mere appendix to the critical aesthetic evaluation (*Beurteilung*) of natural finality, for by that reason no particular form is represented [in nature] ...

So, although the sublime is better presented by (raw) nature than by art, it is not in nature but in ourselves, projected by us because of the inadequation in us of several powers, of several faculties. The appendix will be the *place* of this inadequation. It will deal with it and will be affected by it. This place would be the *proper* place of the colossal were it not the inadequate emplacement of an inadequation.

It is this 'subjective' determination of the sublime based on our faculties that Hegel will judge to be interesting and insufficient. He does this in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in the chapter 'The Symbolism of the Sublime'. In breaking with symbolism, the internal infinity becomes inaccessible and inexpressible. Its presentation can no longer be symbolic (in the Hegelian or Saussurean sense of the term, which implies participation or analogical resemblance between the symbol and what it symbolizes). The content (the infinite idea, in the position of signified and no longer of symbolized) destroys the signifier or the representer. It expresses itself only by marking in its expression the annihilation of expression. It smashes to smithereens [*Il fait voler en éclats:* makes it fly (off) into pieces] the signifier which would presume to measure itself against its infinity. More precisely, form, the act of forming (*Gestalten*), is destroyed through what it expresses, explains, or interprets. Hence the exegetical interpretation (*Auslegung*) of the content is produced as sublation [*relève*] (*Aufhebung*) of the act of interpreting, of showing, of unfolding, of manifesting. That's the sublime: a sublation of the *Auslegen* in the *Auslegung* of the content. The content operates in it and commands the sublation of form. That's what Kant's 'subjectivism' is supposed to have missed. If it is the content, infinity itself, what Hegel calls the one, substance, which itself operates this sublation of the form, if this is what renders the form inadequate, then one cannot explain this operation in terms of a finite subjectivity. We must on the contrary comprehend the sublime inasmuch as it is founded in the unique absolute substance, in the content to be presented (*als dem darzustellenden Inhalt*). In other words, starting from the presented of the presentation and not the presentation of the presented. If there is inadequation, we would say in a code that is scarcely different, between the signified and the signifier, this sublime inadequation must be *thought* on the basis of the more and not the less, the signified infinity and not the signifying finitude.

If – for example – a colossal presentation is without measure, what *is* without measure is the infinite idea, the presented which does not let itself be adequately presented. The form of the presentation, for its part, the *Darstellung*, has a

measurable cise, however large. The cise of the colossal is not on the scale of what it presents, which *is* without cise. Hegel reproaches Kant with setting out from cise and not from without-cise. To which Kant replies in principle that in order to think the without-cise, it has to be presented, even if it is presented without presenting itself adequately, even if it is merely announced, and precisely in the *Aufhebung*. One must (one must and one cannot avoid it) set out from the colossal inasmuch as it cuts into itself [*s'entaille*], lifts its cise and cuts it out against the background of the without-cise: one must set out from the figure, and its cise.

Thus all this goes on around an infinite but truncated column, at the limit of the trunk, at the place of the truncation or the cutting edge, on the borderline, fine as a blade, which defines the cise. The question opens around knowing whether one must *think* a sublimity of the soul from one edge or the other, of the infinite or the finite, it being understood that the two are not opposed to each other but that each transgresses itself toward the other, the one in the other. More precisely, the question opens of *knowing*, or rather of *thinking*, whether one must first *think* (as Hegel thinks) sublimity, set out from the thought of sublimity, or on the contrary (as Kant figures) from presentation, inadequate to this thought, of the sublime, etc.

Kant and Hegel nevertheless reflect the line of cut or rather the *pas* crossing this line between finite and infinite as the proper place of the sublime and the interruption of symbolic beauty. [...]

1 [The literal meaning of the Greek word *parergon* is 'outside the work'. In *The Truth in Painting* Derrida introduces the term, in relation to the frame, to speculate on the meanings of something that is neither outside nor inside the work, neither a part of it nor absolutely extrinsic to it.]

Jacques Derrida, extract from *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 1978); trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Ian McLeod, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 127–34.

Jean-Luc Nancy
The Sublime Offering//1988

[...] The sublime is a feeling, and yet, more than a feeling in the banal sense, it is the emotion of the subject at the limit. The subject of the sublime, if there is one, is a subject who is moved. In the thought of the sublime, it is a question of the emotion of the subject, of that emotion which neither the philosophy of subjectivity and beauty nor the aesthetics of fiction and desire is capable of thinking through, for they think necessarily and solely within the horizon of the enjoyment of the subject (and of the subject as enjoyment). And enjoyment qua satisfaction of an appropriate presentation cuts emotion short.

Thus it is a question here of this emotion without which, to be sure, there would be no beauty, artwork or thought – but which the concepts of beauty, the work, and philosophy, by themselves and in principle, cannot touch. The problem is not that they are too 'cold' (they can be quite lively and warm) but that they (and their system – beauty/work/philosophy) are constructed according to the logic of the self-enjoyment of Reason, the logic of the self-presentation of imagination. It is the aesthetic logic of philosophy and the philosophical logic of aesthetics. The feeling of the sublime, in its emotion, makes this logic vacillate, because it substitutes for this logic what forms, again, its exact reverse, or rather (which comes down to the same thing) a sort of logical exasperation, a passage to the limit: touching presentation on its limit, or rather, being touched, attained by it. This emotion does not consist in the sweetly proprietary pathos of what one can call 'aesthetic emotion'. To this extent, it would be better to say that the feeling of the sublime is hardly an emotion at all but rather the mere motion of presentation – at the limit and syncopated. This (e)motion is without complacency and without satisfaction: it is not a pleasure without being at the same time a pain, which constitutes the affective characteristic of the Kantian sublime. But its ambivalence does not make it any less sensible, does not render it less effectively or less precisely sensible: *it is the sensibility of the fading of the sensible*.

Kant characterizes this sensibility in terms of striving and transport [*élan*]. Striving, transport and tension make themselves felt (and perhaps this is their general logic or 'pathetics') in so far as they are suspended, at the limit (there is no striving or tension except at the limit), in the instant and the beating of their suspension. It is a matter, Kant writes, of the 'feeling of an arrest of the vital forces' (*Hemmung*, 'inhibition', 'impinging upon' or 'blockage'). Suspended life, breath cut off – the beating heart.

It is here that sublime presentation properly takes place. It takes place in effort and feeling:

> Reason ... as faculty of the independence of the absolute totality ... sustains the effort, admittedly sterile, of the spirit to harmonize the representation of the senses with Totality. This effort and the feeling that the Idea is inaccessible to imagination constitute in and of themselves a presentation of the subjective purposiveness of our spirit in the use of the imagination concerning its supersensible destiny. (*Critique of Judgement*, §29, 105; 128)

'Striving', *Bestreben*, is not to be understood here in the sense of a project, an envisioned undertaking that one could evaluate either in terms of its intention or in terms of its result. This striving cannot be conceived in terms of either a logic of desire and potentiality or a logic of the transition to action and the work or a logic of the will and energy (even if all of that is doubtless also present and is not to be neglected if one wishes to provide an account of Kant's thought, which is not my intention here). Rather, striving is to be understood on its own terms, in so far as it obeys in itself only a logic (as well as a 'pathetics' and an ethics) of the limit. Striving or transport is by definition a matter of the limit. It consists in a relation to the limit: a continuous effort is the continuous displacement of a limit. The effort ceases where the limit cedes its place. Striving and exertion transport the limit into themselves: it becomes their structure. In striving as such – and not in its success or failure – it is less a question of a tendency toward something, of the direction or project of a struggling subject, than of the tension of the limit itself. What tends, and what tends here toward or in the extreme, is the limit. The schema of the image, of any image – or the schema of totality, the schematism of total union – is extended toward and tensed in the extreme: it *is* the limit at the limit of its (ex)tension, the tracing – which is no longer quantifiable or hence traceable – of *magnitudo*. Stretched to the limit, the limit (the contour of the figure) is stretched to the breaking point, as one says, and it in fact does break, dividing itself in the instant between two borders, the border of the figure and its unlimited unbordering. Sublime presentation is the feeling of this striving at the instant of rupture, the imagination still for an instant sensible to itself although no longer itself, in extreme tension and distension ('overflowing' or 'abyss').

(Or again, the striving is a striving to reach and touch the limit. The limit is the striving itself and the touching. Touching is the limit of itself: the limit of images and words, contact – and with this, paradoxically, the impossibility of *touching* inscribed in touching, since touching is the limit. Thus, touching is striving, because it is not a state of affairs but a limit. It is not one sensory state among others, it *is* neither as active nor as passive as the others. If all of the senses sense themselves sensing, as Aristotle would have it (who, moreover, established already that there can be no true contact, either in the water or in the air), touching more than the other senses takes place only in touching itself. But more than the others also, it thus touches its limit, itself as limit: it does not attain itself, for one touches only in general (at) the limit. Touching does not touch itself, at least not as seeing sees itself.)

The sublime presentation is a presentation because it gives itself to be sensed. But this sentiment, this feeling is singular. As a sentiment of the limit, it is the sentiment of an insensibility, a nonsensible sentiment (*apatheia, phlegma in significatu bono*, Kant says), a syncopation of sentiment. But it is absolute sentiment as well, not determined as pleasure or as pain but touching the one through the other, touched by the one in the other. The alliance of pleasure with pain ought not to be understood in terms of ease and unease, of comfort and discomfort combined in one subject by a perverse contradiction. For this singular ambivalence has to do first of all with the fact that the subject vanished into it. It is also not the case that the subject gains pleasure by means of pain (as Kant tends to put it); it does not pay the price of the one in order to have the other: rather, the pain here is the pleasure, that is, once again, the limit touched, life suspended, the beating heart.

If feeling properly so-called is always subjective, if it is indeed the core of subjectivity in a primordial 'feeling oneself' of which all the great philosophies of the subject could provide evidence, including the most 'intellectualist' among them, then the feeling of the sublime sets itself off – or affects itself – precisely as the reversal of both feeling and subjectivity. The sublime affection, Kant affirms, goes as far as the suspension of affection, the pathos of apathy. This feeling is not a feeling-oneself, and in this sense, it is not a feeling at all. One could say that it is what remains of feeling at the limit, when feeling no longer feels itself, or when there is no longer anything to feel. Of the beating heart, one can say with equal justification either that it feels only its beating or that it no longer feels anything at all.

On the border of the syncopation, feeling, for a moment, still feels, without any longer being able to relate (itself) to its feeling. It loses feeling: it feels its loss, but this feeling no longer belongs to it: although this feeling is quite singularly its own, this feeling is nonetheless also taken up in the loss of which it is the feeling. This is no longer to feel but to be exposed.

Or in other words, one would have to construct a double analytic of feeling: one analytic of the feeling of appropriation, and another analytic of the feeling of exposition: one of a feeling through or by oneself and another of a feeling through or by the other. Can one feel through the other, through the outside,

even though feeling seems to depend on the self as its means and even though precisely this dependence conditions aesthetic judgement? This is what the feeling of the sublime forces us to think. The subjectivity of feeling and of the judgement of taste are converted here into the singularity of a feeling and a judgement that remain, to be sure, singular, but where the singular as such is first of all exposed to the unlimited totality of an 'outside' rather than related to its proper intimacy. Or in other words, it is the intimacy of the 'to feel' and the 'to feel oneself' that produces itself here, paradoxically, as exposition to what is beyond the self, passage to the (in)sensible or (un)feeling limit of the self.

Can one still say that the totality is presented in this instant? If it were properly presented, it would be in or to that instance of presentification (or (re)presentation) which is the subjectivity of feeling. But the unlimitedness that affects the exposed feeling of the sublime cannot be presented to it, that is, this unlimitedness cannot become present in and for a subject. In its syncopation, the imagination presents itself, presents itself as unlimited, beyond (its) figure, but this means that it *is* affected by (its) nonpresentation. When Kant characterizes feeling, in the striving for the limit, as 'a representation', one must consider this concept in the absence of the values of presence and the present. One must learn – and this is perhaps the secret of the sublime as well as the secret of the schematism – that presentation does indeed take place but that it does not *present* anything. Pure presentation (presentation of presentation itself) or presentation of the totality presents nothing at all. One could no doubt say, in a certain vocabulary, that it presents nothing or *the* nothing. In another vocabulary, one could say that it presents the nonpresentable. Kant himself writes that the genius (who represents a *parte subjecti* the instance of the sublime in art) 'expresses and communicates the unnamable'. The without-name is named, the inexpressible is communicated: *all is presented – at the limit.* But in the end, and precisely at this limit itself, where all is achieved and where all begins, it will be necessary to deny presentation its name.

It will be necessary to say that the totality – or the union of the unlimited and the unlimitedness of union, or again presentation itself, its faculty, act and subject – is *offered* to the feeling of the sublime or is *offered, in* the sublime, to feeling. The offering retains of the 'present' implied by presentation only the gesture of presenting. The offering offers, carries, and places before (etymologically, of-fering is not very different from ob-ject), but it does not install in presence. What is offered remains at a limit, suspended on the border of a reception, an acceptance – which cannot in its turn have any form other than that of an offering. To the offered totality, the imagination is offered – that is, also 'sacrificed' *(aufgeopfert), as* Kant writes. The sacrificed imagination is the imagination offered to its limit.

The offering is the sublime presentation: it withdraws or suspends the values and powers of the present. What takes place is neither a coming-into-presence nor a gift. It is rather the one or the other, or the one and the other, but as abandoned, given up. The offering is the giving up of the gift and of the present. Offering is not giving – it is suspending or giving up the gift in the face of a liberty that can take it or leave it.

What is offered is offered up – addressed, destined, abandoned – to the possibility of a presentation to come, but it is left to this coming and does not impose or determine it. 'In sublime contemplation', Kant writes, 'the spirit abandons itself, without paying attention to the form of things, to the imagination and to reason, which only enlarges the imagination.' The abandon is the abandon to total extension, unlimited, and thus at the limit. What comes to pass at the limit is the offering.

The offering takes place between presentation and representation, between the thing and the subject, elsewhere. This is not a *place*, you will say. Indeed, it is the offering – it is being offered to the offering.

The offering does not offer the Whole. It does not offer the present totality of the unlimited. Nor, despite certain pompous accents audible in Kant's text (and in every text dedicated to the sublime, in the word *sublime* itself), does it offer the sovereign satisfaction of a spirit capable of the infinite. For if such a capacity, at the limit, is supposed to be attained, it consists in nothing but an offering, or in being-offered. In fact, it is not a matter here of the Whole or the imagination of the Whole. It is a matter of its Idea and of the destiny of reason. The Idea of the Whole is not a supreme image, nor is it a grandiose form – nor deformity – beyond all images, any more than the destiny of reason consists in a triumphant Ideal. The Idea of the whole means rather (finally, neither 'Idea' nor 'Whole') the possibility of engaging a totality, the possibility of involving oneself in the union of a totality, the possibility of beginning, along the edge of the unlimited, the outline of a figure. If it is a matter of the whole, then as 'the fundamentally open' of which Deleuze speaks with respect to the sublime. The opening is offered to the possibility of gesture which 'totalizes' figures, or traces. This possibility of a beginning is freedom. Freedom is the sublime idea *kat'exochèn.* This means neither that freedom is the content or the object of the judgement of the sublime nor that it is freedom that makes itself felt in the feeling of the sublime. In all likelihood, that would make no sense whatsoever, for freedom is not a content, if indeed it is any thing at all. Instead, one must understand this: that the sublime offering is the act – or the motion or emotion – of freedom. The sublime offering is the act of freedom in the double sense that freedom is both what offers and what is offered – just as the word *offering* designates now the gesture, now the present offered. [...]

Jean-Luc Nancy, extract from 'L'Offrande sublime', in Jean-Luc Nancy, Jean-François Courtine, et al., *Du sublime. L'extrême contemporain* (Paris: Belin, 1988); trans. Jeffrey S. Librett, *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 44–8.

Philip Shaw
Lacan: Sublimity and Sublimation//2007

[...] Lacan's therapeutic practice is centred on getting the individual to come to terms with his or her alienated identity, the fact that his or her desire for wholeness or completion is an illusion. Patients who have failed to accept the split in their identity remain in thrall to a state of being known as the Imaginary. They remain convinced that union with the idealized mirror image is possible because they refuse to accommodate themselves to the fact that their identity is an effect of language. Lacan groups the linguistic and social structures, which pre-exist the subject's entry into the world, under the collective term Symbolic. The Symbolic, which the infant normally enters around the age of two, fulfils two functions. On the one hand, it enables the infant to become a fully-fledged subject; it is able now to articulate and reflect on its needs and desires. On the other hand, the infant is forced to exchange its sense of wholeness for a level of being that is, by virtue of its inscription in language and society, forever compromised by its relation with the desire of the Other.

Entry into the Symbolic comes, therefore, at a price: we give up our fantasies of completion in order to be in the world of words, but the world of words, we soon discover, fails to satisfy. As soon as we enter the symbolic contract, when we learn, for example, that the word 'mother' is no substitute for the real thing, our desire for the lost object, in this case the mother, is born. It is important to grasp at this point that for Lacan the lost object or 'real thing' is essentially missed or missing (see Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 1979, 54-5).[1] That is, the lost object could never be possessed in the first place; as an indicator of the Real, a concept that must be distinguished from empirical reality and, for that matter, from the abstracted reality of the supersensible, the lost object can never be represented. It appears, rather, as the indicator of the central impossibility, the void or 'Thing' at the heart of the Symbolic which can never be presented in reality but which must nevertheless be presupposed if reality is to cohere (*The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, Book VII, 1992: 119–21).[2]

It is at this point that Lacan begins to engage with the dynamics of the sublime. [...] Lacan's thoughts on the relations between language and sublimity are best approached via two commentaries from *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–60), the first an interpretation of a therapeutic case study and the second a reading of Sophocles' play *Antigone* (442–441 BCE). The case study, which Lacan encounters in a paper by the analyst Melanie Klein, concerns a woman suffering from depression. This woman, notes Lacan, 'always complained of what she called an empty space inside her, a space she could never fill' (1992: 116). The walls of the woman's house are covered with paintings by her brother-in-law. Eventually the brother-in-law sells one of his paintings, which he removes from the wall and takes away, leaving an empty space. The empty space takes on significance for the woman; it is associated with her own feelings of emptiness. One day, in an attempt to overcome her depression, she starts to 'daub a little' on the wall, so as to 'fill up' the space (116). The woman shows remarkable skill as an artist, so much so that when the painting, or 'thing', is shown to her brother-in-law he proclaims, 'You will never make me believe that it is you who painted that.' What is it that accounts for this miraculous transformation? For Klein, the answer resides in the painting's subject matter: a sequence of images of femininity, culminating 'with the re-emergence into the light of day of the image of her own mother at the height of her beauty' (117). It is the lost body of the mother, in other words, that the woman rediscovers in her efforts to fill the vacant space.

Although intrigued by Klein's account, Lacan remains sceptical, arguing that the woman's recovery is not founded on her recovery of the mother but rather realized through the act of 'raising' the mother 'to the dignity of the Thing' (1992: 112). The Thing, let us recall, is the emptiness at the centre of the Real without which signification could not occur. As Lacan puts it, 'the fashioning of the signifier and the introduction of a gap or a hole in the real is identical' (121). In a related formulation the Thing becomes 'that which in the real suffers from the signifier' (118); it exists, in other words, to enable the generation of meaning yet prevents meaning from ever being complete. As such, the Thing has an ambiguous status in the Lacanian schema. Like the Real, the Thing cannot be presented yet must be presupposed. The Thing is therefore 'characterized by the fact that it is impossible for us to imagine it' (125). Like Lyotard's comments on the status of sublime matter, the Thing for Lacan is a kind of non-thing; we become aware of it as a kind of void or absence residing at the heart of signification.

An object, such as the mother, 'raised to the dignity of the Thing' thus becomes sublime. Lacan, however, at this stage in his argument, refers not to the discourse of sublimity but to the concept of sublimation. As advanced by Freud, sublimation refers to the process by which the libido is transferred from a material object (say, the body of the beloved) towards an object that has no

obvious connection with this need (towards, say, the love of God). In Lacan's reworking of Freud this process is reversed: the libido is shifted 'from the void of the "unserviceable" Thing to some concrete, material object of need that assumes a sublime quality the moment it occupies the place of the Thing' (*The Zizek Reader*, 1999, 157).[3] The mother is not inherently sublime; rather she becomes sublime because she indicates the void at the heart of symbolization.

The sublime object points, therefore, to the fundamental emptiness, 'the-beyond-of-the-signified' (Lacan 1992: 54) without which no signification could occur. Objects that come to signify this beyond thus become infinitely attractive, fearful, overbearing, or more simply sublime. At this point, Lacan recalls Freud's definitive work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922), in which Freud argues that psychic life is governed by the desire to regulate pleasure and pain. Too much pleasure, Freud claims, leads to the termination of desire, and thus to the end of life itself. As Lacan summarizes, what Freud calls 'the pleasure principle governs the search for [the lost] object and imposes the detours which maintain the distance in relation to its end' (1992: 58). It is the pleasure principle, in other words, that enables the subject to circle around the void, substituting the illusory satisfaction of the signifier for the deadly encounter with the Thing.

Lacan's discourse on the sublime is picked up later in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* in his detailed reading of *Antigone*. The significance of the play turns on the conflict between two value systems: the values of the political system, espoused by the Theban leader, Creon, and the values of familial love, manifested in the devotion of Antigone to her dead and disgraced brother, Polynices. Tragedy is born out of Antigone's refusal to observe Creon's injunction against the extension of burial rites to traitors. Love, she argues, must transcend the good of the state. Rather than speculating, as previous commentators have done, on the rights or wrongs of Antigone's defiance, Lacan focuses instead on Antigone's aesthetic qualities. Antigone, he notes, possesses 'unbearable splendour. She has a quality that both attracts us and startles us, in the sense of intimidates us; this terrible, self-willed victim disturbs us' (247). Such is Antigone's splendour that she makes rational consideration of her defiance all but impossible. To the Chorus she thus comes to embody the spirit of Eros, or Love:

> Where is the equal of Love
> ... he is here
> In the bloom of a fair face
> Lying in wait;
> And the grip of his madness
> Spares not god or man,
> Marring the righteous man,
> Driving his soul into mazes of sin
> And strife, dividing a house.
> For the light that burns in the eyes of a bride of desire
> Is a life that consumes.
> At the side of the great gods
> Aphrodite immortal
> Works her will upon all.
>
> (Sophocles, *Antigone* [1947 trans.] lines 780–96)

Antigone, Lacan comments, 'causes the Chorus to lose its head ... [she] makes the just appear unjust, and makes the Chorus transgress all limits, including casting aside any respect it might have for the edicts of the city'. Though Lacan does not refer to Antigone as sublime, her 'beauty' is clearly sublime in effect, causing 'all critical judgements to vacillate, stop[ping] analysis, and plung[ing] the different forms involved into a certain confusion or, rather, an essential blindness' (281). But though Antigone blinds us to reason, she nevertheless reveals the dependence of reason on the forbidden dimensions of the Real. From a Lacanian point of view, Antigone is valued for her refusal to sublimate her desire, to exchange, that is, the object of a forbidden love, her incestuous love for Polynices, for the 'higher' love of the state. As such, she goes to the limit, insisting on the 'unique value' of her brother prior to the imposition of language, culture, and morality (279). The limit, as conceived by Lacan, is 'fatal' since it marks the end of signification, of the substitution of one thing for another, and thus of desire itself. In effect, by failing to submit to the letter of the law, Antigone goes beyond the pleasure principle, and so pursues the object of her desire to the bitter end. As she states at the beginning: 'I am dead and I desire death' (281). What Antigone embraces, therefore, in her desire for Polynices is nothing less than the 'real thing', the deadly object that must be excluded for the rationalization of good and evil to cohere. Antigone, by standing in the place of this deadly thing, thus becomes sublime. [...]

1 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

2 *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*, Book VII, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, 'The Ethics of Psychoanalysis', trans. Denis Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

3 *The Zizek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmund Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Philip Shaw, extract from *The Sublime* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) 133–7.

Slavoj Zizek
The Sublime Object of Ideology//1989

The Logic of Sublimity

In his essay on 'The Religion of Sublimity' (1982), Yirmiahu Yovel has pointed out a certain inconsistency in Hegel's systematization of religions, an inconsistency which does not result directly from the very principle of Hegel's philosophy but expresses rather a contingent, empirical prejudice of Hegel's as an individual, and can therefore be rectified by consequent use of Hegel's own dialectical procedure. This inconsistency concerns the place occupied respectively by Jewish and by ancient Greek religion: in Hegel's *Lessons on the Philosophy of Religion*, Christianity is immediately preceded by three forms of the 'religion of spiritual individuality': the Jewish religion of Sublimity [*Erhabenheit*], the Greek religion of Beauty, and the Roman religion of Understanding [*Verstand*]. In this succession the first, lowest place is taken by the Jewish religion – that is, Greek religion is conceived as a higher stage in spiritual development than the Jewish religion. According to Yovel, Hegel has here given way to his personal anti-Semitic prejudice, because to be consistent with the logic of the dialectical process it is undoubtedly the Jewish religion which should follow the Greek.

Despite some reservations about the detail of Yovel's arguments, his fundamental point seems to hit the mark: the Greek, Jewish and Christian religions do form a kind of triad which corresponds perfectly to the triad of reflection (positing, external and determinate reflection), to this elementary matrix of the dialectical process. Greek religion embodies the moment of 'positing reflection': in it, the plurality of spiritual individuals (gods) is immediately 'posited' as the given spiritual essence of the world. The Jewish religion introduces the moment of 'external reflection' – all positivity is abolished by reference to the unapproachable, transcendent God, the absolute Master, the One of absolute negativity; while Christianity conceives the individuality of man not as something external to God but as a 'reflective determination' of God himself (in the figure of Christ, God himself 'becomes man').

It is something of a mystery why Yovel does not mention the crucial argument in his favour: the very interconnection of the notions of 'Beauty' and 'Sublimity'. If Greek religion is, according to Hegel, the religion of Beauty and Jewish religion that of Sublimity, it is clear that the very logic of the dialectical process compels us to conclude that Sublimity should *follow* Beauty because it is the point of its breakdown, of its mediation, of its self-referential negativity. In using the couple Beauty/Sublimity Hegel relies, of course, on Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, where

Beauty and Sublimity are opposed along the semantic axes quality-quantity, shaped-shapeless, bounded-boundless: Beauty calms and comforts; Sublimity excites and agitates. 'Beauty' is the sentiment provoked when the suprasensible Idea appears in the material, sensuous medium, in its harmonious formation – a sentiment of immediate harmony between Idea and the sensuous material of its expression; while the sentiment of Sublimity is attached to chaotic, terrifying limitless phenomena (rough sea, rocky mountains).

Above all, however, Beauty and Sublimity are opposed along the axis pleasure-displeasure: a view of Beauty offers us pleasure, while 'the object is received as sublime with a pleasure that is only possible through the mediation of displeasure' (Kant, *Critique of Judgement* [1964 trans.]: 109). In short, the Sublime is 'beyond the pleasure principle', it is a paradoxical pleasure procured by displeasure itself (the exact definition – one of the Lacanian definitions – of enjoyment [*jouissance*]). This means at the same time that the relation of Beauty to Sublimity coincides with the relation of immediacy to mediation – further proof that the Sublime must *follow* Beauty as a form of mediation of its immediacy. On closer examination, in what does this mediation proper to the Sublime consist? Let us quote the Kantian definition of the Sublime:

> The Sublime may be described in this way: It is an object (of nature) the *representation* [*Vorstellung*] *of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation* [*Darstellung*] *of ideas.* (Kant, 1964: 119)

A definition which, so to speak, anticipates Lacan's determination of the sublime object in his Seminar on *The Ethic of Psychoanalysis:* 'an object raised to the level of the (impossible-real) Thing'. That is to say, with Kant the Sublime designates the relation of an inner-worldly, empirical, sensuous object to *Ding an sich*, to the transcendent, trans-phenomenal, unattainable Thing-in-itself. The paradox of the Sublime is as follows: in principle, the gap separating phenomenal, empirical objects of experience from the Thing-in-itself is insurmountable – that is, no empirical object, no representation [*Vorstellung*] of it can adequately present [*darstellen*] the Thing (the suprasensible Idea); but the Sublime is an object in which we can experience this very impossibility, this permanent failure of the representation to reach after the Thing. Thus, by means of the very failure of representation, we can have a presentiment of the true dimension of the Thing. This is also why an object evoking in us the feeling of Sublimity gives us simultaneous pleasure and displeasure: it gives us displeasure because of its inadequacy to the Thing-Idea, but precisely through this inadequacy it gives us pleasure by indicating

the true, incomparable greatness of the Thing, surpassing every possible phenomenal, empirical experience:

> The feeling of the Sublime is, therefore, at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law. (Kant, 1964: 106)

We can now see why it is precisely nature in its most chaotic, boundless, terrifying dimension which is best qualified to awaken in us the feeling of the Sublime: here, where the aesthetic imagination is strained to its utmost, where all finite determinations dissolve themselves, the failure appears at its purest.

The Sublime is therefore the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable. It is a unique point in Kant's system, a point at which the fissure, the gap between phenomenon and Thing-in-itself, is abolished in a negative way, because in it the phenomenon's very inability to represent the Thing adequately *is inscribed in the phenomenon itself* – or, as Kant puts it, 'even if the Ideas of reason can be in no way adequately represented [in the sensuous-phenomenal world], they can be revived and evoked in the mind by means of this very inadequacy which can be presented in a sensuous way'. It is this mediation of the inability – this successful presentation by means of failure, of the inadequacy itself – which distinguishes *enthusiasm* evoked by the Sublime from fanciful *fanaticism* [*Schwärmerei*]: fanaticism is an insane visionary delusion that we can immediately see or grasp what lies beyond all bounds of sensibility, while enthusiasm precludes all positive presentation. Enthusiasm is an example of purely negative presentation – that is, the sublime object evokes pleasure in a purely negative way: the place of the Thing is indicated through the very failure of its representation. Kant himself pointed out the connection between such a notion of Sublimity and the Jewish religion:

> We have no reason to fear that the feeling of the Sublime will suffer from an abstract mode of presentation like this, which is altogether negative as to what is sensuous. For though the imagination, no doubt, finds nothing beyond the sensible world to which it can lay hold, still this thrusting aside of the sensible barriers gives it a feeling of being unbounded; and that removal is thus a presentation of the infinite. As such it can never be anything more than a negative presentation – but still it expands the soul. Perhaps there is no more sublime passage in the Jewish Law than the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, and so forth. This commandment can alone explain the enthusiasm which the Jewish people, in their moral period, felt for their religion when comparing themselves with others ... (Kant, 1964: 127)

In what consists, then, the Hegelian criticism of this Kantian notion of the Sublime? From Kant's point of view, Hegel's dialectics appears, of course, as a repeated fall, as a return to the *Schwärmerei* of traditional metaphysics which fails to take into account the abyss separating phenomena from the Idea and pretends to mediate the Idea with phenomena (as with the Jewish religion, to which Christianity appears as a return to pagan polytheism and the incarnation of God in a multitude of man-like figures).

In Hegel's defence, it is not enough to point out how in his dialectics none of the determinate, particular phenomena represents adequately the suprasensible Idea – that is, how the Idea is the very movement of sublation [*Aufhebung*] – the famous *Flüssigwerden*, 'liquidizing' – of all particular determinations. The Hegelian criticism is much more radical: it does not affirm, in opposition to Kant, the possibility of some kind of 'reconciliation'-mediation between Idea and phenomena, the possibility of surmounting the gap which separates them, of abolishing the radical 'otherness', the radical negative relationship of the Idea-Thing to phenomena. Hegel's reproach of Kant (and at the same time of Jewish religion) is, on the contrary, that *it is Kant himself who still remains a prisoner of the field of representation*. Precisely when we determine the Thing as a transcendent surplus beyond what can be represented, we determine it on the basis of the field of representation, starting from it, within its horizon, as its negative limit: the (Jewish) notion of God as radical Otherness, as unrepresentable, still remains the extreme point of the logic of representation.

But here again, this Hegelian approach can give way to misunderstanding if we read it as an assertion that – in opposition to Kant, who tries to reach the Thing through the very breakdown of the field of phenomena, by driving the logic of representation to its utmost – in dialectical speculation, we must grasp the Thing 'in itself', from itself, as it is in its pure Beyond, without even a negative reference or relationship to the field of representation. This is *not* Hegel's position: the Kantian criticism has here done its job and if this were Hegel's position, Hegelian dialectics would effectively entail a regression into the traditional metaphysics aiming at an immediate approach to the Thing. Hegel's position is in fact 'more Kantian than Kant himself' – it adds nothing to the Kantian notion of the Sublime; it merely takes it more *literally* than Kant himself.

Hegel, of course, retains the basic dialectical moment of the Sublime, the notion that the Idea is reached through purely negative presentation – that the

very inadequacy of the phenomenality to the Thing is the only appropriate way to present it. The real problem lies elsewhere: Kant still presupposes that the Thing-in-itself exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation, of phenomenality; the breakdown of phenomenality, the experience of phenomena, is for him only an 'external reflection', only a way of indicating, within the domain of phenomenality, this transcendent dimension of the Thing which persists in itself beyond phenomenality.

Hegel's position is, in contrast, that there is *nothing* beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation. The experience of radical negativity, of the radical inadequacy of all phenomena to the Idea, the experience of the radical fissure between the two – this experience is already *Idea itself as pure, radical negativity*. Where Kant thinks that he is still dealing only with a negative presentation of the Thing, we are already in the midst of the Thing-in-itself – *for this Thing-in-itself is nothing but this radical negativity*. In other words – in a somewhat overused Hegelian speculative twist – the negative experience of the Thing must change into the experience of the Thing-in-itself as radical negativity. The experience of the Sublime thus remains the same: all we have to do is to subtract its transcendent presupposition – the presupposition that this experience indicates, in a negative way, some transcendent Thing-in-itself persisting in its positivity beyond it. In short, we must limit ourselves to what is strictly immanent to this experience, to pure negativity, to the negative self-relationship of the representation.

Homologous to Hegel's determination of the difference between the death of the pagan god and the death of Christ (the first being merely the death of the terrestrial embodiment, of the terrestrial representation, figure, of God, while with the death of Christ it is God of beyond, God as a positive, transcendent, unattainable entity, which dies) we could say that what Kant fails to take into account is the way the experience of the nullity, of the inadequacy of the phenomenal world of representation, which befalls us in the sentiment of the Sublime, means at the same time the nullity, the nonexistence of the transcendent Thing-in-itself as a positive entity.

That is to say, the limit of the logic of representation is not to 'reduce all contents to representations', to what can be represented, but, on the contrary, in the very presupposition of some positive entity (Thing-in-itself) *beyond phenomenal representation*. We overcome phenomenality not by reaching beyond it, but by the experience of how there is nothing beyond it – how its beyond is precisely this Nothing of absolute negativity, of the utmost inadequacy of the appearance to its notion. The suprasensible essence is the 'appearance *qua* appearance' – that is, it is not enough to say that the appearance is never adequate to its essence, we must also add that *this 'essence' itself is nothing but the inadequacy of the appearance to itself*; to its notion (inadequacy which makes it '[just] an appearance').

Thus the status of the sublime object is displaced almost imperceptibly, but none the less decisively: the Sublime is no longer an (empirical) object indicating through its very inadequacy the dimension of a transcendent Thing-in-itself (Idea) but an object which occupies the place, replaces, fills out the empty place of the Thing as the void, as the pure Nothing of absolute negativity – the Sublime is an object whose positive body is just an embodiment of Nothing. This logic of an object which, by its very inadequacy, 'gives body' to the absolute negativity of the Idea, is articulated in Hegel in the form of the so-called 'infinite judgement', a judgement in which subject and predicate are radically incompatible, incomparable: 'the Spirit is a *bone*', '*Wealth* is the Self', 'the State is *Monarch*', 'God is *Christ*'.

In Kant, the feeling of the Sublime is evoked by some boundless, terrifying imposing phenomenon (raging nature, and so on), while in Hegel we are dealing with a miserable 'little piece of the Real' – the Spirit *is* the inert, dead skull; the subject's Self *is* this small piece of metal that I am holding in my hand; the State as the rational organization of social life *is* the idiotic body of the Monarch; God who created the world *is* Jesus, this miserable individual crucified together with two robbers ... Herein lies the 'last secret' of dialectical speculation: not in the dialectical mediation-sublimation of all contingent, empirical reality, not in the deduction of all reality from the mediating movement of absolute negativity, but in the fact that this very negativity, to attain its 'being-for-itself', must embody itself again in some miserable, radically contingent corporeal leftover.

'The Spirit is a Bone'

At the immediate level, that of 'understanding', of 'representation [*Vorstellung*]', this proposition appears, of course, as an extreme variation of vulgar materialism; reducing the spirit, the subject, pure negativity, the most mobile and subtle element, an ever-escaping 'fox', to a rigid, fixed, dead object, to total inertia, to an absolutely non-dialectial presence. Consequently, we react to it like the shocked Soviet bureaucrat in the Rabinovitch joke: we are startled, it is absurd and nonsensical; the proposition 'the Spirit is a bone' provokes in us a sentiment of radical, unbearable contradiction; it offers an image of grotesque discord, of an extremely negative relationship.

However, as in the case of Rabinovitch, it is precisely thus that we produce its speculative truth, because *this negativity, this unbearable discord, coincides with subjectivity itself*, it is the only way to make present and 'palpable' the utmost – that is, self-referential – negativity which characterizes the spiritual subjectivity. We *succeed* in transmitting the dimension of subjectivity *by means*

of the failure itself, through the radical insufficiency, through the absolute maladjustment of the predicate in relation to the subject. This is why 'the Spirit is a bone' is a perfect example of what Hegel calls the 'speculative proposition', a proposition whose terms are incompatible, without common measure. As Hegel points out in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to grasp the true meaning of such a proposition we must go back and read it over again, because this true meaning arises from the very failure of the first, 'immediate' reading.

Does not the proposition 'the Spirit is a bone' – this equation of two absolutely incompatible terms, pure negative movement of the subject and the total inertia of a rigid object – offer us something like a Hegelian version of the Lacanian formula of fantasy: $ ◊ a ?' To convince ourselves that it does, it is enough to place this proposition in its proper context the passage from physiognomy to phrenology in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Physiognomy – the language of the body, the expression of the subject's interior in his spontaneous gestures and grimaces – still belongs to the level of language, of signifying representation: a certain corporeal element (a gesture, a grimace) represents, signifies, the non-corporeal interior of the subject. The final result of physiognomy is its utter *failure:* every signifying representation 'betrays' the subject; it perverts, deforms what it is supposed to reveal; there is no 'proper' signifier of the subject. And the passage from physiognomy to phrenology functions as the change of level from *representation* to *presence:* in opposition to gestures and grimaces, the skull is not a sign expressing an interior; it represents nothing; it is – in its very inertia – the immediate presence of the Spirit:

> In physiognomy, Spirit is supposed to be known in its *own* outer aspect, as in a being which is the *utterance* of Spirit – the visible invisibility of its essence... In the determination yet to be considered, however, the outer aspect is lastly a wholly *immobile* reality which is not in its own self a speaking sign but, separated from self-conscious movement, presents itself on its own account and is a mere Thing. (Hegel, 1977: 195)

The bone, the skull, is thus an object which, by means of its *presence*, fills out the void, the impossibility of the signifying *representation* of the subject. In Lacanian terms it is the objectification of a certain lack: a Thing occupies the place where the signifier is lacking; the fantasy-object fills out the lack in the Other (the signifier's order). The inert object of phrenology (the skullbone) is nothing but a positive form of certain failure: it embodies, literally 'gives body' to, the ultimate failure of the signifying representation of the subject. It is therefore correlative to the subject in so far as – in Lacanian theory – the subject is *nothing but* the impossibility of its own signifying representation – the empty

place opened up in the big Other by the failure of this representation. We can now see how meaningless is the usual reproach according to which Hegelian dialectics 'sublates' all the inert objective leftover, including it in the circle of the dialectical mediation: the very movement of dialectics implies, on the contrary, that there is always a certain remnant, a certain leftover escaping the circle of subjectivation, of subjective appropriation-mediation, and *the subject is precisely correlative to this leftover:* $ ◊ a. The leftover which resists 'subjectivation' embodies the impossibility which 'is' the subject: in other words, the subject is strictly correlative to its own impossibility; its limit is its positive condition.

The Hegelian 'idealist wager' consists, rather, in the conversion of this lack of the signifier into the signifier of the lack; from Lacanian theory we know that the signifier of this conversion, by means of which lack as such is symbolized, is the phallus. And – here we encounter the last surprise in the Hegelian text – at the end of the section on phrenology, Hegel himself evokes the phallic metaphor to designate the relationship between the two levels of reading the proposition 'the Spirit is a bone': the usual reading, that of 'representation'/'understanding', and the speculative one:

> The *depth* which Spirit brings forth from within – but only as far as its picture-thinking consciousness where it lets it remain – and the *ignorance* of this consciousness about what it really is saying, are the same conjunction of the high and the low which, in the living being, Nature naïvely expresses when it combines the organ of its highest fulfilment, the organ of generation, with the organ of urination. The infinite judgement, *qua* infinite, would be the fulfilment of life that comprehends itself, the consciousness of the infinite judgement that remains at the level of picture-thinking behaves as urination. (Hegel, 1977: 210) [...]

1 [Lacan proposed a general formula for the way the subject is represented in fantasy: $ ◊ a (the $ symbol used here is an approximation of Lacan's specific symbol which resembles the figure eight). Here the diamond ◊ formalizes the specific relation that the subject of the unconscious, $ (which is 'divided' by its relation to the realm of signifiers) maintains with the object, the 'little a' (*petit a*), or 'lost' object, the 'detached' remainder of the first operation of symbolization by the parental other. To Freud's list of 'detachable' objects (breast, baby, penis, faeces), Lacan added the voice, the gaze and the phoneme. These all constitute object-causes of desire (*objets a*) that are not representable as such. The subject will spend all his or her life searching for various imaginary and concrete intermediary objects to take their place in the realization of desire.]

Slavoj Zizek, extract from *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989) 201–9.

Barbara Claire Freeman
The Feminine Sublime//1995

[...] To investigate the feminine sublime is not to embark upon a search for an autonomous female voice, realm of experience or language, although these categories may be valuable as a dimension of the strategic interventions of feminist practice. What is specifically feminine about the feminine sublime is not an assertion of innate sexual difference, but a radical rearticulation of the role gender plays in producing the history of discourse on the sublime and the formulation of an alternative position with respect to excess and the possibilities of its figuration. To assert the importance of the feminine in this context is not to reinscribe normative gender categories, but to offer a critique of a tradition that has functioned historically to reassert masculine privilege. In this sense, the notion of the feminine does not refer to a particular affinity group, gender or class, but rather to a putting in question of the master discourse that perpetuates the material and psychological oppression of actual women.

I use the word 'feminine' in at least two ways: on the one hand, to refer to the socially constructed category of woman that has endured universal and transhistorical oppression and thus to underscore the reality of women's suffering; on the other, to indicate a position of resistance with respect to the patriarchal order, whether it is perpetuated and sustained by biological women or by men. Here the term does not so much refer to actual women as designate a position of critique with respect to the masculinist systems of thought that contribute to women's subjugation. Although such a conception of the feminine does not suspend reference to existing women, it does suspend the notion of an ultimate feminine identity that could function as the ground of sexual difference. Rather it becomes one name for a residue that disrupts the oppositional structure male/female and thereby calls for a radical rearticulation of the symbolic order. My central question is not, what is the feminine sublime? but rather, how does it signify? It refers to what, in Gloria Anzaldúa's sense, is a site of passage and border crossing in which meanings collide and transform one another, an ongoing process of re-metaphorization in which we may perceive, in Judith Butler's wonderful phrase, 'the movement of boundary itself'.[1]

The sublime has been aligned with a wide variety of political practices. Although an interest in it often marks the conservative (Burke, for example, lauded the sublime but condemned the French Revolution), a number of theorists associate the sublime with the possibility of liberty and freedom.[2] [I would] argue that there is no single, unchanging politics with which one can identify the sublime. Indeed, the fact that it can so readily embrace political positions of every persuasion attests to its metamorphic capacity and ability to exceed any particular designation, definition or category.[3] That the sublime has no inherent politics, however, does not mean that its effects are not inevitably and necessarily political. And while [*The Feminine Sublime*] is not political in the sense of proposing a specific blueprint for social action, it does, I think, imply a strong sense of the form a politics of the feminine sublime might assume.

