



Ghosts of Futures Past: Time in Francis Alÿs' Rehearsal and Tania Bruguera's Untitled (Place, Year) series, Andrés David Montenegro Rosero	2
Garden of thought: Emily Dickinson and her page, Mariya Ustymenko	27
Padua blue between Katz and Kristeva: A naturalistic third way for visual studies, Ian Verstegen	57
From Vacuity to Motion Pictures: the Cinematic Interval, Nawel Sebih	79
Surrealism and (un)Happy Families: Banalité (1930) Hazel Donkin	101
Review: <i>Dissent</i> at the ICA, Kimberley Marwood	127

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Ghosts of Futures Past: Time in Francis Alÿs' *Rehearsal* and Tania Bruguera's *Untitled (Place, Year)* series

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the construction of time in Francis Alÿs' *Rehearsal* (1999-2004) and Tania Bruguera's *Untitled (Place, Year)* (2000-present) series.¹ These suites posit a model of temporality that questions two foundational premises of the modernist understanding of time, the futuristic regime of historicity, and the categorical differentiation between past, present and future. I argue that their works posit an uncanny temporality where the coordinates of the now are always mapped out in relationship to what was and what is to be.

On *Song for Lupita* and *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*

Song for Lupita (Mañana) (1998) is a simple looped animation that depicts a woman endlessly pouring water from one glass to another. Through sketchy, unfinished lines, the video depicts a single figure against a white background as protagonist of the animation. As indicated by Tate Modern's website, the animation is accompanied by a soundtrack 'whose words 'Mañana, mañana' (tomorrow, tomorrow) suggest at once perpetual procrastination and continuing hope for the future'.² Denying the possibility of arriving at a finished state, where the water would be fully transposed from glass to glass, the animation prolongs and extends the act infinitely. Always in process, perpetually not achieving an end or result, the protagonist of the animation is, however, enthralled by the action itself; the woman seems to have no purpose in mind but the sole action of moving the liquid from one container to the other. In the

"Entries" section for Alÿs' Tate Modern retrospective, *A Story of Deception*, (2010) the artist included the following line as an explanatory axiom of the work, 'Mañana, mañana, is soon enough for me',³ (Tomorrow, tomorrow, is soon enough for me) which were also the song's lyrics.⁴ According to the artist and Cuauhtémoc Medina, the work's repetition produces an 'abolition of time'.⁵

According to Boris Groys' interpretation, in *Song for Lupita* 'we find an activity with no beginning and no end, no definite result or product...We are confronted with a pure and repetitive ritual of wasting time; a secular ritual beyond any claim of magical power, beyond any religious tradition or cultural convention'.⁶ Disregarding the passage of time the work highlights the importance of the action itself, not its origin or its conclusion; perhaps it does not even matter to know if it has a beginning or an end. In Russell Ferguson's words, the work 'staged a kind of resignation to the immediate present by introducing a complete hypnosis in the act itself, an act which was pure flux'.⁷ Emphatically prioritising the means, the doing, over the goals, the finished product, *Song for Lupita* literalised what Alÿs calls a 'Mexican sense of time', described as "el hacerlo sin hacerlo, el no hacerlo pero haciéndolo - literally "the doing but without doing, the not doing but doing".⁸ *Song for Lupita*, therefore, creates a space that rejects simple and rigid measurements of time by collapsing the past and future into the present. The work articulates an uncanny present characterised by the palimpsestic co-existence of past and future caught in the eternal present of the animation. In other words, *Song for Lupita* articulates what Alÿs calls 'a present to be continued',⁹ a today that loops eternally denying the existence of a tomorrow or a day before.

Tania Bruguera's *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* did not result in the production of a performance, object or other defined artistic or visual categories. Helaine Posner described this work as follows:

The audience entered a cave-like tunnel at La Fortaleza de la Cabaña, a space formerly used as a penitentiary cell. Underfoot, layers of rotting bagazo or sugarcane husks emitted the noisome stench of fermentation. The audience traipsed through the dark and the detritus towards a distant blue light that came into focus as a television screen, displaying silent looping footage of speeches by Fidel Castro. When they turned around, the audience noticed naked men ordered regimentally in rows of two, making empty, repetitive gestures towards their iconic leader. One rubbed his body, while another wiped his face. One used his fingers to pry open his mouth, and the last bowed.¹⁰

As Posner's description suggests, the work made use of extreme variations of light which the spectator had to endure. In the first instance, the spectator walked from a very bright place into a dark corridor causing a temporary moment of altered vision, or missed-sight insofar as the eye has to react to the light conditions in order to be able to discern what is inside this dark space. Then, the audience had to walk towards a faint light source while traipsing through the rotting sugar cane. Upon arrival at the light source inside the tunnel, the spectator encountered a television monitor hanging from the ceiling showing different official images of Fidel Castro.¹¹ In these images, the Cuban leader carries out different actions such as showing his bare chest (in order to show that he was not wearing a bullet proof vest during times of rumours of a possible US assassination plan).¹² They are images of the early Cuban revolution when, as Roberto Pinto recounts, 'Fidel the man could still be seen swimming in the sea or dressed in casual clothes in his own home'.¹³ Lastly, and as

the spectator's eyes got adjusted to the room's darkness and turned away from the video monitor, they noticed the presence of four naked individuals who repeatedly made a series of indistinct bodily gestures, such as 'bending down, rubbing or hitting parts of their bodies'.¹⁴ Physically, phenomenologically, literally, *Untitled (Havana, 2000)* revealed something hidden within it only after the audience had fully engaged with it. It created a moment of surprise in the spectator. As Bruguera notes, 'the work has a moment of discovery, in which one thing is a different one or when we thought we already knew, a new element appears'.¹⁵ In this particular case, through both physical displacement and an experience of transition between light intensities, the installation rendered parts of itself anew; it proved certain initial perceptions to be mistaken, different from what the spectator had thought.

Modernist Time

For the purposes of this paper, the Modernist understanding of temporal passage can be characterised as a linear, teleological, evolutionary projection that champions acceleration, continuity, succession, and causal progression.¹⁶ At the same time, it posits a categorical differentiation between temporal regimes where one stage (be it second, minute, hour, day, week, month, year, decade) is considered as an independent, specific and autonomous unit stitched together by linear causality.¹⁷ It presupposes that there is a hierarchy of progress, of development, where the past is derided and transcended by the future. In this context, the notion of primitivism, for example, as it circulated in relation to African sculpture and Cubist painting at the turn

of the twentieth century, clearly assigned a place, not only in time, but by implication in a set of values that clearly defined it as 'barbarian', out-dated, irrelevant, exotic, 'bad'. As John Jervis argued in 'Transgressing the Modern':

As rationality, science and 'civilisation' came to constitute the legitimising framework of modern Western values, so ideas of evolution could serve to locate the 'primitive' as the other that is past, yet ever-present, as a threat of regression, temptation to nostalgic longings, trigger for disparagement or envy, or resource for critique of the pretensions of the present, yet a critique that presupposes the very terms of its own rebuttal. If the primitive can stand as a reproach to the civilised, the modern, it denounces the latter from the very place to which the latter has consigned it.¹⁸

Modernist time is understood as a system of measurement that has been systematically imposed over certain territories and regions and that has been commanded, historically speaking, by the West.¹⁹ In a broader context, the notions of the 'developing country' or the 'third world', for example, clearly demarcate the location of a particular place in relation to another (for example a peripheral country, like Mexico, in relation to its northern neighbour, the US). In this demarcation, the 'developing country' is conceptualised as being, not only categorically different, but somehow of less 'value' than the 'developed' one. This implies a vertical organisation that locates the 'developed' above and on top of the 'developing' while, at the same time, plotting a horizontal axis that locates the 'developing' as being before (in terms of progress) than the 'developed'. The 'developing' are, thusly, understood as lacking something that the 'developed' have; the 'developing' are 'incomplete' in the eyes of Modernist wholeness.²⁰

Modernist time, therefore, clearly advocates for what Medina described as a 'movement from tradition to 'modernity'.²¹ As such, the concept promotes the idea that the more modern you are the better. This not only fosters a competitive character in nations where the desire to be at the top of a particular chain of command drives the desire for national modernisation, but implies a sense of productivity, of advancement from one stage to the next; of what Christine Ross, drawing on Jürgen Habermas, has called a futuristic drive.²² In this sense, the adoption of certain cultural, economic or political policies, often dictated by the West, is seen as one possible means to attaining a better status in the world order, or, perhaps, moving from the third world to the second world, or even from the second world to the first world.²³ Under this rubric the developed and the developing, the past and the future, are categorically differentiated and only related by a causal link. Modernist time posits the existence of radical ruptures between ages, epochs or any other unit of time, that make it different than the previous past or future. Choosing to ignore the continuities of certain things through time, Modernist time parcels time into strictly causal history.²⁴

Francis Alÿs: Rehearsals and palimpsestic time

Between 1999 and 2001, and in collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Alÿs produced *Rehearsal I (El Ensayo)*. He described the work as follows,

Soundtrack: The rehearsal of a danzón by a brass band in Juchitán, Mexico.