The dimension of the unrepresentable would be a central feature of any sublime politics. One of [my] main contentions is that the sublime involves an encounter with a radical alterity that remains unassimilable to representation. Such an encounter marks the very limits of the representable, for it entails the question of symbolizing an event that we cannot represent not only because it was never fully present, but because it presents the subject with an unrecuperable excess of excess. In the formulation of Jean-François Lyotard, for example, the sublime is not the presentation of the unpresentable, but the presentation of the fact that the unpresentable exists.[4] To invoke the nondemonstrable – not as a familiar feature of aesthetics but rather in the context of the incommensurable – is to situate the sublime as a site of resistance to aestheticism and also to underscore its political and ethical dimensions. In this sense, the notion of alterity eludes particular ethnicity, sexuality, class, race or geopolitical positioning but implies both a general concept of the unrepresentable as that which exceeds the symbolic order of language and culture, and the particular otherness of actual others, who remain nameless in so far as they are outside its borders.

Unlike the masculinist sublime that seeks to master, appropriate or colonize the other, I propose that the politics of the feminine sublime involves taking up a position of respect in response to an incalculable otherness.[5] A politics of the feminine sublime would ally receptivity and constant attention to that which makes meaning infinitely open and ungovernable. As Bill Readings suggests:

> A sublime politics would not attempt to subject politics to the radical indeterminacy of the sublime as- a questioning of rules and criteria . . . it is to refuse society as the locus of modeling and authority, to argue for heteronomous community in which there can be no absolutely authoritative instance and no consensus that might legitimate such an authority.[6]

Such a practice would authorize concrete strategies and tactics of resistance without the need either to identify itself permanently with any one particular political position or to depend upon a fantasy of collective identity as the basis for consensus. Its most enduring commitment would be instead to sustain a condition of radical uncertainty as the very condition of its possibility. [...]

1 [footnote 19 in source] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) ix.

2 [20] Jean-Luc Nancy ('The Sublime Offering', in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffery S. Librett [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993]) argues that 'as for Kant, he had begun to recognize that what was at stake in art was not the representation of the truth, but – to put it briefly – the *presentation of liberty*. It was this recognition that was engaged in and by the thought of the sublime' (28). Jean-François Lyotard ('After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics', in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991]) observes that the Kantian sublime involves a sacrifice that is crucial 'for the final destination of the mind, which is freedom' (137).

3 [21] The notion that the sublime provokes a crisis in categorization and representation recalls Marjorie Garber's discussion of the 'category crisis' introduced in culture by the figure of the transvestite (*Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* [New York: Routledge, 1992], 16). Garber argues that 'one of the most consistent and effective functions of the transvestite in culture is to indicate the place of what I call "category crisis", disrupting and calling attention to cultural, social or aesthetic dissonances ... by "category crisis" I mean a failure of definitional distinctions, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white, Jew/Christian, noble/bourgeois, master/servant, master/slave'. [...]

4 [22] Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). [...]

5 [23] In this regard, see Drucilla Cornell, *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), especially her notion of 'an ethical relation to otherness' in which 'the subject does not seek to identify or categorize the object, but rather to let the object be in its difference', 148.

6 [24] Bill Readings, 'Sublime Politics: The End of the Party Line', *Modern Language Quarterly* (December 1992) 411; 422–3.

Barbara Claire Freeman, extract from *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995) 10–12.

Jacques Rancière
The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes//2007

Entropies of the Avant-Garde

[...] Whether the quest is for art alone or for emancipation through art, the stage is the same. On this stage, art must tear itself away from the territory of aestheticized life and draw a new borderline, which cannot be crossed. This is a position that we cannot simply assign to avant-garde insistence on the autonomy of art. For this autonomy proves to be in fact a double heteronomy. If Madame Bovary has to die, Flaubert has to disappear. First he has to make the sensorium of literature akin to the sensorium of those things that do not feel: pebbles, shells or grains of dust. To do this, he has to make his prose indistinguishable from that of his characters, the prose of everyday life. In the same way the autonomy of Schoenberg's music, as conceptualized by Adorno, is a double heteronomy: in order to denounce the capitalist division of labour and the adornments of commodification, it has to take that division of labour yet further, to be still more technical, more 'inhuman' than the products of capitalist mass production. But this inhumanity, in turn, makes the blotch of what has been repressed appear and disrupt the perfect technical arrangement of the work. The 'autonomy' of the avant-garde work of art becomes the tension between two heteronomies, between the bonds that tie Ulysses to his mast and the song of the sirens against which he stops his ears.

We can also give to these two positions the names of a pair of Greek divinities, Apollo and Dionysus. Their opposition is not simply a construct of the philosophy of the young Nietzsche. It is the dialectic of the 'spirit of forms' in general. The aesthetic identification of consciousness and unconsciousness, *logos* and *pathos*, can be interpreted in two ways. Either the spirit of forms is the *logos* that weaves its way through its own opacity and the resistance of the materials, in order to become the smile of the statue or the light of the canvas – this is the Apollonian plot – or it is identified with a *pathos* that disrupts the forms of *doxa*, and makes art the inscription of a power that is chaos, radical alterity. Art inscribes on the surface of the work the immanence of *pathos* in the *logos*, of the unthinkable in thought. This is the Dionysian plot. Both are plots of heteronomy. Even the perfection of the Greek statue in Hegel's *Aesthetics* is the form of an inadequacy. The same holds all the more for Schoenberg's perfect construction. In order that 'avant-garde' art stay faithful to the promise of the aesthetic scene it has to stress more and more the power of heteronomy that underpins its autonomy.

Defeat of the Imagination?

This inner necessity leads to another kind of entropy, which makes the task of autonomous avant-garde art akin to that of giving witness to sheer heteronomy. This entropy is perfectly exemplified by the 'aesthetics of the sublime' of Jean-François Lyotard. At first sight this is a radicalization of the dialectic of avant-garde art which twists into a reversal of its logic. The avant-garde must indefinitely draw the dividing-line that separates art from commodity culture, inscribe interminably the link of art to the 'heterogeneous sensible'. But it must do so in order to invalidate indefinitely the 'trickery' of the aesthetic promise itself, to denounce both promises of revolutionary avant-gardism and the entropy of commodity aestheticization. The avant-garde is endowed with the paradoxical duty of bearing witness to an immemorial dependency of human thought that makes any promise of emancipation a deception.

This demonstration takes the shape of a radical re-reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, of a reframing of the aesthetic sensorium which stands as an implicit refutation of Schiller's vision, a kind of counter-originary scene. The whole 'duty' of modern art is deduced by Lyotard from the Kantian analysis of the sublime as a radical experience of disagreement, in which the synthetic power of imagination is defeated by the experience of an infinite, which sets up a gap between the sensible and the supersensible. In Lyotard's analysis this defines the space of modern art as the manifestation of the unrepresentable, of the 'loss of a steady relation between the sensible and intelligible'. It is a paradoxical assertion: firstly, because the sublime in Kant's account does not define the space of art, but marks the transition from aesthetic to ethical experience; and secondly, because the experience of disharmony between Reason and Imagination tends towards the discovery of a higher harmony – the self-perception of the subject as a member of the supersensible world of Reason and Freedom.

Lyotard wants to oppose the Kantian gap of the sublime to Hegelian aestheticization. But he has to borrow from Hegel his concept of the sublime, as the impossibility of an adequation between thought and its sensible presentation. He has to borrow from the plot of the 'spirit of forms' the principle of a counter-construction of the originary scene, to allow for a counter-reading of the plot of the 'life of forms'. Of course this confusion is not a casual misreading. It is a way of blocking the originary path from aesthetics to politics, of imposing at the same crossroad a one-way detour leading from aesthetics to ethics. In this fashion the opposition of the aesthetic regime of art to the representational regime can be ascribed to the sheer opposition of the art of the unrepresentable to the art of representation. 'Modern' works of art then have to become ethical witnesses to the unrepresentable. Strictly speaking, however, it is in the representational regime that you can find unrepresentable subject matters, meaning those for which form and matter cannot be fitted together in any way. The 'loss of a steady relation' between the sensible and the intelligible is not the loss of the power of relating, it is the multiplication of its forms. In the aesthetic regime of art nothing is 'unrepresentable'.

Much has been written to the effect that the Holocaust is unrepresentable, that it allows only for witness and not for art. But the claim is refuted by the work of the witnesses. For example, the paratactic writing of Primo Levi or Robert Antelme has been taken as the sheer mode of testimony befitting the experience of Nazi dehumanization. But this paratactic style, made up of a concatenation of little perceptions and sensations, was one of the major features of the literary revolution of the nineteenth century. The short notations at the beginning of Antelme's book *L'Espèce humaine*, describing the latrines and setting the scene of the camp at Buchenwald, answer to the same pattern as the description of Emma Bovary's farmyard. Similarly, Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* has been seen as bearing witness to the unrepresentable. But what Lanzmann counterposes to the representational plot of the US television series *The Holocaust* is another cinematographic plot – the narrative of a present inquiry reconstructing an enigmatic or an erased past, which can be traced back to Orson Welles' Rosebud in *Citizen Kane*. The argument of the 'unrepresentable' does not fit the experience of artistic practice. Rather, it fulfils the desire that there be something unrepresentable, something unavailable, in order to inscribe in the practice of art the necessity of the ethical detour. The ethics of the unrepresentable might still be an inverted form of the aesthetic promise. [...]

Jacques Rancière, extract from 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', in *Heart of Darkness* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2007) 43–5.

THE BLUE,

THE PINK,

THE IMMATERIAL,

THE VOID,

THE ARCHITECTURE OF

THE AIR,

THE URBAN PLANNING OF

THE AIR,

THE AIR-CONDITIONING OF

THE GREAT GEOGRAPHICAL SPACES

Yves Klein, undated inscription at convent of Santa Rita, Cascia, Italy

TRANSCENDENCE

Yves Klein
Truth Becomes Reality//1961

[...] It is not with rockets, Sputniks and missiles that modern man will achieve the conquest of space. That is the dream of present-day scientists who live in a state of mind romantic and sentimental enough for the last century.

It is by means of the powerful yet pacific force of his sensitivity that man will inhabit space. It is by the impregnation of space with human sensitivity that the much coveted conquest of this space will be achieved. For human sensitivity is omnipotent in immaterial reality; it can even read in the memory of nature about the past, the present, and the future!

It is our effective supply of extradimensional power.

Proofs? Precedents?

... Dante, in the *Divine Comedy*, accurately describes the Southern Cross, a constellation invisible in the northern hemisphere, and which no traveller of his time could have told him about. Swift, in his *Voyage to Laputa*, gives the distances and the rotation periods of the two satellites of Mars, unknown at the time. When the American astronomer Asaph Hall discovered them in 1877 and saw that his calculations corresponded to those of Swift, seized by a sort of panic, he called them Phobos and Deimos, Fear and Terror.

May the authentic realism of today and tomorrow flourish. I want it to live with the best of myself, in total freedom of mind and body. The universal cannibalism that is approaching, the anthropophagous era through which we are soon to pass, is not by nature cruel or fierce, nor inhuman; quite the contrary – it will become the living expression or rather the assimilation of a biological synthesis. It will finally free us from the few tyrannical aspects of nature vis-à-vis ... such as ... [1]

1 In the original publication, Klein had the last page of his article burned off – dematerialized by fire, at this point.

Yves Klein, extract from 'Le Vrai devient réalité', *Zero*, no. 3 (Düsseldorf, July 1961); trans. Howard Beckman, in *Zero*, ed. Otto Piene and Hans Mack (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1973); reprinted in *Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective* (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University/New York: The Arts Publisher, Inc., 1982) 231–2.

Doreet LeVitte Harten
Creating Heaven//1999

The art of the sublime in this century has been articulated by a clear grammar. The founding fathers, Kasimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, and later, those on the far shores of America, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko, laid down the etiquette and court manners by which the sublime in art should be revered and canonized. The sublime was to be abstract, devoid of all signifiers, so that which is signified will appear in all its decorum: that is, by stating its not being there it will have the appropriate *Parousia*, the manifestation of the hidden essence.

Of course, religious feeling had other genealogical lineages, expressed in the works of artists like Max Beckmann, Emil Nolde or Georges Rouault, and later in the works of Joseph Beuys and Anselm Kiefer, but if a difference is to be made between the sublime and the religious and this difference is to be on a scale that goes from popular to aristocratic, then it was the annihilation of signifiers which won the sublime its patrician place in the middle of the twentieth century.

This application of a negative theology in the arts, a theology which is based on the idea of *aphairesis* (the coming to the essence by way of abstraction), haunts us still. It is therefore difficult for the catechist to see the sublime in a popular or figurative form. For the equation of the holy with the monochrome, the sacred with the abstract is combined with another doctrine of art which states that depth is of value, and that one of the conditions by which depth is manifested is through the mechanism which throws the signifier out of the spiel: an endless theoretical field sustains the weakness of the image, chased out of pictorial paradise.

The idea of depth is important for works of art which designate the sublime. Depth is not meant here as a dimension of material space, nor does it only stem from the narrative of the work. It has 'aura' and as such transfers the value of the work into an insubstantial realm and by doing so reinvests the phantasm of the artefact with a value in the physical world. This process of re-materialization was doubly complicated in matters of representing the sublime, for here the work had to be transubstantiated not only in order to gain its value but its narrative as well. If the work of art was to gain its 'aura' as a religious object, and if the sublime was to be made incarnate and described through a field devoid of signifiers, there was a danger of total annihilation of meaning: for how could a spectator make a connection between exalted nothingness and its tokens, if icons were not to be used?

To avoid such a calamity the old device of an interpretative and scholastic web had to be put to use. Depth, or the hidden element, would act here as the

fourth dimension. It is usually achieved through the cultural patina of the work, that is, by a process of time, but it could also be gained by turning time into a factor of speech. Walter Benjamin's 'aura', which is generally accomplished by the action of time on the work, could then be accomplished through a contemplative verbal field.

The verbalization of the field surrounding a work of art in order to sustain its declared religious meaning is understood in our time as an inherent quality of the work itself, emanating from its very essence, thus adding to the myth of authentic and autonomous existence. But we should not forget that such a response was a learned process which took time. Only by depending on the metaphorical depth, acting as if it knew more about the work than the work knew about itself, could the iconoclastic sublime of this secular time be described as being here and now.

But depth is not what it used to be and for that matter, neither is religion nor religious feeling. In postmodern times (and I take it these are still postmodern times for want of the next sonorous terminology), depth is to be regarded with a suspicious eye because it is in the process of losing its absolute hegemony over the concept of value. Rhetorical depth gives way to works of art which either use recognizable icons and words, or in the case of a religious manifestation bring the sublime, in all its transformations, to the surface. A revival of iconic figures, by means of different media, and whose eternal state is sustained through their capacity to sell and to be sold, is almost equivalent to the revival of mythological images in the Renaissance. The laconic, pure attitude of the modern sublime, mistakenly considered as a monotheistic dictum and therefore a step further in the evolutionary ladder, is defeated by the return of a Pagan New, echoing a Weberian prophecy, an iconodule state which comes to its maturity, graced by its Elysian opportunities. Some may say that the sublime is being sold too cheaply, for it can be bestowed upon just about anything that moves, or anything which is popular. It becomes a household artefact, a quality whose visibility is enhanced because of its adaptation to the mundane. But I am not sure this is a case for lamentation, for in its prior aristocratic role, only a chosen few were graced by it, which is no longer the case once applied to more secular forms of devotion.

It is here that we recognize that if art was once religious, by the end of the millennium it is religion that becomes a work of art. This means that every para-phenomenon which acquires the parameters of the religious could be considered to be an artistic act and it is on this assumption that the exhibition 'Heaven' (Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1999) is built.

The moment it is allowable for the sublime to be manifested through chosen signifiers, be they from popular culture, media or traditional icons, a wealth of transformations take place. For example, it could be argued that gods and their

mothers, apostles and angels, devils and saints who were confined within Pandora's box as long as the iconoclastic attitude held sway, are now free to find their apotheosis in celebrities and pop idols, aliens and heroes. It is true that they are called idols and not gods, which places them semantically in a pagan space, thus marking them as throwbacks in the evolutionary plan, but besides this act of equating the pagan with the secular in an apologetic gesture towards hegemonic monotheistic attitudes, the parameters of their worship parallel, in all practical aspects, that of the ancient celestial beings.

And so, the worship of such idols includes acts of adoration, mass hysteria and the collection of devotional items. Altars are built for them in houses and graveyards, and masses are held before their residencies or in rituals in stadia, halls and arenas. If they are song masters their songs become prayers accompanied by a procession of candles. They become the subject of pilgrimages and collections, bought, re-bought and commemorated through sales and market strategies, and after their death, since they are human, they are reconstituted as saviours, brought into the hall of fame of the eternally sacred. Hendrix, Morrison, Elvis, Joplin, Monroe, Diana, are more alive now, that is financially and emotionally, than they were in this world. Of course this ritual of the dead gods living happily ever after in the arcadia of the malls is not very different from the consummated fate of more traditional saints within the legacy of pilgrim places and devotional commerce.

But it is not only in cult idols, or in the rituals surrounding them, that the sublime and the religious find their expression. The whole ritual of beauty, including diet methods, plastic surgery and the cosmetic industry, is based upon the religious formula that equates beauty with virtue, obesity with sin, mutilation of the body with an act of martyrdom and faith. Indeed we are speaking about an industry with an annual turnover of billions of dollars that would not exist without an ethos that promotes its results. The sublime is then to be found in the gym, in making the body closer to the ethereal ideal, in de-naturalization of the flesh so that it will be ready to enter the heavenly state of the spirit.

We are surrounded with new temples. If stadia are places of worship, tourist resorts paradise, shopping centres ecstatic experiences, and museums the bethels [hallowed spaces] of good taste, then the cathedral by the same reasoning could be admired solely as a work of art, and it takes only a small step to regard that which it houses, namely religion, as an artistic project.

There is a great feeling of discontent when the religious (or religious feeling or the presence of the sublime) is manifested through lower forms of culture. I stress 'low' not because I believe them to be such, but for the sake of argument it is convenient to separate them from all which is considered high, and I do so with the knowledge of the transitory character of both good and bad taste. In so

far as the qualities of the authentic and the essential are attributed to Newman or Klein, Rothko or Mondrian and to St Augustine or Rudolf Otto or Mother Teresa or the Pope himself, one might ask whether the cult surrounding Elvis Presley or Lady Diana, Marilyn Monroe or Madonna is basically any different, and whether, on the basis of qualities such as authenticity or truth, they could be dismissed as temporary phenomena that lack the inner core of that which constitutes the religious.

Taking authenticity as the canon that marks the difference between traditional religious passion and its transformation is of course one means to assuage the sense of discontent. But exactly what is authentic in our lives that are surrounded by the mirrors of virtual images emanating through all media, in advertising and soap operas, news and talk shows that form our opinions, guiding us in a tight and ritualized way, advocating good from bad and putting order in our lives? Our intelligence would not then be measured by our illusion of the existence of our own authenticity but rather by recognizing its absence. In such a situation, when old parameters are recognized to be transitory, we tend to hang on to our own prejudices because they are the only good taste we will ever have, as Anatole Broyard wisely said. But knowing good taste to be a prejudice is already a step in accepting that the new religious forms are as inauthentic as everything else there is.

If we agree that the media have taken over the role of religious guide (turning order into chaos, telling us what the 'Good Life' is, localizing us in the world and interlinking the individual with the communal space) then we should also accept that the figures this religious order offers us as icons will live forever as an image. It follows that we can understand every soap-opera as the battlefield between the sons of light and the sons of darkness, can realize that news bulletins are synoptic gospels and can find the numinous in advertisements. And all the more because from the beginning the icons of this matrix are not flesh and blood but virtual and as such given to exist in religious experience as mediators. It is not without reason that one of the titles of the mother of God is *Mediatrix*. If authentic religious feeling is then to survive, it will do so as a citation, which is now the only possible access to any form of the authentic, by being sipped through the sieve of the artistic, through artificializing it twice by means of quotation, so that the new religious construction, be it a feeling, ritual or attitude, now acting as a work of art, becomes true exactly because it is false.

There are then two ways of building Jerusalem, either by being committed to the abstract or by pledging the fantastic, and in a world which lives by the truth of its simulation, that is by abstracting reality and virtualizing it until the map stands for the territory, there seems to be no reason to re-abstract the abstracted,

for it would be an act without logic. It is here that artists, by being compelled to point out the opposites, arrive at new ways of showing the sublime.

Because art has become a religious phenomenon, artists do not even have to pursue such questions as to whether belief is a structure or a content, nor do they have to substitute in the name of a Grand Narrative, religious epiphanies with humanistic issues, or recognize religion as a paradigmatic error. Art as religion is the programme of the dispossessed. Both give room for desire to be manifested through an admire-admired relationship. Both create territories where the dispossessed can enact their desires, making the appearance of the sublime become compensatory. In doing this they differ from contemporary philosophers, like Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard or Jean-François Lyotard, whose aesthetics of the sublime are given almost always through an apocalyptic prism, whereupon the Now of the sublime as claimed by Barnett Newman is interchangeable with the Now of a forever apocalyptic state. Artists, unlike philosophers, substitute irony for eternal despair. [...]

Doreet LeVitte Harten, extract from 'Creating Heaven', in *Heaven: An Exhibition That Will Break Your Heart* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf/Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1999) 9–11.

Luce Irigaray
Belief Itself//2002

[...] But there are still flowers, since after all we still feel a need to spend a little time on earth, in the sunshine, to open up to the joy of light and air, to pulse to the rhythm of the seasons. There are roses, if I may evoke the flower that, despite its thorns, has so often been celebrated by poets, philosophers and divines. Mysteriously, the rose's bloom recalls something of blood and of the angel. It is reborn ceaselessly, causelessly, because it must bloom, having no care for itself, no need to be seen, following in its own cycle and the cycle of the world. The flower is like a pure apparition of natural generation, the angel is like a pure vector of spiritual spatiality, rapt purity before any conception occurs, any meeting of fixed dimensions or directions.

There is the rose, before and after the bloom, forever opening for the first and last time. And yet the arrangement of its petals knows all the roses that have been and are to come, but with no doubles, no replicas. Even as the rose opens up, it already knows about shedding petals, dying down, lying dormant, not as an end

but as a recovery). Except for the petals surrounding or cradling the heart – those at the very centre – the rose's petals are grouped front against back (or the opposite, depending on the presentation), in against out, with inside protecting outside. By thus pursing the lips that have already been opened, offered, the flower seems to guard against dispersion, in a movement contrasting with that of the son who keeps throwing away his many toys or, on each occasion, his woman-mother, either whole or in torn fragments. Sorrow and loss will accompany his memory as it seeks to shelter the inside from an overwhelming outside by clothing and closing itself in with roof, house, appearances. This may deceive him, lead him into error or temptation as to what goes to the heart, the inmost centre, or the source. The rose within itself – if we can speak in this way – seems imperceptibly veiled by its repose in or about an invisible composure. Its inmost secret calyx is never shown, it lies beneath all the gathered petals. When the petals have opened completely in immodest splendour, the place in which the rose once touched herself, lip to lip, has disappeared. You will never see it. You will never see what she is or has in her heart of hearts. Perhaps it – or he? or she – can be sensed by someone living close to the rose, breathing the space around her, which she creates with that caress in which she subsists freely offering herself, in a gift that wafts through the air unseen, untouched. But so easy to lose.

The heart of the rose opens without the need of a blueprint. In the heart of a flower there is nothing – but the heart. It opens for no reason. No teleology directs the petals to unfurl. They serve no function. Unless it is to be gazed upon? But what gaze? The rose looks at us from somewhere where it is not represented. A calendar for the world, the rose recalls sight to a presence virgin of mastery, to a gaze still innocent of all manufactured and reproducible presence. In a certain sense it is invisible, while being so much more visible than anything that is represented. It is neither object nor thing. It cannot speak itself in words, even though a certain set of syllables designate the rose in our language. It has no double. It always gives itself for the first unique time. It draws our eyes in its contemplation, arrests them – for no reason. Our gaze opens – for no reason, bathed in its blossoming.

Movements without forces. Features determined without the rigid requirement to apply some kind of energy. Petals without firm shapes. In-finite finitude, unlimited. Splendour of imperfection.

What is offered in this way is the very movement of blossoming, a growth that is not trusted merely to the veiling-unveiling activity of the gaze but allows itself to be seen as it blooms. The *phuein* [generation/growth] seems to escape the eye, which counts upon itself alone. *Upokeimenon* [first ground/essence] that is perceived only when complete, leaving in the shadow all that contributes to the availability of what is offered to the gaze.

In the movement of the *proteron te phusei* [a priori/prior by nature] may be found the heart of thought, that which remains veiled in what thought says and which speaking obeys as some secret command. But already, when it speaks, thought no longer speaks what moves it. It no longer retains that emotion even as a fault in speech, as a dark night out of which it would expect to burst forth. Thought excludes the heart that moves it. That which makes thought live is spoiled, set outside of it. But it does not know this. Like a firm foundation that itself has no foundation upon which it would rely calmly, careless of the distress rising from the abyss.

As long as it does not touch upon that abyss, thought can still breathe. But it runs out of breath and food and takes no notice. And the sublime, which thought consumes, is transformed into utilities. Instead of singing the lost trace of vanished gods – the sacred ether that it leaves in the night – thought dismembers this being (*étant*) that is no being at all but shelters the mystery of every being. It shreds the air to coin it into values, trumpery values that no longer even shine with that mysterious light of being (*être*). Those garments, which can always be changed, no longer clothe any person in their own radiance, but are loaned out, substituted, calculated to function as a kind of pleasing that masks nothingness but not abandonment. Exercises in futility torn from the poet's flesh that has been left in distress, at the heart of all that oblivion allows, still, to appear. The poet alone remembers the bond that ties men and gods, recalls the nonappearance of the air in which some trace of the sacred remains. He questions, over and over, that presence which does not show itself and yet persists, as a shelter, in time of want, for all that resists calculation. Love, pain, life and death, are kept there, secret, enigmatic, barely breathing out their melody beyond or through all speakable words.

But can a mortal still sing? And how to speak of his song? Has the quarrel between the poet and the thinker already gone far enough to make a basis for their agreement? This will not occur without risk.

A risk that risks life itself, going beyond it barely by a breath (A breath that, if it is held, saves through song, prophet of pure forces that call out and refuse shelter. Does not everything already in existence paralyse the breath? Imperceptibly occupying the air, preventing its free use, strangling with multiple coils anything still anxious to cross this captive atmosphere.

And anyone who does not go down into the abyss can only repeat and retrace the ways already opened that cover over the trace of the vanished gods. Alone, always alone, the poet runs the risk of moving outside the world and turning over what it opens up until touching the bottom of the bottomless, saying yes to something calling him from beyond the horizon. As he stands abandoned, he retains at most a breath, that first and final energy forgotten until it fails.

Everywhere present, yet invisible, it grants Life to everything and everyone, on pain of death. Risk taken at each moment by the poet, that seeker after the still sacred ether, which today is so covered over or buried that he can trust no heaven or earth, learn his path from no mouth, find no sure direction. For him no place is habitable, since his mission is to reopen a ferial site. Thus he has to leave the world, while yet remaining mortal, go off to some shore that bears no signpost, to love a life assured by none. To achieve this he has no firm ground. He must tear himself away from his native land to plunge his roots into a ground that is virgin, unknown, unpredictable. Free for risk.

He even lets go of that captivating magic that makes men kin to each other, becomes an exile from any will belonging to an existing community, descending into the hell of history to seek traces of life there, seeds still held in unturned subsoil. Seeds to set free, to lay in the air even though they may produce something that has never yet appeared, may give rise to a new blossoming, stripped of protection, of shelter, of home. No veil? To advance into danger is to lay the self bare before any answering confidence has been granted. Here, there is no betrothal, no site. Terror becomes consent to everything, permission for everything that touches, without refusal or withdrawal.

Risk protects anyone who, insensibly, invisibly, moves onward while remaining in his own heart. Who is still alien to existence as one who yields, offers himself freely to the other outside himself and receives himself back in return. Access to a space and a time whose dimensions surpass the stars as well as the imaginary of each conscience. Objective and subjective lose their limits thereby. Each person and all things rest in one another, flow one into the other unconfined. Recollection of a state so ancient that few are capable of it. Crossing the frontiers of their own lives, following far and near, risking their breath, they yield the very rhythm of their breath to the other, agreeing to use the beat of their pulse in order to discover a new amplitude. In this way they expire one into the other, and rise up again inspired. Imperiling that citadel of being, language, so that this woman, that man, can find a voice, a song.

Leaving a temple already consecrated, they seek the traces of the ferial bond with the wholly other being. No longer having words, risking speech itself, they have no anxiety because nothing is calculated, they are strangers to exchange, business, marketplace. They tremble at the coming of that which has been announced, that other breath born to them after all known resonance has been broken, beyond everything that has already been achieved. Beyond the unheard sonority of the watchers who do not venture out into the infinite journey of the invisible. The only guide here is the call to the other, whose breath subtly impregnates the air like a vibration perceptible to these men lost for love. They go on, attentively, boldly moving forward over paths where others see only

shadows and hell. They move forward, and at times a song comes to their lips. From their mouths issue sounds that have no meaning – only the inspiration that will strike the other with the feelings and thoughts that overwhelm them. Responses, mostly inaudible, to what they sense in the wind. They breathe confidently, carefree because they lack the anxiety of their security. They have willed to strip away all structure and rely only upon the attraction they perceive that pulls them beyond all frontiers. They agree to walk where they are borne, as far as the source that gives them themselves, unreservedly attaining all that draws them on and letting it flow out again in the fullness of the gift. In this movement to and fro no dwelling has been built, no shelter set up. This consent and its reward take place without additional protection for those who risk their lives in this way. They do not end up in some enclosure that guarantees they will come to no harm, they are not separated. In rapturous consent, they receive and give themselves in the open.

The way to this strange adventure is found in the renunciation of any path that has already been proposed. Anything that once offered a possible future must be abandoned, turned back, like a limited horizon: a veil that imperceptibly conceals the world facing us. Before the departure, all goals must at the very least be turned upside down, every plan must be upset. Those who dare all make their way without maps as blind men do. Free of the spell that made them afraid to be without a shelter, they yield unrestrainedly to the open, a place where men free from fear can embrace and blossom. Offering every aspect of themselves to straight scrutiny, joining their forces, acting upon one another in the integrity of a perception that has no refusal in the centre of its pure gravity, they say yes, unreservedly, to the whole of the experience to come.

Even to death, as one other face of life? Yes. And to the other as other? Yes? Or is it still a matter of remaining in one's own realm? While accepting the reverse, of course, making the negative a positive, naturally, but always acting in the same way. Once the sphere of application has been extended, there enters into it something that shapes a horizon that turns back into a vast imperceptible film whose outside is endlessly given within, unveiling and reveiling what has been closed up in one site.

Beyond go one to the other those who give up their own will. Beneath every speech made, every word spoken, every point articulated, every rhythm beaten out, they are into the mystery of a word that seeks incarnation. While trusting beyond measure in that which gives flesh to speech: air, breath, song, they reciprocally receive and give something that is still crazy, and are thereby reborn by giving each other the gift of a speech of forgotten inspiration, buried beneath logic and indeed beneath all existing language. This suspension of all meaning unveils the commerce that underlies meaning, and risks going back to a time

when separation had not yet occurred, when there was as yet no attempt to rate this as more valuable than that. In this opacity, this night of the world, they discover the trace of vanished gods, at the very point when they have given up their safety. Light shines on them once they have agreed that nothing shall ensure their protection, not even that age-old citadel of man being – (*être*) – not even that guarantor of the meaning or nonmeaning of the world – God.

These prophets know that if anything divine is still to come our way it will be won abandoning all control, all language, and all sense already produced. It is through risk, only risk, leading no one knows where, announcing who knows what future, secretly commemorating who knows what past. No project here. Only this refusal to refuse what has been perceived, whatever distress or wretchedness may come of it.

These predecessors have no future. They come from the future. In them it is already present. But who hears it? Silently their song irrigates the world of today, of tomorrow, of yesterday. The need for this destiny is never heard clearly, never appears in broad daylight without suffering disfigurement.

But on the breath of one who sings while mingling his inspiration with the divine breath remains unattainable, unlocatable, faceless. Anyone who perceives him starts on the road, obeys the call, goes to encounter nothing, or else something greater than anything we now have.

Luce Irigaray, extract from 'Belief Itself', in *The Religious*, ed. John D. Caputo (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 122–6.

David Morgan
Secret Wisdom and Self-Effacement: The Spiritual in the Modern Age//1996

[...] My world crumbles before the looming prospect of a reality that threatens to replace the foundations of the familiar. My sense of order is jumbled, my status called into question, whatever I took to be certain may be thrown into doubt. This experience of the liminal may be configured as transcendence or as transformation. The two should not be confused. Transcendence posits a mystery present in the work of art as the encounter with a metaphysical order beyond or hidden within the ordinary, sensuous world. Transformation, on the other hand, confronts enigma in the work, the disturbing sense that the world is not right. Theodor Adorno spoke of the enigmatic aspect of artworks as their fragmentary character, their status as damaged, less than whole, or incomplete. We might say injured with the wound of violation. If the sublime and the contemplative experience in idealist thought were aimed at union with the divine, elevation to a mystical wholeness, and identity with the cosmic all – that is, transcendence as such – transformation consists of change in the sublunar world alone. One thinks of Freud's transposition of the Schopenhauerian *Wille* into the psychological domain of the Id or It; the result was to eliminate platonic dualism from the aesthetic act and confine expression to the operation of symbolic transformation. Enigma cancels the metaphysical contract with the holy that any conception of the sacred must presuppose. But the fragmentary is not without hope. It makes space in which to live by refusing to say everything, by resisting completion and presence. In this very absence it affirms the utopian possibility of the world as it ought to be.

In the case of the transcendent, the mystery is what promises to unveil itself in the wake of the apocalyptic passing of reality. With the enigma, the self faces its limit, envisions the end of worlds in order to escape their tyranny. Transformation means the rupture of the ordinary domains and patterns of authority, the dense cityscape of *doxa* that conduct the traffic of thought. Transformation portends the possibility of an alternative self and social order, while enigma preserves a radical open-endedness, vigorously resists perfection in the sense of ontological completion or metaphysical resolution. But in either mystery or enigma, transcendence or transformation, something must die in order for something new to live. Death and rebirth and their dialectic of conflict are the characteristic moments of the human self and the principal features of spirituality and its artistic evocation.

If art is to perform a truly transformative task, it must address a world, the place where people dwell, the set of stories that collectively interpret human existence in a peculiar way. The work may call this system into question or broaden its horizon. The Faustian and the kenotic approach transformation in different ways. The first would change the world by the mystical power of art as a world-symbol, whereas the second presumes to change the individual viewer and therefore the viewer's relation to and perception of the world. Both avenues have been pursued by the avant-garde. Rooted in the aesthetics of empathy and the sublime, which tend to regard artistic value as a state of mind rather than an objective affair, the theory of the avant-garde broadly holds that to change consciousness is to change social reality and the public life of humanity. [...]

The spiritual in art in the modern age has worked frequently along two axes. First, by nurturing a sense of the enigmatic, a profound skepticism, a sensibility of suspicion, but one that is nonetheless prepared to hope. This is the *via negativa*, the artistic avenue expressing the kenotic impulse. Second is the *via*

positiva, the Faustian way – the theurgy of Beuys' utopian art or the opaque theosophies of Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian in which the artist acts as a visionary genius whose creative works expand human consciousness and prompt an epoch's spiritual development. Buried deep in the modernist project is a commitment to progress conceived in this manner. The crisis in the second half of the twentieth century has consisted largely of the loss of faith in this notion of progressive cultural and social evolution. The question central in the minds of many artists, critics and art historians in the late twentieth century in light of the loss of this faith is simply: does art still possess the power to speak to the culture about things that matter? Can the apophatic method break free of a system of exchange that makes art a commodity?

The strategy of much avant-garde art, like the mystic's path to illumination, has been to strip away the accretions and conventions of culture as if they were barnacles adhering to the hull of pure art. Progress along this path of negation has been measured by mounting acts of iconoclasm. Art since the Second World War is often fixed on plunging into the wilderness of negation, where it divests itself of cultural illusions, the *maya* of artistic hype and self-promotion. Chief among the cultural constructions to be dismantled is the artist. Bruce Nauman seems deeply skeptical about the prospect of the artist as a revealer of spiritual truths. Consider the gaudy neon spiral advertising the artist's craft of revelation, as if hawking mystic truths in the hubbub of the cultural marketplace, or his window piece called *The True Artist Is an Amazing Luminous Fountain*, a thin layer of transparent Mylar through which we look upon the world outside, filtered through the artist's statement. Nauman mixes the Albertian metaphor of the painting as a window with the romantic figure of the artist as a generative source, suggesting that both belong to a rhetoric that is bankrupt. But his dissatisfaction does not end with the rhetoric of art. Nauman probes the very metaphysic of matter and spirit. *Room with My Soul Left Out, Room That Does Not Care* constructs a Euclidean space through which the body passes, mapped out in a matrix of perpendicular axes, as if such a contraption could trap the soul, trace it over space and time, exposing it to the manipulative visual hunger of the viewer. Such voyeuristic emplotment of the soul recalls a pornographic film apparatus: pay your dime and watch the lady dance.

Still, in a world in which people regularly move in and out of apartments, christening each new space with the rituals of identity that involve cleaning, redecorating, displaying one's things – in a world in which we construct our identity with the clothes we wear and the space in which we dwell, rooms *ought* to care. The new space is appropriated, made to conform to the idea of one's presence such that the space becomes one's own place, the locus and womb of personal identity. Our rooms house an ecology of the self, a niche or cultural habitat to which we belong. As the first orbit of the world around the nucleus of the ego, the dwelling space becomes the immediate expression of the self, the index of the body encoded in the configuration of furniture, the storage of clothing and utensils, the shuffle of everything that does not stay in its place. Hegel gave philosophical expression to this anthropocentric ideal and linked it directly to the creation of art:

> The universal and absolute need out of which art, on its formal side, arises has its source in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit for *himself*, that which he is, and, generally, whatever is. The things of nature are only *immediate and single*, but man as mind *reduplicates* himself, inasmuch as prima facie he is like the things of nature, but in the second place just as really is *for* himself, perceives himself, has ideas of himself, thinks himself, and only thus is active self-realizedness.[1]

According to Hegel, human self-consciousness unfolds in theoretical and practical activity. In the latter case, the human being achieves self-consciousness 'by the modification of external things upon which he impresses the seal of his inner being, and then finds repeated in them his own characteristics. Man does this in order as a free subject to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness, and to enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a mere external reality of himself.' But this empathic imperative is disturbing. Nauman, and for his part Bill Viola no less, set out not to demolish human spirituality but to dismantle the tenacious cultural edifice of anthropocentric projection, the imperialism of homo sapiens in constructing a world-artifice that is the comfortable mirror of the being enthroned in the centre. [...]

1 G.W.F. Hegel, *On Art, Religion, Philosophy*, ed. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970) 57–8.

David Morgan, extract from 'Secret Wisdom and Self-Effacement: The Spiritual in the Modern Age', in *Negotiating Rapture: The Power of Art to Transform Lives* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) 41–2; 43–5.

Jean Fisher
The Echoes of Enchantment//1996

[...] Any speech act is both limited by the horizon of possibility of existing knowledge, and, as an expression of an individuated psychosocial history, a potential erasure of, or challenge to, those limits, capable of opening a space to 'unauthorized' realities. Psychosocial conflict and the eruption of the real into consciousness are universal human experiences, although their intensity, objects and interpretations must be conditioned by the depth of that horizon, by the particularities of what a society deems is permissible to speak and what, in turn, it strives to conceal as the unsayable. Our own circumstances, therefore, are not such that we should expect ordinarily to find them expressed in the language of religious faith. The mystic trajectory may however find an analogy with the creative process since it too is an attempt to speak against the grain of inherited assumptions about existence. As an example I want to mention here the work of two artists, Yves Klein and Susan Hiller, which connects rather directly, albeit in very different ways, to mystic speech.

That Klein's work links to the mystic tradition is made explicit by the artist himself in his performance/photograph *Leap into the Void* (1960) and perhaps also in the blue body imprints of his female models, which suggest an 'embodiment' of the metaphysical union of flesh with the infinite. Among the commentaries on Klein's work, few of which address this, Maurizio Calvesi tells us that

> All his researches comprise none other than an organic utopian philosophy. A true attempt to construct his own universe, or better, in his own words, 'a new humanism', whose origins and key lie in esoteric religion and the alchemical mystery of theosophy. Klein's philosophy was never simply the result of research but of a sudden drunkenness or rapture, which changed his behaviour and work and, in the last analysis, his life. It has the appearance of Saint Paul struck by lightning on the road to Damascus.[1]

Klein, a devout Catholic, spent time occasionally at the convent of Santa Rita da Cascia, the Protector of Desperate and Hopeless Causes. In 1979, seventeen years after Klein's death, a painter employed by the convent to restore the Basilica asked the nuns if they had a spare piece of gold leaf. Not knowing its aesthetic significance, the nuns presented a casket containing gold ingots and coloured pigments which turned out to be an *ex voto* donated by Klein to the convent. In a separate compartment of the box was a handwritten seven-part dedication to Santa Rita, which, in its intoxicated garrulousness, oscillating between the base and the elevated, the finite and the infinite, echoes the language of desire:

> – The BLUE, the GOLD, the PINK, the IMMATERIAL, the VOID, the architecture of the air, the urban planning of the air, the air-conditioning of the great geographical spaces for a return to a human life in nature, in the Paradisiac state of legend. These three fine gold ingots are the product of the sale of the 4 ZONES OF IMMATERIAL PAINTING SENSIBILITY – Under the earthly care of Santa Rita da Cascia: the Pictorial Sensibility, the monochromes, the I.K.B.s, the sponge sculptures, the immaterial, the static anthropometrical imprints, positive, negative and in movement, the shrouds, the Fountains of Fire, of Water and Fire, – the architecture of the air, the urbanism of the air, the air-conditioning of geographic spaces thus transformed into constant Gardens of Eden rediscovered on the surface of our globe – the Void. – Santa Rita da Cascia, Saint of impossible and desperate causes, thanks be to you for all the powerful, decisive and marvellous help which you have granted me so far – I thank you with all my heart. Even if I am personally not worthy to receive it grant me your aid again and always in my heart and protect everything that I have created so that, despite my unworthiness, it will always be of great beauty.[2]

Klein's simple but elegant presentation of the sheer vibrancy of colour and light through the raw materiality of pigment and gold is one of the clearest attempts in art to evoke that transformative immateriality, that fugitive moment of lightness and ecstasy, to which mystic speech so often refers.

One evening, while staying in the village of Loupien, near Sète in France, Susan Hiller picked up a blue pencil and began to make random marks on a blank sheet of drawing paper. Lost for seven years, the pages of script reappeared in 1979, and from them the artist made *Sisters of Menon*, first as a set of framed and annotated panels arranged in a cruciform (1979), and later as a book (1983). *Sisters of Menon* was the beginning of the artist's involvement in 'automatic writing', practised by psychic mediums to 'get in touch' with the dead and by the Surrealists to 'get in touch' with unconscious processes. Yet it becomes clear that Susan Hiller's involvement in 'automatic writing' has little to do with either 'magic' or revelations of modernism's autonomous creative self, but rather with processes of creative thought, of which the work of art is their 're-embodiment'. In *Sisters of Menon* the script appears alphabetic although the opacity of its 'message' resists any 'reasoned' interpretation. Alien to work characteristic of the artist at that time, the script appears with all the rhythm of an incantation or song:

> who is this one/ I am this one/ Menon is Menon is this one/ you are this one/last night we were 3 sisters now we are 4 sisters/you are the sister of Menon/ we are 3 sisters/we live on the air in the water/Menon/ we three sisters are your sister/ this is the nothing that we are/ the riddle is the sister of the zero

What is the 'riddle' that is answered, albeit in cryptic form, even as it is posed? 'Menon' resonates with auditory puns, anagrams and metonymies: nomen, no men, me non, mais non, no name, one and no one ... Subjectivity would seem to be framed as a *paradox*, an affirmative-negative: I am ... we are ... nothing. Hence in its self-effacing movement, the one who writes is not only the 'I am ...', named 'Menon', of the utterance, it is heterogeneous, it multiplies, it lacks gravity or boundedness ('we live on the air in the water'). 'I' moves in the rhythmic, limitless time-space of the other; but the 'nothing' that 'I/we/you are' is not simply nothing; it is the place from which writing comes into being. As with the mystic narrative, the will to substantiate the movement of desire is not metaphorical; as Achille Bonito Oliva has pointed out, 'art is a metonymical practice of desire, a progressive shift of a poisoned vision'.[3]

This is not to say that 'writing' or the image of art bears any easily determinable relation to the repressed signifier. Since the emergence of the latter is subject to resistance it must be refracted and disguised through a relay of substitutes bound into a discursive field, substitutes which, nonetheless, will always bear the traces of its presence.