Image: A Volkswagen Beetle repeatedly tries to ascend a hill without ever succeeding.

Mechanics: The driver of a VW listens to the tape recording of a rehearsal session by a brass band.

-While the musicians play, the car goes uphill.

-When the musicians lose track and pause, the car stops.

-While the musicians are tuning their instruments and talking, the car rolls back downhill.²⁵

Despite its apparent simplicity, the 29-minute video of the work documents a carefully researched and staged action performed by the artist in the outskirts of Tijuana, Mexico. *Rehearsal I* also articulated an uncanny temporality akin to that of the *Song for Lupita* as it blurred the boundaries of categorical differentiations between the past, the present and the future. The protagonist of *Rehearsal I* is caught in an act described by the artist as 'stubborn repetition',²⁶ which, 'hints at a story that is constantly delayed, and where the attempt to formulate the story takes the lead over the story itself. It is a story of struggle rather than one of achievement, an allegory in process rather than a quest for synthesis'.²⁷ Both *Lupita* and *Alÿs* are trapped in an unending operation that forfeits any definite sense of development. In this respect, both works posit a notion of time that is not dictated by the fulfilment of a specific task. The protagonist of *Rehearsal I*, the artist, is constantly, and literally, falling back towards the past.

The rehearsal itself, the car's —and therefore *Alÿs*'— oscillation, was thoroughly prepared through a series of studies and sketches. Importantly, the methodology of rehearsal was informed by a previous work entitled *Caracoles* (1999). For this 5-minute video, the artist recorded a popular Mexican children's game where the player

endlessly kicks a half-empty plastic bottle up a hill. The video documents how with each kick of the bottle, and although it temporarily ascends the hill, the bottle inevitably rolls downhill undoing any sense of stable progress. Furthermore, it shows the protagonist of the action, the child, constantly repeating the same motion — kicking— enthralled by the cyclical process implied by his game. This repetitive structure, but also the literal scenario of a struggle to conquer a topographical challenge, were then translated through a series of studies that would become the basis for *Rehearsal I*. In one particularly revealing study, Alÿs simulated the mechanics of *Rehearsal I* by constructing a miniature version of his ideal scenario. For this micro-rehearsal, Alÿs used a toy red Volkswagen that mimicked the one used in his final version. The car was placed at the beginning of a maquette of a slope constructed out of white paper. Anticipating the actual pendular,²⁸ back-and-forth, oscillation of the finished version, the toy car was then electrically powered while the aforementioned soundtrack was played and allowed to roll down during the musical breaks. Similar, in scale, to the plastic bottle used by the child in *Caracoles*, the red toy perpetually failed to reach the cusp of the miniature slope. Or, in other words, both kicker and miniature toy (and by extension the actual VW, and Alÿs), constantly postpone achieving a goal —reaching the top—, and therefore infinitely delay the achievement of any definite conclusion.

Rehearsal I aims at sustaining the ephemeral feeling of temporal condensation explored by *Song for Lupita*. Like Lupita, the protagonist of *Rehearsal* constantly returns to the starting place of his journey and is, therefore, caught in a perpetual

cycle of repetition. The red VW is not only engaged in an impossible task to conquer the hill itself but, given the city in which the work was performed, it is also caught in an unending attempt to reach the United States. According to Alÿs, *Rehearsal I* is also an allegory for 'the struggle of Latin American societies to adjust to the social and economic expectations of their northern neighbours'.²⁹ Although it seems straight forward, the car is trapped in an impossible maze; its attempts are heroic but decidedly thwarted. As the action is repeated in what seems to be an endless loop, a feeling of frustration, and irony, are conjured by the work; eternal repetition with no significant progress.

Rehearsal II (2001-2006)

Produced between 2001 and 2006, *Rehearsal II* is a further exploration of the logic of the rehearsal as an allegory for the fraught relationship between Latin America and Western models of modernity. Repeating the mechanics of *Rehearsal I*, according to Alÿs and Medina, in the work,

A stripper listens to the rehearsal session of a soprano with her pianist. While the pianist plays and the soprano sings, the stripper undresses. When the soprano or the pianist loses track over a musical phrase and pause, the stripper halts her act. While the soprano and the pianist discuss the musical phrase in question, the stripper dresses up again. The rehearsal session will go on until the stripper completes her act.³⁰

As their description suggests, the 14-minute-long video features a female stripper slowly taking off her clothes while a pianist and a singer rehearse Franz Schubert's

Song of Longing.³¹ Although the camera focuses exclusively on the stripper's action, when the musicians stop we can hear their discussions as the stripper puts her clothes back on. The work echoed *Rehearsal I*'s logic of interruptions and repetitions, as the stripper is constantly prevented from fulfilling her task and simultaneously forced to repeat the process, almost, endlessly.

According to the artist, the purpose of *Rehearsal II* 'was to parody the seduction that "development" and the aspiration to mimic "advanced" capitalists societies exert on Latin American governments and elites'.³² The stripper, in this sense, impersonates modernity and its allure of socioeconomic progress, constantly teasing the audience's —Latin America's— desire for erotic satisfaction allegorizing the desire for modernity. Exploiting what he considers to be modernity's seductive power, in *Rehearsal II* the ostensible desire of the viewer to see the stripper naked is constantly thwarted and delayed. At the same time, this erotic desire is articulated as an allegorical rendering of modernity's appeal for Latin American countries. Just like the stripper's goal, being naked, is constantly thwarted and interrupted, so is Latin America's achievement of modern standards. According to Medina, 'In that sense, the *Rehearsals* evoke the embrace that cannot be achieved, the orgasm forever delayed, for only in relation to the longing for satisfaction can we understand the impulse of modernisation'.³³

Politics of Rehearsal (2004)

Produced in 2004, *Politics of Rehearsal* articulates Alÿs' philosophy of Latin American history through a single, 30-minute video. Duplicating *Rehearsal II*, for *Politics of Rehearsal*, a stripper (a different woman from the one in *Rehearsal I*) also puts her clothes back on while the musicians discussed a specific phrase from the piece they were rehearsing. The work is in every way exactly as *Rehearsal II* except that it begins with several edited clips of Harry S. Truman's presidential inauguration speech given in January 20th, 1949 in Washington D.C., stitched together sequentially. The chosen fragments were part of a longer address to his country and the world during a time of war and emergency, which opened with a condemnation of Communism as a dangerous 'false philosophy'³⁴ based 'on the belief that man is so weak and inadequate that he is unable to govern himself, and therefore requires the rule of strong masters'.³⁵ Against Communism's dictatorial impulse and de-individualising drive, Truman posited Democracy as the sole alternative, for he saw it as a system 'based on the conviction that man has the moral and intellectual capacity, as well as the inalienable right, to govern himself with reason and justice'.³⁶ Importantly, Truman believed that the 'differences between communism and democracy do not concern the United States alone', as he thought Communism had expansionist intentions and, therefore, threatened the stability of every nation —and the world. Although it is important for understanding Truman's later claims about underdeveloped countries, this ideological 'preface' was not included in *Politics of Rehearsal*.

What the work did show, however, were several clips edited from the speech. Through these, we can hear Truman reading several passages of his address where he referred, specifically, to the extension of US models of 'scientific advances and industrial progress', modernity, to other nations that could use such knowledge for the 'improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas'.³⁷ Immediately after Truman's introduction, Alÿs included the following explanatory caption, '*Politics of Rehearsal* is a metaphor of Latin America's ambiguous affair with modernity, forever arousing and yet, always delaying the moment it will happen'.³⁸

After this, the video changes dramatically. Instead of archival footage or a text, it shows an interior space with a metal chair on the middle surrounded by a piano, a pianist, a singer, a photographer (presumably Rafael Ortega) and Alÿs —himself recording the action as well. Soon after, and as the singer and the pianist begin to rehearse the piece, a stripper enters the stage and begins to slowly take off her clothes. At this stage, the video includes a disembodied voice, who we know is Medina, although he is never shown, that offers what Alÿs has called an 'impromptu' commentary that 'fleshes out' the main concerns of the piece, the aforementioned introductory caption.³⁹

Medina's intervention begins with the phrase, 'I was rethinking the implication of the rehearsal as a comment on modernity, and what becomes immediately obvious is the notion that modernity is pornographic'.⁴⁰ From this assertion, he develops a discourse on the temporality of the rehearsal that lasts as long as the rehearsal itself.

His address not only defines a specific version of modernity but also argues that the temporality of the rehearsal stands as a resistance to imposed modern models.