Art that is sustained primarily by the experience of the maker, whose struggle is with the very impossibility of language, or representation, to produce a meaningful account of the self's existence in its world – in contradistinction to visual production which is content, however artfully, to establish meanings or to reaffirm existing ones – suffers, like mystic speech, from a problem of legitimacy. As Michel de Certeau says of the mystic text:

> Deprived of the legitimacy that would be given it by a social status (hierarchical, professional, etc.), the author presents himself in the name of what speaks within him: the Real ... But he still has to show that he is indeed in the very place from which he is presumed to speak. He must, by his text itself, make what founds his text believable.[4]

Neither is the writing of the autobiographical in itself any guarantee of an escape from the determinations of the symbolic order that would reveal an 'authentic' self. It is not a question here of any such authenticity. In so far as the unconscious – that which is conventionally understood as the most intimate to the self – is, by

Freud's own account, profoundly social in its formation, then identity is the image of the other; one is always inscribed by the other. At the same time, the disparity between the image of the self constructed through inherited discourses and its own sense of existence exposes an inherent indeterminacy of language; something like an excess of signifiers in the semantic field unable to fix or stabilise identity. It is nevertheless through this field of multiple possibilities, infused with 'sense' but absent of meaning, where the phantasms of unconscious desire interface with the pressures of conscious thought, that the self ceaselessly dialogues with itself to find a sense of coherence. It is also therefore the field of the imagination where the self finds the potential for transformation: if there is no 'authentic' self then what is already an inscription can always be reinscribed, differently. Here, perhaps, we might find the workings of the creative process.

The language of desire of both aesthetic and mystic practice, in order to be heard, must, then, in some way found a place from which to speak, to find a way of using language even while it may at the same time put it in crisis. A fiction is established. Like Alfred Hitchcock's 'MacGuffin', it has no meaning outside the significance given it by the protagonists; but it functions as the *pretext* that sets the narrative in motion. [...]

In visual art the fiction is the 'veil', which, again, means 'nothing' in itself since, surely, what it conceals is no more than art's own fictionality. Its value for the perceiver lies in its power to activate and organize the movement of desire: in our desire to know what is behind it, imaginative thought and knowledge are engendered. Hence, knowledge is not discovered in the object, but in the process of the search, and the search can only proceed from the feeling that something 'lost' must be recovered. What might this be if not the sense of a 'lost' unity of the self? And yet, if the language of art seeks to imagine unity it can only discover its impossibility, becoming, in effect, an 'affirmation of alterity'.[5] The veil of art emerges through a compelling materiality, a spatial dynamics of the work of thought on matter, already a transcription of a transcription of the movement of desire, that struggles to move outward from the self to the other (and in this sense art is social). But the resonance that emanates from this echo of an image, in the interstices of the language of art, is neither that of the maker nor the viewer, but a third: a scene for 'communication'. It is within this ineffable space that I am, in turn, captivated by an affectivity that is immediate not mediated.

This is why the artwork cannot be apprehended in reproduction. It is a space that is sensuous, thick with sense, with an indeterminacy that nonetheless carries the potential to invoke several possible meanings. Unable to map myself as a coherent self within the work's multiple coordinates, I am set adrift in uncertainty. Words fail me. I am struck dumb. I 'lose' my ego-self; time seems suspended and I am discharged into the non-time of a free-floating reminiscence.

Is this the ecstasy of which the mystics wrote? Perhaps, but I have no way of knowing. In any case, it is a moment in which I am caught up in the sonorous tones of the infinite: something felt or heard, but not seen. In this moment my body is reappropriated, reinscribed by the language of the other. It surrenders, with a sense of lightness and release, or a diabolical laughter, to an alterity in which the play of desire is unbound from the constraints of the everyday to pursue what it will never know. It is to this irreconcilable distance between self and other that art's scene of communication alludes: what it 'communicates' is the pathos of incommunicability, an interiority that is an infinite exteriority. However, it is a scene in which the realization of the unknowable frees language into the energy fields of phantasy and imagination, where new intuitions of hitherto unthought realities may be intimated. And this, perhaps, is the nature of its enchantment.

> ... ecstasy is, it seems, communication, which is opposed to the 'turning in on oneself' of which I have spoken ... But we reach ecstasy by a contestation of knowledge. Were I to stop at ecstasy and grasp it, in the end I would define it. But nothing resists the contestation of knowledge and I have seen at the end that the idea of communication itself leaves naked – not knowing anything ... I remain in intolerable non-knowledge, which has no other way out than ecstasy.[6]
> – Georges Bataille

1 [footnote 14 in source] M. Calvesi, 'Klein's Utopia', in *Arte e Creazione* (January/February 1968); trans. Stella Santacatterina.

2 [15] Yves Klein, extract of inscription in the *ex voto* to Santa Rita da Cascia, reproduced in Pierre Restany, *Yves Klein e la mistica di Santa Rita da Cascia* (Milan: Editoriale Domus/Monastero S. Rita da Cascia, 1981).

3 [16] Achille Bonito Oliva, 'Organo/Obliquo', in *Passo dello strabismo sulle arti* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1978).

4 [17] Michel de Certeau, 'The Institution of Speech', in *The Mystic Fable, vol. I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1982); trans. Michael Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

5 [18] Achille Bonito Oliva, 'Il comportamento mancato. Il senso di colpa, la morte, il suicido', in *Passo dello strabismo sulle arti*, op. cit., 35.

6 [19] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* (1943); trans. Leslie Anne Boldt, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Jean Fisher, extract from 'The Echoes of Enchantment', in *Inside the Visible* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996); reprinted in Jean Fisher, *Vampire in the Text: Narratives of Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003) 184–7.

Anish Kapoor
Interview with Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton//1990

Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton Some people would hold that aesthetic experience is transcendent, and others that transcendence is only possible through religious Grace.

Anish Kapoor In those terms I can understand that Yves Klein might have needed to jump into the void.

Guyton Let's talk about the void.

Kapoor Void is really a state within. It has a lot to do with fear, in Oedipal terms, but more so, with darkness. There is nothing so black as the black within. No blackness is as black as that. I am aware of the phenomenological presence of the Void works but I am also aware that phenomenological experience on its own is insufficient. I find myself coming back to the idea of narrative without storytelling, to that which allows one to bring in psychology, fear, death and love in as direct a way as possible. This void is not something which is of no utterance. It is a potential space, not a non-space.

Guyton *Void Field* and *Angel* in the recent Lisson Gallery [London] show seemed to operate as an installation, not as two separate works. There is something very strange about *Angel* because the blue makes it an illusory image but at the same time the slate is clearly a heavy lump. There is a dialectic between the image and the solid material presence. And the blocks of *Void Field* have such an obdurate physical presence and yet one realizes they are hollow.

Kapoor My intention was to make a work which was simply about mass and no-mass. In the hollowed stones of *Void Field I* was trying to suggest the idea of sky which is contained in earth. *Angel* represents another transformation: earth to sky. They also relate to the earlier powder works, which refer to another basic opposition: male to female. Given the kind of conjunction they were in at the Lisson Gallery, *Void Field* and *Angel* did operate as one work. They were about transfiguration. This is an essential theme.

Guyton A Christian theme?

Kapoor Well, yes, it is Christian, but I think it is a central part of any philosophy. Most religions have some notion of transfiguration of body into spirit. There are alchemical parallels which take their root from Christianity and Judaism; but I think there are equally clear Buddhist and Hindu parallels. It is also the central image of Islam. In Mecca, the 'kaaba' is a cube with a meteorite at its centre.

Guyton A node, a fulcrum of energy?

Kapoor Exactly. Also there is a relationship, just in terms of form, between the cube and the cosmos, the man-made and the celestial. But one has to lay aside mysticism; that is something which is a private world; one doesn't wear it on one's sleeve. What is important however, is the idea that the works are manifestations, signs of a state of being.

Guyton A state of flux?

Kapoor Exactly, as metaphors for a state of becoming.

Guyton So nothing is fixed, nothing has a positive identity: nothing can be read as a symbol?

Kapoor I try to avoid that. Notions about illusion are quite central. This is where I have a curious overlap with painting, in that the space of painting is the space of illusion. I seem to be making sculpture about the space beyond, illusory space. [...]

Anish Kapoor and Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton, extract from interview in *Anish Kapoor. British Pavilion . XLIV Venice Biennale* (London: The British Council, 1990) 44–6.

Shirazeh Houshiary
Interview with Stella Santacatterina//1994

Stella Santacaterina Who is an artist?

Shirazeh Houshiary An artist is someone who is capable of unveiling the invisible, not a producer of art objects. The figure of the artist is very similar to that of the alchemist who transforms base metal into gold: an artist is someone who can put her or himself into a 'transforming' dimension. The prime mechanism for this transformation is distancing oneself: the further we go away from ourselves, the more space we leave for what exists above us. Art uncovers a reality which is in the world, but which in some ways is also beyond the world. The object and the image which the artist creates have their place in the external world, but their essence and meaning are conceived in an inner world, and this internal world is an intermediate space between body and soul; the seat of the imagination is the soul. So that the finished work is a real experience in a state of continual becoming. Art-making is subject to a movement of ascension and descension, it is not born of the body, but becomes it.

Santacatterina What are the aesthetic qualities that, in your opinion, distinguish art from what is not art?

Houshiary The aesthetic quality (beauty, mystery, truth) is not in the forms, but outside them. We could say that wherever we meet imagination, we are faced with ambiguity. Above all, when we are in front of a work of art, we lose a sense of time; art is timeless. The quality of art is outside the historicist dimension – to see the evolution of art through chronological time is a requirement of art historians and critics, but it has never been intrinsic to art. There is no relationship between development and progress, as is emphasized in the American modernist tradition. Art reveals another reality.

Santacatterina What is the difference between invention and creation?

Houshiary Creation has a divine origin, while invention belongs to knowledge (etymologically, it means finding what already exists); there can be invention without creation and vice versa. I believe that art has its origins in creation. Indeed, in my work there is a continual invention of already existing forms and symbols precisely because the problem is not to be original, nor indeed to

establish a distinction between forms of knowledge, between East and West. If we want to be more precise, we could say that the mysticism of eastern poetry is similar to ancient mysticism, to Platonic and Heraclitan philosophy. There is a kinship between Sufi symbols and Greek symbols, as for example in the Sufi theme of the nocturnal 'butterfly' hurling itself into the flame of the torch, and the Greek myth which makes the 'butterfly' the symbol of the soul, presenting Psyche in the form of a 'butterfly', caught by Eros and burnt by a torch. But as I was saying earlier, the germ of creation lies in the imagination and not in forms; form becomes creation only if it establishes itself through the surprising and mysterious epiphany of a deep and necessary meaning, in other words, as a truth which had not previously been uncovered.

Santacatterina What does the mystical dimension mean for you?

Houshiary The mystical dimension is when knowledge is not used to construct the self as identity in terms of nationality, cultural context or gender, but to go beyond the self, where the reality of daily life is forgotten or rendered dormant. Those identities become a barrier blocking our access to the inner self; which is the place of the imagination. Daily life reality is a place of closedness, whilst imagination is one of openness. Here being is a continuous becoming – it is being as becoming. In other words, it is the moment of extreme consciousness.

Santacatterina What has to be transcended in the process towards this moment of extreme consciousness?

Houshiary All this work ultimately is about knowing who I am. Who I am is the central question ...

Santacatterina ... outside what you know ...

Houshiary Exactly, this is the only question there is.

Shirazeh Houshiary and Stella Santacaterina, extract from interview translated from Italian by Judith Landry, in *Third Text*, no. 27 (Summer 1994); reprinted in *Shirazeh Houshiary: Isthmus* (Grenoble: Magasin – Centre national d'art contemporain, 1995) 111–12; 121.

Bill Viola
The Crossing//1996

A large double-sided projection screen stands in the middle of the room, its bottom edge resting on the floor. Two video projectors mounted at opposite ends of the room project images onto the front and back sides of the screen simultaneously, showing a single action involving a human figure culminating in a violent annihilation by the opposing natural forces of fire and water.

On one side of the screen, a human form slowly approaches from a great distance through a dark space. The figure gradually becomes more distinct, and we soon recognize a man walking straight toward us, all the time becoming larger. When his body almost fills the frame, he stops moving and stands still, staring directly at the viewer in silence. A small votive flame appears at his feet. Suddenly, brilliant orange flames rise up and quickly spread across the floor and up onto his body. A loud roaring sound fills the space as his form rapidly becomes completely engulfed by a violent raging fire. The fire soon subsides until only a few small flickering flames remain on a charred floor. The figure of the man is gone. The image returns to black and the cycle repeats anew.

On the other side, we again see a dark human form approaching. He slowly moves toward us out of the shadows, in the same manner as the other figure. Finally, he too stops and stares, motionless and silent. Suddenly, a stream of silver-blue water begins pouring onto his head, sending luminous trails of splashing droplets off in all directions. The stream quickly turns into a raging torrent as a massive amount of water cascades from above, completely inundating the man as a loud roaring sound fills the space. The falling water soon begins to subside and it trails off, leaving few droplets falling on a wet floor. The figure of the man is gone. The image then returns to black and the cycle repeats anew.

The two complementary actions appear simultaneously on the two sides of the screen, and the viewer must move around the space to see both images. The image sequences are timed to play in perfect synchronization, with the approach and the culminating conflagration and deluge occurring simultaneously, energizing the space with a violent raging crescendo of intense images and roaring sound. The two traditional natural elements of fire and water appear here not only in their destructive aspects, but manifest their cathartic, purifying, transformative, and regenerative capacities as well. In this way, self-annihilation becomes a necessary means to transcendence and liberation.

Bill Viola, 'The Crossing' (1996), in *Bill Viola* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1998) n.p.

Lynn M. Herbert
Spirit and Light and the Immensity Within//1998

In the beginning, there was light, simply light. For followers of the Bible, the words 'Let there be light' marked the beginning of everything. Science tells us that light initiated life on earth; plants and animals could not exist without it. Whatever one's philosophical inclination, light is intrinsic to our physical and spiritual selves. It gives us the power of vision so that looking and consequent 'seeing' is possible. Because the evolution of human intelligence is primarily based on information we have gathered through vision, light has come to mean illumination and enlightenment, a possession of the mind. Not only does it reveal what is around us, it also makes known that which is inside us. That illumination is often spiritual in nature, applied both to God as the source of divine light and to individuals who manifest it.

Like the air we breathe, we take light for granted. It is so fundamental to our being that we don't tend to dwell on it. And yet, it is light's elemental nature that gives it the potential to be so powerfully enlightening. Art historian Rudolph Arnheim has noted:

> Light is one of the revealing elements of life ... It is the most spectacular experience of the senses, an apparition properly celebrated, worshipped and implored in early religious ceremonies. But as its powers over the practice of daily living become sufficiently familiar, it is threatened with falling into oblivion. It remains for the artist and the occasional poetical moods of the common man to preserve the access to the wisdom that can be gained from the contemplation of light.[1]

James Turrell is just such an artist. His medium is light – not paintings that depict light, not sculpture that incorporates light, but simply light itself. Turrell taps into the light that greets us when we flip an electrical switch or turn on a television, the light from headlights and neon signs all around us at night, the light that each day rises in the east and sets in the west, and the light that glimmers in far away stars. Turrell's particular gift is in affording us the opportunity to have a unique and intimate experience with light and to feel its transcendent power.

Just where does that transcendence lead us? Words like 'grace', 'revelation', 'rapture', 'numinous', 'primordial', 'empyrean', and 'sublime' have all been applied to Turrell's work. As the grandness of such words implies, Turrell's work explores our connection to the universe. He takes us to this intense and lofty realm in a confoundingly simple way: he allows us to *see* ourselves *seeing*.

William Blake once wrote: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'[2] Turrell's work enables us to see through those doors of perception; light enables him to engage perception as a medium. There are no objects in the traditional sense – perception itself becomes his object as he pares his works down to an essence. Avoiding 'associative, symbolic thought', he wants us to look at looking. As such, viewing one of Turrell's works is an intensely personal experience. It is direct, not vicarious: you are seeing light as you've never seen it before through your body's only windows onto the brain, your eyes. With no object, no subject or symbol, viewing becomes a primal experience. Science, religion and art history are forced to take a back seat to primitive visual intelligence. [...]

For many, viewing Turrell's work leads to thoughts about the spirit and religion. Religion has become an unwelcome word in critical discourse about contemporary art – and unfairly so. It has fallen victim to those who would narrowly define it as being part of this or that specific ideological group or institution when, in fact, religion is defined as an *individual's* recognition of some higher unseen power. As a former Episcopalian priest once put it, one doesn't get 'religion' in a church any more than one gets 'education' at a university.[3] William James, a noted scholar in the psychology and philosophy of religion, once wrote that: 'the great world, the background, in all of us, is the world of our beliefs.'[4] James' definition of religion is instructive: 'Religion, whatever it is, is a man's total reaction upon life.'[5] It is 'the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine'.[6]

James had high praise for George Fox, the founder of the Quaker religion: 'The Quaker religion ... is something which it is impossible to overpraise. In a day of shams, it was a religion of veracity rooted in spiritual inwardness, and a return to something more like the original gospel truth than men had ever known in England.'[7] Turrell's parents were Quakers and he grew up in a home where that influence was felt. In a Quaker meeting, the individual seeks greater awareness by looking inward (as opposed to, say, listening to a sermon). Meetings are silent to allow for this quiet, still, soul-searching contemplation. Turrell has spoken of how Quakers go inside to greet the light of revelation: 'This is going into meditation and waiting for the light to come. That is something that I worked with from a very young age, and this has many connotations too. It has to do with spirit, spirituality, thought.'[8]

For centuries, 'divine light' has streamed through stained glass into the interiors of churches. A person who comes from the outside into the relative darkness of a cathedral such as Chartres is struck by the light pouring through the coloured glass. Such an experience intentionally underlines the difference

between the inside and the outside. Turrell has talked of the experience of going into certain cathedrals and how the light has taken his breath away: 'sometimes that feeling connects me much better with the fullness or oneness of the universe than anything anybody says.'[9] In Quaker culture, the symbolism traditionally found in the narrative stained-glass images is not allowed. Spirituality instead flourishes in a very simple setting. Plainness and economy of means are considered virtues. These characteristics of the Quaker tradition go hand in hand with Turrell's work, which is pared down, direct and quiet, and he acknowledges being influenced by the Quaker 'straightforward, strict presentation of the sublime'.[10] [...]

In 1988 and 1989, Turrell designed a series of architectural models for Ganzfelds and sky spaces. They reflect his interest in a variety of cultures and approaches to spirituality. His sky spaces are oculi to the sky, like the Pantheon in Rome, a sanctuary built for *all* gods. In the Pantheon, the sky seems remote and far away, placed high in a lofty dome, whereas Turrell's sky spaces bring the sky down to us. In *Meeting* (1986), a sky space installed at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, New York, viewers sit on pew-like benches along the perimeter of a square chamber and can look up and see the sky framed directly overhead, relatively close at hand. Describing the idea behind this work, Turrell has said: 'The sky would no longer be out there, away from us, but in close contact. This plumbing of visual space through the conscious act of moving, feeling out through the eyes, became analogous to a physical journey of self as a flight of the soul through the planes.'[11] As in a Quaker meeting (after which the piece is named), viewers must have patience and commit to a sustained period of contemplation to reap the full reward. At sunrise or sunset, times when the sky experiences a dramatic change, viewers can watch the sky go from a light blue to an intense vibrant blue, to a sensuous velvety black, and vice versa. [...]

In the 1960s, Turrell was linked with a number of artists working in Southern California who were exploring light and perception. Given the moniker 'Light and Space Artists', these artists were offered an opportunity to pursue ambitious ideas when the Los Angeles County Museum of Art launched its 'Art and Technology' programme that paired artists with pre-eminent scientists. Turrell joined fellow artist Robert Irwin in a collaboration with Dr Edward Wortz, a perceptual psychologist at Garrett Aerospace Corporation. At the time, Wortz was investigating the perceptual consequences of space travel for NASA. Though nothing concrete ever materialized from the collaboration, Turrell, who had studied perceptual psychology in school, emerged with a refined mission and a set of ideas that he has been exploring ever since in his various bodies of work. Irwin, whose work was often compared to Turrell's, tended to make objects that dissolved into light, while Turrell chose simply to use light itself.

Turrell's work is often linked to the work of Minimalist artists as well. He is an admirer of Minimalism's direct, unconfused style and clarity. In the mid 1960s, Tony DeLap and John McCracken were among Turrell's teachers at graduate school, and they, like Donald Judd and Robert Morris, were engaged in making minimalist sculpture. They, however, were dealing with substantive and unyielding mass, while Turrell's perceptual volumes, such as *Afrum-Proto*, were immaterial. Even in the work of Dan Flavin, a minimalist sculptor whose work incorporates light, the physicality of the fluorescent tubes and their hardware remains an integral part of the whole.

Works such as *Amba* (1968) and *Milk Run II* (1997) illustrate that Turrell is in some ways more closely aligned to painters such as Mark Rothko and Agnes Martin. *Milk Run II* is what Turrell calls a 'wedge work' The name stems from a flight term, 'wedging', which refers to the differentiation of vision caused by water vapour and other conditions when one flies into a weather front.[12] In his wedge works, light is projected at an angle across the viewing space in a manner that produces three different qualities of opaque, translucent and transparent light. Yukito Tanaka has explained: 'This type of input to the visual perception system at a lower level forces emotional and cognitive completion at a higher level.'[13] Like a Rothko painting, *Milk Run II's* mystical colours and luminosity create a feeling of tranquility tinged with anxiety; the atmospheric glow and sfumato of the suspended planes somehow hover in space.

Amba adds a new dimension to Josef Albers' investigations into colour interaction as well as to Barnett Newman's mystical 'zip'.[14] Two rectangles of projected white light overlap, and the resulting central vertical column is so bright that it appears to step forward into three-dimensionality, the whites on either side of it paling in comparison. Martin's paintings have found a similar resonance in subtlety and simplicity. Turrell has said, 'I want to create an atmosphere ... that can be consciously plumbed with seeing, like the wordless thought that comes from looking in a fire.'[15] Martin has equated the wordless thought that attends looking at her work more directly to the landscape: 'When people go to the ocean, they like to see it all day ... . Anyone who can sit on a stone in a field awhile can see my painting.'[16]

The landscape has often served as a point of departure for painters seeking the sublime. The American Luminist painters of the nineteenth century thought that spiritual awareness could be enhanced by looking at paintings of the American landscape bathed in a natural (read Divine) light. Viewers of such paintings, though, must settle for experiencing the 'light' vicariously. Martin's and Rothko's works bring viewers closer, but Turrell places viewers right in direct contact with the 'light'.

Since the early 1970s, Turrell has worked at the creation of a celestial observatory in a spectacular natural setting. In 1977, he found an extinct

volcanic cinder-cone north of Flagstaff, Arizona – the Roden Crater. The *Roden Crater Project* brings together ideas that Turrell has worked on throughout his career. It is so grand, so visionary, that one can't help but associate it with the likes of Stonehenge and other primitive observatories. Through the centuries these structures have served as touchstones to humankind's ingenuity and to its hunger for knowledge and an understanding of the universe and our place in it.

The Roden Crater is one of hundreds of craters in the San Francisco volcanic field. Situated near the Grand Canyon and the Painted Desert, it is a site where, as Turrell has pointed out, 'you feel geologic time'.[17] The sky at the crater site is particularly theatrical and vivid. Sunrises and sunsets present ranges of colour unimaginable to the uninitiated, and the night sky is overwhelmingly resplendent with stars and planets. In this part of the United States, the sky can be seen at its most glorious.

Many of Turrell's works, including the space-division pieces, sky spaces and wedge works, have in some respects been studies for chambers to be built inside Roden Crater. Scheduled to open at the start of the millenium, the observatory will include a series of tunnels and chambers that look to different portions of the sky and present different events. You will be able to watch the movement of the North Star, see a detailed image of the moon via a pinhole camera, view wedge works and Ganzfelds formed by natural light, see the light of Jupiter, and observe much more, all with the naked eye. You will even be able to listen to the music of the spheres in a pool of water that picks up signals from quasars and distant galaxies. As Turrell explains, 'some of the events will occur daily, some semiannually, equidistant from the solstices, and others will be very infrequent.'[18]

Emerging from the tunnels and chambers to the rim of the crater, one will experience a phenomenon called 'celestial vaulting' in which the eye sees the sky as a dome rather than as a flat expanse. With this vision of the heavens embracing one overhead, the feeling is very much as if one were standing on the edge of the earth, close to the sky.

At Roden Crater, Turrell is at last working with a natural, curvilinear, irregular space rather than the rectilinear spaces he created to conform with (and disappear into) man-made spaces like museums and galleries. Because he is an artist working outdoors in the American west, many consider Turrell's *Roden Crater Project* to be the climax of the Earthwork movement. Unlike such artists as Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson, however, Turrell will inscribe a mark in the ground that is barely perceptible. His stamp of creation will not have been any noticeable alteration of the Roden Crater's terrain; rather it will have been to forge a direct and unforgettable link through the sky with the greater universe beyond. Rather than being ephemeral, it will be timeless. Turrell has noted:

> The crater's spaces will be filled with starlight. For me, this has a very elegant quality because there are stars that are billions of years old and there is starlight that's fairly recent, maybe only twenty light years old. Other starlight has taken millions or billions of light years to get there. So you can mix this light of different ages, which has a physical presence, which speaks of its time.[19] [...]

With the simplest of means, Turrell enables us to experience transcendence and to discover that, as philosopher Gaston Bachelard has written, 'Immensity is within ourselves'.[20] Turrell once called himself an 'intranaut', someone who explores inner space instead of outer space. In Carl Sagan's fictional account of what the spiritual consequences of discovering more about the universe might be, when the chosen astronaut ventures into outer space and witnesses the glorious light of the great beyond, her first words are, 'They should have sent a poet.'[21] Turrell's sublime is compounded as we observe ourselves seeing. He allows us to look at light in such a way that we can see into ourselves through to the universe beyond. [...]

1 Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964) 245.

2 William Blake, quoted in Jane Livingston, 'Robert Irwin/James Turrell', *Art & Technology: A Report on the Art & Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art 1967–1971* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art/New York: Viking Press, 1971) 133.

3 [footnote 14 in source] Author's conversation with J. Pittman McGehee, 17 March 1998.

4 [15] Willliam James, letter to Helen Keller, quoted in Helen Keller, The Story of My Life (New York: Doubleday & Co.,, 1954) 15.

5 [16] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) 45.

6 [17] Ibid., 42

7 [18] Ibid., 25

8 [19] James Turrell, interview with Yukio Hasegawa, in *James Turrell: Where Does the Light in Our Dreams Come From?* (Setagaya, Japan: Setagaya Art Museum, 1997) 15 (English Supplement).

9 [20] Ibid., 22.

10 [21] James Turrell, in *Air Mass: James Turrell* (London: South Bank Centre, 1993) 26.

11 [23] Ibid., 19.

12 [25] Ibid., 34.

13 [26] Yukito Tanaka, in *James Turrell: Where Does the Light in Our Dreams Come From?* (Setagaya, Japan: Setagaya Art Museum , 1997) 7.

14 [27] Josef Albers investigated colour interaction in a series of paintings in which he nested three or four squares within one another, enabling him to explore the illusory ability of opaque colours to appear translucent and overlapping. Barnett Newman painted large saturated colour

fields inflected with a vertical stripe or 'zip' that created the impression of an opening in the picture plane.

15 [28] James Turrell, quoted in Jan Butterfield, 'James Turrell', *The Art of Light and Space* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1993) 77.

16 [29] Agnes Martin, quoted on introductory wall panel for solo exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1993.

17 [30] James Turrell, *Air Mass*, op. cit., 58.

18 [31] Ibid., 57.

19 [32] James Turrell, interview with Richard Flood and Carl Stigliano, *Parkett*, no. 25 (1990) 98.

20 [38] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958); trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) 184.

21 [39] James Turrell, quoted in Craig Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 221.

Lynn M. Herbert, extracts from 'Spirit and Light and the Immensity Within', in James Turrell (Houston: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998) 11–12; 14–21.

Lee Joon
Void: Mapping the Invisible in Korean Art//2007

[...] The term 'void', often used in discussions of expressive methods in East Asian traditional painting refers to the unpainted, empty space beside the objects depicted. In East Asian painting, which traditionally placed more emphasis on inherent spirit in objects than on representing them, the void was often used to express not only profound spaces of nature, such as clouds, atmosphere and the ocean, but also worlds that are abridged, suggested and invisible. From the perspective of Western art, which explicates everything based on forms, the void of Asian painting may appear to a certain extent to be a lack of forms or a space of incompletion. In fact, it is difficult to find a term corresponding to the concept in the Western artistic lexicon. 'Empty space', a negative element, implies absence of physical representation or is synonymous with 'blank space'. In the theory of East Asian painting, however, the void exists as a complete, legitimate part of a work of art, and, in a more active sense, an 'unpainted painting'.

In this sense the void does not mean renunciation of the use of space but rather encouragement of space, absence-with-presence. This tradition of East Asian painting has been inherited and continued in various ways by contemporary artists, and this is because the 'void' is not merely an artistic problematic but instead reflects the philosophical and spiritual way of thinking unique to East Asian culture.

In order better to understand the question of the void in painting we need to begin with a broader philosophical understanding. Although there have been many changes over time, China, Japan and Korea all belong to the Sinic civilization, which is influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The three main religions interpret the 'void' in distinctive ways: 'self-emptying' (*sunyata* in Sanskrit) in Buddhism; '[doing] nothing' in Taoism; and 'nothingness' in Confucianism. Nonetheless, what all these teachings share is the paradox that the world of seeming binaries – being and non-being, presence and absence, life and death, emptiness and fullness – are in fact not separated from each other but rather arise from one and the same source. Of these religious traditions, it is Zen Buddhism, which emphasizes self-discipline and enlightenment, and Taoism, represented by the teachings of Zhuangzi and Lao Tsu, that have played the most critical roles in transmitting the notion of emptiness to the present. 'All under the sky grow out of being, and being grows out of nothingness.' In Asian philosophy, encapsulated in this statement, 'nothingness' is not simply the origin of being, it coexists with being and becomes the dynamic, functional aspect of being.

The void in East Asian painting is the space that mediates between being and nothingness and also plays the role of accentuating being by being absent. From Lao Tsu's viewpoint, form in Asian painting is visible, thus 'full', while spirit is 'nothing' as it is invisible. In other words, forms that are rendered with an intention may be deemed yang, whereas the space of non-form that is unpainted may be interpreted as yin. The visible and the invisible, yin and yang, do not belong to two irreconcilable categories, however; rather, there are relationships of structural correspondence between the contrasting elements, allowing them to interpenetrate. The relationship of 'full' and 'nothing' as an aesthetic category does not stop at combining form and non-form, yin and yang, presence and absence, whole and part, and supports being with nothingness and contributes creatively to growth and transformation. 'The space between the sky and the earth is like a pair of fire-bellows – it is empty inside but generates the vital energy that gives birth to all things.' New meanings are generated in such a space of resonance connecting inside and outside, and the expansive meaning of emptiness operates in a landscape of differences. The void is a state in which a kind of energy, or chi, is alive that is invisible but can be seen by the eye, that can be analysed but must be felt corporeally.

What is this East Asian aesthetic of emptiness, then, related to the aesthetic characteristics of Korean art? Korean art, while sharing spiritual, cultural nutrients with the other two Northeast Asian countries has always embodied its

own autonomy and nativity. It is the well known fact that human cultures are deeply influenced by environments, and differences in environments result in differences in inherent characters of peoples. Discussing cultural differences between East and West, Daniel A. Herwitz has pointed out that the fact that culture is characterized not only by distinct traditions but also by divergent senses about what is natural and familiar is an extremely important anthropological lesson in understanding aesthetics. If Korean viewers feel that a certain work is very Korean, then, this is very much because of such naturalness and familiarity. Although Europe's splendid church murals and intense African sculptures may very well stimulate certain sensations at the moment of encounter, they don't necessarily come to us with emotional closeness and comfort.

This point can be illustrated in relation to the aesthetic distinctions from China and Japan, while these two countries belong to the same cultural sphere, Chinese art boasts a continental force and a solid sense of form, and Japanese art is marked by decorativeness, sensitivity and highly-accomplished artificiality. In contrast, Korean art is characterized by a naturalist approach, in which manmade elements are eliminated as much as possible, while naturally leaving things as they are. In other words, what distinguishes this naturalism of Korean artists' work is the ways in which, instead of creating something, it draws out the inherent vitality of forms. In addition, there is certain comfort and depth with which controlled emotions and unexaggerated, natural harmonies are deployed – a trait rarely seen in the work of foreign artists. Korean aesthetician Zoh Johann said that in the foundation of the lives and aesthetic sensibilities of Koreans are not only shamanism and Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, but also harmony with nature. In that light, the present exhibition does not depart much from the conventional methodological approach of certain aestheticians and art historians, which interprets the main characteristic of Korean art in terms of 'Korean-style naturalism' based in native specificities.

Especially significant aspect of this characteristic is the emphasis on natural principles and the rhythms of the body, while also paying attention to mutual communication and exchange between humans and nature, the body and the spirit, self and others, and yin and yang. This tendency has existed in Korean traditional architecture as well as all fields of arts and culture. Korean architecture fluidly utilize boundaries between inside and outside and, using the naturally occurring patterns of wood, it pursues natural beauty; of utmost importance in *Panson*, a Korean narrative song form, are the cadence of short and long notes, the bodily rhythm of tension and relaxation, and breathing. This concept of harmony with nature is also evident in *samulnori* (traditional percussion quartet), basic movements in dance, sijo verse and sanjo (a duet of gayageum, a twelve-stringed Korean harp and a narrator). This is why it is

important to approach the question of the void from diverse angles, not only as one of invisible space in the visual arts but also, for instance, as one of silence, interrupted temporal flow, gaps and distances in music and poetry. Needless to say, such traditional aesthetics and aesthetic values change with times and societal situations. Today's young generations, transcending geographies, nations, genres and mediums, are more sensitive to the demands of novelties and changes than to traditions. Herein also lies the danger of simplifying and categorizing an aesthetic consciousness on the basis of a national identity. At the same time, it is necessary to find a shared context connecting all different sedimentations in the midst of numerous landscapes of differences.

The specific distinctions of this idea can only be revealed through actual works of art. In this exhibition ('Void: Mapping the Invisible in Korean Art'), therefore, the concept of void is approached not as an aesthetic trait but in a more multidimensional way, via three subthemes. The first, an introductory concept, asks what meanings nature has for us and in what ways Korean artists see and interpret nature. In particular, this section introduces the aesthetic consciousness of our forebears, who aspired to escape the worldly and to commune with nature as well as geomancy and the cosmic view based in the concept of yin and yang, along with more recent perspectives on nature of contemporary artists. The second chapter argues that what was sought by our ancestors, who lived with nature, is ultimately a spirit of freedom. In this section, viewers encounter traditional artworks, which demonstrate a spirit of rule-breaking and departure, generosity and emptiness, attained through an attitude of letting nature as it is. Furthermore, this section includes contemporary artists who practice in their work this spirit of emptiness through endless repetitions of simple actions. The final section of the exhibition looks at what meanings the space of the invisible void offers to us. The space of emptiness and control is a space of communication, which draws the participation of viewers. Encompassing a range of objects from archaeological artefacts and Nam June Paik's media art, this last section invites viewers to experience how much the void can enable imaginative possibilities for creators and receivers. [...]

Lee Joon, extract from 'Void: Mapping the Invisible in Korean Art', in *Void in Korean Art* (Seoul: Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, 2007) 19–23.

HEAVEN AND EARTH

MOVING BY DAY RESTING BY NIGHT

GLACIER CREEK GLITTERING WATER GLITTERING OBSIDIAN

EACH SLEEPING PLACE THE DREAMS AT EACH SLEEPING PLACE

NORTH SISTER KICKING IN SNOW-STEPS *WICKIUP PLAIN* EASY WALKING

AN ODD NUMBER OF MOUNTAINS AN EVEN NUMBER OF RIVERS

THE EARTH'S AXIS MAGNETIC NORTH POSITIVE MAGNETIC SOUTH NEGATIVE

THE WALK AS A TRUE PATH SOME FALSE MOVES

A 15 DAY WALK IN THE THREE SISTERS WILDERNESS OREGON 2001

NATURE

Robert Rosenblum
The Abstract Sublime//1961

[...] 'It's like a religious experience!' With such words, a pilgrim I met in Buffalo last winter attempted to describe his unfamiliar sensations before the awesome phenomenon created by seventy-two Clyfford Stills at the Albright Art Gallery. A century and a half ago, the Irish Romantic poet, Thomas Moore, also made a pilgrimage to the Buffalo area, except that his goal was Niagara Falls. His experience, as recorded in a letter to his mother, July 24, 1804, similarly beggared prosaic response:

> I felt as if approaching the very residence of the Deity; the tears started into my eyes; and I remained, for moments after we had lost sight of the scene, in that delicious absorption which pious enthusiasm alone can produce. We arrived at the New Ladder and descended to the bottom. Here all its awful sublimities rushed full upon me ... My whole heart and soul ascended towards the Divinity in a swell of devout admiration, which I never before experienced. Oh! bring the atheist here, and he cannot return an atheist! I pity the man who can coldly sit down to write a description of these ineffable wonders: much more do I pity him who can submit them to the admeasurement of gallons and yards ... We must have new combinations of language to describe the Fall of Niagara.

Moore's bafflement before a unique spectacle, his need to abandon measurable reason for mystical empathy, are the very ingredients of the mid-twentieth-century spectator's 'religious experience' before the work of Still. During the Romantic movement, Moore's response to Niagara would have been called an experience of the 'Sublime', an aesthetic category that suddenly acquires fresh relevance in the face of the most astonishing summits of pictorial heresy attained in America in the last fifteen years.

Originating with Longinus, the Sublime was fervently explored in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and recurs constantly in the aesthetics of such writers as Burke, Reynolds, Kant, Diderot and Delacroix. For them and for their contemporaries, the Sublime provided a flexible semantic container for the murky new Romantic experiences of awe, terror, boundlessness and divinity that began to rupture the decorous confines of earlier aesthetic systems. As imprecise and irrational as the feelings it tried to name, the Sublime could be extended to art as well as to nature. One of its major expressions, in fact, was the painting of sublime landscapes.

A case in point is the dwarfing immensity of Gordale Scar, a natural wonder of Yorkshire and a goal of many Romantic tourists. Re-created on canvas between 1811 and 1815 by the British painter James Ward (1769–1855), *Gordale Scar* is meant to stun the spectator into an experience of the Sublime that may well be unparalleled in painting until a work like Clyfford Still's *1957–D*. In the words of Edmund Burke, whose *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) was the most influential analysis of such feelings, 'Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime'. Indeed, in both the Ward and the Still, the spectator is first awed by the sheer magnitude of the sight before him. (Ward's canvas is 131 by 166 inches; Still's, 113 by 159 inches.) At the same time, his breath is held by the dizzy drop to the pit of an abyss; and then, shuddering like Moore at the bottom of Niagara, he can only look up with what senses are left him and gasp before something akin to divinity.

Lest the dumbfounding size of these paintings prove insufficient to paralyse the spectator's traditional habits of seeing and thinking, both Ward and Still insist on a comparably bewildering structure. In the Ward, the chasms and cascades, whose vertiginous heights transform the ox, deer and cattle into Lilliputian toys, are spread out into unpredictable patterns of jagged silhouettes. No laws of man or man-made beauty can account for these God-made shapes; their mysterious, dark formations (echoing Burke's belief that obscurity is another cause of the Sublime) lie outside the intelligible boundaries of aesthetic law. In the Still, Ward's limestone cliffs have been translated into an abstract geology, but the effects are substantially the same. We move physically across such a picture like a visitor touring the Grand Canyon or journeying to the centre of the earth. Suddenly, a wall of black rock is split by a searing crevice of light, or a stalactite threatens the approach to a precipice. No less than caverns and waterfalls, Still's paintings seem the product of aeons of change; and their flaking surfaces, parched like bark or slate, almost promise that this natural process will continue, as unsusceptible to human order as the immeasurable patterns of ocean, sky, earth or water. And not the least awesome thing about Still's work is the paradox that the more elemental and monolithic its vocabulary becomes, the more complex and mysterious are its effects. As the Romantics discovered, all the sublimity of God can be found in the simplest natural phenomena, whether a blade of grass or an expanse of sky.

In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant tells us that whereas 'the Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries, the Sublime is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it, or by occasion of it, *boundlessness* is represented' (I, Book 2, 23). Indeed, such a breathtaking confrontation with a boundlessness in which we also experience an equally powerful totality is a motif that continually links the painters of the

Romantic Sublime with a group of recent American painters who seek out what might be called the 'Abstract Sublime'. In the context of two sea meditations by two great Romantic painters, Caspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* of about 1809 and Joseph Mallord William Turner's *Evening Star*, Mark Rothko's *Light, Earth and Blue* of 1954 reveals affinities of vision and feeling. Replacing the abrasive, ragged fissures of Ward's and Still's real and abstract gorges with a no less numbing phenomenon of light and void, Rothko, like Friedrich and Turner, places us on the threshold of those shapeless infinities discussed by the aestheticians of the Sublime. The tiny monk in the Friedrich and the fisher in the Turner establish, like the cattle in *Gordale Scar*, a poignant contrast between the infinite vastness of a pantheistic God and the infinite smallness of His creatures. In the abstract language of Rothko, such literal detail – a bridge of empathy between the real spectator and the presentation of a transcendental landscape – is no longer necessary; we ourselves are the monk before the sea, standing silently and contemplatively before these huge and soundless pictures as if we were looking at a sunset or a moonlit night. Like the mystic trinity of sky, water and earth that, in the Friedrich and Turner, appears to emanate from one unseen source, the floating, horizontal tiers of veiled light in the Rothko seem to conceal a total, remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp. These infinite, glowing voids carry us beyond reason to the Sublime; we can only submit to them in an act of faith and let ourselves be absorbed into their radiant depths.

If the Sublime can be attained by saturating such limitless expanses with a luminous, hushed stillness, it can also be reached inversely by filling this void with a teeming, unleashed power. Turner's art, for one, presents both of these sublime extremes. In his *Snowstorm* of 1842, the infinities are dynamic rather than static, and the most extravagant of nature's phenomena are sought out as metaphors for this experience of cosmic energy. Steam, wind, water, snow and fire spin wildly around the pitiful work of man – the ghost of a boat – in vortical rhythms that suck one into a sublime whirlpool before reason can intervene. And if the immeasurable spaces and incalculable energies of such a Turner evoke the elemental power of creation, other works of the period grapple even more literally with these primordial forces. Turner's contemporary, John Martin (1779–1854), dedicated his erratic life to the pursuit of an art which, in the words of the *Edinburgh Review* (1829), 'awakes a sense of awe and sublimity, beneath which the mind seems overpowered'. Of the cataclysmic themes that alone satisfied him, *The Creation*, an engraving of 1831, is characteristically sublime. With Turner, it aims at nothing short of God's full power, upheaving rock, sky, cloud, sun, moon, stars and sea in the primal act. With its torrential description of molten paths of energy, it locates us once more on a near-hysterical brink of sublime chaos.

That brink is again reached when we stand before a *perpetuum mobile* of Jackson Pollock, whose gyrating labyrinths re-create in the metaphorical language of abstraction the superhuman turbulence depicted more literally, in Turner and Martin. In *Number 1, 1948*, we are as immediately plunged into divine fury as we are drenched in Turner's sea; in neither case can our minds provide systems of navigation. Again, sheer magnitude can help produce the Sublime. Here, the very size of the Pollock – 68 by 104 inches – permits no pause before the engulfing; we are almost physically lost in this boundless web of inexhaustible energy. To be sure, Pollock's generally abstract vocabulary allows multiple readings of its mood and imagery, although occasional titles (*Full Fathom Five, Ocean Greyness, The Deep, Greyed Rainbow*) may indicate a more explicit region of nature. But whether achieved by the most blinding of blizzards or the most gentle of winds and rains, Pollock invariably evokes the sublime mysteries of nature's untamable forces. Like the awesome vistas of telescope and microscope, his pictures leave us dazzled before the imponderables of galaxy and atom.

The fourth master of the Abstract Sublime, Barnett Newman, explores a realm of sublimity so perilous that it defies comparison with even the most adventurous Romantic exploration into sublime nature. Yet it is worth noting that in the 1940s Newman, like Still, Rothko and Pollock, painted pictures with more literal references to an elemental nature; and that more recently, he has spoken of a strong desire to visit the tundra, so that he might have the sensation of being surrounded by four horizons in a total surrender to spatial infinity. In abstract terms, at least, some of his paintings of the 1950s already approached this sublime goal. In its all-embracing width (114.5 inches), Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* puts us before a void as terrifying, if exhilarating, as the arctic emptiness of the tundra; and in its passionate reduction of pictorial means to a single hue (warm red) and a single kind of structural division (vertical) for some 144 square feet, it likewise achieves a simplicity as heroic and sublime as the protagonist of its title. Yet again, as with Still, Rothko and Pollock, such a rudimentary vocabulary creates bafflingly complex results. Thus the single hue is varied by an extremely wide range of light values; and these unexpected mutations occur at intervals that thoroughly elude any rational system. Like the other three masters of the Abstract Sublime, Newman bravely abandons the securities of familiar pictorial geometries in favour of the risks of untested pictorial intuitions; and like them, he produces awesomely simple mysteries that evoke the primaeval movement of creation. His very titles (*Onement, The Beginning, Pagan Void, Death of Euclid, Adam, Day One*) attest to this sublime intention. Indeed, a quartet of the largest canvases by Newman, Still, Rothko and Pollock might well be interpreted as a post-World-War-II myth of Genesis. During the Romantic era, the sublimities of nature gave proof of the divine;

today, such supernatural experiences are conveyed through the abstract medium of paint alone. What used to be pantheism has now become a kind of 'paint-theism'.

Much has been written about how these four masters of the Abstract Sublime have rejected the Cubist tradition and replaced its geometric vocabulary and intellectual structure with a new kind of space created by flattened, spreading expanses of light, colour and plane. Yet it should not be overlooked that this denial of the Cubist tradition is not only determined by formal needs, but also by emotional ones that, in the anxieties of the atomic age, suddenly seem to correspond with a Romantic tradition of the irrational and the awesome as well as with a Romantic vocabulary of boundless energies and limitless spaces. The line from the Romantic Sublime to the Abstract Sublime is broken and devious, for its tradition is more one of an erratic, private feeling than submission to objective disciplines. If certain vestiges of sublime landscape painting linger into the later nineteenth century in the popularized panoramic travelogues of Americans like Bierstadt and Church (with whom Dore Ashton has compared Still), the tradition was generally suppressed by the international domination of the French tradition, with its familiar values of reason, intellect and objectivity. At times, the countervalues of the Northern Romantic tradition have been partially reasserted (with a strong admixture of French pictorial discipline) by such masters as van Gogh, Ryder, Marc, Klee, Feininger, Mondrian; but its most spectacular manifestations – the sublimities of British and German Romantic landscape – have only been resurrected after 1945 in America, where the authority of Parisian painting has been challenged to an unprecedented degree. In its heroic search for a private myth to embody the sublime power of the supernatural, the art of Still, Rothko, Pollock and Newman should remind us once more that the disturbing heritage of the Romantics has not yet been exhausted.

Robert Rosenblum, 'The Abstract Sublime', *ARTnews*, vol. 59, no.10 (February 1961); reprinted in *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, ed. Ellen G. Landau (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) 273–8.

Gerhard Richter
Statement//1973

A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted: specific ideologies, for example. Beyond that, if it is any 'good', it concerns us – transcending ideology – as art that we consider worth the trouble of defending (perceiving, showing, making). It is therefore quite possible to paint like Caspar David Friedrich 'today'.

Gerhard Richter, Letter to Jean-Christophe Ammann, February 1973, in Gerhard Richter, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interview 1962–1993*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Obrist, trans. David Britt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995) 81.

Robert Smithson
Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape//1973

The landscape-architect André formerly in charge-of the suburban plantations of Paris, was walking with me through the Parc Buttes-Chaumont, of which he was the designer, when I said of a certain passage of it, 'That, to my mind, is the best piece of artificial planting of its age, I have ever seen'. He smiled and said, 'Shall I confess that it is the result of neglect?'
– Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Spoils of the Park*

Imagine yourself in Central Park one million years ago. You would be standing on a vast ice sheet, a 4,000-mile glacial wall, as much as 2,000 feet thick. Alone on the vast glacier, you would not sense its slow crushing, scraping, ripping movement as it advanced south, leaving great masses of rock debris in its wake. Under the frozen depths, where the carousel now stands, you would not notice the effect on the bedrock as the glacier dragged itself along.

Back in the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux considered that glacial aftermath along its geological profiles. The building of New York City had interrupted the ponderous results of those Pleistocene ice sheets. Olmsted and Vaux studied the site topography for their proposed park called 'Greensward'. In *Greensward Presentation Sketch No. 5* we see a 'before' photograph of the site

they would remake in terms of earth sculpture. It reminds me of the strip-mining regions I saw last year in southeastern Ohio. This faded photograph reveals that Manhattan Island once had a desert on it – a man-made wasteland. Treeless and barren, it evokes the observations of 'the valley of ashes' in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), 'where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens'.

Olmsted, 'the sylvan artist', yearned for the colour *green* as 'Nature's universal robe' (see James Thomson, *The Seasons*, 1728) and the 'Sharawadgi' parks of England.' He wanted the asymmetrical landscapes of Uvedale Price in the middle of urban flux. Into Brooklyn he would bring 'the luxuriance of tropical scenery ... gay with flowers and intricate with vines and creepers, ferns, rushes and broad leaved plants'. This is like having an orchid garden in a steel mill, or a factory where palm trees would be lit by the fire of blast furnaces. In comparison to Thoreau's mental contrasts ('Walden Pond became a small ocean'), Olmsted's physical contrasts brought a Jeffersonian rural reality into the metropolis. Olmsted made ponds, he didn't just conceptualize about them.

The origins of Olmsted's view of landscape are to be found in eighteenth-century England, particularly in the theories of Uvedale Price and William Gilpin. Price extended Edmund Burke's *Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) to a point that tried to free landscaping from the 'picture' gardens of Italy into a more physical sense of the temporal landscape. A tree, for example, struck by lightning was something other than merely beautiful or sublime – it was 'picturesque'. This word in its own way has been struck by lightning over the centuries. Words, like trees, can be suddenly deformed or wrecked, but such deformation or wreckage cannot be dismissed by timid academics. Price seems to have accepted a side of nature that the 'formalists' of his times would rather have excluded. Some of our present-day ecologists, who still see nature through eyes conditioned by a one-sided idealism, should consider the following quote from Price.

> The side of a smooth green hill, torn by floods, may at first very properly be called deformed, and on the same principle, though not with the same impression, as a gash on a living animal. When a rawness of such a gash in the ground is softened, and in part concealed and ornamented by the effects of time, and the progress of vegetation, deformity, by this usual process, is converted into picturesqueness; and this is the case with quarries, gravel pits, etc., which at first are deformities, and which in their most picturesque state, are often considered as such by a levelling improver. (*Three Essays on the Picturesque*, 1810)

And from William Gilpin's *Observations Relative to Picturesque Beauty* (1789): 'A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree, but if we introduce it in a picture it immediately becomes a formal object and ceases to please.'

Price and Gilpin were, for Olmsted, 'professional touchstones', whose views he esteemed 'so much more than any published since, as stimulating the exercise of judgment in matters of my art, that I put them into the hands of my pupils as soon as they come into our office, saying, "You are to read these seriously, as a student of law would read Blackstone."'

Inherent in the theories of Price and Gilpin, and in Olmsted's response to them, are the beginnings of a dialectic of the landscape. Burke's notion of 'beautiful' and 'sublime' functions as a *thesis* of smoothness, gentle curves and delicacy of nature, and as an *antithesis* of terror, solitude and vastness of nature, both of which are rooted in the real world, rather than in a Hegelian Ideal. Price and Gilpin provide a *synthesis* with their formulation of the 'picturesque', which is on close examination related to chance and change in the material order of nature. The contradictions of the 'picturesque' depart from a static formalistic view of nature. The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in its material external existence. We cannot take a one-sided view of the landscape within this dialectic. A park can no longer be seen as 'a thing-in-itself', but rather as a process of ongoing relationships existing in a physical region – the park becomes a 'thing-for-us'. As a result we are not hurled into the spiritualism of Thoreauian transcendentalism, or its present day offspring of 'modernist formalism' rooted in Kant, Hegel and Fichte. Price, Gilpin and Olmsted are forerunners of a dialectical materialism applied to the physical landscape. Dialectics of this type are a way of seeing things in a manifold of relations, not as isolated objects. Nature for the dialectician is *indifferent* to any formal ideal. [...]

Any discussion concerning nature and art is bound to be shot through with moral implications. Once a student told me that 'nature is anything that is not manmade'. For that student man was outside the natural order of things. In Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), we are told that Byzantine and Egyptian art were created out of a psychological need to escape nature, and that since the Renaissance our understanding of such art has been clouded by an undue confidence in nature. Worringer locates *his* 'concept' of abstraction outside the sensuous anthropomorphic pantheism of Renaissance humanism. 'The primal artistic impulse', says Worringer, 'has nothing to do with the renderings of nature.' Yet, throughout his book he refers to 'crystalline forms of inanimate matter'. Geometry strikes me as a 'rendering' of inanimate matter. What are the lattices and grids of pure abstraction, if not renderings and

representations of a reduced order of nature? Abstraction is a representation of nature devoid of 'realism' based on mental or conceptual reduction. There is no escaping nature through abstract representation; abstraction brings one closer to physical structures within nature itself. But this does not mean a renewed confidence in nature, it simply means that abstraction is no cause for faith. Abstraction can only be valid if it accepts nature's dialectic.

In *The New York Times* (Sunday 12 March 1972) Grace Glueck's column has a headline, 'Artist-in-Residence for Mother Earth', and a photograph of Alan Gussow captioned 'A sort of spiritual caretaker'. Reading the article, one discovers what might be called an ecological Oedipus complex. Penetration of 'Mother Earth' becomes a projection of the incest taboo onto nature. In Theodore Thass-Thienemann's book, *The Subconscious Language*, we find a quote from a catatonic schizophrenic: 'They should stop digging (*now shouting petulantly in rage*) down inside the earth to draw metals out of it. That's digging down into Mother Earth and taking things that shouldn't be taken.'

Simone de Beauvoir has written in *The Second Sex*, 'Aeschylus says of Oedipus that he "dared to seed the sacred furrow where he was formed".' Alan Gussow in *The New York Times* projects onto 'earth works artists' an Oedipus complex born out of a wishy-washy transcendentalism. Indulging in spiritual fantasy, he says of representational landscape painters in his book *A Sense of Place: Artists and the American Land*, published by Friends of the Earth: 'What these artists do is make these places visible, communicate their spirit – not like the earth works artists who cut and gouge the land like Army engineers. What's needed are lyric poets to celebrate it'.

Gussow's projection of the 'Army engineers' on what he imagines to be 'earth works artists' seems linked to his own sexual fears. As Paul Shepard in his *Man in the Landscape* points out, 'Those [army] engineers seem to be at the opposite extreme from aesthetes who attempt to etherealize their sexuality. Yet, the engineers' authority and dominance over land carries the force of sexual aggression – and perhaps the guilt as well'.

An etherealized representational artist such as Gussow (he does mediocre impressionistic paintings) fails to recognize the possibility of a direct organic manipulation of the land devoid of violence and 'macho' aggression. Spiritualism widens the split between man and nature. The farmer's, miner's or artist's treatment of the land depends on how aware he is of himself as nature; after all, sex isn't all a series of rapes. The farmer or engineer who cuts into the land can either cultivate it or devastate it. Representing nature once removed in lyric poetry and landscape painting is not the same as direct cultivation of the land. If strip miners were less alienated from the nature in themselves and free of sexual aggression, cultivation would take place. When one looks at the Indian

cliff dwelling in Mesa Verde, one cannot separate art from nature. And one can't forget the Indian mounds in Ohio.

One wonders what the likes of Gussow would make of America's first 'earthwork artist' – Frederick Law Olmsted. Perhaps, if Gussow had lived in the mid nineteenth century, he would have suggested that Olmsted write 'lyric poetry' instead of moving ten million horse-cart loads of earth to make Central Park. Artists like Gussow are the type who would rather *retreat* to scenic beauty spots than try to make a concrete dialectic between nature and people. Such an artist surrounds himself with self-righteousness and pretends to be saving the landscape. This is not being an ecologist of the real, but rather, a spiritual snob.

This kind of spirituality mentioned in the preceding paragraphs is what Rollo May in *Power and Innocence* calls 'pseudo-innocence', which can only lead to pseudo-spirituality and pseudo-art. May speaks of an '... insulation from the evil in the world'. The authentic artist cannot turn his back on the contradictions that inhabit our landscapes. Olmsted himself was full of contradictions; for instance, he wrote to his wife of his reaction to the California desert, 'the whole aspect of the country is detestable.' [...]

My own experience is that the best sites for 'earth art' are sites that have been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanization, or nature's own devastation. For instance, *The Spiral Jetty* is built in a dead sea, and *The Broken Circle* and *Spiral Hill* in a working sand quarry. Such land is cultivated or recycled as art. On the other hand, when Olmsted visited Yosemite it existed as a 'wilderness'. There's no point in recycling wilderness the way Central Park was recycled. One need not improve Yosemite, all one needs is to provide access routes and accommodations. But this decreases the original definition of wilderness as a place that exists without human involvement. Today, Yosemite is more like an urbanized wilderness with its electrical outlets for campers, and its clothes lines hung between the pines. There is not much room for contemplation in solitude. The new national parks like the Everglades and the Dinosaur National Monument are more 'abstract' and lack the 'picturesqueness' of Yosemite and Yellowstone.

In many ways the more humble or even degraded sites left in the wake of mining operations offer more of a challenge to art, and a greater possibility for being in solitude. Imposing cliffs and unimproved mesas could just as well be left alone. But as the nation's 'energy crisis' mounts, such places will eventually be mined. Some 5.5 millions of acres, an area the size of New Hampshire, is currently being bought up in North Dakota, Wyoming and Montana by mining companies. 'I think', says Interior Secretary Rogers Morton (*Newsweek*, 9 October 1972), 'we can set the standard for a new mining ethic so that the deep seams can be mined and closely followed by an environment programme that is compatible aesthetically and with proper land use.' One can only wonder what

his notion of 'aesthetics' is. The precedents set by Olmsted should be studied by both miners and ecologists. [...]

1 Sharawadgi involves a Chinese influence on English landscape development. The work corresponds to the Chinese syllables Sa-lo-kwai-chi, meaning 'quality of being impressive or surprising through careless or unorderly grace'. See Y.Z. Chang, 'A Note on Sharawadgi', *Modern Language Notes* (1930) 221. [...] [Smithson's other footnotes are not included here.]

Robert Smithson, extracts from 'Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape', *Artforum* (February 1973); reprinted in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996) 157–60; 162–4; 165–6. Text © Estate of Robert Smithson/Licensed by VAGA, New York.

Walter De Maria
Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements//1980

The Lightning Field is a permanent work.
The land is not the setting for the work but a part of the work.

The work is located in West Central New Mexico.
The states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and Texas were searched by truck over a five-year period before the location in New Mexico was selected.
Desirable qualities of the location included flatness, high lightning activity and isolation.
The region is located 7,200 feet above sea level. *The Lightning Field* is 11.5 miles east of the Continental Divide.
The earliest manifestation of land art was represented in the drawings and plans for the *Mile-Long Parallel Walls in the Desert*, 1961–1963.
The Lightning Field began in the form of a note, following the completion of *The Bed of Spikes* in 1969. The sculpture was completed in its physical form on 1 November 1977.
The work was commissioned and is maintained by Dia Art Foundation, New York.
In July 1974, a small *Lightning Field* was constructed. This served as the prototype for the 1977 *Lightning Field*. It had 35 stainless steel poles with pointed tips, each 18 feet tall and 200 feet apart, arranged in a five-row by seven-row grid. It was located in Northern Arizona. The land was loaned by Mr and Mrs Burton Tremaine. The work now is in the collection of Virginia Dwan. It remained in place from 1974 through 1976 and is presently dismantled, prior to an installation in a new location.

The sum of the facts does not constitute the work or determine its aesthetics.

The Lightning Field measures one mile by one kilometre and six metres (5,280 feet by 3,300 feet). There are 400 highly polished stainless steel poles with solid, pointed tips.
The poles are arranged in a rectangular grid array (16 to the width, 25 to the length) and are spaced 220 feet apart.
A simple walk around the perimeter of the poles takes approximately two hours.
The primary experience takes place within *The Lightning Field*.
Each mile-long row contains 25 poles and runs east-west.
Each kilometre-long row contains 16 poles and runs north-south.
Because the sky-ground relationship is central to the work, viewing *The Lightning Field* from the air is of no value.
Part of the essential content of the work is the ratio of people to the space: a small number of people to a large amount of space.
Installation was carried out from June through October 1977.
The principal associates in construction, Robert Fosdick and Helen Winkler, have worked with the sculpture continuously for the last three years.
An aerial survey, combined with computer analysis, determined the positioning of the rectangular grid and the elevation of the terrain.
A land survey determined four elevation points surrounding each pole position to insure the perfect placement and exact height of each element. It took five months to complete both the aerial and the land surveys.
Each measurement relevant to foundation position, installation procedure and pole alignment was triple-checked for accuracy.
The poles' concrete foundations, set one foot below the surface of the land, are three feet deep and one foot in diameter.
Engineering studies indicated that these foundations will hold poles to a vertical position in winds of up to 110 miles per hour.
Heavy carbon steel pipes extend from the foundation cement and rise through the lightning poles to give extra strength.
The poles were constructed of type 304 stainless steel tubing with an outside diameter of two inches. Each pole was cut, within an accuracy of one hundredth of an inch, to its own individual length.
The average pole height is 20 feet 7.5 inches. The shortest pole height is 15 feet. The tallest pole height is 26 feet 9 inches.

The solid, stainless steel tips were turned to match an arc with a radius of six feet.
The tips were welded to the poles, then ground and polished, creating a continuous unit.
The total weight of the steel used is approximately 38,000 pounds.
All poles are parallel, and the spaces between them are accurate to within one twenty-fifth of an inch.
Diagonal distance between any two contiguous poles is 311 feet.
If laid end to end the poles would stretch over one and a half miles (8,240 feet).
The plane of the tips would evenly support an imaginary sheet of glass.
During the mid-portion of the day 70 to 90 per cent of the poles become virtually invisible due to the high angle of the sun.
It is intended that the work be viewed alone, or in the company of a very small number of people, over at least a 24-hour period.
The original log cabin located 200 yards beyond the mid point of the northernmost row has been restored to accommodate visitors' needs.
A permanent caretaker and administrator will reside near the location for continuous maintenance, protection and assistance.
A visit may be reserved only through written correspondence.
The cabin serves as a shelter during extreme weather conditions or storms.
The climate is semi-arid; eleven inches of rain is the yearly average.
Sometimes in winter, *The Lightning Field* is seen in light snow.
Occasionally in spring, 30- to 50-mile-an-hour winds blow steadily for days.
The light is as important as the lightning.
The period of primary lightning activity is from late May through early September.
There are approximately 60 days per year when thunder and lightning activity can be witnessed from *The Lightning Field.*

The invisible is real.

The observed ratio of lightning storms which pass over the sculpture has been approximately 3 per 30 days during the lightning season.
Only after a lightning strike has advanced to an area of about 200 feet above *The Lightning Field* can it sense the poles.
Several distinct thunderstorms can be observed at one time from *The Lightning Field.*
Traditional grounding cable and grounding rod protect the foundations by diverting lightning current into the earth.
Lightning strikes have not been observed to jump or arc from pole to pole.
Lightning strikes have done no perceptible damage to the poles.
On very rare occasions when there is a strong electrical current in the air, a glow known as 'St. Elmo's Fire' may be emitted from the tips of the poles.

Photography of lightning in the daytime was made possible by the use of camera triggering devices newly developed by Dr Richard Orville, Dr Bernard Vonnegut and Robert Zeh, of the State University of New York at Albany.
Photography of *The Lightning Field* required the use of medium- and large-format cameras.
No photograph, group of photographs or other recorded images can completely represent *The Lightning Field.*

Isolation is the essence of Land Art.

Walter De Maria, 'Some Facts, Notes, Data, Information, Statistics and Statements', *Artforum* (April 1980).

Tacita Dean
Bas Jan Ader//1997

On 9 July 1975, Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader set sail alone from Cape Cod in America to Falmouth in England. He was making an artwork: a trilogy, which he called *In Search of the Miraculous*. It was a journey from Los Angeles across the Atlantic to Amsterdam: one night in Los Angeles (part one), an estimated sixty days at sea (part two) and one night in Amsterdam (part three). He had completed the first part, wandering around LA with a torch, until he ended up on the edge of the ocean. Now, two years later, he set sail across the Atlantic in a thirteen-foot sailing boat, taking with him a camera and tape recorder. His boat was called *Ocean Wave*.

Earlier, in April of the same year, his show in LA opened with a small choir of students singing sea shanteys, accompanied by a piano. The lyrics of the songs were hung on the wall. After the opening, slides of the choir were projected life size with a recording of the songs. Prior to departure, Bas Jan Ader had arranged for a similar exhibition with a Dutch choir to take place in Holland on his arrival there. Three weeks into his trip, he lost radio contact. It was not until April of the following year that his boat was eventually found by a Spanish fishing trawler, two-thirds capsized, a hundred and fifty miles off the coast of Ireland. The fishermen took it to La Coruna, where it was stolen. Bas Jan Ader's wife and family never saw the boat with their own eyes; their information came from the translations of official documents.

Like Tristan, Bas Jan Ader believed that setting sail alone in a small boat, surrendering himself up to the forces of the sea, was the highest form of pilgrimage. The sea was the last free place on Earth. He had told people his trip would take sixty days, or ninety days if he chose not to use his sail, and let the wind and the current carry him to Europe. He was an adventurer who wanted to survive alone, and died making a work of art.

Tacita Dean, 'Bas Jan Ader' (1997): reprinted in 'Artist's Writings' section of *Tacita Dean* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2006) 128.

Olafur Eliasson
The Weather Forecast and Now//2001

Think with me about your extension of now.

'Now' has been stretched to last longer and longer. Unlike most animals, we (the human race) have the ability to link one moment to the next, creating our sensation of presence. Time flows continuously in a single motion, so to speak, with each moment naturally relating to the next. Edmund Husserl added that our expectations of the coming moment and the memory of the one just passed are all part of our sense of 'now'. If this were not the case, our remarkable ability to orient ourselves would probably not have developed to the extent that it has. Husserl's assumption was that 'now' can only be linked to a subject whose expectations and memory set the parameters of experience and orientation – in a space.

So, if you are still thinking with me, we can say that my understanding of 'our' time is necessarily within my 'own' time; my 'now' is inside yours, or, your 'now' is my surroundings (and vice versa). So, since our 'now' has been extended in time, a discussion about 'here' must follow, particularly with reference to spatial issues such as what constitutes our immediate surroundings.

The familiar 'now and here' (also known as 'nowhere') might just as well be 'now and there'. Since the subject moves around (in a space), there should be no doubt regarding our ability to orient ourselves not only in the near past and future, but also in the space we will enter in a moment – or that exists on a map of yesterday's activities. Our society is laid out to cope with this extended orientation, organized in accordance with principles of predictability (think, for example, of traffic safety). Our surroundings are organized to be moved in without necessarily just being 'here' or 'there' but rather with a sense of having come from up there, now being here, and soon being down there.

Imagine if we were only to orient ourselves in relation to a Barnett Newman painting. Our brain would work intermittently like a strobe lamp, and we would experience our world as an infinite number of suspended, static moments. This does not, as Newman assumed, bring you closer to some shared primordial state whilst maintaining your strange sense of certainty. In fact there is nothing 'real' outside us, only cultural constructs. Your time, my time – even Einstein's attempt to encapsulate us in objective time – was nothing but a then-practical way to cultivate our surroundings. It was practical in the sense that we now know time is gravitational, so that when standing on top of the world's tallest building, so-called time is one second longer in a hundred million years than when standing

down in the street. The practicality of the collective cultivation of our surroundings is beyond discussion. Otherwise, we would be like Truman in the film *The Truman Show*, each living in our own separate reality.

So how long *is* 'now', and where does 'here' *end?* One frontier of 'now and here' is the weather forecast, with all its people and predictions. In feudal times meteorology was a matter of life and death. The prediction of the weather originated from a real need to prolong 'now' to include tomorrow's weather, taking our overly suspended reality for a joyride into the future. Like time travellers, weather predictions can draw a small part of the future back to be included in our cultivated sense of 'here and now'.

By turning farmers' needs into a science, the weather – the broadest of all sources of collective awarenesses – cultivates complexity and unpredictability. If anything is collective, it's the weather map; its only international competition is the rise and fall of the stock market. In the West, the significance of weather forecasts has decreased in proportion to the declining importance of an agricultural economy. On network newscasts, the stock market report (often shown immediately afterwards) has eaten its way into the ever-shortening, faster-spoken weather forecasts. The daily stock market update followed by the weather forecast forms a perfect (time)frame of reference, informing us 'officially' that the recent past and the recent future belong to your now. The recent past (the daily state of the stock markets) and the immediate future (the prediction of the weather) form today's perfect collective, cultivated Now. 'Now' is eating calendar pages and digesting the upcoming weather into the daily dump of stock-market rates.

Cultivation of a collective sense of time and space works, as we can see, through representation. The weather forecast is our mediated experience thermostat letting us know if we are freezing and in which direction the wind is blowing. Through these representational layers, our immediate, tactile sensation of time and space ('now and here') is evacuated, replaced by TV and thermostats. This enables us to orient ourselves more productively as long as we are aware of the level of representation at work. Our sense of cold is activated by the temperature reading on the thermostat, not by a chill on the skin. Such mediations can be infinite; they only form a threat when you mistakenly believe that time and space are objective. Like when you are elsewhere and assume that you are here. Just like Truman.

Olafur Eliasson, 'The Weather Forecast and Now', *Cabinet*, no. 3 (Summer 2001) 64–5; reprinted in 'Artist's Writings' section of *Olafur Eliasson* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 2002).

John Berger
Into the Woods//2006

The way I go is the way back to see the future
– Jitka Hanzlová

The forest in question is far away, near the Carpathian mountains, beside the Czech village where she lived as a child. The images could be of another forest, but not for Jitka Hanzlová. Over the years she has returned to hers. She goes into it alone, and if not alone does not take pictures.

Many nature photographs are like fashion photos. This is not to dismiss them; they record and admit pleasure. Mountaintops, waterfalls, meadows, lakes, beech trees in autumn, are asked to stand there, wearing themselves and giving the camera a moody look. And why not? They are reminders of the pleasure of at last arriving after hours in airports.

Nature as hostess.

In Jitka's pictures there is no welcome. They have been taken from the inside. The deep inside of a forest, perceived like the inside of a glove by a hand within it.

She speaks of the between-forest. This is because, in the same valley as her village, there are two forests that join. Yet the preposition *between* belongs to forests in general. It's what they are about.

A forest is what exists between its trees, between its dense undergrowth and its clearings, between all its life cycles and their different timescales, ranging from solar energy to insects that live for a day. A forest is also a meeting place between those who enter it and something unnameable and attendant, waiting behind a tree or in the undergrowth. Something intangible and within touching distance. Neither silent nor audible. It is not only visitors who feel this attendant something; hunters and foresters who can read unwritten signs are even more keenly aware of it.

'I went to the forest-hills early in the morning when the forest awakes. Standing there I breathed in the wind, the unruffled voices of the birds and the silence which I love. And then when I was concentrating on a picture, I stopped hearing the silence around me.

'It was as if I was somewhere else, like in a film. The forest started to move and, as I looked through the camera, I experienced fear. Maybe it was just the framing and the stillness of the evening. As if the birds and the crickets had stopped their singing, as if the wind had come to a stop in the valley. Nothing but nothing to hear. No birds, no wind, no people, no crickets.

'The darkness of the light and this other silence made my hair stand on end ... I could not exactly place the fear, but it was coming from the inside. It was the first time I felt this so intensely, but not the last. I escaped! What's the basis of this fear of mine? Why? I'm not afraid of animals or of the forest. The place is safe.'

Throughout history and prehistory forests have offered shelter, a hiding-place, whilst also being places in which a wanderer can be ultimately lost. They oblige us to recognize how much is hidden.

It's a commonplace to say that photographs interrupt or arrest the flow of time. They do it, however, in thousands of different ways. Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment' is different from Atget's slowing down to a standstill, or from Thomas Struth's ceremonial stopping of time. What is strange about some of Jitka's forest photos – not her photos of other subjects – is that they appear to have stopped nothing.

In a space without gravity there is no weight, and these pictures of hers are, as it were, weightless in terms of time. It is as if they have been taken between times, where there is none.

What is intangible and within touching distance in a forest may be the presence of a kind of timelessness. Not the abstract timelessness of metaphysical speculation, nor the metaphorical timelessness of cyclic, seasonal repetition. Forests exist in time – they are, God knows, subject to history – and today many are catastrophically being obliterated for the quick pursuit of profit.

Yet in a forest there are 'events' which have not found their place in any of the forest's numberless time scales, and which exist between those scales. What events? you ask. Some are in Jitka's photographs. They are what remains unnameable in the photographs after we have made an inventory of everything that is recognizable.

The ancient Greeks named events like these *dryads*. My lumberjack friends from Bergamo refer to the forest as a separate kingdom, a 'realm' on its own. Wifredo Lam painted equivalent events in his imagined jungle. Yet let's be clear. We are not talking about fantasies. Jitka spoke of the forest's silence. The diametric opposite of such a silence is music. In music every event that occurs is accommodated within the single seamless timescale of that music.

In the silence of the forest certain events are unaccommodated and cannot be placed in time. Being like this they both disconcert and entice the observer's imagination: for they are like another creature's experience of duration. We feel them occurring, we feel their presence, yet we cannot confront them, for they are occurring for us, somewhere between past, present and future.

The philosopher Heidegger, for whom a forest was a metaphor for all reality – and the task of the philosopher was to find the *weg*, the woodcutters' path through it – spoke of 'coming into the nearness of distance' and I believe this

was his way of approaching the forest phenomenon I am trying to define. Just as Jitka's formulation is another. 'The way I go is the way back to see the future'. Both reverse the hourglass.

To make sense of what I'm suggesting it is necessary to reject the notion of time that began in Europe during the eighteenth century and is closely linked with the positivism and linear accountability of modern capitalism: the notion that a single time, which is unilinear, regular, abstract and irreversible, carries everything. All other cultures have proposed a coexistence of various times surrounded in some way by the timeless.

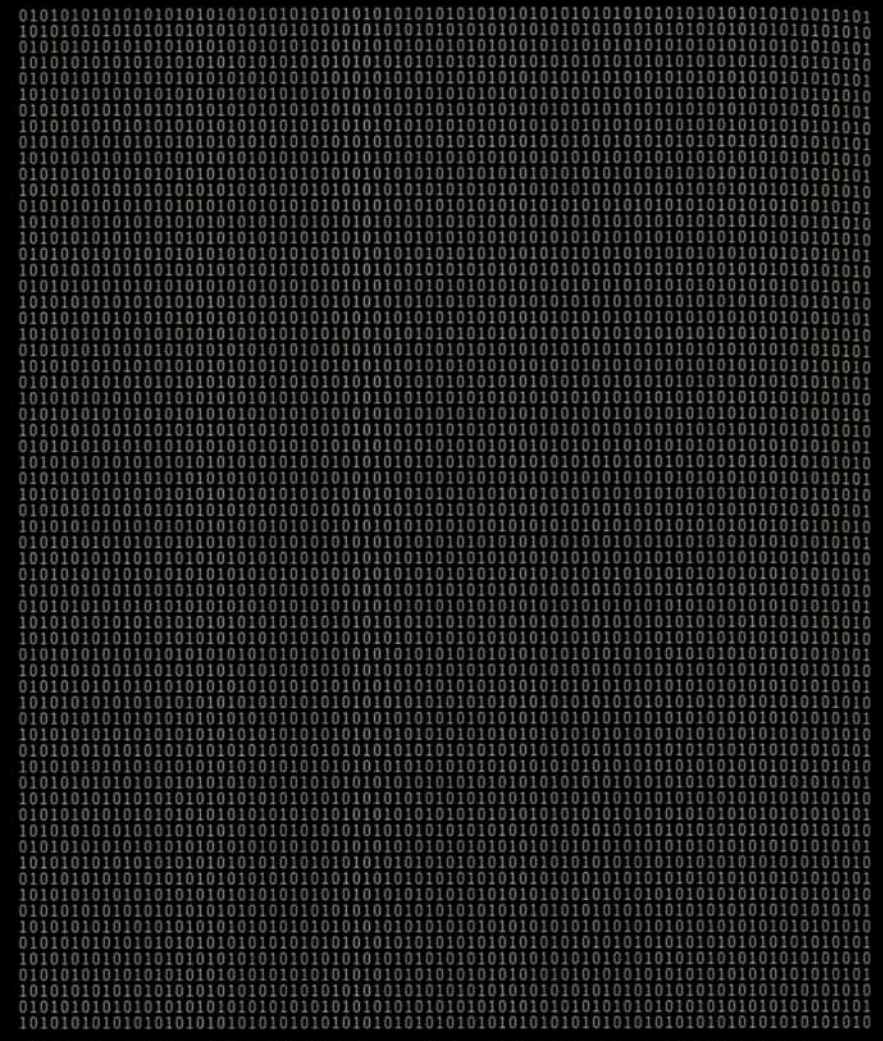
Return to the forests that belong to history. In Jitka's one there is often a sense of waiting, yet what is it that is waiting? And is waiting the right word? A patience. A patience practised by what? A forest incident. An incident we can neither name, describe, nor place. And yet is there.

The intricacy of the crossing paths and crossing energies in a forest – the paths of birds, insects, mammals, spores, seeds, reptiles, ferns, lichens, worms, trees, etc, etc – is unique; perhaps in certain areas on the sea bed there exists a comparable intricacy, but there man is a recent intruder, whereas, with all his sense perceptions, he came from the forest. Man is the only creature who lives within at least two timescales: the biological one of his body and the one of his consciousness. (This is perhaps what grants him his sixth sense.)

Every one of the crossing energies operating in a forest has its own timescale. From the ant to the oak tree. From the process of photosynthesis to the process of fermentation. In this intricate conglomeration of times, energies and exchanges there occur 'incidents' that are recalcitrant incidents, unaccommodated in any timescale and therefore (temporarily?) waiting *between*. These are what Jitka photographs.

The longer one looks at Jitka Hanzlová's pictures of a forest, the clearer it becomes that a breakout from the prison of modern time is possible. The dryads beckon. You may slip between – but unaccompanied.

John Berger, 'Into the Woods' [on Jitka Hanzlová's *Forest* series, 2000–5], *Le Monde Diplomatique* (February 2006).



WITH THE COMPUTER, AND BROUGHT TOGETHER IN THE TELEMATIC EMBRACE, WE CAN HOPE TO GLIMPSE THE UNSEEABLE, TO GRASP THE INEFFABLE CHAOS OF BECOMING, THE SECRET ORDER OF DISORDER. AND AS WE COME TO SEE MORE, WE SHALL SEE THE COMPUTER LESS AND LESS. IT WILL BECOME INVISIBLE IN ITS IMMANENCE

Roy Ascott, 'Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?' 1990

TECHNOLOGY

Jean-François Lyotard
Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime//1982

It is not just photography that has rendered the profession of painting 'impossible'; to claim that it was would be like saying that Stéphane Mallarmé's work, or James Joyce's, were simply responses to the development of journalism. Painting's impossibility arises from the industrial and post-industrial, techno-scientific world's greater need for photography than for painting, just as that world needs journalism more than it does literature. The momentum of this world brought with it the decline of the so-called 'noble' professions which had belonged to the previous world, as well as the contraction of that earlier world.

Painting won its noble imprimatur, was ranked as a fine art, and was awarded almost princely privileges during the Quattrocento. In the centuries that followed it contributed its share toward realizing the metaphysical and political programme of visual and social order. Optical geometry, the ordering of colours and values according to a hierarchy of Neoplatonic inspiration, and the pictorial rules that captured and crystalized the heydays of religious or historical legend helped instill a sense of identity in the new political communities – the City, the State, the Nation – by allotting them the fate of seeing all through reason and thus making the world transparent (clear and distinct). The narrative, urban, architectural, religious and ethical components of these communities were given order on the pictorial plane by the painter's eye, according to Leon Battista Alberti's *costruzione legittima* (broadly, the laws of perspective). In turn, the eye of the monarch registered a well-ordered universe all the way to the vanishing point. Exhibited in the churches and the great halls of seignorial or civic palaces, these representations allowed every member of the community the same possibility as the monarch or the painter for an identity within and mastery over that universe. The modern concept of state – the republic or the democracy – is foreshadowed by this commoner, who in perceptual union with the monarch is a 'virtual prince' and who will later become the citizen. The modern concept of culture stems from this public access to historical-political identifying signs arid to their collective interpretation. Museums perpetuate this tradition; but more pointedly, a glance into the halls of Congress in Washington, or into the Chambre des députés in Paris, attests to the fact that this classical spatial organization is not limited to museum paintings, but structures the representation of the body politic itself. The extent to which the plans of Greek and Roman public places are paradigms for the modern socio-political arena is clear. Photography achieves this programme of

metapolitical visual and social ordering. It achieves it in both senses of the word: it realizes it, and it concludes it. The know-how and knowledge that were given substance and were transmitted in the school and the studio are now programmed inside the photographic machine. In a single click, an ordinary citizen, whether amateur or tourist, can organize his or her identifying spaces and make a picture that enriches the cultural memory-bank. Improved contemporary instruments free one from the problem of lengthy poses, of focusing, aperture selection and developing. Thanks to optical, chemical, mechanical and electronic refinements, the photographic machine makes certain of the skills, experience and training that were required of the apprentice painter (such as eradicating bad habits, educating the eye, hand, body and soul, in order to elevate them to a new order) available to the amateur. All the amateur has to do is choose a subject and even there the photographer is guided by customs and connotations, though they can be ignored and the unexpected can be sought – as it often is. Rather than becoming a tedious survey, amateur photography over the course of the nineteenth century became a means of prospecting and discovering, and even of ethnological inquiry. The old political function of painting became fragmented; the painter was an ethnologist of little ethnologies, and the community now had less of a need to identify with its prince, its core, than it had to explore its boundaries. Amateur photographers made field trips; they returned with documents.

Painters had already set themselves to the task of documentation (one thinks here of Gustave Courbet, of Edouard Manet), but they were quickly overtaken in this. Their procedures could not compete: slow professional learning processes, costly materials, lengthy production periods, difficult objects to manage – in short, the cost of the whole endeavour was high, compared to the relatively minimal total cost of making a photograph. Later, Marcel Duchamp concluded that it was no longer the time to paint. With photography, the idea of the industrial readymade had arrived. Those painters who persisted had to confront photography's challenge, and so they engaged in the dialectic of the avant-garde which had at stake the question 'What is Painting?' Painting became a philosophical activity: previously defined rules governing the formation of pictorial images were not enunciated and applied automatically. Rather, painting's rule became the re-evaluation of those pictorial rules, as philosophy re-evaluates philosophical syntax.

Thus avant-garde painters cut themselves off from the public who were already handling well-regulated photographic equipment, and had been leafing through 'real' pictures (and seeing them at the movies as well). That public remained convinced that the programmes for artificial perspective had to be maintained, and did not understand that it can take a year to make a blank

square; in other words, to create nothing (assuming that that's the only form of the unrepresentable).

Thus photography entered the field that had been opened up by the classical aesthetics of imagery, the aesthetics of beauty. Like classical painting of the Renaissance, photography called upon communal taste. The nature of this consensus, however, is profoundly modified in photography, as it is in the whole field of aesthetic objects in the contemporary Western world. Immanuel Kant insisted that consensus as to what is beautiful must remain free; in other words, that it is not regulated *a priori* by laws. The widespread introduction of industrial and post-industrial techno-sciences, of which the invention of photography is only one aspect, evidently signifies painstaking programming, by means of optical, chemical and photo-electronic processes, of the production of beautiful images. These images immediately bear the stamp of the laws of knowledge. The indeterminate, since it does not allow for precision, will have to be eliminated, and with it goes feeling. The person for whom these beautiful pictures are intended is a consumer of finished products. Photography's infallibility is that of the perfectly programmed; its beauty is that of Voyager II.

Loss of aura is the negative aspect of the hardware involved in producing the machine that produces the photograph. The amateur has to choose a subject, but the look is controlled by the manufacturer. Experience is that mass of affects – of projections and memories – that must perish and be born for any subject to attain the expression of its essence. The body of amateur photography has almost nothing to do with experience and owes almost everything to the experiments of industrial research laboratories. As a result, it is not just beautiful, but too beautiful. Something is inherent in this 'too': an infinity; not the indeterminacy of a feeling, but the infinite ability of science, of technology, of capitalism, to realize. The ability of machines to function is, by principle, subject to obsolescence because the accomplishments of the most esteemed capitalists demand the perpetual reformulation of merchandise and the creation of new markets. The hardness of industrial beauty contains the infinity of techno-scientific and economic reasons.

The destruction of experience that this implies is not simply due to the introduction of that which is 'well-conceived' into the field of aesthetics. Science, technology and capital, in spite of their matter-of-fact approach, are also modes of making concrete the infinity of ideas. Knowing all, being capable of all, having all, are their horizons – and horizons extend to infinity. The readymade in the techno-sciences presents itself as a potential for infinite production, and so does the photograph. In this sense amateur photography, at first glance not much more than the consummation of the machine's image-making capacities, also belongs to the infinite dialectic of ideas in the process of being realized – the state of consuming – and therein it heralds a new condition. The end of experience is no doubt the end of poetics, but it is also the concretization of an objective infinity which continually constructs and deconstructs the world, and one wherein the individual, at whatever level of the social hierarchy, is both voluntary and involuntary subject.

It follows that the definition of a well-realized photographic image, initially linked to the rules of artificial perspective, is subject to revision. Photography enters into that infinite field opened up by technoscientific research. Its initial function, inherited from the identifying task assigned to painting in the Quattrocento, falls into disuse, as does the general community's previous definition of its identity. In the current state of techno-science and accumulated capital in the developed world, community identity requires no spiritual allegiance, nor does it demand a grand, shared ideology, but it crystallizes instead through the mediation of the total sum of goods and services, which are being exchanged at a prodigious rate. At the edge of the twenty-first century the search for knowledge, technology and capital is evident in the very structure of our languages. The traditional function of the state has shifted: it need no longer incarnate the idea of community, and tends instead to identify with its infinite potential to generate data, know-how and wealth. Within this trend, photography is relieved of the responsibility for ideological identification which it inherited from pictorial tradition, and makes room for research, and, of course, for photographic art. We are past deploring 'mechanical reproducibility' in works of art; we know that industry doesn't mean the end of the arts, only their mutation. The question, 'What is photography?' draws photographic researches into a dialectic comparable to that of the pictorial avant-garde.