As articulated within Alÿs' practice, modernity presupposes that there is a hierarchical scale of 'progress', of development, where the 'previous' stage is transcended and even derided by the future. According to Medina's speech, Truman's characterisation of certain places as underdeveloped brought with it the 'implication of historical succession, that is, suddenly the view of places that had been under colonial rule, or were simply poorer countries, became a promise of a process of reaching the North American model that considered itself to be developed, to have realised all the potentiality of the era, of capitalism'.⁴¹ In other words, Truman's discourse, while highlighting the potential of certain nations, clearly stated that there were some things that prevented these countries from fulfilling their potential and becoming prosperous, modern nations. Cooperation with those nations, however, really meant the spread of US influence against Communist ideology. By the 1970s, however, and according to Medina, this model of tacit intervention as a resistance to Communism had collapsed as it became clear that the Cold War had been 'won' by capitalism and the West. Unmoored from their specific ideological struggle, according to Medina, the notion of the underdeveloped took on a 'completely abstract definition',⁴² insofar as it became a blanket category to define several nations trapped trying to achieve an ephemeral, intangible, set of values posited by modernity. For Medina, in these countries —and he bases his experience specifically on Mexico and more broadly on Latin America— 'Every five or six years there's a crisis, there's the promise to overcome the crisis, the

promise to bring development to the rank and file. What is this promise? To reach first-world levels of development'.⁴³ Yet due to the abstract nature of these standards, the countries striving for modernity are constantly falling for the illusion of development and simultaneously discovering the impossibility of achieving such a state. According to Medina, the temporal experience of underdeveloped societies is akin to a Sisyphean punishment in which 'No sooner do you start a task, no sooner there has been some type of effort...then you have to go back to the original starting point'.⁴⁴ Further, he adds, this scenario

always makes me think of a game of snakes and ladders. You advance through the game and suddenly instead of the little ladder they promised you there's a snake that sends you back to the starting square. And what that produces, in effect, is the notion of a sort of time that, even though there are a multitude of historical moments, multitude of phenomena, a multitude of changes, is crossed with the notion that history is not advancing, that history is always repeating itself and getting lost.⁴⁵

Tania Bruguera: Uncanny present

If Francis Alÿs' artistic practice tries to enact a non-linear conception of time where the present is always thrown back into the past and vice versa, Tania Bruguera's model, not only sees the past as a frame for the present, but advocates for an activation of the past, of memory, of history, in the present. Contrary to a Modernist version of time, Bruguera aims at disclosing the repressed continuities that unite past and present and that shape the future to come. As a result, in her practice, sedimented, anaesthetised sets of knowledge or images are made strange in order to

reveal how those supposedly past conditionings are still operational, not only as a premise but as active agents in our configuration of the present.

Untitled (Place, Year) series

The works belonging to this series share a sense of urgency. They reference places that are politically charged, areas that configure (and are configured by) economic, social, religious or ethnic tensions and problems. These sites, many times personally chosen by the artist and not necessarily determined by the artistic circuit, share an important discursive baggage that has conditioned and determined their identity in the global scene. This 'political imaginary' is defined by Bruguera, following Susan Buck-Morss and Valerii Podoroga, as

a political landscape is more than political logics, it is a visual field where political actors move and where they are also acted upon; it is a power landscape where political collectivity is found, a visual representation of what is political, thinking in the formation of a national identity through the appropriation of the territory.⁴⁶

The political imaginary, for Bruguera, could be described as mental imagery about a particular location that identifies, defines and reduces a site. These imaginaries, entrenched in public discourse, easily 'describe' a place taking as its main characteristics the events and actions that successfully circulate globally as identifying traits for a particular location. As stereotypes, the political imaginaries that define certain locations succeed at quickly providing a visual, political landscape of the place, a fleeting, bird's-eye-view of the complexities of a site. At the same time,

like kernels of information, the political imaginaries circulate with great speed through our world, in the form of cultural artefacts, such as movies, books, etc., simultaneously imposing their vision upon the receivers while perpetuating a logic of simplification through reductive, stereotypical identification. The political imaginaries, therefore, construct a vision of a particular location based on the needs and desires of those who are doing the defining. As an abstraction of observations on a particular reality, we can say that the political imaginaries tend to reduce the tensions existing in a particular place - be it social, economic, racial or violent - and favour simplistic, quasi-formulaic, stable, categorisations.