The pictorial avant-garde, as we have seen, responded to painting's 'impossibility' by engaging in research centered around the question, 'What is painting?' One after another, previous assumptions about the painter's practice were put on trial and debated. Tonality, linear perspective, the rendering of values, the frame, format, the supports, surface, medium, instrument, place of exhibition, and many other presuppositions were questioned plastically by the various avant-gardes. 'Modern painters' discovered that they had to represent the existence of that which was not demonstrable if the perspectival laws of *costruzione legittima* were followed. They set about to revolutionize the supposed visual givens in order to reveal that the field of vision simultaneously conceals and needs the invisible, that it relates therefore not only to the eye, but to the spirit as well.

Thus they introduced painting into the field opened by the aesthetics of the sublime – which is not governed by a consensus of taste. Avant-garde painting eludes the aesthetics of beauty in that it does not draw on a communal sense of shared pleasure. To the public taste its products seem 'monstrous', 'formless',

purely 'negative' non-entities. (I am using terms by which Kant characterized those objects that give rise to a sense of the sublime.) When one represents the non-demonstrable, representation itself is martyred. Among other things this means that neither painting nor the viewing public can draw on established symbols, figures or plastic forms that permit the sense or the understanding of there being, in these idea works, any question of the kind of reason and imagination that existed in Romano-Christian painting. In our techno-scientific industrial world there are no consistent symbols for good, just, true, infinite, etc. There have been certain 'realisms', usually academic – bourgeois at the end of the nineteenth century, socialist and national-socialist during the twentieth – that have tried to reintroduce symbolism, to offer the public accessible works of art which will allow it to identify with specific ideas (race, socialism, nation, etc.). We know these attempts always call for the elimination of the avant-garde. For its part the avant-garde, in its prodigious effort of questioning precedents of painting, manages to neglect utterly its 'cultural' responsibility for unifying taste and providing a sense of communal identity by means of visual symbols. The avant-garde painter feels an overriding responsibility to the fulfilment of the imperative implied by the question, 'What is painting?' Essentially what is at stake in the work is the demonstration of the existence of the invisible in the visual. The task of 'cultivating' the public comes later.

That which is not demonstrable is that which stems from Ideas and for which one cannot cite (represent) any example, case in point, or even symbol. The universe is not demonstrable; neither is humanity, the end of history, the moment, the species, the good, the just, etc – or, according to Kant, absolutes in general – because to represent is to make relative, to place in context within conditions of representation. Therefore one cannot represent the absolute, but one can demonstrate that the absolute exists – through 'negative representation', which Kant called the 'abstract'. The momentum of abstract painting since 1910 stems from the rigours of indirect, virtually ungraspable allusions to the invisible within the visual. The sublime is the sense that these works draw upon, not the beautiful.

The sublime is not simple gratification but the gratification of effort. It is impossible to represent the absolute, which is ungratifying; but one knows that one has to, that the faculty of feeling or imagining is called upon to make the perceptible represent the ineffable – and even if this fails, and even if that causes suffering, a pure gratification will emerge from the tension. It is not surprising to find the term sublime in Apollinaire's essays on Modern paintings, in Barnett Newman's writings and painting titles, in texts published by many more recent avant-gardists during the 1960s. The word belongs to the romantic vocabulary.

The pictorial avant-gardes achieved romanticism – in other words, a Modernism (already presaged by Petronius and Augustine) which signifies the weakening of the links between that which can be felt and that which can be understood. But at the same time they were by-products of a romantic nostalgia, because they looked to their immediate circumstances, to the actual conditions of the art-making process. Marcel Proust was still a romantic, Joyce less so, and Gertrude Stein even less. Henry Fuseli and Caspar David Friedrich were Romantics, and so was Eugène Delacroix; Paul Cézanne less so, the Delaunays and Piet Mondrian barely at all. These last three were already following the experimental imperative (in what they accomplished if not always in what they wrote). Their sublime was fundamentally not nostalgic and tended toward the infinity of plastic experiment rather than toward the representation of any lost absolute. In this, their work belongs to the contemporary industrial, techno-scientific world.

As for Achille Bonito Oliva's 'trans-avantgarde' and similar current notions in Italy, Germany and the United States (including Charles Jencks' postmodernism in architecture – which the reader will kindly not confuse with what I have referred to in the past as the 'postmodern condition'), it is clear that under the pretext of consolidating the avant-garde tradition it is in effect squandering it. That tradition can only convey itself through the dialectic of refutation and questioning. Drawing firm conclusions, especially by process of addition, means the end of that dialectic and the encouragement of the eclecticism of consumerism.

Mixing neo- or hyper-realistic motifs with lyrically abstract or conceptual ones on a single surface is saying that everything is equal because everything is easy to consume. It means establishing and ratifying new 'taste'. This 'taste' is not Taste. Eclecticism panders to the habits of magazine readers, to the needs of consumers of standard industrial imagery, to the sensibility of the supermarket shopper. That kind of post-Modernism, to the extent that it exerts – by means of critics, curators, gallery directors, and collectors – intense pressure on artists, aligns pictorial inquiry to the current state of 'culture', and strips artists of their responsibility to the question of the nondemonstrable. That question is, to me, the only one worthy of life's high stakes, and of the world of thought in the coming century. Any denial of that question is a menace – and one that cannot be ignored, as it threatens to relax the tension between the act of painting and the essence of painting, when it is that very tension which stimulated one of the most heroic centuries of Western painting. This menace implies the corruption of painting's honour – which thus far has remained intact in spite of the worst temptations of the state and of the market.

The governing principle of the post-industrial techno-scientific world is not the need to represent the representable, but rather the opposite principle. To

turn away from this principle – that infinity is inherent in the very dialectic of search – is absurd, impractical and reactionary. It is not up to the artist to reinstate a make-believe 'reality' which the drive toward knowledge, technology and wealth will continually destroy in order to replace it with a version considered more viable – and which itself will eventually be replaced. The spirit of the times is surely not that of the merely pleasant: its mission remains that of the immanent sublime, that of alluding to the nondemonstrable. It goes without saying that such a mission causes anguish, but painters are not subject to the question, 'How can we avoid anguish?' They are subject to the question, 'What is painting?' In addition, they are also subject to the question 'How do we communicate our painting to those who are not painters?' – but this does not mean that the two roles are to be confused. To confuse them would be comparable to the philosopher confusing responsibility to thought with responsibility to the public. The responsibility of communicating the meaning of thoughts and paintings belongs to the intellectual. In fact, the question 'What is thought?' places the philosopher in an avant-garde position. That is why he dares speak of painters, his brothers and sisters in experimentation.

The subject of representation is of such broad philosophical scope that I thought if best to conceive this piece as a critical sketch, rather than as far-ranging analysis – J.-F.L.

Jean-Francois Lyotard, 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime', trans. Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum* (April 1982) 64–9.

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe
Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime//1999

[...] I want to discuss Barnett Newman briefly here and, in doing so, to suggest that he formulated a version of a postmodern Kantian sublime that is no longer available at the end of the century as it was in the middle of it, when he made it up. It's no longer available because it's a sublime which still finds itself in nature, but it provides the terms for what seeks to find a way out of it.

I think Newman's paintings are clearly involved with the idea of limitlessness. They are certainly rough in this or that sense and present colour without form, pointing in that to the possibility of formlessness, an emptiness which is at the same time full. Typically they do so through the indeterminacy – which Lyotard sees as Newman's theme – offered by red, which unlike yellow doesn't advance, unlike blue doesn't recede, but instead hovers in the middle ground. The model might be Matisse's *Red Studio*, where red holds together foreground and background, and where the clock at the back reveals, in its unpainted face, the ground of the painting as a whole. In making the origin, the ground of the painting, also its culmination, what's at the centre of the furthest recess made by the pictorial space, Matisse is quite Heideggerian in the way he makes the painting be a matter of the return of the origin at the end and as an end. This is not quite what happens in Newman, where there is no trace of the ground.

Newman painted his first, as they are called, zip painting, and most but I think not all the subsequent ones, by putting tape down over a colour and leaving it there until the painting as a whole was finished, removing it at the end. So the last mark marks the act of removal which reveals the first, leaving traces of the build-up on the tape which had covered the original colour, and which now give an irregular edge to the stripe or zip. Therein, along with his generally very cavalier attitude to painting technique, lies the role of roughness and simplicity in Newman's sublime.

Richard Shiff described Newman putting down first colour and then tape as an act of subdivision, which at the same time engages the temporal by, as it were, dividing one duration by that which it replaced. One could add to that the complication that comes from the different way one sees even the same thing if it's on the left or on the right. In any case, the stripe or zip is the provision of a third area between two others that are identical to one another and in a sense follow from the one from which they mutually differ. And though they look and are the same, the one thing we know for sure is that they don't run behind the stripe, because the stripe or zip is a sign of origin re-presented after a period in which it's been hidden, revealed at the end as an initiation. Lyotard goes on to say of Longinus' evocation of extreme simplicity that 'I don't mind if this simplicity, this silence, is taken to be yet another rhetorical figure. But it must be granted that it constitutes the most indeterminate of figures ... Must we admit that there are techniques for hiding figures, that there are figures for the erasure of figures?'

That question reverberates through much of the present discussion, leading back to the substitution of the technological sublime for nature and the reversal of the presumptive relationship between the two. In Newman erasure is presented in two conditions, one of the irreversible development of the main field of the painting, the other its suspension and reversal in the stripe left by the masking tape's removal.

Lyotard also relates Newman's sublime to the temporal, itself an idea inherent in themes like limitlessness – which can't be spatialized, and as such is an invisibility apparent to vision but unrealizable by it – and it is in these terms

that one could say that in Matisse the painting begins with its ground but in Newman it begins with the stripe, which is what survives of a colour first painted over the whole of the surface. The origin to which one is returned is not the ground of action but an originary act meant to subsume that which preceded it, its ground. The sublimity of the act lies in its roughness and indeterminacy – the latter underscored in those paintings where Newman places the tape over wet paint – and thus it is that Newman can be discussed at length, and has been, without mention of beauty.

On the other hand *Onement* is symmetrical, a property usually associated with beauty, and *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* organized according to the golden section, the high style epitomized. So what is framing what? Certainly limitlessness is being presented in some way. As a red painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* hovers like Matisse's *Red Studio.* But being a nonrepresentational painting, and therefore ungrounded in representation – which is to say, the recognizable – it contains no extremities of near or far, so that indeterminacy means the loss of hierarchy, and movement must become something other than the possibility of movement between things. In both Matisse and Newman, red envelops as well as joins, but in Newman, the act of linking is the same thing as the act of holding apart, in a context where, unlike Matisse's, there never were any solids or voids, because the stripes or zips function spatially, as fields of colour. Their initial appearance as things suspended in or superimposed on the red is problematized by their dissolving into spaces, which is to say voids, when one actually looks *at* them.

In order to be sublime in the way that he said they were, Newman's paintings had to be large, which could link him with the specifically American sublime theorized by Harold Bloom. This sublime would seem to be caught up in Protestantism's close relationship with the Old Testament, with a purposive creation, with law as logic, with the plain and simple of Jonathan Edwards. A severe and hard sublime predicated on questions of origin and boundlessness. Others have seen the New York painters of the 1950s, Newman among them, as an American version of the German romantic sublime, an art concerned with the overwhelming and with the idea of destiny as an idea of acting out, a sublime severe but atmospheric and engulfing rather than hard and resistant.

In addition to these, the size and format of Newman's paintings could also invite comparison with a third sublime, not unrelated to Bloom's, which is the banal sublime of the propagandist painters of what was in the nineteenth century called America's 'manifest destiny'. Large canvases containing honest settlers dwarfed by the vistas they are about to conquer, with in at least one painting an angel in the sky goading them on, the awesomeness of the landscape mirrored in the awe with which the soon-to-be-displaced indigenous

population regards them. Such paintings employ a wide-screen format (the proportions of marine paintings applied to the Wild West) as does *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, and while I am not suggesting that Newman's work is continuous with that tradition (any more than I could subscribe to the thesis that Rothko's paintings are Friedrich's without the trees and figures), I want to see Newman as related to it through a kind of negation. Newman was interested in the art of Native Americans, a fascination he shared with Pollock (who, unlike Newman, was from the West) and in thinking of the role of limitlessness and indeterminacy in his work, I think of Newman's interest in a Native American dance in which the dancer places a pole in the ground and dances in response to it: an idea of mobility which can vary, be potentially limitless, on all sides while retaining a constant center. As I think of this, I think also of Newman's expressed desire, eventually fulfilled I think, to go to the tundra, where one can turn around through 360 degrees and the horizon will remain constant and level. Again, limitlessness with a fixed centre and also the idea of flattening, i.e. of unimpeded extension and, by implication, of uninterrupted movement.

One could say, then, that the theme of limitlessness offered in an earlier American sublime persists in Newman in some other way. What locates that sublime in Newman, anchors it, is a principle of origin and return. He finds a model for it, as nineteenth-century American art did not, in Native American culture as well as elsewhere, and in the American landscape at its most remote and most fragile. One of the elsewheres where he found the model was, as is well known, and has been discussed at some length by Tom Hess and others, the Cabala. There Newman found, for example, the theme of the absent as a sign of immanent presence, in the idea that before making the world God had to make the space it would occupy. A theme not unconnected to ideas like manifest destiny or, in another sense, to the ideals of Puritans like Jonathan Edwards.

Newman's sublime, then, is one of limitlessness visualized within the terms of an activity which leaves no trace of what was there before it but returns to what began it. Or very little trace. This sounds quite American, and I think one can find in it the reasons why later painting would want to build on it without being able to preserve its assumptions. But nowadays the image of the tundra, which, as an idea of emptiness and freedom to move, inspired Newman, might be seen to have been replaced with the knowledge that invisibility itself, the air, is filled with electronic signals. An, as it were, geographical image of limitlessness has given way to a technological one. Immediacy – what Lyotard calls the enigma of the *Is it happening?* – is in a sense a technological convention, second nature to the computer and the phone company, leaving the work of art to expand that immediacy into a gap of which one may be conscious.

A contemporary sublime might, then, have to engage an environment in which multiplicitous signification, that proliferation of systems which is the technological condition of late capitalism, is not only the norm but the model, and where the issues are not the incomplete and the rough but the intersection of differences and repetition as difference – where, as Deleuze has pointed out, repetition precedes and makes possible the original. What makes it a repetition is also what prevents it from being one, it is in fact not that which it repeats.

And I think one might ask whether this would not be a good place to stop talking about consciousness as organized around or through oneness (or 'onement') and ask instead whether it should be seen as a realization of a state like that warned against by Kant when he says that heteronomy threatens or tempts the subject's autonomy. In that it originates in knowledge and production rather than nature, the contemporary sublime seems less readily describable through the model of an autonomous subject – techno-capitalism's success being a function of its not being clearly one thing – than of one that could find itself in 'the most indeterminate of figures' by being a mobile collection of centres without a single determining form. Immediacy, as a condition of everyday life, would require it, as would the logic which suggests that while one may have a single theory that explains nature (that attributes an end to it), knowledge is heteronomous as nature is not, in that it originates in competing and contradictory discourses. Immediacy is a state in which the message is already at its destination, or where one could not separate the start from the finish. A state of permanent immediacy is one in which the message is always already there – thus, at the banal level, its perfect expression by the television, a set of continua that includes what has happened a minute ago, or is happening right now – but not here, thank God – but which also cannot end. Here autonomy is a reactive confirmation of absence, hence its perfect relationship to the banal, but it also illustrates the need for absence on the part of the autonomous subject in its more elevated forms. The extreme mobility of the contemporary sublime erodes autonomy because it calls for movement through the heteronomous which is itself heteronomous, provisional singularity taking the place of the irreducible, movement being the basis of the indeterminacy of what is erased and represented within it.

Lyotard says that in criticizing Burke's

> over-'surrealist' description of the sublime work ... Newman judged surrealism to be over-reliant on a pre-romantic or romantic approach to indeterminacy. Thus, when he seeks sublimating in the here and now he breaks with the eloquence of romantic art but does not reject its fundamental task, that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible ... [which] ... does not reside in an over there, in another time, but in this: in that (something) happens. In the determination of pictorial art, the indeterminate, the 'it happens' is the paint, the picture. The paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to bear witness. (Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', 92–3.)

Newman was in little doubt that the inexpressible was an idea, traditionally conceived. That is to say it was one thing – or, as Lyotard puts it, an 'it' – that was to happen in the paint and picture, or that these were to happen as, when each or either were encountered as an (inexpressible, which is to say, unsayable) 'occurrence or event'. In contrast to this presumptive unity of the indeterminate, I think that in later painting this 'it' has to become a 'them' or, rather, seeks to. The inexpressible takes another turn or form, and it is an idea of autonomy that becomes indeterminate, or, more precisely, could be seen to have the option of seeking to become more indeterminate. [...]

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, extract from *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999).

Fredric Jameson
Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism//1991

IV

[...] Let us re-emphasize the enormity of a transition which leaves behind it the desolation of Edward Hopper's buildings or the stark Midwest syntax of Charles Sheeler's forms, replacing them with the extraordinary surfaces of the photorealist cityscape, where even the automobile wrecks gleam with some new hallucinatory splendour. The exhilaration of these new surfaces is all the more paradoxical in that their essential content – the city itself – has deteriorated or disintegrated to a degree surely still inconceivable in the early years of the twentieth century, let alone in the previous era. How urban squalor can be a delight to the eyes when expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration – these are some of the questions that confront us in this moment of our inquiry. Nor should the human figure be exempted from investigation, although it seems clear that for the newer aesthetic the representation of space itself has come to be felt as

incompatible with the representation of the body: a kind of aesthetic division of labour far more pronounced than in any of the earlier generic conceptions of landscape, and a most ominous symptom indeed. The privileged space of the newer art is radically anti-anthropomorphic, as in the empty bathrooms of Doug Bond's work. The ultimate contemporary fetishization of the human body, however, takes a very different direction in the statues of Duane Hanson: what I have already called the simulacrum, whose peculiar function lies in what Sartre would have called the *derealization* of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality. Your moment of doubt and hesitation as to the breath and warmth of these polyester figures, in other words, tends to return upon the real human beings moving about you in the museum and to transform them also for the briefest instant into so many dead and flesh-coloured simulacra in their own right. The world thereby momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density. But is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience?

It has proved fruitful to think of such experiences in terms of what Susan Sontag, in an influential statement, isolated as 'camp'. I propose a somewhat different cross-light on it, drawing on the equally fashionable current theme of the 'sublime', as it has been rediscovered in the works of Edmund Burke and Kant; or perhaps one might want to yoke the two notions together in the form of something like a camp or 'hysterical' sublime. The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse, in astonishment, stupor and awe, of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description then refined by Kant to include the question of representation itself, so that the object of the sublime becomes not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces. Such forces Burke, in his historical moment at the dawn of the modern bourgeois state, was only able to conceptualize in terms of the divine, while even Heidegger continues to entertain a phantasmatic relationship with some organic pre-capitalist peasant landscape and village society, which is the final form of the image of Nature in our own time.

Today, however, it may be possible to think all this in a different way, at the moment of a radical eclipse of Nature itself: Heidegger's 'field path' is, after all, irredeemably and irrevocably destroyed by late capital, by the green revolution, by neocolonialism and the megalopolis which runs its superhighways over the older fields and vacant lots and turns Heidegger's 'house of being' into condominiums, if not the most miserable unheated, rat-infested tenement buildings. The other of our society is in that sense no longer

Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify.

I am anxious that this other thing not overhastily be grasped as technology per se, since I will want to show that technology is here itself a figure for something else. Yet technology may well serve as adequate shorthand to designate that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labour stored up in our machinery – an alienated power, what Sartre calls the counterfinality of the practico-inert, which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis.

Technological development is however on the Marxist view the result of the development of capital rather than some ultimately determining instance in its own right. It will therefore be appropriate to distinguish several generations of machine power, several stages of technological revolution within capital itself. I here follow Ernest Mandel, who outlines three such fundamental breaks or quantum leaps in the evolution of machinery under capital:

> The fundamental revolutions in power technology – the technology of the production of motive machines by machines – thus appears as the determinant moment in revolutions of technology as a whole. Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the nineteenth century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the twentieth century – these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the 'original' industrial revolution of the later eighteenth century.
> – *Late Capitalism* (London 1978) 118

This periodization underscores the general thesis of Mandel's book *Late Capitalism*; namely, that there have been three fundamental moments it capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. These are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own, wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational, capital. I have already pointed out that Mandel's intervention in the post-industrial debate involves the proposition that late or multinational or consumer capitalism, far from being inconsistent with Marx's great nineteenth-century analysis, constitutes, on the contrary, the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas. This purer capitalism of our own time thus eliminates the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way. One is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically

original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious: that is, the destruction of pre-capitalist Third World agriculture by the Green Revolution, and the rise of the media and the advertising industry. At any rate, it will also have been clear that my own cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel's tripartite scheme.

We may therefore speak of our own period as the Third Machine Age; and it is at this point that we must reintroduce the problem of aesthetic representation already explicitly developed in Kant's earlier analysis of the sublime, since it would seem only logical that the relationship to and the representation of the machine could be expected to shift dialectically with each of these qualitatively different stages of technological development.

It is appropriate to recall the excitement of machinery in the moment of capital preceding our own, the exhilaration of futurism, most notably, and of Marinetti's celebration of the machine gun and the motor car. These are still visible emblems, sculptural nodes of energy which give tangibility and figuration to the motive energies of that earlier moment of modernization. The prestige of these great streamlined shapes can be measured by their metaphorical presence in Le Corbusier's buildings, vast utopian structures which ride like so many gigantic steamship liners upon the urban scenery of an older fallen earth. Machinery exerts another kind of fascination in the works of artists like Picabia and Duchamp, whom we have no time to consider here; but let me mention, for completeness' sake, the ways in which revolutionary or communist artists of the 1930s also sought to reappropriate this excitement of machine energy for a Promethean reconstruction of human society as a whole, as in Fernand Léger and Diego Rivera.

It is immediately obvious that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation: not the turbine, nor even Sheeler's grain elevators or smokestacks, not the baroque elaboration of pipes and conveyor belts, nor even the streamlined profile of the railroad train – all vehicles of speed still concentrated at rest – but rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself.

Such machines are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment, of some older speed-and-energy sculpture. Here we have less to do with kinetic energy than with all kinds of new reproductive

processes; and in the weaker productions of postmodernism the aesthetic embodiment of such processes often tends to slip back more comfortably into a mere thematic representation of content – into narratives which are about the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of the production and reproduction of the simulacrum. (The shift from Antonioni's modernist *Blow-Up* to DePalma's postmodernist *Blowout* is here paradigmatic.) When Japanese architects, for example, model a building on the decorative imitation of stacks of cassettes, then the solution is at best thematic and allusive, although often humorous.

Yet something else does tend to emerge in the most energetic postmodernist texts, and this is the sense that beyond all thematics or content the work seems to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. Architecture therefore remains in this sense the privileged aesthetic language; and the distorting and fragmenting reflections of one enormous glass surface to the other can be taken as paradigmatic of the central role of process and reproduction in postmodernist culture.

As I have said, however, I want to avoid the implication that technology is in any way the 'ultimately determining instance' either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production: such a thesis is, of course, ultimately at one with the post-Marxist notion of a post-industrial society. Rather, I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely, the whole world system of a present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating not so much in its own right but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp: the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself. This is a figural process presently best observed in a whole mode of contemporary entertainment literature – one is tempted to characterize it as 'high-tech paranoia' – in which the circuits and networks of some putative global computer hookup are narratively mobilized by labyrinthine conspiracies of autonomous but deadly interlocking and competing information agencies in a complexity often beyond the capacity of the normal reading mind. Yet conspiracy theory (and its garish narrative manifestations) must be seen as a degraded attempt – through the figuration of advanced technology – to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system. It is in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social

institutions that, in my opinion, the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized.

Such narratives, which first tried to find expression through the generic structure of the spy novel, have only recently crystallized in a new type of science fiction, called cyberpunk, which is fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia itself: William Gibson's representational innovations, indeed, mark his work as an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production. [...]

Fredric Jameson, extract from *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 32–8.

Roy Ascott
Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?//1990

[...] The digital matrix that brings all the new electronic and optical media into its telematic embrace[1] – being a connectionist model of hypermedia – calls for a 'connective criticism'. The personal computer yields to the interpersonal computer. Serial data processing becomes parallel distributed processing. Networks link memory bank to memory bank, intelligence to intelligence. Digital image and digital sound find their common ground, just as a synthesis of modes – visual, tactile, textual, acoustic, environment – can be expected to 'hypermediate' the networked sensibilities of a constellation of global cultures. The digital camera – gathering still and moving images from remote sensors deep in space, or directed by human or artifical intelligence on earth, seeking out what is unseen, imaging what is invisible – meets at a point between our own eyes and the reticular retina of worldwide networks, stretching perception laterally away from the tunnel vision, from the Cartesian sight lines of the old deterministic era. Our sensory experience becomes extrasensory, as our vision is enhanced by the extrasensory devices of telematic perception. The computer deals invisibly with the invisible. It processes those connections, collusions, systems, forces and fields, transformations and transferences, chaotic assemblies and higher orders of organization that lie outside our vision, outside the gross level of material perception afforded by our natural senses. Totally invisible to our everyday unaided perception, for example, is the underlying fluidity of matter, the indeterminate dance of electrons, the 'snap, crackle and pop' of quanta, the tunelling and transpositions, nonlocal and superluminal, that the new physics represents. It is these patterns of events, these new exhilarating metaphors of existence – nonlinear, uncertain, layered and discontinuous – that the computer can re-describe. With the computer, and brought together in the telematic embrace, we can hope to glimpse the unseeable, to grasp the ineffable chaos of becoming, the secret order of disorder. And as we come to see more, we shall see the computer less and less. It will become invisible in its immanence, but its presence will be palpable to the artist engaged telematically in the world process of autopoeisis, planetary self-creation.

The technology of computerized media and telematic systems is no longer to be viewed simply as a set of rather complicated tools extending the range of painting and sculpture, performed music or published literature. It can now be seen to support a whole new field of creative endeavour that is as radically unlike each of those established artistic genres as they are unlike each other. A new vehicle of consciousness, of creativity and expression, has entered our repertoire of being. [...]

1 'Telematics is a term used to designate computer-mediated communications networking involving telephone, cable and satellite links between geographically dispersed individuals and institutions that are interfaced to data-processing systems, remote sensing devices, and capacious data-storage banks. It involves the technology of interaction among human beings and between the human mind and artificial systems of intelligence and perception.' [Roy Ascott, definition from earlier in the text.]

Roy Ascott, extract from 'Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?', *Art Journal*, vol. 49, no. 3 (Fall 1990) 246–7.

Gustav Metzger, *Manifesto: Auto Destructive Art*, 1960

TERROR

Gustav Metzger
Manifesto: Auto Destructive Art//1960

Man in Regent Street is auto-destructive.
Rockets, nuclear weapons are auto-destructive.
Auto-destructive art.
The drop drop dropping of HH bombs
Not interested in ruins (the picturesque).

Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummelling to which individuals and masses are subjected.

Auto-destructive art demonstrates man's power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them.

Auto-destructive art mirrors the compulsive perfectionism of arms manufacture – polishing to destruction point.

Auto-destructive art is the transformation of technology into public art.

The immense productive capacity, the chaos of capitalism and of Soviet communism, the co-existence of surplus and starvation; the increasing stockpiling of nuclear weapons – more than enough to destroy technological societies; the disintegrative effects of machinery and of life in vast built-up areas on the person ...

Auto-destructive art is art that contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years. Other forms of auto-destructive art involve manual manipulation. There are forms of auto-destructive art where the artist has a tight control over the nature and timing of the disintegrative process, and there are other forms where the artist's control is slight.

Materials and techniques used in creating auto-destructive art include: Acid, Adhesives, Ballistics, Canvas, Clay, Combustion, Compression, Concrete, Corrosion, Cybernetics, Drop, Elasticity, Electricity, Electrolysis, Electronics, Explosives, Feedback, Glass, Heat, Human energy, Ice, Jet, Light, Load, Mass-production, Metal, Motion picture, Natural forces, Nuclear energy, Paint, Paper, Photography, Plaster, Plastics, Pressure, Radiation, Sand, Solar energy, Sound, Steam, Stress, Terracotta, Vibration, Water, Welding, Wire, Wood.

Gustav Metzger, Manifesto: Auto Destructive Art' (London, 10 March 1960), in *Metzger at AA* (London: Destruction/Creation, 1965).

Vijay Mishra
The Gothic Sublime//1994

[...] The metaphysics of human superiority espoused by Kant is no longer the condition of the sublime. Instead, death is embraced contemplatively and idealism is now tempered by pessimism and human insignificance. Desire becomes a thing-in-itself, and since it is founded on lack (we desire that which we do not possess), the oceanic sublime becomes the desired object. Unless, as Freud qualifies it, the reality principle intervenes, this *nirvana* principle, this death instinct, becomes the goal of life.[1] Freud quotes Schopenhauer approvingly ('For him death is the "true result and to that extent the purpose of life"')[2] in his own deliberations on the struggle of the death instinct with the persistent will to live. More extensively argued in his essay 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood' (1910) Freud introduces the term 'sublimation' to mean both Schopenhauer's sublime as exaltation and a process of change borrowed from the scientific definition of the term. The conflicting drives of life and death, therefore, find in the process of sublimation a substitute outlet for these conflicts that, if discharged, would make conscious life intolerable. In the words of Steven Z. Levine:

> The process of sublimation converts the unsayable into the said, the unseeable into the seen; but the underlying drive remains behind in a repressed, unconscious form, ever ready to erupt.[3]

Life and will therefore struggle against the repressed desire for death. In the sublime – and especially in the oceanic sublime metaphorically invoked by all theoreticians of the subject, from Longinus to Schopenhauer – the death instinct is momentarily triumphant. (Schopenhauer had, of course, read this through a very Hindu concept of universal self-extinction and oneness with Brahman; Freud sees in it the essential 'truth' of the unconscious itself.)

In other words, in the oceanic sublime we discover the image of a desire to return from the terrors of life to the 'inviting tranquility of death'.[4] The latter is what we would call sublimation, a process of displacement and rechannelling, which allows the ego to confront its own relentless and inevitable goal, death.[5]

The foregoing very selective outline of the sublime from the eighteenth-century theoreticians through Kant to Freud is meant to demonstrate the possibilities of another narrative of the sublime that remained occluded or repressed. The extraordinary emphasis on the primacy of reason meant that the

subject, though scarred, nevertheless emerges from the encounter with the sublime more or less triumphant. Against this I have projected the category of the Gothic sublime as the other, unspeakable narrative of this position, claiming that the triumph of reason (which has its counterpart in the epic's capacity to achieve, through writing, a faked immortality) is not to be taken for granted and that the totalizing grand narrative that is implicit in that claim to triumph is presaged in the Gothic, which shows the far-reaching consequences of narratives that examine a possible history of the period designated in the momentary lapse on the part of reason as it gives imagination total freedom. If we examine that space we find that there is no hope of self-transcendence available, as the subject simply dissolves into the pleasure principle and, finally, death. The narrative of this gap, this lapse, begins with Kant but ends up with the ghosts of the unconscious that Freud lays bare before us. In this respect the Gothic sublime becomes a general field under which another narrative, more like our own postmodern narrative, may be composed. This other sublime, the Gothic sublime, is in many ways the voice from the crypt that questions the power of reason (in Kant a substitute for the law of patriarchy as well) and destabilizes the centrality of the ego in Kant's formulation. It is the voice that wishes to write the narrative of the gap, the infinitesimal lapse, in which reason for the moment gives way to chaos as the mind embraces the full terror of the sublime. The Gothic narrative is to be located at that indeterminate moment of the near-abyss where the subject says, I am my own abyss, and is faced with a horrifying image of its own lack of totality. Where the Romantic version of this narrative re-establishes a totality as the ego under the security of reason embraces the magnificence of storm or holocaust, the Gothic subject has none of the capacities of the supremely confident, overpowering (though often insecure) Romantic ego: 'We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;/But thereof come in the end despondency and madness'.

The Gothic's abject failure to totalize brings us tantalizingly close to what Lyotard has called the 'abyss of heterogeneity',[6] history as a series of events that stubbornly resists any totalizing pattern. In this respect Lyotard's selective use of the Kantian sublime as the lynchpin of his definition of the postmodern condition is not so much a statement about the power of indeterminacy in the general domain of the sublime as a strategic harnessing of the occluded texts of the Gothic. In other words, the real metatexts for Lyotard are in fact the texts of the Gothic sublime. In Lyotard's reading of the Kantian sublime, the sublime does violence to the imagination, since the passage from speculative reason to its representation in an object commensurate to the idea can only lead to a radical heterogeneity. The heterogeneity is another way of explaining the chasm that exists between the two orders, the idea and its representation, will and

action, in postmodern speculations on history. Like Andy Warhol's postmodern image of the Empire State Building in flames, the Gothic sublime is pure Piranesi; not the vast oceans and tempests of Longinus or Kant, but the subterranean passages and the grotesque deformations contained in the dreamscape of the Gothic imagination. The Gothic sublime is the *sub*, not as 'up to' (as in *sub + limen*, the Latin etymology of sublime), but rather as the *below*, the underneath, of the *limen*, of the limit of one's perception. Clearly, it must be stressed that this possibility of the sublime was not lost on Kant, who was aware, in Paul de Man's words, of the 'dialectical complication'[7] of the sublime, since its *Lust*, its peculiar pleasure, implied the ravenous appetite also of monsters and ghosts occluded from consciousness. That Paul de Man retreats into the discourse of the Gothic to explain the lawlessness of the sublime is symptomatic of a tendency in the criticism of the sublime generally, in which the Gothic is invoked but not granted theoretical legitimation. From the depths of the underworld/abyss/unconscious the Gothic invades the discourses of the sublime. We need not go beyond de Man and Lyotard to become conscious of this contamination.

One of the shortcomings of earlier theories of sublimity (Gothic or not) is that they were linked to single-effect theories. In other words, the effect of the sublime was seen through either geographical categories (landscapes of vastness, the sublimity of storms, the movement of the 'lumbering planets') or through psychological categories (the impact on the mind of an extreme emotion attendant on terror). In these single-effect theories the subject's sense of sublime empowerment comes directly from the descriptive force of the adjective that precedes the noun: the Romantic sublime, for instance, is basically an egotistical sublime that consumes in its search for self-transcendence all possible distinctions; the technological sublime deals with special effects and finds its grand metaphors in cinema; the genetic sublime, as in Ibsen, locates sexually determined sources of terror; the Indian sublime seeks to aestheticize the religious experience, and so on. What our study of the Gothic sublime establishes, albeit only partially and problematically, is that all single-effect definitions of the sublime are predicated on the supplanting of the force of the sublime by its preceding descriptor, without recognizing that it is the very nature of the sublime that it cannot be contained. To add a descriptor to the sublime is to frame it; it is to establish formal limits to the sublime. Although these heuristic limitations are often necessary, what must be stressed is the regressive assimilationist force of the term *sublime*. It is not that the word *Gothic* in the phrase *Gothic sublime* progressively assimilates the sublime into its own domain; on the contrary, it is the sublime that regressively colonizes its descriptor. In the final analysis this is the terror of the sublime, the frighteningly contaminative force of the impossible idea itself. To collocate with the sublime,

to cohabit with it, is to be faced with an instance of radical incommensurability. Of all the sublimes, the Gothic sublime (in this specific collocation/cohabitation) is most aware of this incommensurability and the inherent problems of self-transcendence. The Gothic subject never self-transcends, in this sense. Its self-empowerment, as the subject under the sign of the Gothic, always implies subservience to the trope. There is a pleasure of impotence in the face of the sublime: the sublime castrates, it humiliates by its (phallic) grandeur.[8] If, as Rob Wilson points out in his masterly study, one version of the American sublime is to be read 'as a sign of national grandeur and collective empowerment',[9] then the Gothic sublime is a collective disempowerment under the sign of patriarchal power. Where the American sublime harnesses patriarchy toward its positive (divine) ends, Gothic sublimity is incapable of harnessing that force because the subject under patriarchy is continually defined in terms of lack. In this respect the Gothic sublime is indeed Harold Bloom's countersublime, impossible to imagine without repression.[10] The sublime, as an imaginal construct, may be troped by its descriptor, but not framed by it; it is the impossible *ergon* without a *parergon*.

The classic text here, of course, is Derrida's reading of the Kantian sublime in *The Truth in Painting* (*La vérité en peinture*)[11] in which Derrida reads Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* as both philosophy and imaginative literature. '*I seduce it*', he writes, 'by treating the third critique as a work of art. I neutralize or encrypt its existence.'[12] To transform Kant's study of aesthetics into a work of art is like seduction and encrypting. The offhand parenthesis of 'encrypt' (the *OED* cites no such word) connects art with one of the central themes of the Gothic. One recalls the feverish excitement of Ambrosio as he 'encrypts' and then violates his own sister in Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*. This unspeakable violation is, as Peter Brooks suggests, a 'specifically literary obsession with the buried utterance',[13] For Ambrosio the taboo encrypted, entombed, must be violated precisely in this space of emptiness and silence – the crypt, the tomb – from which meaning is removed.

But Derrida's 'encrypting' (a markedly Gothic word, in case we have forgotten), his seduction of a major philosophical work, is also an act of critical engagement in which the text can be entered from any point, since 'it is a sort of architecture'.[14] And he takes this freedom to read Kant from his own margins, from the frames, the borders of the text. In the section of the book called 'Parergon' (recall the Reverend Edward Casaubon's supplementary pamphlets on his *grand récit*, the work-in-progress entitled *Key to all Mythologies*, which he published as 'Parerga')[15] Derrida opens up the crucial domain of the Kantian sublime through the ambiguity of its own frames. Can an aesthetic of such magnitude as the sublime be framed in the first instance? Is Kant 'encrypting' the sublime through his own frames? Re-read from the point of view of the *parergon*, the incidental, the frame, what can we discover about the sublime if not its own intransigence, its own uneasiness with both metaphysical and transcendental principles? Having symbolically contained (framed) the sublime through a mathematical analogy (a metaphysical analogue), Kant then attempts to offer an extended coda through his far-reaching, dynamic sublime, in which a transcendental principle seems to overturn all attempts at metaphysical containment. For Kant the sublime is not so much a knowledge as a problem about aesthetics.

Since the sublime cannot be bordered, defined, delimited, it threatens the notion of the beautiful, which is predicated on an aesthetic conception of the harmony of understanding and imagination. For Lyotard the experience of the formless, as an 'affective paradox',[16] has parallels in the domain of politics, where the 'as-if presentation' signals the only way in which the assumed laws of a civil society (its morality and so on) may be given expression. The cleavage that we note here is the cleavage also of the Gothic sublime, in that there, too, a radical discourse that turned its back on realism claimed that the world cannot be presented as an unproblematic harmony. It, therefore, returned to those marginal discourses of Jacobean tragedy – notably the genre of revenge tragedy – in search of its own sublime figures. It is no accident that one of the key literary texts of postmodernism, Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, uses the intertext of Ford, Webster, Tourneur, and 'Wharfinger' (the latter as Pynchon's 'as-if presentation') to construct an allegory of the signifier. The self-conscious Gothicism of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* or a film such as *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) is another case in point.[17] Models of the supernatural, the romance, sentimentality, and the revenge genre precede the real in the Gothic in an uncanny echo of the model-oriented hyperreality of Baudrillard's technological sublime: 'the real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced, the hyperreal'.[18] What it releases – what the sublime releases – is both a philosophical threat to an entire tradition of rational thinking and the shock of nothing further happening. In his insightful essay on the sublime and the avant-garde, Lyotard is remarkably Gothic. The definition of the sublime given here is identical with the way in which we will define Gothic effects in our readings of Gothic texts. Referring to Burke's terror, his 'entirely spiritual passion', Lyotard continues: 'Terrors are linked to privation ... What is terrifying is that the *It happens that* does not happen, that it stops happening.'[19] For the subject, such as the heroine of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, this is no consolation: the sublime event's incapacity to reincarnate itself simply extends the concept of non-correspondence between cognitive and speculative judgments. It is precisely this *de jure* principle, lifted to the level of an imperative, that may be heard in Matthew Arnold's poem 'Empedocles on Etna'. As a sign around which so many sublimes intersect, the Gothic will at times

emerge as an archegenre with a voracious appetite to consume all other sublimes. In the final analysis the Gothic sublime is linked not so much to belief (as is the Romantic sublime) as to uncertainty. The key words here are the unsayable and the unspeakable. By placing its faith in the sublime (and not the beautiful – though, as with Kant, it, too, is uncomfortable with the distinction) the Gothic takes an enormous risk. It also, quite legitimately I should think, confiscates the domain of the beautiful and denies it a separate existence. For the Gothic there is no such thing as the aesthetics of the beautiful, there is only the superabundance of the sublime. [...]

1 [footnote 59 in source] Sigmund Freud, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (1924), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 11 (Harmondsorth: Penguin Books, 1984) 414–15.

2 [60] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) 322.

3 [61] Steven Z Levine, 'Seascapes of the Sublime: Vernet, Monet and the Oceanic Feeling', *New Literary History*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Winter 1985) 397.

4 [62] Ibid., 398.

5 [63] See Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood' (1910), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985) 167: 'The sexual instinct is particularly well fitted to make contributions of this kind since it is endowed with a capacity for sublimation.' In Leonardo's case the chanelling of the sexual instincts led to his desexualization, which finally enabled him to go beyond the polarities of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, love and hate.

6 [64] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

7 [65] Paul de Man, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant', in *The Textual Sublime*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Gary E. Aylesworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) 90.

8 [66] On the pleasures of impotence with reference to Edmund Burke see Frances Ferguson, 'The Sublime of Edmund Burke, or the Bathos of Experience', *Glyph*, no. 8 (1981) 73 ff.

9 [67] Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) 26

10 [68] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) 99–112.

11 [69] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

12 [70] Ibid., 49.

13 [71] Peter Brooks, 'Narrative Transaction and Transference (Unburying *Le Colonel Chabert*)', in *Novel*, no. 15 (Winter 1982) 102.

14 [72] Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, op. cit., 50.

15 [73] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 3, chapter 29.

16 [74] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, op. cit., 170.

17 [75] Norman K. Denzin, '*Blue Velvet*: Postmodern Contradictions', in *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 5, no. 2–3 (June 1988) 461–73.

18 [76] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983) 146.

19 [77] Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 204.

Vijay Mishra, extract from *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 37–42.

Thomas Weiskel
The Logic of Terror//1979

[...] In the second or traumatic phase of the negative sublime, the mind is overwhelmed, but because this state has been associated with gratification it is unconsciously and irresistibly attractive. This is why a diffuse melancholy predisposes to the sublime. The melancholic is in need of 'narcissistic supplies' – self-esteem – from his superego, in which an original deprivation is likely to have been institutionalized. The sublime appearance promises an overabundance of stimulation. At any rate, we see that the Oedipal formation with all its vagaries and derivatives is superimposed upon an original ambivalence, a rapid alternation of attraction and repulsion. Our line of thought postulates a wish to be inundated and a simultaneous anxiety of annihilation: to survive, as it were, the ego must go on the offensive and cease to be passive. This movement from passive to active is technically a reaction formation, and the Oedipal configuration we have remarked thus appears as itself a defence against the original wish. The wish to be inundated is reversed into a wish to possess. Since the defence is directed primarily against the dangerous passivity, the other component of the Oedipus complex – the aggressive wish against the father – is only structurally motivated and fails to impress us as authentic.

It would appear that the negative sublime as a whole is the expression of two separate sets of defences intimately linked. To put it sequentially: the excessive object excites a wish to be inundated, which yields an anxiety of incorporation; this anxiety is met by a reaction formation against the wish which precipitates a recapitulation of the Oedipus complex; this in turn yields a feeling of guilt (superego anxiety) and is resolved through identification (introjection). How can a process evidently so complicated yield delight? We have interpreted the

delight – the 'joy and vaunting' first celebrated by Longinus – as the affective correlative of a successful, supererogatory identification. But perhaps this final defence has an instinctual source less mediated. It is just possible that the defence mechanism of introjection gratifies a wish prior even to the ambivalent wish excited by the sublime appearance – the wish (i.e. to be pleasurably stimulated) before it has become experientially associated with excess. The more-or-less voluntary introjection – swallowing, as it were, on one's own terms – would in effect defuse the components of the oral masochism which presents itself as the point of origin for the negative sublime. The secondary defence mechanism would itself become instinctually charged in this sublimation (change of aim and object). But this hypothesis seems useless and also remains utterly beyond verification.

We should not be surprised to find that the sublime moment is overdetermined in its effect on the mind. The excess which we have supposed to be the precipitating occasion, or 'trigger', directly prompts the secondary anxiety in the case of the dynamical sublime of terror. In the mathematical sublime, however, the traumatic phase exhibits a primary system on which the secondary (guilt) system is superimposed. This situation explains an odd but unmistakable fact of Kant's analytic. Whenever he is generalizing about both versions of the negative sublime, the (secondary) rhetoric of power dominates. It is not logically necessary that the reason's capacity for totality or infinity should be invariably construed as power degrading the sensible and rescuing man from 'humiliation' at the hands of nature. But though the sublime of magnitude does not originate in a power struggle, it almost instantaneously turns into one as the secondary Oedipal system takes over. [...]

Thomas Weiskel, extract from *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 105–6.

Julia Kristeva
Approaching Abjection//1980

Beyond the Unconscious

[...] [T]here are lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion*. They are clearly distinguishable from those understood as neurotic or psychotic, articulated by *negation* and its modalities, *transgression*, *denial* and *repudiation*. Their dynamics challenges the theory of the unconscious, seeing that the latter is dependent upon a dialectic of negativity.

The theory of the unconscious, as is well known, presupposes a repression of contents (affects and presentations) that, thereby, do not have access to consciousness but effect within the subject modifications, either of speech (parapraxes, etc.), or of the body (symptoms), or both (hallucinations, etc.) As correlative to the notion of *repression*, Freud put forward that of *denial* as a means of figuring out neurosis, that of *rejection* (*repudiation*) as a means of situating psychosis. The asymmetry of the two repressions becomes more marked owing to denial's bearing on the object whereas repudiation affects desire itself (Lacan, in perfect keeping with Freud's thought, interprets this as 'repudiation of the Name of the Father').

Yet, facing the ab-ject and more specifically phobia and the splitting of the ego, one might ask if those articulations of negativity germane to the unconscious (inherited by Freud from philosophy and psychology) have not become inoperative. The 'unconscious' contents remain here *excluded* but in strange fashion: not radically enough to allow for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive *position* to be established – one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration. As if the fundamental opposition were between I and Other or, in more archaic fashion, between Inside and Outside. As if such an opposition subsumed the one between Conscious and Unconscious, elaborated on the basis of neuroses.

Owing to the ambiguous opposition I/Other, Inside/Outside – an opposition that is vigorous but pervious, violent but uncertain – there are contents, 'normally' unconscious in neurotics, that become explicit if not conscious in 'borderline' patients' speeches and behaviour. Such contents are often openly manifested through symbolic practices, without by the same token being integrated into the judging consciousness of those particular subjects. Since they make the conscious/unconscious distinction irrelevant, borderline subjects and their speech constitute propitious ground for a sublimating discourse ('aesthetic' or 'mystical', etc.), rather than a scientific or rationalist one.

An Exile Who Asks 'Where?'

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter – since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaean, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations.

Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being', he does so concerning his place: '*Where* am I?' instead of '*Who* am I?' For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject – constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved.

Time: Forgetfulness and Thunder

For it is out of such straying on excluded ground that he draws his jouissance. The abject from which he does not cease separating is for him, in short, a *land of oblivion* that is constantly remembered. Once upon blotted-out time, the abject must have been a magnetized pole of covetousness. But the ashes of oblivion now serve as a screen and reflect aversion, repugnance. The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame. Then, forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.

Jouissance and Affect

Jouissance, in short. For the stray considers himself as equivalent to a Third Party. He secures the latter's judgment, he acts on the strength of its power in order to condemn, he grounds himself on its law in order to tear the veil of oblivion but also to set up its object as inoperative. As jettisoned. Parachuted by the Other. A ternary structure, if you wish, held in keystone position by the Other, but a 'structure' that is skewed, a topology of catastrophe. For, having provided itself with an *alter ego*, the Other no longer has a grip on the three apices of the triangle where subjective homogeneity resides; and so, it jettisons the object into an abominable real, inaccessible except through jouissance. It follows that jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such. One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object *a* [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims – if not its submissive and willing ones.

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives. Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be – maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. To be sure, if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as a thing, it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me. That order, that glance, that voice, that gesture, which enact the law for my frightened body, constitute and bring about an effect and not yet a sign. I speak to it in vain in order to exclude it from what will no longer be, for myself, a world that can be assimilated. Obviously, *I am* only *like* someone else: mimetic logic of the advent of the ego, objects and signs. But when I *seek* (myself), *lose* (myself), or experience *jouissance* – then 'I' is *heterogeneous*. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise. Thus braided, woven, ambivalent, a heterogeneous flux marks out a territory that I can call my own because the Other, having dwelt in me as *alter ego*, points it out to me through loathing.

This means once more that the heterogeneous flow, which portions the abject and sends back abjection, already dwells in a human animal that has been highly altered. I experience abection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me'. Not at all an other with whom I identify and

incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody. Significance is indeed inherent in the human body.

At the Limit of Primal Repression

If, on account of that Other, a space becomes demarcated, separating the abject from what will be a subject and its objects, it is because a repression that one might call 'primal' has been effected prior to the springing forth of the ego, of its objects and representations. The latter, in turn, as they depend on another repression, the 'secondary' one, arrive only *a posteriori* on an enigmatic foundation that has already been marked off; its return, in a phobic, obsessional, psychotic guise, or more generally and in more imaginary fashion in the shape of *abjection*, notifies us of the limits of the human universe.

On such limits and at the limit one could say that there is no unconscious, which is elaborated when representations and affects (whether or not tied to representations) shape a logic. Here, on the contrary, consciousness has not assumed its rights and transformed into signifiers those fluid demarcations of yet unstable territories where an 'I' that is taking shape is ceaselessly straying. We are no longer within the sphere of the unconscious but at the limit of primal repression that, nevertheless, has discovered an intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection. There is an effervescence of object and sign – not of desire but of intolerable significance; they tumble over into non-sense or the impossible real, but they appear even so in spite of 'myself' (which is not) as abjection.

Premises of the Sign, Linings of the Sublime

Let us pause a while at this juncture. If the abject is already a wellspring of sign for a non-object, on the edges of primal repression, one can understand its skirting the somatic symptom on the one hand and sublimation on the other. The *symptom:* a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumour, a cancer that the listening devices of the unconscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire. *Sublimation*, on the contrary, is nothing else than the possibility of naming the pre-nominal, the pre-objectal, which are in fact only a trans-nominal, a trans-objectal. In the symptom, the abject permeates me, I become abject. Through sublimation, I keep it under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being.

For the sublime has no object either. When the starry sky, a vista of open seas or a stained glass window shedding purple beams fascinate me, there is a cluster of meaning, of colours, of words, of caresses, there are light touches, scents, sighs, cadences that arise, shroud me, carry me away, and sweep me beyond the things that I see, hear, or think. The 'sublime' object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory. It is such a memory, which, from stopping point to stopping point, remembrance to remembrance, love to love, transfers that object to the refulgent point of the dazzlement in which I stray in order to be. As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers – it has always already triggered – a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where 'I' am – delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling. A divergence, an impossible bounding. Everything missed, joy – fascination.

Before the Beginning: Separation

The abject might then appear as the most *fragile* (from a synchronic point of view), the most *archaic* (from a diachronic one) sublimation of an 'object' still inseparable from drives. The abject is that pseudo-object that is made up *before* but appears only *within* the gaps of secondary repression. *The abject would thus be the 'object' of primal repression.*

But what is primal repression? Let us call it the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat. Without *one* division, *one* separation, *one* subject/object having been constituted (not yet, or no longer yet). Why? Perhaps because of maternal anguish, unable to be satiated within the encompassing symbolic.

The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*. Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder.

The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. The difficulty a mother has in acknowledging (or being acknowledged by) the symbolic realm – in other words, the problem she has with the phallus that her father or her husband stands for – is not such as to help the future subject leave the natural mansion.

The child can serve its mother as token of her own authentication; there is, however, hardly any reason for her to serve as go-between for it to become autonomous and authentic in its turn. In such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supply of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting.

In this struggle, which fashions the human being, the *mimesis*, by means of which he becomes homologous to another in order to become himself, is in short logically and chronologically secondary. Even before being *like*, 'I' am not but do *separate, reject, ab-ject*. Abjection, with a meaning broadened to take in subjective diachrony, *is a precondition of narcissism*. It is coexistent with it and causes it to be permanently brittle. The more or less beautiful image in which I behold or recognize myself rests upon an abjection that sunders it as soon as repression, the constant watchman, is relaxed.

The 'Chora', Receptacle of Narcissism

Let us enter, for a moment, into that Freudian aporia called primal repression. Curious primacy, where what is repressed cannot really be held down, and where what represses always already borrows its strength and authority from what is apparently very secondary: language. Let us therefore not speak of primacy but of the instability of the symbolic function in its most significant aspect – the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as a defence against auto-eroticism and incest taboo). Here, drives hold sway and constitute a strange space that I shall name, after Plato *(Timaeus*, 48–53), a *chora*, a receptacle.

For the benefit of the ego or its detriment, drives, whether life drives or death drives, serve to correlate that 'not yet' ego with an 'object' in order to establish both of them. Such a process, while dichotomous (inside/outside, ego/not ego) and repetitive, has nevertheless something centripetal about it: it aims to settle the ego as centre of a solar system of objects. If, by dint of coming back towards the centre, the drive's motion should eventually become centrifugal, hence fasten on the Other and come into being as sign so as to produce meaning – that is, literally speaking, exorbitant.

But from that moment on, while I recognize my image as sign and change in order to signify, another economy is instituted. The sign represses the *chora* and its eternal return. Desire alone will henceforth be witness to that 'primal' pulsation. But desire ex-patriates the *ego* toward an *other* subject and accepts the exactness of the ego only as narcissistic. Narcissism then appears as a regression to a position set back from the other, a return to a self-contemplative, conservative, self-sufficient haven. Actually, such narcissism never is the wrinkleless image of the Greek youth in a quiet fountain. The conflicts of drives muddle its bed, cloud its water, and bring forth everything that, by not becoming integrated with a given system of signs, is abjection for it.

Abjection is therefore a kind of *narcissistic crisis:* it is witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called 'narcissism' with reproachful jealousy, heaven knows why; what is more, abjection gives narcissism (the thing and the concept) its classification as 'seeming'.

Nevertheless, it is enough that a prohibition, which can be a superego, block the desire craving an other – or that this other, as its role demands, not fulfil it – for desire and its signifiers to turn back toward the 'same', thus clouding the waters of Narcissus. It is precisely at the moment of narcissistic perturbation (all things considered, the permanent state of the speaking being, if he would only hear himself speak) that secondary repression, with its reserve of symbolic means, attempts to transfer to its own account, which has thus been overdrawn, the resources of primal repression. The archaic economy is brought into full light of day, signified, verbalized. Its strategies (rejecting, separating, repeating/abjecting) hence find a symbolic existence, and the very logic of the symbolic – arguments, demonstrations, proofs, etc. – must conform to it. It is then that the object ceases to be circumscribed, reasoned with, thrust aside: it appears as abject.

Two seemingly contradictory causes bring about the narcissistic crisis that provides, along with its truth, a view of the abject. *Too much strictness on the part of the Other*, confused with the One and the Law. The *lapse of the Other*, which shows through the breakdown of objects of desire. In both instances, the abject appears in order to uphold 'I' within the Other. The abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away – it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death. Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance.

Perverse or Artistic

The Abject is related to perversion. The sense of abjection that I experience is anchored in the superego. The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life – a progressive despot; it lives at the behest of death – an operator in genetic experimentations; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit – a cynic (and a psychoanalyst); it establishes narcissistic power while pretending

to reveal the abyss – an artist who practises his art as a 'business'. Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject.

An unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside. Religion, Morality, Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so.

Contemporary literature does not take their place. Rather, it seems to be written out of the untenable aspects of perverse or superego positions. It acknowledges the impossibility of Religion, Morality and Law – their power play, their necessary and absurd seeming. Like perversion, it takes advantage of them, gets round them and makes sport of them. Nevertheless, it maintains a distance where the abject is concerned. The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the abject's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it. One might thus say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality.

For the subject firmly settled in its superego, a writing of this sort is necessarily implicated in the interspace that characterizes perversion; and for that reason, it gives rise in turn to abjection. And yet, such texts call for a softening of the superego. Writing them implies an ability to imagine the abject, that is, to see oneself in its place and to thrust it aside only by means of the displacements of verbal play. It is only after his death, eventually, that the writer of abjection will escape his condition of waste, reject, abject. Then, he will either sink into oblivion or attain the rank of incommensurate ideal. Death would thus be the chief curator of our imaginary museum; it would protect us in the last resort from the abjection that contemporary literature claims to expend while uttering it. Such a protection, which gives its quietus to abjection, but also perhaps to the bothersome, incandescent stake of the literary phenomenon itself, which, raised to the status of the sacred, is severed from its specificity. Death thus keeps house in our contemporary universe. By purifying (us from) literature, it establishes our secular religion.

As Abjection – So the Sacred

Abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse. Several structurations of abjection should be distinguished, each one determining a specific form of the sacred.

Abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilineal character. It takes on the form of the *exclusion* of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up.

Abjection persists as *exclusion* or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions, Judaism in particular, but drifts over to more 'secondary' forms such as *transgression* (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy. It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness – but always nameable, always totalizeable.

The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the central component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religions.

Outside of the Sacred, the Abject is Written

In the contemporary practice of the West and owing to the crisis in Christianity, abjection elicits more archaic resonances that are culturally prior to sin; through them it again assumes its biblical status, and beyond it that of defilement in primitive societies. In a world in which the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task – a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct – amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, 'subject' and 'object' push each other away, confront each other, collapse and start again – inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject. [...]

Julia Kristeva, extract from *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980); trans. Leon S. Roudiez, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 6–18.

Thomas McEvilley
Turned Upside Down and Torn Apart//2001

[...] In many ways the so-called postmodern sublime is really an oxymoron or contradiction in terms. The sublime was a basic concept of the modernist era. Burke's terror-sublime anticipated the period of the Terror during the French Revolution, and meant the destruction of social traditions. Not long after, in the work of Hegel, the terror-sublime referred hiddenly to the end of history, or the end of the world.[1] As the visionary of the ultimate, the Romantic artist or poet hero was a visionary of the sublime, an eavesdropper on the approach of the end of the world. This is more or less what the abstract sublime meant in the works of Malevich also, and again after World War II. The terror-sublime means the end of the world – the Sivaite devouring – Malevich's *Black Square* as a reaction to World War I, the mid-century monochrome as a reaction to World War II

Postmodernism really does not deal in such concepts as the grandeur that bursts through the surface in a gust of frenzy. It is no worshipper of the end of the world. It does not fall on its knees before the final conflagration. It does not see the 'negative pleasure' of violence as a consummation. Really, taking the sublime in the old sense, there is no postmodern sublime. As one author notes, 'One could not now find the sublime where it was to be found two hundred years ago.'[2] This observation is essentially Kantian in that it can only be true on the subjectivist model: If the sublime consists only in a type of subjective reaction, then as the reacting consciousness changes from age to age, the sublime will change too. So on the Kantian model one is free to propose whatever one wishes as the type of stimulus which, today, supposedly elicits the sublime response. The characteristics of the postmodern sublime begin in this somewhat arbitrary ability to designate it wherever one wants.

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, in his recent book *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, seems almost unaware that a pre-Kantian part of the tradition posited the sublime as 'an "incomprehensible darkness" that reason can never dispel'. He follows Kant in abreacting to the opposite extreme and identifying the sublime with reason, and unaccountably insists that 'beauty was never identified with reason'.[3] Maybe 'never', in that sentence only means 'never in the modern Euro-American tradition' – for surely among the ancient Greeks, who gave us these concepts, beauty *was* cosmos *was* reason *was* mathematics *was* the inner order of the finite world. One must wonder whether this author's assignment of high fashion as the sublime of our time might not be another confusion of sublimity and beauty. And when he says, 'the beautiful is ... an image that always exceeds the adequacy of its ideation by suggesting an idea incompatible with reason',[4] he is clearly, in terms of the tradition, talking about the sublime and calling it by the name of its more mannered sibling.

The confusion between beauty and the sublime which dominates the discourse today may be viewed appreciatively as a part of postmodernism's policy of reversing or collapsing the hierarchies of modernism. For example, Arthur Danto (critic for the *Nation*, the seat which once was held by Clement Greenberg) writes in the catalogue of the exhibition *Regarding Beauty*: 'Does one feel pleasure in looking at Mark Rothko's paintings from his great period? Well, maybe some do, but most of us feel something deeper than pleasure, which holds us in front of the paintings as if waiting for the disclosure of a possibly shattering truth.'[5] This 'something deeper than pleasure' is the 'negative pleasure' proposed by Kant; this 'shattering truth' is the sublime bursting apart the bonds of cosmos.

Most extreme in the conflation of the two aesthetic concepts is *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl, who sings the praises of a beauty which has been mixed with the sublime so as to deepen it and give it an edge of danger. 'The merely attractive (pretty, glamorous) and merely pleasing (lovely, delectable) are not beautiful. They lack the element of belief and the feeling of awe that announces it.'[6] The experience of awe is characteristic of encounters with the sublime, and is traditionally the opposite of the satisfying delectation provided by beauty; the experience of awe is the aura of the gust of frenzy with which the sublime breaks through the pretty surface. For, contrary to Schjeldahl, the concept of beauty has in fact traditionally been close to that of prettiness; this is how 'Longinus' meant it, and often Burke. The term beauty is taken so reverentially today – by Danto, Schjeldahl and many others – because it has absorbed the qualities of the sublime, in order both to deepen itself and to deflect or defuse the sublime's essential danger.

Dave Hickey's presentation of Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio* works as sublime (though he does not use the word) seems similarly to involve mistaking a highly aestheticized product for the bottom line zero.[7] In fact, Gilbert-Rolfe, Schjeldahl and Hickey all toe the Kantian line, which is to say, the Greenbergian line, except that they would probably point at different artworks to illustrate it than did Greenberg. When, for example, Hickey proclaimed, 'When I stand in front of a great painting it hits me like *this!*', thumping his chest hard with his fist in unison with the word 'this', he seemed to be talking not about beauty but the sublime.[8] The painting's effect, it seems, was supposed to bypass all conceptual and conditioned parts of the personality and rush, like a lightning bolt as 'Longinus' put it, straight into the heart. Though he said, and may have thought, he was talking about beauty, in terms of the tradition of Western discourse, he was talking about the sublime – or rather about Kant's beauty-as-

tame-sublime. Gilbert-Rolfe also affirms this Kantian bottom line by saying, 'Beauty resists or otherwise evades critique, because it is irreducible to it and may indeed precede it.'[9]

This idea – that beauty bypasses the mind as it streaks directly to some deeper faculty – seems the weakest point in the art-critical doctrine that used to be called formalism – meaning simply Kantianism in a somewhat simplified (Greenbergian) form.[10] The idea that the most significant experiences of human life bypass the mind and all its associations, reactions and impulses leaves one wondering how they may become 'significant', that is, meaningful, without involving the mind, which is the organ that provides meaning. This line of thought points to only one place, and that is the traditional Christian idea of the soul as a centre higher than the mind, which deals with matters of eternal importance only. That this primitive notion should have re-arisen in the minds of cultural spokespeople today is disheartening and recalls Adorno's suggestion that 'it might be better to stop talking about the sublime [or beauty?] completely', seeing that 'the term has been corrupted beyond recognition by the mumbo jumbo of the high priests of art religion.'[11]

Other authors looking for a postmodern sublime have spoken of a 'techno-sublime', referring mostly, it seems, to cyber-reality. But again this designation seems inappropriate in terms of the deeper meanings of the tradition about this word. Technological marvels in general, from the vacuum cleaner to the Internet, are forms of the beautiful, not the sublime. It may be true that nuclear bombs are sublime in the old sense (remember Oppenheimer saying, 'I am Siva'?), but what is meant by techno-sublime is different: Computer-based phenomena do not really constitute a cyber-sublime, as some have thought; it is more appropriate to call it cyber-beautiful.[12]

If the sublime, in its weakened postmodern forms, is still to be seen as dangerous, then the meaning of its danger has shifted. It is no longer based on the idea that the sublime is so huge, powerful, unknown and unpredictable that it might sweep you away, entirely and forever, without even noticing that it has done so; the danger now is that the sublime will ingratiate itself to you by acting hypocritically like the beautiful, then double-cross you by turning out to be less than satisfying as such, in a new version of the negative pleasure (or bait-and-switch). For example: You get married to someone, thinking that person is beautiful just like you; then after a while you are quarrelling and hate each other and you realize you've been tricked: that other person really *was* an Other. That otherness is the sublime, countervailing the particular desire system which is your individuality. The Kantian other-as-sublime is dangerous not in the raw Burkean sense of a storm at sea but in this ingratiating infiltrating way of a false beauty, which deceives and betrays the viewer.

The postmodernist sublime is a premonitory defusing of a dangerous and exciting modernist concept, a taming of it, which began with Kant and is climaxing now. Kant and all those after him elevated the experience of beauty over that of the sublime, out of a sane desire to not be in love with death – or anyway, not to suffer the consequences of such love. So it seems our postmodernist sublime is a wholesome medicine, if not an exciting intoxicant. Still it is questionable whether the sublime as previously known can be said to exist with any honesty in the postmodernist discourse. It seems really we are dealing with a kind of post-sublime. In the post-sublime every otherness is sublime – so each entity is sublime to every other entity, and the concept sublime has become a universal blank like the concept other. This fits into the whole postmodernist attempt to promote more attention to difference and how to handle it in practical terms for the sake of the living. It also reflects the postmodernist fear of modernist ego-inflated ambitions.

Seeking the sublime in the superstructural worlds of fashion, gender politics or the safely beautified and tamed, is an attempt to further trivialize and diminish it. If one wanted, instead, to retain something of its old dignity and danger, one might look at what is happening around us in the global theatre today. Something as terrifying as the old sublime can be seen in the onrushing transition from national to transnational scale. The sublime concept of globalization (bigger than the individual) seemed, ten years ago, a cultural concept: The nations and ethnicities of the world seemed to be making peace with one another through distinctive types of cultural interaction such as the international art exhibition. Now, a decade or two later, the sublime of the World Trade Organization has ceased masquerading as a cultural ideal and has revealed itself as an uncompromisingly economy-based move in what Fredric Jameson, based on Ernest Mandel, treats as the destiny, or the organic life cycle, of capitalism. Even with all the experience we've had, even with all the intimate knowledge we have of earlier stages of capitalism – the barter phase, the market phase, the monopoly phase – still we know next to nothing of how the grand expansion of global capitalism will unfold, an expansion which is still in a fairly early stage, and encountering resistance. The resistance reflects the troubling fact that the unknown face of global capitalism is terrifying in its vastness. We see now that nations, in the age of nationalism, were like the figures on the ground of a picture; the all-encompassing underlying reality of the expanding destiny of transnational capitalism was the ground, lying hidden behind the figures, waiting to gobble them up. The culminating developments of capitalist globalization will be the terror-sublime of the next fifty years. With rue in my heart, I leave it to my children to experience.

As this culmination beyond nationalisms unfolds, culture, as always, will play about the surface, expending the best and finest of the surplus energy of the ever-vaster economic system. And as the process of becoming molten and melting down afflicts nations and traditions and ambitions, grand and glorious artistic expressions and embodiments of it all will occur. And these will seem, at first, most refreshing in a world long surfeited with the affliction of the nation state. But then what? Inevitably, even though we no longer, like Hegel, insist that everyone must look and act like us (nineteenth-century Prussians, as he thought), still the process of traditions encountering traditions will cause a more gradual but still ineluctable homogenization. Cultures will lose their outlines and blur into a big, vague more-or-less-sameness – like the monochrome ground rising up around the figures. A vacuity will enter as cultural traditions are vaporized, a solitude as communities break down, a silence as languages die. (Some linguists predict that half the world's six thousand languages will pass out of existence in the next century; the process will go on till only about two hundred and fifty languages are left; English, which is already displacing hundreds of languages around the world, is actually losing vocabulary units.)[13]

Cultures only really believe in themselves while they remain isolated. With contact, they cannot avoid relativization. Nowadays, communications technology acts as the handmaiden or facilitator of postcolonial encounters, which inevitably lead to a relativization of the values and feelings of the cultures involved. Various psychological trips ensue – from feeling the limitations of one's inherited culture were stupid and embarrassing once one has stood before the eyes of the world with them, to feeling nostalgic longing for the wholeness of the age before self-doubt, the age when one simply was oneself, without knowing there were any alternatives. But whatever the local resistance that may arise here and there, the process will go on. The international food court will grow at the airport. All cultures will become first commodities at the lowest possible level to one another, then museums at a higher cultural level, trying to preserve at least a record of what they were. But underneath no one will believe in culture in that old sense – separate traditions, separate nations – anymore. The early postmodern hybrid personality will give way to a later postmodern blank, or question mark, or grey blur.

That's the sublime that's facing us. Art and technology and so on are just role-players in the grand game, which goes on despite their momentary triumphs or disasters. A grand game, Which has no score, no goal, no end. The Enlightenment itself, it seems, will fade into a crack of the woodwork of the museum.

That's our terrifying sublime.

1 [footnote 83 in source] For more on this see McEvilley, 'Seeking the Primal through Paint: The Monochrome Icon.'

2 [84] Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999) 1. Perhaps the recent development which cleaves most closely to the Burkean sublime is what J.M. Bernstein calls 'the deconstructive sublime'. (See his *The Fate of Art* [University Park, Pennsylvania: The Penn State Press, 1992].) 'Deconstruction ... is sublime', Bernstein suggests (171), because it is 'a heterology, a pursuit of alterity' (175). Interruption is a form of tearing apart, and '... deconstructive readings enact, perform, the sublime interruption of the texts ...' (182). 'The aesthetic figure of interruption is the sublime' (140).

3 [85] Gilbert-Rolfe, op. cit., 13

4 [86] Ibid., 2–3.

5 [87] Arthur Danto in *Regarding Beauty: A View of Late Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Neal Benezra and Olga M. Viso (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1999) 191.

6 [88] Peter Schjeldahl, 'Beauty', *Art Issues*, no. 33 (May/June 1994) 25.

7 [89] See Dave Hickey, 'Nothing Like the Son: On Robert Mapplethorpe's *X Portfolio*', in *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1995). By submitting the essay for the present volume [*Sticky Sublime*, 2001] Hickey identifies the works as, in his opinion, sublime. His association of the concept with gender politics bears something in common with Barbara Claire Freeman's 'feminine sublime' (see Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995]).

8 [90] This was said by Dave Hickey during a conversation-event, 'Beauty and the Beast', that he and I did together at the Drawing Center in New York City in 1995. It is available on audiotape from *Artforum* magazine.

9 [91] Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, op. cit., 12.

10 [92] For an extended critique of this position see McEvilley, 'Heads It's Form, Tails It's Not Content', *Artforum* (November 1982).

11 [93] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (1997), cited in Frances Ferguson, 'The Sublime from Burke to the Present', in *The Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol. III, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 330.

12 [94] This claim came out of a conversation-event I conducted with Frank Gillette at Universal Concepts Unlimited in New York City in May 2000.

13 [95] Earl Shorris, 'The Last Words: Can the World's Small Languages be Saved?', *Harper's Magazine* (August 2000) 35–43.

Thomas McEvilley, extract from 'Turned Upside Down and Torn Apart', in *Sticky Sublime*, ed. Bill Beckley (New York: Allworth Press, 2001) 74–9.

Gene Ray
Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime//2001

[...] In a much-cited 1982 interview with Max Reithmann, Joseph Beuys asserted that the horror denoted by the place-name 'Auschwitz' cannot be 'represented in an image'. Thus, he never sought to represent that horror in his art, but to 'remember' it through what he called 'its positive counter image'.[1] This notion is far from clear, but can be read as a refusal of direct, positive representations in favour of what I call negative presentation, and other strategies of evocation and avowal. However, both Beuys' conclusion that *Auschwitz Demonstration* may therefore be seen as a kind of 'toy'[2] and his glib suggestion that consumer capitalism must be seen as a contemporary Auschwitz[3] seem to me disturbing and regrettable; they simply subvert the gravity of his other statements.

In earlier discussions with Caroline Tisdall, Beuys again explained that the objects *KZ=Essen* are not meant to 'represent catastrophe', but to explore 'the content and meaning of catastrophe'.[4] He implied that they could function therapeutically, by 'healing like with like' in a homoeopathic healing process. But here as elsewhere there is a rapid shift to the present tense, with an assertion that 'the human condition is Auschwitz'. In a less-cited 1980 interview published in *Penthouse*, Beuys acknowledged the deep personal shock which came with his first realization, after the end of the war, of the full extent of the genocide. That shock, he said, 'is my primary experience, my fundamental experience, which led me to begin really to go into art'.[5] Together, these statements are as near as Beuys was willing to go toward an unambiguous acknowledgment of a project of mourning. In themselves, they would hardly be enough. But as confirmation of what can be read in the objects themselves, they suffice. Indeed, the consistent pattern of visual and material linkages I have pointed to does not need any confirmation at all from the artist: the links are there for anyone to see, trace and feel. At this point, the argument makes contact with an ongoing and still-contested contemporary analysis of the role of artistic intention.

We cannot know what Beuys actually felt and believed about the Holocaust. We simply do not have access to that knowledge. Moreover, Beuys himself may not have been able to know or understand his own deepest feelings about the Nazi period. In this sense, Beuys' own words cannot be taken as infallible guides. Given Beuys' relation to that time, we would expect that a personal confrontation with it would have been acutely painful, but we cannot know for sure if that confrontation took place or, if it did, how deeply it probed and with what effect. Further, we do not know for certain whether Beuys intentionally coded his objects with Holocaust references or whether that encoding was largely unconscious. Beyond that, claims by way of answer to this dilemma devolve into speculation. What we can say is that the objects do evoke and avow. When viewed in the correct context, they indeed generate such meanings. We can also say it was entirely possible that Beuys knew of the relevant facts and images pertaining to that context. He may have first encountered them while doing research for his 1958 proposal for an Auschwitz memorial. Kramer has noted that a major war crimes trial in Frankfurt in 1963 and 1964 had created, at a crucial time in the development of Beuys' art and persona, the first public occasion since the war and the Nuremberg trials for Germans to confront and discuss among themselves details about the mechanics and logistics of the killing centres.[6] Beuys could at that time have come into contact with additional information about, for example, the use of human hair. He could have been shown or been exposed to the relevant images – photos, for example, taken by a visitor to the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum. In the strictest sense, the facts and images had been in public circulation since Nuremberg. One does not need to be an uncritical Freudian (with respect to the unconscious) or a missionary Derridean (with respect to intention and iterability) to realize that Beuys' works could function at one level as objects and gestures of mourning with or without Beuys' clear intention or full apprehension.

There are, then, two possibilities. Beuys may not have grasped how consistently and intensely his objects oriented themselves toward the Holocaust. That, though improbable, would most simply explain the relative paucity of clearer statements from the artist himself. Alternatively, Beuys may have known perfectly well what he was doing, in which case the pronounced evasiveness of his statements on the subject was no accident. That is, he may have wanted to avoid the association of his art with the too-facile 'art about Auschwitz' label. He may have wanted to preserve for the objects and actions an opportunity to have their effects without the interference of such assumptions and expectations. There would have been good reason to do so; the effects of the sublime depend in large part on a certain openness or vulnerability on the part of the spectator. The expectation that one was about to view 'Auschwitz art' would have functioned for many as a protective shield or barrier against the hit of the sublime. It would also have blocked any reflection on the 'expanded concept of art'. That would have been a major concern, since Beuys clearly did not want the spectator's reflection to end with or come to rest at Auschwitz. The issue is finally undecidable, but if the public evasions in fact reflect Beuys' deliberate strategy, then it must be said that the strategy worked too well. The myriad autobiographical banalities were readily seized on as iconographic certainties, and the 'expanded concept of art' construed as the primary content of his work. Auschwitz was moved to the margins, where it has remained.

The question then becomes one of the effectiveness of the project of mourning. Much has been made of a purported German 'inability to mourn'. Instead of confronting and working-through national guilt for Nazi crimes, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich have argued, Germans of the perpetrating generation threw themselves into the less-painful labour of economic recovery.[7] While there is perhaps some truth to this analysis, anyone who has spent time in contemporary Germany will recognize it as a broad and problematic generalization. Working-through the Holocaust and mourning its victims is a slow, ongoing process that takes place across generations and on many levels. The Slovenian theorist Slavoj Zizek has made the point that the weakness of the major discursive analyses of Nazism carried out by Frankfurt School and poststructuralist theorists is that their focus on the levels of imaginary and symbolic identification misses the deep, 'pre-symbolic enjoyment' which the Nazi fantasy activated. Merely rational critiques of Nazi fantasies of purity and omnipotence are ultimately ineffective in so f--ar as they leave this deeper level of enjoyment untouched. To 'go through the fantasy' is only possible at the end of a movement which first reenacts it, which puts its symbols back into play in order to call back and confront that deepest and most persistent level of support.[8]

Beuys may have intuited something similar, or have been on his way toward such an intuition. This may well be what he meant by his talk of a 'homoeopathic process'. We can at any rate observe that after 1964 he avoided the kind of directly confrontational allusions to the Holocaust that are still more likely than not to provoke reflexive and unproductively defensive reactions. Whether he knew it or not, Beuys found a way to evoke and avow the genocide by means of subtler strategies of indirection, opening up the way to what Zizek calls the 'traumatic kernel'. And as one nears the irreducible kernel of catastrophe, one is exposed to the sharp and disturbing punch of the sublime. An occasion for mourning and working-through is created. There is no guarantee that Beuys' works will have this effect. One may argue that whatever their potential, the history of Beuys' reception indicates that they did not. I am not so sure. My own experience is that the force of the late installations is quite palpable.

The risk of the sublime is always that its hit not be followed by an adequate interpretation. An adequate interpretation, in the case of Beuys, would include the patient establishment of links to the Holocaust. That is the task of the critic. Only in the clarity of such links can one grasp Beuys' importance as a postwar European artist at the cutting edge of a new mode of history art. With respect to the project of mourning, only through such diligent linking can the 'terrible sins, and not-for-describing black marks' be kept in view and not lost sight of 'even for a moment'.

The greatness of Beuys' work comes from its strong, simultaneous engagement with both the past and the future. The way out of the transgressive and traumatic past is the way into the redemptive future. Healing enables the creation of a better world. But it is no overstatement to say that the very dignity of Beuys' message of hope hangs upon the struggle and hard work implied in the posture of perpetual remembrance. Without that, the message – in all its ethical and political dimensions – becomes less convincing. If the sins and marks Beuys spoke of seem to have slipped from view in the published reception, the corrective is available. As Beuys seems to have implied, it may have been too early, even in 1985, to 'talk about one's own country' directly, with clear words and place names. It may have been too early to make the more brutal linkages I have made here. One trusts it is not still so.

1 [footnote 51 in source] 'In seinem positiven Gegenbilde' in the original German ms. transcription, translated as 'une contre-image positive'. Max Reithmann, *Joseph Beuys: Par la présente, je n'appartiens plus à l'art* (Paris: L'Arche, 1982) 121–2.

2 [52] 'Also insofern ist diese Auschwitzvitrine eigentlich ein Spielzeug', trans. as 'C'est pourquoi "la vitrine d'Auschwitz" n'est en réalité qu'un jouet'. Ibid., 122.

3 [53] Beuys may have been alluding to Theodor Adorno, who linked Auschwitz to the logic of identity universalized under late capitalism, most famously at the end of the 1966 *Negative Dialectics*. But what has force and authority within a sustained and complexly nuanced philosophical critique became, in a few careless words from a German who fought for the Third Reich, painfully inappropriate.

4 [54] Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979) 21–3.

5 [55] 'Joseph Beuys', in *Penthouse*, no. 106 (1980) 98; and cited in Mario Kramer, 'Art Nourishes Life – Joseph Beuys: Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956-1964' in Eckhart Gillen, ed., *Deutschlandbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilen Land* (Cologne: Dumont, 1997) 261.

6 [56] Kramer, op. cit., 262; 269.

7 The basic elements of this thesis were advanced by Theodor Adorno in *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959), trans. T. Bahti and G. Hartman as 'What Does Coming To Terms with the Past Mean?', in Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 114–29. The thesis was developed and elaborated along more technically Freudian lines by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967) trans. B. Placzek, as *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour* (New York: Grove Press, 1975).

8 Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989) 87–128. [...]

Gene Ray, extract from 'Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime', in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (Sarasota: The John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art/New York: D.A.P., 2001) 70–74.

Marco Belpoliti
Memory of Oblivion//2006

Under the Sky

Has the sky fallen down? Upon entering the Hangar Bicocca [Milan] you feel lost and small. *Homo minor:* tiny before the immense space of the hangar. Everything seems to lose itself in the darkness of this place: above, but also all around, a dark sky from which the rays that light up the towers fall like lightning bolts.

There they are – slender, white, a grayish-off-white, perfect in their imperfection. The divine – so they say – manifests itself not through fulfilment, but by means of its opposite: the greatness of imperfection. The world was created with flaws so that the divine, perfect, could cleanse it. The seven heavenly palaces [*Sette Palazzi Celesti*, a site-specific installation realized by Anselm Kiefer in 2004] are architectures that are part of this world, and they are worlds of their own. They belong to the space of the human mind. But which space? They are generating matter.

What is inside is also outside: we are the cosmos, tiny pieces of a puzzle, insects – ants, or termites, that move around the towers of Anselm Kiefer. The towers can be climbed only with our eyes, and yet even our gaze immediately retracts, confused by their tapering and dangerous beauty. What materials make up these monuments around which the invisible guardian angels block our journey towards the divine? The smallest and most mobile of materials: cement.

They are composed of dust, a subtle material. In fact, cement is an accumulation of invisible points, with which we make houses and buildings, palaces and monuments, but also bunkers, airport runways and traffic dividers. Cement is the clay of the twenty-first century, the substance of fabrication of this new artificial world – a material that is absolutely inclined to take on any form, be it noble or base, refined or vulgar.

Each tower weighs ninety tons. In order to mould the tiny houses, shelters, casements, tenements or warehouses, of which the keep is composed, blue and red containers were deposited inside the hangar, unusual forms for casting. The towers are ruins that explore the sky, that stretch to the heavens in an unstable, though sturdy, balancing act. They try on, like giants, the very form of the divine: a patch of light within the darkness of awareness. Each tower, says the artist who sketched the form by means of a magical and combinative pattern, enunciates a quality, but also a moment of creation itself. Like the façades of cafés and stores, each tower bears its name in neon: cosmology of mysticism. Love, but also Majesty, Justice and Beauty.

The towers are ruins through which the thoughts of he who erected them have stretched up to the heavens. Are they the remains of an ancient city, an industrial settlement, or a village with asbestos rooftops? With these fragments, a monument to the heavens was erected: eighty-five angular sections each weighing six tons, armed and compact.

German Ruins

Between 1942 and 1945 the Royal Air Force dropped one million tons of bombs in roughly 400,000 raids over Nazi Germany. Ancient German cities, Cologne, Hamburg, Dresden, became heaps of rubble.

In July 1943, the writer Hans Erich Nossack, who had narrowly escaped the attack, describes the remains of his city, Hamburg. When he arrives in front of the Katharinenkirke he stops in his tracks. For over ten years, the bell tower that stood in front of his desk, an object of spring and autumn reveries, a silent witness of another disaster, a fire, which it had miraculously survived a century earlier. Nossack narrates, in one of the few accounts of the destruction inflicted by the Allied forces on Nazi Germany and its defenceless population, that nothing remained of the bell tower except a pathetic piece, crumbled and blackened by the smoke. Clipped right above the clock, on the ruins, the word *Gloria* in gold letters could still be read, whereas a part of the roof had caved in: all crumbled up, it resembled a death shroud.

While contemplating the seven towers of Anselm Kiefer, it's hard not to think of Germany's ruins, the photographs of stubs of houses and buildings after 1945, the *tabula rasa* created by a strategy, certainly not ironic, christened *moral bombing*. In one of his books, *Luftkrieg and Literatur*, W.G. Sebald, the author of *Austerlitz*, narrates how the Germans repressed all memory of the war. Afflicted by an enormous sense of guilt for the things they themselves had committed – Nazism, the Shoah, the world war – Sebald writes that the Germans carried out a second repression: to forget what had happened to their cities.

In his works during the seventies, Kiefer dealt with the taboo of Nazism. With his canvases imbued with sand, straw, seeds and ashes, he reminded an oblivious Germany, and the rest of the world, what had taken place. With rubble and debris he challenged the first repression of German history. Now with the towers and the ruins he seems to have given shape to another symmetrical omission: since they were guilty and had to work out their guilt, the Germans repressed the destruction of their cities, as is narrated by Walter Kempowski in *Die deutsche Cronik* – the taboos of German collective memory.

Upon returning to Hamburg, a few days after the air raid that had razed it to the ground, Nossak saw a woman carefully washing the windows of her home that had remained intact amidst a desert of rubble and ruins. She's not mad, but

she repeats an obsessive ritual like all the other survivors: children rip out weeds from a garden, men and women sit on a balcony sipping coffee as if nothing had ever happened.

Hannah Arendt, in a trip to Germany seven years later, noted that the people wrote postcards to each other that depicted churches and market squares, bridges and public buildings that no longer existed, almost as if they didn't want to see the rubble that still lay in the streets of their cities. Indifference, Arendt adds, is the attitude with which they move among the war debris. Indifference and lack of emotion: no one, or almost no one, wears black for the dead or reacts to the presence of refugees that live among them.

After the Disaster

Does Anselm Kiefer want to speak to us of this repression? Do his towers allude to the German ruins, and to those of the war that men have never stopped fighting in the world since 1945?

In a series of images reproduced in the catalogue, we catch a glimpse of the cement structures the artist erected at Barjac, near Avignon, where he lives. They are cement skeletons, tall and desolate like certain industrial architecture: structures to grind gravel, water towers, or other uninhabitable buildings that we catch a glimpse of in the distant outskirts of metropolises in the East and West.

In the snapshots, we catch sight of one of the towers that folds over upon itself, like a giant that lowers its head, bends its knees, and ends up on all fours, shattering into a million pieces. The frames give back the slowed-down succession of events: collapse, death, dishevelled tomb. The form of the tower is that of a heap, a dusty pile of greyish rubble.

What does this mean? Kiefer wants to produce ruins. Marc Augé maintains that beginning in the 1950s people suddenly stopped making ruins, whereas every day they produce rubble, enormous quantities of debris and waste that in no way resemble the ruins of ancient cities.

In modern-day metropolises, the incessant pace of building and destroying – feverish and neurotic, but never catastrophic so as not to frighten or terrorize – allows old neighbourhoods, old buildings in city centres, entire city sections, to be gutted and razed to the ground. Without our noticing it, as the French anthropologist writes, we are living inside a 'planetary civil war' that was never declared but which leads us towards an increasingly similar and standardized universe, composed of great mirroring buildings, glass and cement towers, stereotyped urban agglomerations from Beijing to Moscow, Algiers to Amsterdam.

In the moment of the greatest annihilation of our cities, ruins tend to disappear, Augé reminds us, 'as a reality, as a concept'. In a world dominated by the rapid circulation of men and goods, ruins will cease to exist because there isn't any time to make them. Contemplating ruins, he writes, does not mean going on a journey through history, but rather 'experiencing time, pure time'. Does Anselm Kiefer work with this pure time?

In answering a critic's question, the artist spoke about his ruins like something unstable, not fixed, something that never remains the same: 'not eternal'. He stated: I shorten time in an alchemical sense (literally: 'the shortening of time'). His ruins are an image of the future, not of the past. They do not awaken feelings of nostalgia whatsoever, but instead express a sense of waiting ('I project something towards the future').

But what exactly is a ruin? Nothing more than a utopia, an image of time that we have lost and one which art will not give up. It is 'time eluding History' (Augé). Ruins, according to Piranesi, are a sign of life and not of death. They possess, like the seven towers in the hangar, exasperated beauty: they show us the future, countless possible futures. In contemporary art, ruins no longer represent a relationship with the past, but rather a rapport with a time that awaits us.

In our cities, new buildings no longer have the goal of creating identities, of offering a soul – the *genius* loci – to those who inhabit them, but rather serve to circulate objects and persons, images and information faster and faster. That is why ruins are cursed objects in the contemporary world: they must rapidly disappear and be left in old caves, in distant warehouses, in far-off suburbs, eliminated and possibly recycled. Cities with rubble and without ruins.

Kiefer has begun to produce ruins composed of unsettling heaps of cement: debris, wrecks, fragments, leftovers. A ruin of rubble.

Lethe

Piranesi, the artist of ruins, in the introduction of his *Roman Antiquities* (1756), recalls how the Eternal City, though stripped of its marble, its columns, its decorations, continued to create the effect of continuous wonder: surprise obtained through absence. Kiefer follows an aesthetics of decay by means of the accumulation of debris, but also reconstruction in the shape of towers. He wants to take the place of time, compress it and manipulate it. He deforms matter, he pulverizes it, makes it explode, and then pieces it back together. His reconstructive art shifts our attention from the act of destroying to remembering.

The divinity that presides over this destruction-construction is Lethe, the goddess of Oblivion. Kiefer's work resembles the technique of inlay, a patient 'taking away' that through 'removing and adding' possesses 'something surprising and sickening at the same time, though perhaps nobly united, like all diabolical things' (M. Brusatin). There is something diabolical, and not only divine, in the towers. Isn't there perhaps something diabolic in the yearning for perfection that can be glimpsed in this work that strives for the heavens?

The towers ignore us. At night, when even the lights are turned off, they awaken. Walking around the hangar, and drawing your ear to the walls, you hear them whisper. They talk about themselves with themselves. They wonder about their destiny. They discuss who made them, who looks at them. They are distant and indifferent, but also close and fearful of themselves. They fear they must last. And that is why they await a final gesture that will never come. The night is never a night for the towers that do not have eyes to see with, or mouths to speak with, or ears to listen with. Their dialogue is silent, and yet we can hear it easily. They discuss life and abandonment, form and the formless, building and destroying.

The angels have gone, and that is why the towers fear being transformed into ghosts, being forgotten. The sky, along with darkness, falls to Earth inside the hangar, while the seven towers would like to change into the inhabitants of a future city, alchemically change their nature into something else, something more divine or perhaps more human. In any event, they cannot.

They are the monument to the continual loss of self, towers of memory and oblivion. Their sign, the stigma the builder has given them, is that of being the memory of oblivion. This is the most difficult task that the art of Anselm Kiefer bears today.

Marco Belpoliti, extract from 'Memory of Oblivion', in *Anselm Kiefer: Merkaba* (Milan: Charta, 2006) 25–7.

Lawrence Rinder
Tuymans' Terror//1997

In these times of dreary crisis, what is the point of emphasizing the horror of being?
– Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

If the Gothic novel and the horror film had a corresponding genre in the visual arts, Luc Tuymans would be its newest avatar. Gothic horror resonates in the graphic art and painting of Piranesi, Goya, Fuseli and Bresdin; in our century, artists as diverse as Salvador Dalí, Meret Oppenheim, Bruce Conner and Cindy Sherman have inspired fear, loathing and revulsion. Yet their works do not comprise a horror genre *per se*; rather, it is almost a defining trait of this temperament among artists that their products appear *sui generis*. Hence, there can be no equivalent in visual arts criticism to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's literary analysis, The *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, or Steven King's classification of horror literature and film, *Danse Macabre*. When Tuymans talks about his influences and affinities, it is primarily to literature and film that he refers: the films of F.W. Murnau, Georges Franju or Roman Polanski, or his current fascination with the writings of Thomas Pynchon. In exploring the role of horror in Tuymans' art, it is helpful to do so glancing sideways in these directions.

Tuymans' art may initially appear bland and innocuous; even those pieces clearly related to Nazism possess a subdued, weary affect. The more time you spend with his art, though, the more unnerving it becomes. Something in it persists, subliminally: a pulse like a watch wrapped in cotton as Poe described his terrifying 'tell-tale heart'.[1] Like the best horror movies, Tuymans' art does not revel in gore or violence. Real horror is what happens *before* things get ugly. Like Polanski's *Knife in the Water*, in which primal rage flickers at deadly voltage just beneath the surface, Tuymans' best works veer between innocence and panic, tightly coiled yet never sprung. Restraint itself becomes almost unbearable: why such repression? What enormous force is being concealed? Even as we are being protected from the worst, the magnitude of that dark power is revealed.

In *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King proposes for horror three categories of effect.[2] Of these the lowest, in his estimation, is 'Revulsion', which is produced simply by gruesome imagery, like the chest-bursting scene in *Alien*. There may be one or two examples of this in Tuymans' oeuvre: perhaps the paintings Eyes *without a Face* (the title and subject of which are borrowed from the filmmaker Franju) and *Bloodstains* – though really both are too mild to qualify. Much of Cindy Sherman's recent grisly photography, on the other hand, fits squarely into this category. The middle level, King calls 'Horror', which is distinguished from 'Revulsion' by leaving more to the imagination while still presenting physical evidence of something amiss. Several of Tuymans' works, such as *Superstition*, *The Doll*, *Wiedergutmachung* and *Apple*, achieve this highly-charged balance. According to King, the 'finest' emotion of the three categories is 'Terror' in which nothing is *shown* to be wrong, but an atmosphere of fear is created that is impalpable and omnipresent. Look at Ceiling, *Shadow II*, Our *New Quarters*, or *Rear Mirror*; terror is what Tuymans does best.

The kind of terror King describes and Tuymans evokes so potently often goes by another name. 'The essence of evil', Social Anthropologist Alan Macfarlane writes, '... is shadowy, mysterious covert, hidden ... it is aggressively, insidiously undermining, the worm in the bud. Things are not what they seem: the smiling face conceals hatred, the friendly gesture leads to downfall. The same person is both a neighbour and possibly a member of a secret, subversive organization'.[3] Julia Kristeva, meanwhile, calls it 'the abject': 'a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten

life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence, hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me'.[4]

What underlies all of these conceptions is a raging sense of paranoia. When threats are explicit, paranoia is superfluous; but in the realm of the implicit and the possible, paranoiacs are right at home. This is where we find Tuymans at work. It's not surprising to learn that Luc Tuymans the Terrorist is reading Thomas Pynchon the Paranoiac: they are stylistic twins, equally adept at the kind of insidious gestures that send shivers down the spine. Both exploit quirky emphases that load their works with ominous significance; both encourage confusion between interior and exterior spaces; both cultivate a sense of moral ambiguity. There is also in Pynchon's style a quality of indirectness and elliptical meaning that echoes the frequently obscure or indistinct description of subjects in Tuymans' art.

In the following passage from Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* – a labyrinthine novel that takes place during the immediate aftermath of World War Two as the nascent Cold War powers jockey for position amid the ruins, of Europe – the hero, Slothrop, has just heard that Roosevelt is dead:

> 'They said it was a stroke', Saure sez. His voice is arriving from some quite peculiar direction, let us say from directly underneath, as the wide necropolis begins now to draw inward, to neck down and stretchout into a Corridor, once known to Slothrop, though not by name, a deformation of space that lurks inside his life, latent as a hereditary disease. A band of doctors in white masks that cover everything but the eyes, move in step down the passage to where Roosevelt is lying. They carry shiny, black kits. Metal rings inside the black leather, rings as if to speak, as if a ventriloquist were playing a trick, help-me-out-of-here ... Whoever it was, posing in the black cape at Yalta with the other leaders, conveyed beautifully the sense of Death's wings, rich, soft and black as the winter cape, prepared a nation of starers for the passing of Roosevelt, a being They assembled, a being They would dismantle [...]'.[5]

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identified such indirectness – she calls it 'the unspeakable' – as one of the central conventions of Gothic literature: 'The story does get through, but in a muffled form, with a distorted time sense, and accompanied by a kind of despair about any direct use of language'.[6] Such a characterization clearly applies to Tuymans, whose work is both self-consciously anachronistic and sketchy – at times almost to the point of disappearance. The total lack of affect in Tuymans' frequent portraits of Nazi officers, as well as in his series of portraits of terminally ill patients, echoes the passive and rather despairing sentiments expressed in Thomas de Quincey's Gothic classic, *Confessions of an Opium Eater*: 'to fight up against the wearying siege of an abiding sickness imposes a fiery combat. I attempt no description of this combat, knowing the unintelligibility and repulsiveness of all attempts to communicate the incommunicable'.[7]

Again, in light of Tuymans' work, Kristeva's thoughts on 'the abject' echo Sedgwick's Gothic 'unspeakable': 'he is not mad, he for whom the abject exists. Out of the daze that has petrified him before the untouchable, impossible, absent body of the mother, a daze that has cut off his impulses from their objects, that is, from their representations, out of such a daze he causes, along with loathing, one word to crop up – fear. The phobic has no other object but the abject. But that word, 'fear' – a fluid haze, an elusive clamminess – no sooner has it cropped up than it shades off like a mirage and permeates all words of the language with nonexistence, with a hallucinatory ghostly glimmer. Thus, fear having been bracketed, discourse will seem tenable only if it ceaselessly confront that otherness, a burden repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapprochable and intimate: the abject'.[8]

A number of other ostensibly Gothic conventions turn up in this brief passage of Pynchon as well in many of Tuymans' works. For example, Pynchon's necropolis, which expands inexplicably and bizarrely downward and which holds the marginally sentient Roosevelt, echoes Kosofsky's theme of live burial as well as that of the paradoxically expansive prison. As in Piranesi's *Carceri d'invenzione*, it is the viewer himself who is buried in Tuymans' exitless spaces: *The Green Room*, *Antichambre*, *Tunnel*, *Gaskamer*, *Sealed Rooms*. Tuymans, too, achieves a sense of suffocating yet limitless space: 'It is a space that never ends', he explains, 'a space that goes beyond the image itself'.[9] 'A prison which has neither inside nor outside', writes Sedgwick, 'is self-evidently one from which there is no escape ... but it is also one to which there is no access. The particular claustrophobia of [Piranesi's] vision is that it rejects the viewer even as it lures her in and exerts its weight on her.'[10]

Pynchon's 'white masks' and 'black cape' recall the Gothic veil, an image that both marks the threshold between inside and outside while in its insubstantiality signifies the very vulnerability of that demarcation. For Sedgwick, the veil's imprecise bordering alludes to the instability of identity and constant shifting between self and other in the Gothic tradition. The ambiguity of the veil is frequently exploited by Tuymans, not only in his frequent close-up depictions of human skin and fabric where peculiarities of scale accentuate the veil's destabilizing effects, but also in his treatment of the artworks' surface. His

works characteristically appear to be seen through some kind of thin haze or milky cloud. In some cases, such as *Arena*, this veil becomes literalized with the use of an overlay of semi-transparent material.

Stephen King asserts that the tropes of the horror genre arise from the specific unconscious fears of an age. Indeed, it is tempting to see Tuymans as a kind of history painter whose art reflects our own era of ultra-nationalism and resurgent fascism. Our recent history has also been a period of astonishingly sordid events and revelations; this summer, for example, the mysterious deaths of two young girls led to the exposure of a child sex-slave ring extending into the very highest levels of the Belgian police force and government. There are echoes of such contemporary social traumas in Tuymans' work although these echoes may be faint, obscured, or couched in allegory. In the most literal sense, we might see his images of the Third Reich as signalling not so much a retrospective view as a masked expression of current events. As such, the muted, bloodless appearance of these images is not a result of the 'unrepresentability' of their nominal subject, the Holocaust – after all, Tuymans approaches other subjects such as Belgian nationalism and clinical pathology in an equally understated fashion. Rather, their muteness betrays a deep anxiety about the very location of the feeling subject and hints at a bifurcation of the artist's existential and social conditions. That is to say, the artist appeals to a peculiar feature of the Modern psyche: a waning of superstitious thinking mixed with a lingering nostalgia for the viscerality of evil. These two tendencies are incommensurable, according to Alan Macfarlane: since the rise of industrial capitalism, evil has 'been almost abolished'. In earlier times, writes Macfarlane 'when havoc [fell] out of clear sky and [struck] down an individual or a society, there [was] evil at work'.[11] Now, our culture seems to be reaching ever more extreme conditions of banality, so that even such grotesque incidents as the Belgian child sex-slave scandal are soon absorbed and forgotten. Rationality has replaced superstition as the explanation for human actions. However bad things may seem, we now live in a world thoroughly permeated by Enlightenment logic and values. If evil still exists, it exists solely in the realm of nostalgia. This may explain why Tuymans' works – especially his drawings – are so distanced from the here and now: cracked, torn, ephemeral, they have the appearance of future artefacts. Because terror has been relegated to the past, the past – as such – has become fraught with ominousness. Thus, as exemplified in Tuymans' art, nostalgia itself has become the horror trope *par excellence* of our time.

The ineluctable, Modern problem of evil's haunting presence in a desacralized universe is the crux of Tuymans' art. As such, it is interesting to compare his work to that of Paul Delaroche, the French painter of the *juste milieu*, whose works – created at the dawn of the Modern age – bear more than a passing resemblance to Tuymans'. Delaroche's paintings, such as *The Death of Cardinal Mazarin*, *The Death of Elizabeth*, *The Children of Edward IV in the Tower*, and *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey*, are bland renditions of ghastly subjects removed historically from the painter's time yet bathed in a strangely nostalgic afterglow. The two artists' works share a quality of weary airlessness and random composition that, I would argue, is linked to their mediating role as embodiments of a Modern social condition which choose to dwell on the archaic spirit of evil. Like Tuymans, Delaroche lived in an era when rhetorical Liberalism flourished while powerful memories of recent catastrophe – for Tuymans, the Holocaust; for Delaroche, the revolutionary Terror and Napoleon's totalitarian excesses – were undergoing a massive repression. Delaroche's diminutive *Death of Cardinal Mazarin* is a very near cousin, if not a sibling, to Tuymans' *Gaskamer;* both evoke a simultaneously nauseating and vertiginous sense of, 'the spaciousness and vacuity of the imprisoning environment'.[12] Tuymans, like Delaroche, appeals to our nostalgia for terror only to smite us with us with a terror of nostalgia.

1 Cf. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', in *The Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Random House, 1974) 306.

2 See Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York: Everest House Publishers, 1981) 34–7.

3 Alan Macfarlane, 'The Root of all Evil', in *The Antrhopology of Evil, ed.* David Parkin (Oxford: Blackwell) 57–8.

4 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 2.

5 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974) 435.

6 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 14.

7 Ibid., 84–5.

8 Kristeva, op. cit., 6.

9 Luc Tuymans, Interview with Juan Vicente Aliaga, in *Luc Tuymans* (London and New York: Phaidon Press, 1996) 25.

10 Sedgwick, op. cit., 26.

11 Macfarlane, op. cit., 60.

12 Sedgwick, op. cit., 38.

Lawrence Rinder, 'Tuyman's Terror', in *Premonitions: Luc Tuymans, Drawings* (Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1997) n.p.

Doris Salcedo
Interview with Charles Merewether//1998

Charles Merewether Concerning your work *Unland* (1995–98) you have spoken of how each table draws upon a specific story of incidents happening in Colombia. How do you conceive your work in relation to these stories? Can you say something about the importance of art for you; that is, what you believe art is able to bring to the subject and to the viewer that is of special value?

Doris Salcedo Anyone who has been witness to the violent death of someone else, especially of a loved one, has lived an experience similar to that of a tragic hero, such as Gilgamesh. Life's trajectory for the victims of violence in Colombia is already defined by this kind of encounter with death, the same as for Gilgamesh. Their lives acquire death as their only content. The confrontation with death, and especially with the death of a loved one, provokes what Aristotle called both terror and compassion.

Merewether How do you make choices from peoples' testimonials, choices which are then given an aesthetic form and represent those testimonies or experiences?

Salcedo The civil war in Colombia defines a reality that imposes itself on my work at every level of its production. The precariousness of the materials that I use is already given in the testimonies of the victims. As a result, as an artist, I don't have the opportunity to choose the themes that inform a piece. The oft-celebrated freedom of the artist is a myth.

The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has helped us understand that the other precedes me and claims my presence before I exist. In that sense, there is a delay that can never be made up. 'My presence does not respond to the extreme urgency of its assignment. It only accuses me of having been late', writes Levinas. I work with this delay that cannot be made up. As a result, everything precedes me, everything makes its presence felt with such urgency that I am not the one who chooses; my themes are given to me, reality is given to me, the presence of each victim imposes itself.

Merewether In the installation of *Unland* the placement of each table and the lighting seem very important to creating the conditions for its viewing and for our understanding. For me, it creates an aura of silence in which to view the three tables as single, almost isolated pieces and, at the same time, as sharing something in common. Can you say something about this in view of your experience of listening to these stories, their remembrance, and the presentation of *Unland?*

Salcedo Just as it happens to heroes, for the victims of violence, the world becomes strange to them, and they enclose themselves in complete - mute - silence. Franz Rosenzweig writes in *The Star of Redemption* that the only language for a tragic hero is silence.

In art, silence is already a language – a language prior to language – of the unexpressed and the inexpressible: 'Art is the transmission without words of what is the same in all human beings ... The tragic hero's silence is silent in all art and is understood in all art without a single word'. Rosenzweig says that art does not create a community. In art, all remains silent. The silence of the victim of the violence in Colombia, my silence as an artist and the silence of the viewer come together during the precise moment of contemplation and only in the very space where that contemplation occurs.

Merewether May we not link this silence also to the duration and proximity in the viewing of the work, in so far that it is only upon closer viewing, with proximity, that the tables begin to reveal themselves? Perceiving the work then is guided by silence and duration in order to work like a slow-release chemical inside the body. Is this a metaphor for our relation to the subject, to people and to their lives, to the way trauma occurs after the fact, as if it is being experienced for the first time?

Salcedo The silent contemplation of each viewer permits the life seen in the work to reappear. Change takes place, as if the experience of the victim were reaching out, beyond, as if making a bridge over the space between one person and another. To make this connection possible is the important thing. As Deleuze has written: 'Duration is essentially memory, conscience and liberty. It is conscience and liberty because it is, primordially, memory.'

The experience is intimate and can only be made visible in the space, the space permits that the experience endures. The sculpture presents the experience of the victim as something present – a reality that resounds within the silence of each human being that gazes upon it.

It is because of this that the work of art preserves life, offering the possibility that an intimacy develops in a human being when he or she receives something of the experience of another. Art sustains the possibility of an encounter between people who come from quite distinct realities.

Merewether How might you speak of an ethics of remembering when there is; at times, a need to forget as much as there is an absence of memory, or amnesia? What role does memory play in your work, both in terms of your method of working and for the audience?

Salcedo Over the past few years the question of memory has been abused and exhausted as a theme. Given that mourning is a permanent presence in my work, the notion of memory is also ambiguous, since it is always confronted with a doubt, with an aporia. One struggles between the necessity of being faithful to the memory of the other, to keep that loved one alive within us, and with the necessity of overcoming that impossible mourning with forgetting.

My work deals with the fact that the beloved – the object of violence – always leaves his or her trace imprinted on us. Simultaneously, the art works to continue the life of the bereaved, a life disfigured by the other's death. Derrida says, 'Everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of the memories from beyond the grave'.

My work speaks of the continuation of life, a life disfigured, as Derrida would say. Memory must work between the figure of the one who has died and the life disfigured by the death. As a result, I would say that the only way in which I confront memory in my work is to begin with the failure of memory.

Merewether I should like to ask you about what I perceive as changes in your work over the past ten years. Your work in the late 1980s seemed more overtly to represent violence, and then with *Atrabiliarios* (1991–96) and *La Casa Viuda (Widowed House*, 1992–94), to move towards ways of addressing the experience of absence, loss and mourning.

Do you see your work as an articulation of that loss? Is it about bearing witness and overcoming that loss, of trying to come to terms with the experience of trauma and bereavement? How would you describe your current work? Is it also about survival, about living on?

Salcedo I take on with full responsibility the theme of violence and war. I don't think that in my work this theme develops in an evolutionary way; I simply touch upon different aspects of war. Perhaps one day I will return to more explicit images.

As I've stated, I don't choose my themes, I accept what happens. My works are for the victims of violence. I try to be a witness of the witness. I look for an intimate proximity with the victims of violence that allows me to stand in for them. One must feel close to another in order to stand in for him or her and create an artwork out of another's experience. As a result, the work is made using his or her testimony as its foundation. It is not my rational intent but rather the experience of the victim that tells us about trauma, pain, loss.

As a sculptor, I'm aware of every detail that informs the life of the victim: the corporeality, the feelings, the vulnerability, the failings, the space, his or her life's trajectory and language. I don't formulate the experience of the victim, rather, I assemble it so that it remains forever a presence in the present moment. I don't try to elaborate or transform the grief or overcome the traumas of another being. I can only give form to works which, once completed, are autonomous creatures, independent of my intentions. Sculpture for me is the giving of a material gift to that being who makes his or her presence felt in my work.

Merewether You have spoken of how you don't choose the themes, but accept what happens. Does the long process of making the work – a form of immersion – play a part in this displacement of yourself and recognition of the other?

Salcedo This process of approaching the other takes place all the way to the point that supplanting or metamorphosis does indeed occur. During the elaboration of an artwork, these victims live within me and remain in me even after the work is finished.

But also I would like to add that the finished work of art is an autonomous creature, independent of my original intention; my work as an artist is not to illustrate these testimonies. Formal logic is not at all helpful in the formative process of making a work of art. On the contrary, it is harmful: it paralyses intuition, blocks inspiration and impedes the appropriation of the dissimilar.

Merewether Do you see the role of the artist as mediating between a witness or victim of violence and an audience that has not necessarily had such an experience or knows very little, such as an audience from outside Colombia? Could we say that the work of art might play a part in enabling us to recognize difference and commonality, in order that we might understand both the specificity of the violence on the subject to whom you refer and an experience that may be common to us all?

Salcedo Living amidst war, my role is to think of war, both from the point of view of the victim and of the perpetrator. I am interested in war as a part of human history, as a central activity of all societies in the past as well as in the present. The enemies change, the forms of annihilation change, the weapons change, but the nature of war is the same. When I take the case of Colombia, I do so because that is the reality that I know best. I do not speak of the violence in Colombia from a nationalist perspective. I focus on the individual and not on the acts of

violence that define the State. I am not interested in denouncing before an international audience what is happening in my country here and now. I am aware that art has a precarious capacity to denounce.

Moreover, violence is present in the whole world and in all of us. As a result, I am interested in questioning the elements of violence endemic to human nature. Cruelty, indolence and hatred towards others are universal. I look for the possibility of making the connection between the one particular and harsh event that takes place in Colombia and the equally cruel and harsh everyday life that takes place elsewhere. Perhaps in other places it occurs in a more hidden and subtle way, yet one that is no less painful or unjust. As Levinas says, there are a thousand ways of spilling blood. For example, when we are sophisticated and cruel, one way to spill blood is to make the other person blush. [...]

Merewether Can you say more about this in relation to the notion of community? Do you see your work as a way of trying to create different forms of community based on absence, loss, shared values and responsibility to each other?

Salcedo The notion of community is born when the individual opens him or herself to others. To accompany someone to his or her death, step by step, opens us to the other, and leads us to forget our own existence, it unites us to that other, who will then remain inscribed inside us. The exhaustive investigation that I carry out on the deaths of the victims of violence, on the actual deed of the murder, leads me to accompany them, step by step, to that death, and in that sense I feel as though they are inscribed in me. Therefore, I assume responsibility towards the bereaved.

Without responsibility an idea of a community is also impossible. That is why I try to keep in mind the famous line from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* that is also so close to what Levinas writes and which seems to me a good model to emulate, a proposition that we should all make our own: 'We are all responsible for everyone else – but I am more responsible than all the others'.

Doris Salcedo and Charles Merewether, Interview (1998) in *Unland. Doris Salcedo: New Work* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1999). Translated from Spanish by Charles Merewether and Sylvia Korwek.

Okwui Enwezor
The American Sublime and the Racial Self//2006

[...] The turning point in Lorna Simpson's work lies specifically in the fact that for her generation photographic inquiry became concerned principally with cogito, and it was not necessarily the drive to self-knowledge nor autobiography that compelled this shift. There were larger issues at stake: a whole social body and its pathologies. Let us give this a name: It is the spectacle of the racial self and the gendered body. Take the example of *Completing the Analogy*, in which a tousle-haired black female garbed in a crinkled cotton gown, her back turned to the viewer, appears to be facing a blackboard in an image in which foreground and background have been erased. The slightly animated pose contrasts dramatically with the text printed on the photograph, which reads:

HAT IS TO HEAD
AS DARKNESS IS TO ... SKIN

SCISSORS ARE TO CLOTH
AS RAZOR IS TO ... SKIN

BOW IS TO ARROW
AS SHOTGUN IS TO ... SKIN

But in so far as this is concerned with certain practices of dissection, we can more properly locate its aesthetic properties as the ken of the American sublime: race and gender in social discourse. Therefore, to confront Simpson's early photographic work (1985–95) and the elliptical linguistic registers that ring it like a halo, we have to engage how the disquietingly straightforward, pared-down images open the viewer up to a vast epistemic field. It is a field rooted in a particular type of violence. This violence is grounded in methods of subjection and denial. Access to its disclosure therefore requires more than the tacit acknowledgment of its historical base and its temporality.

Over the last century, manifold cultural examinations and artistic investigations have been opening knowledge of this violence to viewers. D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is a key example of the iconographic violence rooted in the American sublime. Popular media, literature and countless Hollywood films are saturated with such images. It is never said enough that nothing escapes the racial sublime and the epistemic violence that surrounds it

in the American civilization. The scrutiny of the racial sublime constitutes a key philosophical and methodological framework of Simpson's critical project. But what is this violence and how does it frame her artistic procedures? Or, rather, how has Simpson deployed the dispersed regimes of this violence to explore the limits of the body, the black body mounted on the scaffold and bound up in its suffocating hold? Then there is the female body. And then the black female body. And then ... Simpson stages her work in the tumultuous events of the racial and gendered self. Perhaps we can see why it is possible to speak here of the double displacement that is evident in all her work, especially in the constant insertion of the photographic subject into the zones of racial and female identification. The first displacement connects to the question of what it is to be black and female.

This frame represents the universal and the particular in her line of enquiry. The second displacement is on the narrower subject of what it means to be African American and American simultaneously. This frame is driven by the concepts of diaspora and subalternity; nationality and citizenship. The relay of positions and modes of address also touch on specific formal and methodological issues: the inter-media relationship between photography and film, text and image, speech and narrative. All of these form the backdrop of what this essay seeks to explore.

Rupture, or the Madness of Race

There is in the 'mythology of madness' the oft-repeated story of the radical therapy effected by Phillipe Pinel when he released the madmen and madwomen from their chains in Bicêtre and Salpêtrière hospitals in Paris in 1794. Pinel's freeing of the madmen and madwomen was said to have ushered in a revolution in the treatment of madness. Not only did he free these men and women from their literal chains, he simultaneously, through their deincarceration, also freed them from the stigma to which the chain had interminably condemned them beyond repair.

By the same token, Pinel did not so much free the insane from their hellish confinement as much as he released their madness from total censure. In this way he returned them back into the world, or rather, into the social government of the asylum from which the insane had been banished. And in which for centuries scores languished, under lock and key, behind high walls, where no 'serene' gaze of rationality and respectability would ever fall on that insolence that represents the ruined human character.

In America, race constitutes its own form of madness, along with its own asylums and governmentalities. From the earliest moment that European colonists arrived on the American shores, race has been the great alloy of a potent social experiment, one that produced slavery and the plantation economy. If the

Bicêtre and Salpêtrière hospitals were more than therapeutic zones – being as they were places of seizure – the confinement on the plantation under slavery mobilizes similar senses of capture and stigma. Race in America simultaneously represents the unspeakable and the irrepressible, as well as an epistemological model of biological differentiation that produces a prodigious body of discourse and representation. And like madness in the asylum, it enjoys a particular kind of censure behind the high walls of its own asylum. Except, unlike the asylum, which is ringed by thick, mortared walls and protected by a forbidding gate, the madness of race exists nakedly visible in the tumescent flesh of the American social ideal and is practiced in the open terrain of the cultural landscape.

Toni Morrison has productively explored how the episteme of race as a literary device of social and political differences was constituted. She makes us aware of how the discourse of race suffuses the canons of early and modern American writing, particularly the novels of America's most celebrated writers. She argues that the madness of race, along with its utter naked visibility, is part of the unique character of American literary arts. According to her analysis, a cursory search into American literature reveals the obsessive nature of the racial attitude in what she identifies as the uses of an Africanist presence to elevate the representations of literary whiteness and at the same time ameloriate the lurking sense of a human bond that connects the enslaved and the free. This presence, as it were, stages a discourse, a funnel through which the dialectic between enslavement and freedom could be passed. Morrison came to this insight through close readings of Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Styron, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and many others.

My curiosity about the origins and literary uses of this carefully observed, and carefully invented, Africanist presence has become an informal study of what I call American Africanism. It is an investigation into the ways in which non-white, African-like (or Africanist) presence or persona was constructed in the United States, and the imaginative uses this fabricated presence served. I am using the term 'Africanism' not to suggest the larger body of knowledge on Africa that the philosopher Valentin Mudimbe means by the term 'Africanism', nor to suggest the varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited this country. Rather I use it as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little restraint has been attached to its uses. As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual licence, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. Through the

simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of colour on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom.

Abolition literature and the slave narrative were direct literary responses to the disjuncture of racial difference. This disjuncture has been well preserved in the American aesthetic imagination, from the vaudeville black face of Al Jolson to President George W.H. Bush's deployment of Willie Horton in an advertisement during his presidential campaign in 1988. During the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s the disjuncture of race as an artistic paradigm made a return in the form of black nationalism, while in the 1980s it was penetrated by the insight of cultural and postcolonial studies and postmodernism. In contemporary art, a denotative and connotative Africanist presence has been abundantly used by artists – black and white alike – who find in the form of this spectral subject a language for the racial sublime. Simpson, Kara Walker, Glenn Ligon and Fred Wilson are some of the better-known younger African-American artists who have wrung meaning out of the vast Africanist visual archive and who have also departed from the props of black nationalism of the 1960s. They have devised a more nuanced if not always successful philosophical engagement with its imagery. If the madness of race suffused the work of these artists – providing, as their work proved, a topic of serious theoretical and historical reflection – it has not come without misgivings on the part of the critical establishment. As Morrison correctly observed, 'When matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature [and art], critical response has tended to be on the order of a humanistic nostrum – or a dismissal mandated by the label "political". Excising the political from the life of the mind is a sacrifice that has proven costly'.

However, the work of these artists was accompanied by a number of broader theoretical positions. One such position could be found in the work of the Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, whose book *Black Skin, White Masks* sought to unravel the power of the racial asylum over its inhabitants and administrators.

I want to think through some of the implications of race and madness in connection with the important work Fanon did in the asylum in Blida, Algeria, during the colonial war there in the 1950s. Early in his career Fanon had grasped the link between racism and madness. Similar metaphors used to describe Pinel's historic deincarceration of the insane have been applied to Fanon's work in Blida. In Algeria, Fanon wanted to demonstrate through the case study of asylum inmates interned in colonial jails that racism literally drives the subject insane. In order to offer the inmates effective therapy, he, like Pinel, had to release them from the chain of inferiority imposed by colonial racism.

Fanon's work then was a double therapy, dealing with literal madness and colonial racism. Lorna Simpson's interrogation of race in her work has consistently attempted to unravel the underlying madness of the same: the racial sublime, a combination of desire and repression. The racial sublime operates on the prodigious multiplication of social signifiers along with the phantom forms of subjection in everyday life in America. No wonder Cindy Sherman suppressed an early work in which she developed a number of female characters in black face, adding to the archive. In this series of untitled, photographic impersonations produced in 1976 she projected the romance of race back into the scrim of the racial sublime.

But in Simpson's work we will notice that the selfsame racial sublime was not only a romance but was accompanied by the episteme of violence to the black body, which is doubly violent to the black woman's body and psyche. Therein lies the undercurrent that lurks in many of Simpson's images. While the theoretical basis of the intersection of race and gender in Simpson's work is soundly grounded in the broader project of feminism, as her project doubtless is, it still does not obscure the basic premise argued by many African-American feminists such as Michelle Wallace and bell hooks, that mainstream feminism has been quite blind to the violence of the racial sublime. Within this terrain Simpson's work has introduced a fundamental dialectic, namely, the relationship between plenitude and negation. The privileging of the black female subject in her photographic projects addresses the question of plenitude, while the insistent refusal of the face of the woman alludes to her negation by the culture at large. In fact, much of Simpson's work proceeds from the establishment of this crucial disjuncture. [...]

Okwui Enwezor, extract from 'Representation and Differentiation: Lorna Simpson's Iconography of the Racial Sublime', in *Lorna Simpson* (New York: Abrams, in association with American Federation of the Arts, 2006) 113–17.

A SEA MEMORY, I AM QUITE SURE THAT IT'S A MEMORY OF THE SEA. NOT A CLOUD IN THE SKY, A SHARP-EDGED HORIZON, WAVES SURGING IN ENDLESSLY FROM BEYOND. WHEN I SAW THAT VISTA, IT WAS AS IF SOMETHING IN MY INFANT CONSCIOUSNESS AWAKENED FROM A LONG DREAM. I LOOKED AROUND AT MY HANDS AND FEET. AND THEN I SEEMED TO BE LOOKING DOWN ON MYSELF FROM ABOVE. AS IF I WERE THERE MERGED INTO THAT SEASCAPE.

Hiroshi Sugimoto, 'Noh Such Thing as Time', 2002

THE UNCANNY

Gilles Ivain
Formula for a New Urbanism//1958

[...] The quarters of this city could correspond to diverse catalogued feelings that one meets *by chance* in current life. Bizarre Quarter; Happy Quarter – particularly reserved for habitation; Noble and Tragic Quarter (for wise children); Historic Quarter (musems, schools); Useful Quarter (shops, equipment stores); Sinister Quarter, etc. Perhaps also a Quarter of Death, not to die but to live in peace ... The Sinister Quarter for example will usefully replace those holes, hell mouths that peoples once possessed in their capitals; they symbolized the evil powers of life. The Sinister Quarter will have no need to shelter real dangers, such as traps, secret dungeons or mines. It would be approached in a complicated way, frightfully decorated (loud whistles, alarm clocks, periodic sirens with irregular cadence, monstrous sculptures, mechanical mobiles driven by motors, called *Auto-Mobiles*) and lit poorly at night, as well as violently lit during the day by an abusive use of reflection. At the centre the 'Square of the Terrifying Mobile'. The saturation of the market by a product provokes the devaluation of this product: the child and the adult will learn by exploring the Sinister Quarter no longer to fear the anguishing manifestations of life, but to be amused by them. [...]

Gilles Ivain, extract from 'Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (June 1958) 1.

Mike Kelley
In Conversation with Thomas McEvilley//1992

Thomas McEvilley Right at the beginning of his essay ['The Uncanny', 1919], Freud says, 'The uncanny belongs to all that is terrible, to all that arouses dread and creeping horror', which reminds us, quite directly, of the traditional eighteenth-century writings on the sublime.

Mike Kelley That's right. It's very much like Edmund Burke.

McEvilley And like Kant, who may have adopted many of Burke's views of the sublime, but extended them in an interesting way. For Burke the sublime was anything that is so vast and 'other' that it seems by its very existence to threaten the annihilation of the observing subject. One is witnessing a thing whose inner meaning is one's own annihilation.

Kelley I think Minimalism is sublime in that regard.

McEvilley But Kant made an interesting shift by saying that any experience is sublime that involves the deliberate subordination of oneself to some force or category supposedly greater than oneself. You had four famous examples that I think were used first by Addison, then by Burke, then by Kant: mountain peaks, storms at sea, Milton's description of Hell, and infinity.

Kelley I love Burke's compendium of sublime subjects.

McEvilley But aside from that list of awesome, threatening, terrifying, and delightful experiences, Kant proposed that ethical acts are also sublime, because they also involved the denial of oneself in relation to some greater category.

Kelley Right. But you could say that that goes back to the original discussion of the sublime by ...

McEvilley Longinus?

Kelley Yes. His descriptions of the sublime relating to rhetorical concerns in public speech-making.

McEvilley Except for his remark – which lies in the background of sublime paintings such as Turner's later works, or Gericault's *Raft of the Medusa* – that a picture of the sublime might show the entire world being torn apart. It's only a step from that to the abstract expressionist sublime – say Barnett Newman's – the portrayal of the void into which one's selfhood will supposedly dissolve. Which gets us right back to Ernst Jentsch's idea [in 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', 1906] of the uncanny as the interface between life and death, or animate and inanimate.

Kelley Or the loss of self. I think Longinus is an interesting writer to think about propaganda through. Propaganda is sublime in that it causes one to accept ideas, that one wouldn't normally accept, as one's own. It's an interesting entry into discussions of fascism, for example.

McEvilley The sublime does have that tendency, doesn't it? So the idea of the sublime, when extended in that way, goes very far.

Kelley Very far – into political considerations.

McEvilley For example, the experience of beholding an artwork or literary work which one basically doesn't like, and making an effort to appreciate it by getting into an alien point of view, might be a sublime act on this Kantian model.

Kelley A loss of self in any way.

McEvilley Any willing loss of self. I mean, the sublime in Burke ...

Kelley Oh, but that's unwilling, in Burke it's unwilling.

McEvilley Well, he talks about the delight of the storm at sea and so on, and one can imagine him climbing up to mountain peaks in search of the sublime experience, like they did so commonly a couple of generations later.

Kelley But wouldn't that be a kitsch sublime?

McEvilley But that's how the sublime functions as a cultural presence – through this deliberation. I mean, one gets on a motorcycle and goes a hundred miles an hour at night to deliberately feel the terror and wonder of the sublime.

Kelley Right. But I don't know if that could really be considered sublime. I mean, that I would willingly take a risk, not to annihilate my ego – but to promote it, to prove my greatness, my strength.

McEvilley Well, again I see what you mean, but I think that at a certain point in experiences like that there is just the sheer, hair-raising terror of the sublime, going beyond any mood of self-congratulation. [...] What I'm driving at is that, in terms of embodying it in artistic objects, the sublime has been approached primarily by way of trying to shadow forth the formless in art.

Kelley Like monochrome painting?

McEvilley Yes. But by focusing on the uncanny rather than the sublime, you've reversed the direction. Rather than approaching the formless beyond, you propose to show that form from which life has just departed, or might be just about to depart, into that hypothetical beyond. So you're showing the small formed reality into which the sublime is ingressing.

Kelley Like I said, using an artistic form that itself is dead.

McEvilley The resuscitation of the corpse. It's kind of like the sublime as the Golem.

Kelley Yes. Or Frankenstein.

McEvilley Uh-huh.

Kelley I was reading some books recently from the early 1970s, about the first verist sculptors, like John De Andrea and Hanson. Some really believed that their works were an extension of nineteenth-century realism. That's bullshit. That kind of realism was already impossible because of the irony and formal removal of Pop art. I can only see their statues as depicting stock character types. In De Andrea's case, I see false idealism – false Greek sculpture – and in Hanson's case false social realism.

McEvilley I think of Yves Klein as the first verist sculptor, for his body casts.

Kelley But I'm avoiding anything connected with body art and the whole 'art and life' movement. That gets into theatre and questions of identity, which I don't want to get involved with. I want to keep away from any focus on the human person except for its sheer materiality.

McEvilley Along with formlessness, the theme of the sublime in recent art involved a sense of the human individual possessing in a hidden way a potential for vast spiritual greatness. Newman is again the obvious example. But clearly you are approaching it differently.

Kelley Right. I have a big problem with that reading of the sublime. My reading is more Freudian, involved with notions of sublimation. I see the sublime as coming from the natural limitations of our knowledge; when we are confronted with something that's beyond our limits of acceptability, or that threatens to expose some repressed thing, then we have this feeling of the uncanny. So it's not about getting in touch with something greater than ourselves. It's about getting in touch with something we know and can't accept – something outside the boundaries of what we are willing to accept about ourselves.

McEvilley You're not concerning yourself with what's on the other side of that limitation.

Kelley The limitation is us. I'm not interested in what's not us. But to keep talking about it in relation to the threat of physical annihilation separates the project too much from aesthetic discourse. And I want that also to be a part of it. It's about one's interaction with an object, not just one's interaction with one's self. The focus is on the object.

McEvilley Still, the object and the self tend to merge in this case, since the sublime, as the uncanny, leads immediately to a contemplation of the death and decay of the body.

Kelley Well, of course. Why else would one want to make a mummy, or a statue, or any representation at all? [...]

Mike Kelley and Thomas McEvilley, extract from 'From the Sublime to the Uncanny: Mike Kelley in Conversation with Thomas McEvilley' (New York, 1992), first published in a slightly different form in the catalogue for Sonsbeek 93 (Arnhem, The Netherlands 1993); reprinted in Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticism*, ed. John C. Welchman (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003) 63–7.

Hiroshi Sugimoto
Noh Such Thing as Time//2002

What I have attempted to show via the medium of photography is an ancient level of human memory. Whether individual memory or cultural memory or the collective memory of humanity as a whole, the idea is to go back in time to remember where we came from, how we came to be. As for myself, my own memories seem to plumb some interminable, dim and hazy primordial chaos from which issues a thin threadlike strand. Grappling my way along, I am dragged down to the sunless depths of the sea, yet I am sure the line connects to something somewhere far off. The other end of the thread is 'now', but somehow the strand keeps stretching out and that far end of memory gets further and further away.

A sea memory, I am quite sure that it's a memory of the sea. Not a cloud in the sky, a sharp-edged horizon, waves surging in endlessly from beyond. When I saw that vista, it was as if something in my infant consciousness awakened from a long dream. I looked around at my hands and feet. And then I seemed to be looking down on myself from above. As if I were there merged into that seascape. My life began from that moment.

Then one day 40 years later, while travelling along the northern Italian coast tracing my memories of the sea, I came upon a communal graveyard in a tiny settlement. Situated atop a high bluff overlooking the sea, weathered and overgrown, each gravestone bore an inscription, surmounted by a small inlaid cameo photo, apparently a portrait of the person buried there. Some photos were silvered beyond all recognition; others revealed a faint image when viewed from an angle. In still others, water seepage had dissolved the faces to where one could scarcely tell it was a person, though that left an even stronger impression. According to the inscriptions, most had been born in the nineteenth century and died at the beginning of the twentieth. And not just old people; there were many who died young, even mere babes in arms. As I gazed at these portrait photos, I fell into a strange kind of misperception: that at first there had been only glazed lozenges affixed to the gravestones, but gradually over the years the ghosts of the dead began to surface as silvery images in the glass. I felt as if they were trying to tell me something – me, a total stranger who just happened by. I stayed there three days and went to look at the graves each day; unknowingly the images seemed to grow more pronounced than the day before.

The medium of photography is a moulding device comprising a paired positive and negative. One takes a direct mould from a living person's face. And

one can cast a lifelike mask right from that mould, though it stays 'lifelike' for only the briefest interval as the mask will increasingly betray the living face. A mask doesn't age, but the living face soon fades away like the Portrait of Dorian Gray and finally dies, leaving only the mask behind. Like cicada shells once the insect has broken out of its subterranean nether life and winged away, photographs preserve the husk of human souls now flown off to that boundless freedom, such is death. Thus, since ancient times in Japan we've spoken of dying as *jobutsu*, 'becoming a Buddha'.

I first encountered masks in secondary school when I went to the Tokyo National Museum to see the Tutankhamen exhibition. The long snaking queue finally deposited me before that mask, the king's magnificence radiating in gleaming gold, the image of his young face freshly shaded with heavy eye-shadow and crowned with a poison adder. The catalogue had a photograph of the king's mummy unwrapped of its linen bandages. I was shocked: until then I'd believed that photographs captured reality at its living best, but here was not the image of how the man looked in life but a vivid portrayal of death itself – all of 3,300 years dead. Instead, the living image of the deceased remained upon that gold mask. I felt a chill run through me, as if I'd fallen into a time-crevasse between the mask and the photograph. As the catalogue described the fate of the excavation, Lord Carnarvon, one of the principal discoverers and sole source of funding for the excavation, was stung by a mosquito in Cairo some months after the discovery of the mummy, the sting abscessed, and he quickly died of a strange illness that was neither yellow fever nor malaria. And in the years that followed, other members of the excavation team died mysterious deaths one after another. That's how I first came to understand the meaning of the Buddhist term *karma*.

Noh is composed of simple elements – an itinerant priest, a bridge, a dream. The priest crosses the bridge and is freed from the constraints of secular time, guided into a kind of Twilight Zone where a shadowy figure appears out of nowhere to tell the tale of that other land. Thinking it strange, he asks the man's name, but the man merely voices ominous utterances and vanishes. The night grows late and the priest falls asleep, whereupon the same man appears in his dream, saying that he himself is none other than the ghost of the hero [protagonist] of that tragic tale and that he suffers because he is still attached to this world and unable to become a Buddha. He begins to dance. The priest offers prayers into the dawn and at some point the ghost disappears. Such is the theatrical formula initially created by the fifteenth-century dramatic genius Zeami. The main characters in Noh dramas are all famous historic figures from the tale of Genhji, the Tale of the Heike, the Tale of Ise and other mediaeval Japanese classics. That is to say, from some ancient level of common memory shared by all

of Japan. Recapping, those memories in the form of phantasmal Noh serves to create a dramatic space of shared hallucination in which many different times coexist: the time of the viewer watching the play, the mediaeval period of the itinerant priest, and the legendary era of the ghost several centuries before that. These three times flow simultaneously within the same space.

Noh masks are, in a sense, devices for freely transporting the performer through different times in the same space. Noh is performed in two separate parts: in the first half, the main character appears in mask – the mask of an old fisherman or a young village maiden – as a person of that particular place; in the latter half, the character appears again, this time wearing the mask of the ghost's former self. At this point, the ghost may be said to be manifesting in double, both as the ghost and as the incarnation of who the ghost was when alive – a samurai slain in battle or a woman driven mad with unfulfilled love and transformed into an ogress. This moment of onstage transformation from old man to young warrior, from young girl to ogress represents the climax of the drama.

Prior to appearing by the bridge, the lead in Noh – known as the shi'te or 'doer' – stays in the Kagami-no-Ma, the 'Mirror Room'. No mere backstage dressing room, the room is conceived as a holy ceremonial space where the ghost of the person to be performed possesses the *shi'te* as he dons the mask at the mirror. That's what the room is for. Or conversely, the ghost of the dead is made to move the borrowed worldly body of the shi'te via the mask.

According to Zeami's *Kadensho (Relate of the Flower)*, the origins of Noh are to be found in the ancient mythological dance performed by the god Amenouzume-no-Mikoto at the cave of Amano-Iwato where hid the sun goddess Amaterasu. Likewise in ancient Greece, masked tragedies were said to have been performed at celebrations of the god of drink Dionysus, though a gap of more than a millennium makes it difficult for us to know just what those dances were like. In Japan, however, ancient myths orally transmitted by pre-literate memory masters known *as kataribe* or 'tellers' were refined into mediaeval masked drama by Zeami and passed down unbroken to this day. Something of a miracle, one might say.

Only now does it occur to me to wonder whether or not Lord Carnarvon's spirit ever found peace and attained Buddha-hood. Granted, Christianity only affords a dichotomy of either Heaven or Hell. Yet this seems to hark back to the ancient level of shamanism or animism common to humanity long before Christianity. Perhaps because he's thought to have been killed by a curse. As if like a *shi'te* he had to keep chanting to Tutankhamen: *Dream fast bound, do not awake from your sleep, Dream fast bound, do not awake from your sleep*, for his part in the excavation:

A fallen flower returns not to the branch,
A shattered mirror never again casts its light.
And yet, still to blind attachment bound, burning with anger,
My departed soul becomes a haunting spirit and,
Inflicting torture upon itself,
Comes to Asura's shore, adrift on the waves of
Deep-lying karma of former lives.

One day I would like to visit the grave in England where sleeps Lord Carnarvon and mentally recite this passage from the Noh play *Yashima* for him.

Hiroshi Sugimoto, 'Noh such Thing as Time', in *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Architecture of Time* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2002) 79–84.

A K Dolven
A Found Page//2004

To come to Røst, you have to pass the Moskeneststraumen, the heavy maelstrom between the main islands of Lofoten and Røst. Then you find it, a municipality of around 600 people. They have lived very well from fishing for more than a thousand years. When the Venetian Pietro Quirini was unexpectedly stranded here with eleven men in 1432, he found – as he describes it in his written account – some 120 people, many dressed in woollen clothes from London. I am told that one third of all seabirds in Norway land or live on Røst sooner or later. That's a lot of birds. With their massive sound and presence they turn this beautiful place into an urban-like site far out in the Arctic sea.

On 26 April 2003, on the small island called Kårøya, among the Røst islands, we had a party. Next day, Cecilia and I took a walk. She wanted to enter this house she had seen. The windows were broken and gone; the wood was grey from wind and weather. It must have been empty for at least two generations. The remains of curtains were hanging here and there; in short, it looked like a cliché of 'an old spooky house'. Cecilia filmed it with her mini-DV camera. We climbed through the windows and I went up to the first floor. There was a mixture of layers of bird-shit and rubbish and pieces of old furniture. And there were lots of pages from books, spread all over the floor. I picked up one page and read:

It may appear strange, but now, when we were in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than when we were only approaching it. Having made up my mind to hope no more, I got rid of a great deal of that terror which unmanned me at first. I suppose it was despair that strung my nerves.

It may look like boasting – but what I tell you is the truth – I began to reflect how magnificent it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power. I do believe that I blushed with shame when this idea crossed my mind. After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a wish to explore its depth, even at the sacrifice I was going to make; and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see. These, no doubt, were singular fancies to occupy a man's mind in such extremity – and I have often thought since ...

The spelling in the Norwegian version from the derelict house suggested a date from perhaps 1930–40. The text was so striking and well written that I kept it. This was no kiosk literature. I put the wet page in the back pocket of my jeans.

Several months later we came back with the team to film 'moving mountain'.

We passed the maelstrom once more. I still had the text.

Back in London again, months later, I was really curious to know what kind of book they had been reading in that house. What literature did they have? My first instinct had been right, for the page I found was written in New York by Edgar Allan Poe. The passage occurs in his short story *A Descent into the Maelstrøm*,[1] written in 1841 while his young wife was very ill.

1 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (Penguin Classics) 188.

A K Dolven, 'A found page', in *A K Dolven: Moving Mountain* (Bergen: Kunsthall Bergen, 2004) 105–7.

Tony Oursler, 'Monologues', *The Influence Machine*, 2002

ALTERED STATES

Marina Abramovic
Statements//1992

In our 'civilized' world the non-rational capacities which we still possess as children are completely destroyed within a rational education system. Bit by bit we are pushed into a rational pattern, losing our non-rational abilities and instincts. Our society is constructed entirely upon rational patterns. Everything which is not rational is treated with a certain secrecy. Only among good friends can someone admit that he believes in dreams, telepathy, acts of providence, astrological prophesies, magical power or visions. Our rational way of thinking demands proof, evidence, but this is only one element in our perceptive capabilities. Things which we cannot explain rationally are eliminated from our lives, as if they were non-existent. We don't want to know anything about them. Art is a field in which the non-rational may sometimes be tolerated, where it is creatively employed. I want to introduce the non-rational into our society. In far eastern cultures the non-rational is part of the everyday; there things we reject as miracles or pure 'chance' are not excluded.

I would like to invite shamans as artists. For example one of them could demonstrate that it is possible to spend three days and three nights under water. There is no rational, scientific explanation of this phenomenon. There is no trick involved. Breaks with conventional 'understanding' are important to me; I want to produce a 'mental jump', want to lead people to a point where rational thinking fails, where the brain has to give up. The confusion which then arises in the brain is also an interval. Another world can open up. I shall point the way, no more. Artists today? They are couriers, they accompany people on the true adventure, a journey into the inner self. There are no firmly established religious structures any longer, the old structures have all been destroyed and new ones have not yet emerged. Artists accompany us on our search for a new order.

Marina Abramovic, Statements from conversation with the author (1992), quoted by Doris von Drathen, in her essay 'World Unity: Dream or Reality, a question of survival', in *Marina Abramovic* (Berlin: Nationalgalerie/Ostfildern-Ruit: Edition Cantz, 1993) 235; 236–7; essay reprinted in Doris von Drathen, *Vortex of Silence: A Proposition for an Art Criticism beyond Aesthetic Categories* (Milan: Charta, 2004).

Stelarc
Beyond the Body//1988

The invasion of technology: miniaturized and biocompatible, technology implodes back to the body, not only landing on the skin but embedding itself as an internal component. Implanted technology energizes the body, accelerating it to attain planetary escape velocity. Evolution ends when technology invades the body. It is no longer of any advantage either to remain 'human' or to evolve as a species. Human thought recedes into the human past. The end of philosophy, the end of the human form.

If the earlier events can be characterized as probing and piercing the body (the three films of the inside of the stomach, lungs and colon/the 25 suspensions), then the recent performances extend and enhance it. The amplified internal rhythms, laser eyes and mechanical hand acoustically and visually expand the body's parameters. They can no longer be seen as biofeedback situations (they never really were) but rather sci-fi scenarios for human-machine symbiosis – with sound as the medium that reshapes the human body, for redesigning an obsolete body. It may not yet be possible physiologically to modify the body, but it can resonate with modulated rhythms. The body does not simply acquire an acoustical aura – its humanoid form is stretched and restructured with sound. The amplified body is no longer the container of its rhythms. The humanoid form is transformed into the cuboid space. The body becomes hollow, resonating with its own echoes.

Hollow Body: Off the planet, the body's complexity, softness and wetness would be difficult to sustain. The strategy should be to hollow, harden and dehydrate the body. Extraterrestrial environments amplify the body's obsolescence, intensifying the pressures for its modification. The solution to radically redesigning the body lies not with its internal structure but with a change of skin. [...]

Stelarc, extract from first section of 'Beyond the Body: Amplified Body, Laser Eyes and Third Hand', *NMA*, no. 6 (Melbourne, 1988) 27.

George Quasha and Charles Stein
HanD HearD/Liminal Objects//2000

Liminality

A *limen* in Latin is a threshold. While its current usage is principally behavioural with respect to the threshold of a physiological or psychological response, in fact, liminal or borderline states are anywhere that something is about to undergo a phase transition or turn into something else. They range from the ordinary to the extraordinary – from, say, the everyday hypnogogic state between sleeping and waking to the 'final' margin between life and death. We tend to set these all-important states in opposition to each other as though their borders were clear and absolute, but when we study liminal states we may discriminate virtually limitless nuances, even to the point of challenging the major distinctions themselves. With respect to the distinction 'life and death', for instance, Tibetan Buddhist philosophy discusses highly nuanced in-between states called *bardos*, the knowledge of which theoretically equips one to exercise profound and consequential choice in phasic transitions that the ordinary opposition does not recognize at all. Comparable distinctions are now made, for instance, in Western therapeutic bodywork such that intervention in borderline 'body-mind' states allows far-reaching pattern-transformation. These liminal interventions challenge the normative 'scientific' distinction between body and mind. What is conceptually difficult in observing liminal states is that even fundamental distinctions like *space* and *time* come into question. Where are we and when are we in the in-between? In what sense is what we observe 'really there'? Or is it only *liminally there?*

'At the still point, there the dance is,/But neither arrest nor movement', wrote the poet T.S. Eliot in *The Four Quartets*, a powerful evocation of transtemporal awareness: 'To be conscious is not to be in time'. This vision of suddenly realized timelessness raises the issue of the liminality of time. While deriving from Dante's vision of eternal stillness in the last canto of the *Paradiso*, it interestingly resonates with 'still point' in other, apparently unrelated contexts far from the rarefied world of sacred poetry. Perhaps least expected *is* its use as a technical term in therapeutic bodywork (e.g., in craniosacral therapy, an offshoot of ostoeopathy). Here 'still point' refers to a momentary suspension in the body's 'fundamental pulsation' (the 'craniosacral rhythmical impulse'), mobilizing the system's inherent ability to correct its own imbalances. Paradoxically, the still point's *liminal* awareness is connected to a sense of *whole*ness – that is, *in the margin we find the threshold of an experience of totality.* So to be *at the limen* does not mean to be off-centre or moving away from centrality. For the still point *is* anywhere that the discovery of the threshold takes place: centre and periphery are one *in the present moment.*

Gary Hill's interest in this species of *integrative liminality* shows up, for instance, in his 1993 piece with the related title *Learning Curve (still point)*, particularly its image of an endlessly breaking wave, an interest derived from years of Pacific Ocean surfing. For the surfer, balanced 'stillness' is the key to entering the 'green room', the interior of a cresting wave, and remaining there as it rolls toward shore. This ecstatically sustained moment of being inside the state of 'continuous wave' now contextualizes the whole of the activity of surfing. The experiential knowledge of riding the green room – its secret *jouissance* – is what lies behind a sort of 'surfer's obsession'. And this is one model of what it is to *declare liminality as a possibility of Being:* special knowledge of a non-ordinary state attracts one back – you might say it calls one home – to an apparently marginal zone. We speak of the one who intentionally returns as an *initiate*, one who hears and responds: the *beginner* of the work.

There are works of art that require initiation. This does not mean that they require explanation, special consensus, or any other prescriptive bearing. It does mean that one must discover an *appropriate mode of entry* which is more than informational. This can involve radical reorientation, as in the case of HanD HearD, which directly (but non-coercively) introduces us to the posture of awareness appropriate to our participation in the piece. In a certain sense the piece is this process of orientation, rather than 'visual objects' calling for observation. The objects are, in this sense, orientational nodes – points that conduct the participant to a noetic state. They are signposts of liminality. Since they do not absorb and contain your gaze, but instead reflect it back, the gaze is *retained* within the state of alert presence. Objects that are only liminally what they seem to be may lead to some measure of open reflection. And in this reflective retention of 'looking energy', the objects invite inquiry into their very nature – a process of inquiry that, the truer it is, the more nearly 'endless' is its state. Liminality could be described as the state in which reality questions itself, inquires into what it is to itself.

Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, along with other texts reflecting on the ontological significance of the technological as such, has served as a focal point for Gary Hill's recent work on this complex issue. For Heidegger, the essence of technology is a movement in history that progressively takes possession of Being itself, an appropriation performed by increasingly subjecting Being to calculation and control. Within the 'Frame' (*Gestell*) of the technological, according to Heidegger, only what can be calculated – represented by mathematical co-ordinates – counts as real. Technology in this

essential sense is not what it appears to be – the hardware, the software, and the general collection of procedures and apparatuses designed to produce objects on demand. It is rather the underlying ontological assumption that only the calculable is real.

For Heidegger, Being is not encompassed by the technological, although our awareness of this truth is seriously at risk. There is a way beyond the truly monstrous consequences of a world fully appropriated by the technological, but it is hardly simple. It consists in a realization within thinking itself – a poetic, mediative thinking that inquires more profoundly into Being's essence, displacing the technological Frame. Gary Hill's direct invocation of this aspect of Heidegger's work signals his own interest in a transformative relationship with the technological – to preempt, so to speak, what would preempt us, by turning technical means toward open ontological inquiry.

The stand against submission to the technological 'Frame' is no simplistic or Luddite opposition to technology. Heidegger, in fact, warns against direct opposition that would inevitably enclose itself within the frame it defies. The point is akin to Blake's insistence that when we use our enemy's means we become the enemy. If we fight technological manipulation and control merely by trying to control it, we unwittingly further the technological. There's another possibility, however, which has to do with the nature of Being itself – to participate by serving what the technological does not know how to encompass: *the art of the open.* This is an art of the threshold, the liminal possibility, an art of beginnings. It declares a context of radical inquiry and a space of continuous presencing before the unknown. It does not represent 'reality', it presents possibility; not a claim of assessment, but a declaration of radical affinities. [...]

George Quasha and Charles Stein, extract from 'HanD HearD/Liminal Objects', in *Gary Hill*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 126–8;133.

Marina Warner
'Ourself behind Ourself, Concealed ...'
Ethereal Whispers from the Dark Side//2000

[...] The condition that has above all fascinated Tony Oursler is Multiple Personality Disorder, which was described in the case study of [the nineteenth-century psychic] Hélène Smith, made by Théodore Flournoy in Switzerland in 1900. The resulting book is called *Des Indes au Planête Mars* as Hélène enfolded within her, Flournoy recorded, the personae of an Indian Princess as well as a Martian leader: Hélène could inhabit her several identities with conviction: she could speak in a Martian tongue and made detailed drawings of the Martians' mode of travel: a spinning, hand-held fan somewhat like a child's windmill. Years later, the American psychologist described the case of another young woman who contained even more identities: it was he who gave the syndrome its name, Multiple Personality Disorder, and its symptoms have now been presented in numerous more cases as well, of course, as inspiring supernatural fictions, with the horror impresario Stephen King setting the pace.

Oursler is fascinated by MPD, not only as a clinical condition but as a state of consciousness, that might be available to anyone through trance, performance and inspiration. Historically, the state of possession has not been diagnosed as mental illness: to call upon only one scene, for example, Virgil in the *Aeneid* passionately evokes the frenzy of the Sybil of Cumae, as the god takes possession of her and speaks through her in her echoing cave; the frenzy makes her rave and froth, but, for the Romans, doesn't define her as mad. Oursler has worked for some time with Tracy Leipold, who can produce different voices and excavate different personalities within herself, at will. Oursler both prompts, sustains and records her *glossolalia.* He wants to register and transmit the noise inside the brain and out: the crackling and sparking of consciousness, including the individual unconscious, as well as the messages of interstellar frequencies, with all the gibberish and distortions, interference and jumble that past models of self have screened out. His babble and mutterings turn to the imagery of computer communication to create a sound poem that takes the venerable nonsense tradition in the direction of paranoid, psychological portraiture: 'you catch me like a virus from a sound from a bird from its voice through the air from a bug caught inside, inside you, I can hide, let me hide, inside, I'll be quiet, I'll be watching ...'

This area of interest seems to be shedding its embarrassing undertones to take its place as part of the urgent need for the 're-enchantment of the world'. Amongst artists and writers today, this shift results, I feel, from the larger question with which they are engaged: who or what is a person? The question

is related to agency: who I am matters, affects, in more ways than one, what I make. And the converse: what I make matters with regard to who I am. The paradox of Duchamp's urinal, that the artist need only sign a work to make it art, raised the question of authorship in ways that challenge the death of the author, proclaimed nearly half a century later by Roland Barthes. Issues of authorship and its implied origin in authority require clarification of identity: it is not possible to copyright some act of making as all your own work – unless you define the boundaries of yourself. But that definition is slippery, and artists are increasingly puzzling out its difficulty: the performances of Cindy Sherman for the camera take her through a baffling range of personae in which her features both become transformed and yet remain at the same time distinctive. Michael Landy's installation *Break Down* extended the concept of self through all his goods and chattels and demonstrated his authority – his authorship – by destroying them systematically, in a modern *auto-da-fé* of consumerist consciousness. For Sherman, the selves are manifest in the protean face and body; for Landy, he can renew himself through discarding all his goods.

By contrast, Tony Oursler is inquiring into inner selves. He is compelled by the twinned mysteries of consciousness and communications technology; in taking the distinctive step of freeing the image from the video monitor or sonic device, he has truly magnified the eerie atmosphere that his cast of disembodied messengers cast about them. Indoor pieces, such as *Stone Blue* (1995) and *Insomnia* (1996) include floating, distorted faces speechifying and rambling in Oursler's characteristic post-Dada techno-babble. They extend into a metaphysical dimension the existential riddle posed by cartoon characters, who exist only in 'picture-flesh', walking talking apparitions, possessing no referent in the actual world. Oursler's work with dummies and automata and projections realizes the point where spooks and spectres coincide with the phantoms of film, of LEDS, and of other digital means. Analogously, whereas an eighteenth-century automaton mimicked real life and inspires delight, wonder and fear through the disturbing convincingness of its lifelikeness, Oursler's permutations of the effigy's possibilities produce their peculiar frisson because the conditions of life are discarded, its norms exploded: huge eyeballs disconnected from any body or person, weep and laugh, on their own, as if alive; limbless, limp, tiny rag dolls blossom with huge speaking heads.

With *The Influence Machine*, Tony Oursler has moved on from the historical development of automata and audio animatronics, to work on another kind of conjuring of the illusion of life. In this installation, he revels in the possibilities of another species of 'immortal' created by mechanical illusion: the ghost.

The Influence Machine dramatizes spirit visions and visits: Oursler draws on existing accounts of messages transmitted from other worlds and departs from

conventional orthodoxy about mind-body unity, and space-time confines. In this outdoor urban phantasmagoria, the artist beamed, onto trembling foliage and interlaced branches, and high up onto the surrounding buildings of an urban park/garden, looming, vast close-ups of out-of-body messengers, men and women with stories to tell of wanderings in other worlds. They describe out-of-body states and encounters that defy conventional physics. Oursler projected, on one wall of the square a huge fist rapping, as in the first Spiritualist séances, when the Fox sisters reported ghosts knocking for admittance. In the central enclave of the garden/park, the artist conjured up wraiths and mediums on to the trees and even on to smoke, so that they dissolved and expanded, loomed and shrank, vaporized and materialized, in a sequence of hypnotic anamorphoses. Oursler's mimicry of séance ramblings surpasses most of the originals that have been recorded; yet the effect is so accomplished, so apparently authentic, and his collaborators' performance so convincing that it was only when I read the transcripts that I realised he had made them up, that he had created a collage of quotes and samplings and historical data about the history of disembodiment.

The spectacle was inspired by the earliest Gothic popular entertainment, the *Phantasmagoria*. Soon after the Terror, in the same period when the waxworks Chamber of Horrors were beginning to draw crowds as well, the *Phantasmagoria, or* commercial light show, was principally developed through the work of two innovative and spirited showmen or 'galanty men': Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, Belgian-born in 1763, and his younger contemporary, Paul de Philipsthal – also known as Philidor, who was a friend of Madame Tussaud's, who began his version in 1801, and toured widely around Europe, including London and Edinburgh. In his engaging memoirs, Robertson describes his brilliant technical innovations, and Oursler, in tribute to Robertson and in all consciousness of his legacy, has borrowed and adapted many of them for *The Influence Machine*. [...]

Created in the new millennium, *The Influence Machine* derives from a clinically paranoid, disturbed, fragmented concept of human personality. As in its psychoanalytical origins, it projects extreme and unusual cases of mental disturbance into the common arena of experience and reads human personality in general in its anamorphic shadow. The story Oursler tells in *The Influence Machine*, and in numerous pieces that preceded it, is one of romantic individuality decentred, evacuated and occupied, haunted and unhoused, the self multiplied and scattered, cellular memories rampant and contradictorily on the loose inside the mind and body of a person; Oursler presents this story as generic in our time. *The Influence Machine* is no less than a *mise en scène* of contemporary existence, in his words, a psycho-landscape.

Tony Oursler's work, which is using the new media and new concepts of physics and psychology, is continuing the inquiries of a long and great tradition of natural magic. But there has been another crucial shift, since Robertson created the *Phantasmagoria* in Paris in the 1790s and Goya drew the monsters in his own head. The showman Robertson believed he was throwing light, in the spirit of the new age, on the processes by which superstitious credence in miracles and devils and spectres had duped people, and Goya's ironies and satire struggled against fantasy and credulity. By contrast, the spectres that haunt us now have achieved the unsettling cartoon being of media reality; they have also regained their mystery and power to disturb. For, as one of Tony Oursler's apparitions says: 'It sure is dark out here'.

Marina Warner, extract from "Ourself behind Ourself, Concealed ...': Ethereal Whispers from the Dark Side', in *Tony Oursler: The Influence Machine* (London: Artangel, 2000) 73–5; 76; reprinted, with variations, in Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Fred Tomaselli
Interview with Siri Hustvedt//2007

Siri Hustvedt Each week, I teach a writing class to psychiatric in-patients at New York Hospital, which has been a very interesting experience for me. I've discovered a couple of things. Firstly, psychotic patients are far more creative than the non-psychotic ones, and they are often cosmologists, that is, they're very interested in mythologies that explain how the world is organized. I know you've drawn upon your own experiences with drugs in your work and, as you may know, there is a connection between drug-induced hallucinations and those due to psychosis, probably because of shared neurochemical activity. Is psychosis something that interests you?

Fred Tomaselli I guess you could say that I'm interested in all kinds of altered states, which of course, would include psychosis. I love the work of many lunatic outsiders like Henry Darger or Adolph Wölfli. Primarily, I'm attracted to how vividly they depict their inner states, but then, that would apply to any great artist whether they were nuts or not. Maybe it's because I've suffered through my own bouts of bad neurochemistry and self-medication, but I don't believe you need to be crazy to be insanely creative. I am, however, fascinated by charismatic madmen and their ability to create mass hysteria. In many respects, the history of the twentieth century is defined by madmen – from Hitler to Pol Pot to our current situation. I'm intrigued by how easy it is to manipulate individuals so they lose themselves to a mob or a mass movement. We humans think we know who we are, yet our psyches end up being such porous, leaky things.

Wherever there are charismatic, deluded leaders, you also have the struggle of utopian ideologies. The utopian struggle was also central to modernism, which was just beginning to crash and burn as I was stepping up to add my voice. I've been kicking through its wreckage ever since. Works like *Goth* (2000) try to address this issue by looking at the imposition of utopian ideology on the American landscape. The seemingly peaceful painting of a town is actually composed of various dwellings that depict different radical religious and political ideologies – everything from Thoreau's cabin to the Aryan Nations compound. Instead of a bucolic piece of heaven, it's town of hate and conflict.

Hustvedt In my own work, I'm obsesses with the fact that distinguishing between the imaginary and the real is ultimately impossible. We have a cultural code for making this distinction, but looking at your pieces, I get the feeling that you are similarly obsessed with the blur between these categories. I loved the archive sheets of eyes and ears – the photographs of both real and artificial eyes and ears that you have used in your work. The effect it creates is uncanny. Can you talk about your interest in the border between fantasy and reality, nature and artifice?

Tomaselli I guess it comes from growing up close to Disneyland. I've often told the story of how, after hiking miles into the wilderness and discovering my first real waterfall, I immediately began looking for the pumps and conduit that make it work. My assumption growing up was that everything was a construct. As I've become older, technology keeps adding to the menu of artificial realities. Plastic surgery is getting better and more routine, computers are getting more powerful, drugs have become more sophisticated, and politics have been reduced to advertising. Our culture of escapism has irrevocably shaped our world. It has helped elect our leaders, and is also one of our dominant commodities. Under these circumstances, the 'real' is the strangest thing there is. [...]

Fred Tomaselli and Siri Hustvedt, extract from interview, *Another Magazine* (Autumn/Winter 2007).

Eleanor Heartney
Zhang Huan: Becoming the Body//2008

[...] When artists use their own bodies as an art material, normal distinctions between creator and created disappear. By becoming art themselves, they render disinterested aesthetic judgments of the art object absurd or irrelevant. Because the 'artwork' is also a sentient, reasoning being, body art brings moral, ethical and political issues into play.

This becomes abundantly clear in the work of Chinese body artist Zhang Huan. In the course of his career, Zhang Huan has subjected himself to painful trials: sitting motionless for hours in an outhouse covered in honey and fish oil while flies crawled over his body; suspending himself from the ceiling in his apartment as his blood dripped slowly from incisions into a metal bowl; and lying on a block of ice until his body temperature reached dangerously low levels. He has presented himself to audiences in different ways, ranging from near solitary actions witnessed only by a few friends or bystanders to full-scale performances involving the orchestration of dozens of people before large audiences.

These performances vary in many ways, and in fact one can detect the gradual evolution over years from private introspection toward an embrace of larger communities and contexts. What unites them is Zhang Huan's sense of the body as the point of social, mental and spiritual contact with the outside world. Rejecting western tendencies to block off mind and body into separate spheres, he instead embraces a corporeal consciousness that is acquired through, rather than in spite of, the body. He has remarked, 'the body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society comes to know me. The body is the proof of identity. The body is language.'

In Zhang Huan's work body consciousness operates in a number of ways. It is the link between the inner spirit and the outside world, a relationship that is heightened in works of endurance where pain makes other distinctions collapse. But it is also the medium through which we connect with others, as Zhang Huan's more communal works attest. He often chooses to be naked in his performances and asks others to be naked as well, because nudity strips us of our cultural shells and places us back into the natural order.

These are hardly new ideas. In Zhang Huan's case they have roots in Buddhism and other Asian spiritual practices. From a more western perspective, they resonate with the feminist movement's revalorization of bodily experiences. And, as many commentators have noted, Zhang Huan's approach also recalls the explorations of extreme physical states undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s by artists such as Chris Burden, Gina Pane and Marina Abramovic. However, body consciousness is increasingly marginalized in a society prone to frame the relationship of mind and body using computer-inspired metaphors that make inviolable distinctions between software and hardware. In this situation, Zhang Huan's insistence on the corporeal aspect of knowledge offers a useful corrective. [...]

The performances created since Zhang Huan's move to the West increasingly employ objects and elements that refer to traditional Asian rituals and spiritual practices. This is a development that is equally evident in the work of other expatriate Chinese artists such as Chen Zhen, Wenda Gu, Huang Yong Ping and Cai Guo-Qiang, for whom departure from China heightened a sense of the preciousness of tradition. Zhang Huan's work has always contained an undercurrent of Buddhist thought and has drawn on Buddhism's emphasis on the release of ego and the union of self with the larger forces of nature. This influence is evident in the way the artist has described the early endurance works as ways to heighten his sense of the mind's union with the body. In more recent works addressed to non-Chinese audiences, his allusions to Asian spiritual practices are more explicit in order to contrast them with the individualistic and materialistic orientation of the West.

Eleanor Heartney, extract from 'Zhang Huan: Becoming the Body', in *Zhang Huan: Altered States* (New York: Asia Society and Museum, 2008) n.p.

Marina Abramovic is a Belgrade-born, New York-based artist who began her performance work in the early 1970s. Key recent performances include *The House with the Ocean View*, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York (2003) and *Five Easy Pieces*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2005).

Roy Ascott is Professor of Technoetic Arts at the University of Plymouth, England, and has been an artist, teacher and theorist of cybernetics since the early 1960s. His writings are collected in *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology and Consciousness* (2003).

Marco Belpoliti is an Italian writer and literary critic who has written extensively on the work of artists such as Alberto Giacometti and writers such as Italo Calvino and Primo Levi. Translated books he has edited include Levi's *The Black Hole of Auschwitz* (2006 edition).

John Berger is a British writer, artist and art critic whose books include *A Painter of Our Time* (1958), *Ways of Seeing* (1972), *A Seventh Man* (1975), *About Looking* (1980), *Another Way of Telling* (1982) and *Here is Where We Meet* (2005).

Tacita Dean is a British artist based in Berlin. Solo exhibitions include Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (1997), Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (1998), ARC Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2003), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2007) and Dia: Beacon, Riggio Galleries, Beacon, New York (2008).

Walter De Maria is an American artist and composer based in New York who has been making work since the late 1950s. Among his permanently sited artworks are *The Lightning Field* in Western New Mexico, and *The New York Earth Room* (both 1977) curated by the Dia Art Foundation.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was among the most influential of post-war French philosophers and literary theorists. His central works include *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference* (both 1967), and *Spectres of Marx* (1993).

A K Dolven (Anne Katrine) is a Norwegian-born artist based in the Lofoten islands and London. Solo exhibitions include Kunsthalle Bern (2001), Kunsthalle Nürnberg (2001) and Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, Tromsø, Norway (2009).

Olafur Eliasson is a Danish-Icelandic artist who lives and teaches in Berlin. Solo exhibitions include Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2002), The Danish Pavilion, 50th Venice Biennale (2003) and The Museum of Modern Art and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2008).

Okwui Enwezor is Adjunct Curator at the International Center of Photography, New York. A poet, art historian and curator, he was Artistic Director of Documenta 11, Kassel, Germany (1998–2002). He is the founder and editor of the critical art journal *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*.

Jean Fisher lectures in Art and Art Theory at Middlesex University and the Royal College of Art, London. She is the editor of *Global Visions: A New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (1994) and *Reverberations: Tactics of Resistance, Forms of Agency in Trans/cultural Practices* (2000).

Barbara Claire Freeman is a poet, literary critic and professor of literature in the Rhetoric Department of the University of California at Berkeley. She is the author of *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1997).

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe is a British-born artist, theorist and critic based in Los Angeles. His books include *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime* (2000) and *Beyond Piety: Critical Essays on the Visual Arts 1986–1993* (1995).

Doreet LeVitte Harten is an Israeli-born art historian and exhibition organizer based in Berlin. Among her curatorial projects are *Heaven* (Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1999) and the Israeli Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009).

Eleanor Heartney is an independent cultural critic and author based in New York. She has been a regular contributor to *Art in America*, *Artpress*, *ARTnews* and the *New Art Examiner*. Her books include *Defending Complexity: Art, Politics and the New World Order* (2005).

Lynn M. Herbert is an independent curator and art historian, and Adjunct Curator for the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, where she was Senior Curator from 1999 to 2007. Her publications include *The Inward Eye: Transcendence in Contemporary Art* (2002).

Shirazeh Houshiary is an Iranian-born artist based in London. Major solo exhibitions include Magasin Centre National d'Art Contemporain de Grenoble (1995, touring) and Bienal de São Paulo (1996). Group exhibitions include Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2003), Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (2004) and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2006).

Gilles Ivain (Ivan Vladimirovitch Chtcheglov, 1933–98) was a painter and writer and briefly a collaborator with the Lettrist and Situationist movements in the 1950s. His text 'Formulaire pour un urbanisme nouveau' was first written in 1952–53 and published, edited by Guy Debord, in *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 1 (1958).

Luce Irigaray is a Belgian feminist philosopher and theorist of language, psychoanalysis and culture. Her works include *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), *Je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* (1990) and *Between East and West* (1999).

Fredric Jameson is Professor of Comparative Literature and Romance Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. His works include *Signatures of the Visible* (1990), *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and *The Cultural Turn* (1998).

Anish Kapoor is an Indian-born sculptor who has worked in London since the early 1970s. Recent sited commissions include Tate Modern, London (2002), Rockefeller Center, New York (2006), MAK, Vienna; Royal Academy, London; and Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (all 2009).

Mike Kelley is a Californian artist who has been working since the late 1970s. Solo exhibitions include the Whitney Museum of American Art (retrospective, 1993) and Gagosian Gallery, New York (2005). In 1993 he curated 'The Uncanny' at the Gemeentemuseum, Arnhem, for Sonsbeek '93. He presented a revised and updated version of the exhibition at Tate Liverpool, England, in 2004.

Yves Klein (1928–62) was a French artist whose influential work from the late 1940s onwards paralleled aspects of American neo-dada and Fluxus, and intersected with that of his fellow European artists in the Nouveau Réalisme movement and the Zero group. Retrospectives include Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2007).

Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian-born French philosopher, literary scholar, feminist theorist and practising psychoanalyst. Her works include *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (1987; *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy*, 1989) and *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980; *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, 1982).

Lee Joon is Deputy Director of the Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, whose exhibitions have included 'Matthew Barney: Drawing Restraint' (2005), 'Homage to Nam June Paik' (2006), 'Flash Cube' (2007) and 'Void in Korean Art' (2007–8).

Richard Long is a British artist based in Bristol who has been making work based on walking in the landscape since the late 1960s. Major solo exhibitions include Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (retrospective, 1986), Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1993), Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo (1996), Museu Serralves, Porto (2001) and Tate Britain, London (retrospective, 2009).

Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98) was a French philosopher and theorist of poststructuralism, aesthetics and politics. His works include *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; trans. 1984), *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1988; trans. 1991) and *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgement* (1991; trans. 1994).

Thomas McEvilley is an American writer, scholar and art critic based in New York. His books include 1991, *Art and Discontent* (1991), *Art and Otherness* (1992), *The Exile's Return: Toward a Redefinition of Painting for the Post-Modern Era* (1993), *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* (1999) and *The Triumph of Anti-Art* (2007).

Gustav Metzger is a Polish-Jewish-born artist who has been a stateless refugee since the 1940s and lives and works in London. In the late 1950s he developed the concept and practice of auto-destructive art. In 2009 his first retrospective exhibition was held at the Serpentine Gallery, London, and his *Liquid Crystal Environment* was included in 'Altermodern', Tate Britain, London.

Henri Michaux (1899–1984) was a Francophone Belgian poet, artist and writer on Eastern, South American and African cultures, and esoteric subjects including experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs. Retrospective surveys of his work include *Untitled Passages by Henri Michaux*, The Drawing Center, New York (2000).

Vijay Mishra is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia. His books include *The Gothic Sublime* (1994), *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime* (1998), *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2002) and *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007).

David Morgan is Professor of Religion at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. His works include *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (1998), *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (2005) and *The Lure of Images: A History of Religion and Visual Media in America* (2007).

Jean-Luc Nancy is a French philosopher among whose central subjects of reference are the work of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Friedrich Nietzsche. His works include *The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan* (with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1973; trans. 1992), *The Inoperative Community*, 1986; trans. 1991), *Retreating the Political* (with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 1997) and *Being Singular Plural* (2000).

Barnett Newman (1905–70) was an American painter and leading figure in the emergence of Abstract Expressionism and later colour field painting. Retrospectives include Philadelphia Museum of Art (2002, touring). The Barnett Newman Foundation website is at www.barnettnewman.org

George Quasha is an American artist, poet and writer based in New York. As well as making art independently, documented in *Axial Stones: An Art of Precarious Balance* (2006), he has collaborated for three decades with the artist Gary Hill and the poet Charles Stein. With Susan Quasha he is the founder and publisher of Barrytown/Station Hill Press.

Jacques Rancière is a French philosopher who first came to prominence as a co-author, with Louis Althusser and others, of *Reading* Capital (1965; trans. 1979). More recently he has turned from politics and society to examine the politics of aesthetics. His works include *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1982; trans. 1991), *Disagreement* (1998) and *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004).

Gene Ray is a critic and theorist based in Berlin, and is a member of the Radical Culture Research Collective (RCRC). A contributor to *Third Text*, *Left Curve* and *Analyse & Kritik*, he is the editor of *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (2002) and the author of *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (2005).

Gerhard Richter is among the most influential German artists of the post-1945 period; he has been described as a conceptual painter. Retrospectives include The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2004). His work is extensively documented at http://www.gerhard-richter.com

Lawrence Rinder is Director of Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and was founding director of the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco. He has curated numerous major exhibitions at these institutions and at the Whitney Museum of American Art and is a regular contributor to art journals such as *Artforum*, *Flash Art* and *Parkett*.

Robert Rosenblum (1927–2006) was an innovative American art historian and curator of artworks from the eighteenth century to the present. His works include *Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art* (1960), *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (1967) and *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1975).

Doris Salcedo is a Colombian-born artist based in Bogotá. Solo exhibitions include Shedhalle, Zurich (1992), The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1998), Camden Arts Centre, London (2001) and Tate Modern, London (2007).

Philip Shaw is Professor of Romantic Studies in the School of English at the University of Leicester. He is the author of *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (2002) and *The Sublime* (2006), and editor of *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793–1822* (2000).

Robert Smithson (1938–73) was an American artist whose work intersected with conceptual art, Land art and Minimalism, and whose wide-ranging writings made a significant contribution to art discourse in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Retrospectives include Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1982), Centro Julio González, Valencia (1993) and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2004).

Charles Stein is an American poet, scholar and critic, who has written a study of the writings of Charles Olson, and in collaboration with George Quasha and Gary Hill, developed innovative approaches to the critical discussion of visual, verbal and sonic representation.

Stelarc is an Australian-based performance artist whose work explores the concept of the body and its relationship with technology through human-machine interfaces incorporating medical imaging, prosthetics, robotics, VR systems and the Internet. His website is at www.stelarc.va.com

Hiroshi Sugimoto is a Japanese-born photographer who works in Tokyo and New York. His series of works are published in *Seascapes* (1994), *Time Exposed* (1995), *In Praise of Shadows* (2000) and *Theatres* (2006). Retrospectives include Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2008).

Fred Tomaselli is an American artist based in California. Solo exhibitions include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1999), Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Florida (2001), Site Santa Fe, New Mexico (2001), Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2003), Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2005).

Bill Viola is an American artist who has been working since the early 1970s. Solo exhibitions include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1997, touring retrospective), Guggenheim Bilbao (2004), Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2007), National Gallery of Victoria, New South Wales, Australia (2008).

Marina Warner is a novelist, short story writer and cultural critic whose work focuses on folklore and mythology from a feminist perspective. Her works include *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (1981), *The Lost Father* (1988) and *Phantasmagoria* (2006).

Thomas Weiskel (1944–74) was an American literary critic and author of *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, which was published in 1976.

Slavoj Zizek is a Slovenian psychoanalytic philosopher, sociologist and cultural critic, based at the University of Ljubljana. His numerous works include *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997) and *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (2000).

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Simon Morley is a British artist and art historian who has contributed to international art journals including *Art Monthly*, *Untitled*, *Contemporary Visual Art*, *Tate Etc* and *Tema Celeste*. A Lecturer at Winchester School of Art, England, he is the author of *Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art* (2003).

'The sublime is spectacularly envisioned by the artists in this book, and gracefully articulated by its authors. Many of these works and texts perform the contemporary sublime. They open a schism between expectation and sensation, expanding the horizon between the known territories of the real and our capacity to imagine otherwise. They show us that we may still be taken by surprise by scenes of wonder. Aesthetic experience at the brink of our senses removes the familiar ground on which we know and experience the existential condition of being.'
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'In the nineteenth century, the sublime coupled awe with fear of nature, as well as fear of the bogeyman that was the Industrial Revolution. Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Emily Brontë, Thomas Hardy and Edgar Allen Poe responded. In the twentieth century, two world wars and the two atomic bombs must have had something to do with the sublime pathos of Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Francis Bacon and the poetry of Wallace Stevens. In this anthology, Simon Morley looks to the twenty-first century, to our sublime. Nothing could be more relevant – socially, morally or aesthetically.'
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THE SUBLIME

Artists surveyed include Marina Abramovic//Joseph Beuys//Tacita Dean//Walter De Maria//A K Dolven//Olafur Eliasson//Jitka Hanzlová//Gary Hill//Susan Hiller//Shirazeh Houshiary//Anish Kapoor//Mike Kelley//Yves Klein//Richard Long//Gustav Metzger//Henri Michaux//Barnett Newman//Tony Oursler//Cornelia Parker//Gerhard Richter//Doris Salcedo//Lorna Simpson//Stelarc//Hiroshi Sugimoto//Fred Tomaselli//James Turrell//Luc Tuymans//Bill Viola//Zhang Huan Writers include Marco Belpoliti//John Berger//Jacques Derrida//Okwui Enwezor//Jean Fisher//Barbara Claire Freeman//Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe//Doreet LeVitte Harten//Eleanor Heartney//Lynn M. Herbert//Luce Irigaray//Fredric Jameson//Julia Kristeva//Lee Joon//Jean-François Lyotard//Thomas McEvilley//Vijay Mishra//David Morgan//Jean-Luc Nancy//Jacques Rancière//Gene Ray//Robert Rosenblum//Paul Virilio//Marina Warner//Thomas Weiskel//Slavoj Zizek

THE SUBLIME In a world where technology, spectacle and excess seem to eclipse former concepts of nature, the individual and society, what might be the characteristics of a contemporary sublime? If there is any consensus it is in the notion that the sublime represents a taking to the limits, to the point at which fixities begin to fragment. This anthology examines how ideas of the sublime are explored in the work of contemporary artists and theorists, in relation to the unpresentable, transcendence, terror, nature, technology, the uncanny and altered states.

The Sublime is one of a series documenting major themes and ideas in contemporary art

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