The *Untitled (place, year)* series reflects upon the importance of the stereotypes and reductive perspectives that determine the historical construction of certain places. Simultaneously they seek to act upon the reality that is constructed by these ideological presuppositions. The works propose an oscillation between the analysis of a collective ideological discourse (that determines a place as dangerous, conflicted, violent or repressive), and an observation of the present conditions of possibility that sustain such stereotypes. Importantly, *Untitled (place, year)* strategically deploys such imaginaries against themselves, appropriating and detourning them for critically dismantling accepted and assumed notions, categorisations and stereotypes. The works in the *Untitled (Place, Year)* series constantly re-evaluate, re-signify and re-deploy these generalised conceptions of place in such a way that they become active in the present as a tool for a critique, not only of the past, but also of the present. Bruguera's investigation into the sense of

place of a particular site focuses on the historical, ideological and discursive tensions and repressions that configure them. At the same time, and precisely by investigating the relevance of past historic conditionings of the present, they try to implicate their immediate reality, to uncover usually 'forgotten' or 'obscured' sets of knowledge and histories of a place with the intention of deploying them for the critical and tactical analysis of the present.

Untitled (Kassel, 2002)

The piece I did in Documenta was a translation of *Untitled* (Havana, 2000)...It was not a formal translation but the translation of the theme: what we see and what we don't see, what we don't want to see. It was about responsibility about what one wants to see and why.⁴⁷

-Tania Bruguera

Created for Documenta XI, *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* was described by Helaine Posner as follows,

A row of 750-watt lights was strung on a trestle above the entrance to the installation, assaulting the eyes of the viewer as if under interrogation. The metallic clicking sound of a person on patrol loading and unloading a gun was heard overhead. At first one did not know whether this sound was live or recorded, but it gradually became clear that the real human beings were watching and, in theory, threatening one's life. Suddenly the bright lights went out, the sound ceased and, for a few moments, the darkened space was dimly lit by a projection displaying the names of one hundred locations across the globe where political massacres have occurred since the end of World War II, some resulting in enormous casualties.⁴⁸

As her account suggests, just as in the aforementioned *Untitled (Havana, 2000)*, there are several visual moments that compose an overall experience of the work. In

the first instance, a very powerful and uncomfortable line of 700-watt light bulbs blinded the viewer. Secondly, there was a 'soundtrack,' a metallic clicking noise that assaulted the viewer's sense of hearing and confused him or her as to what and where was the source of such continuous noise. Thirdly, the viewer was thrown into a sudden ocean of darkness, the clicking noise suspended. Finally, the viewer was exposed to a projected image that listed the names and casualties of a 100 different places around the globe where political massacres had taken place since the Second World War. Sensorial experience played a significant role in the careful orchestration of this piece. In the first moment of the work, the visitor was rendered almost blind, at least incapable to see beyond the lights themselves. While blind, the spectator of *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* was assaulted through another sense, this time hearing, through a series of repetitive clicking noises that were impossible to determine where they came from. Finally, the video showing the list of politically motivated violent sites, refocused the spectator's gaze towards a centre light-emitting source. In the case of *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)*, darkness revealed not only the existence of politically violent sites after World War II, but also allowed the viewer to identify the source of the clicking noise he or she experienced upon first entering the work. Only in darkness could the viewer notice that the noise came from a live performer who, perched above the audience, systematically loaded a gun.

Untitled (Kassel, 2002) put the spectator through a series of extreme variations of visual experience; the room itself created a feeling of physical instability, a dizzying space not very easy to navigate or to comprehend. Complimented by the live

'soundtrack', the space further confused the viewer as he or she could not figure out where the noise came from or what it was. Once disoriented, the viewer was then assaulted by information related to different historically violent sites, forcing him or her to reflect upon contemporary political violence. This move displaced the initial physical discomfort into an intellectual and emotional discomfort that focused on the articulation and deployment of power within the world after World War II. This inner confusion was then furthered and emphasised when the spectators noticed the performer cocking the gun, making them feel observed, vulnerable, and perhaps more importantly, as if they were being interrogated or in the line of fire of an execution.⁴⁹

As Pinto comments, 'Kassel, indeed, was one of the driving centres behind the Nazi arms industry during the Second World War'.⁵⁰ As a result, Kassel as a city, a site, was deeply imbricated within the Nazi apparatus. This story, however, is usually obscured and Kassel is 'sold' as a quaint, quiet town in the middle of Germany welcoming to the eccentricities of contemporary art. Documenta has not helped this idyllic representation of the place, quite the opposite, it has solidified Kassel's identity as a neutral place, almost 'in parenthesis' from reality, where every five years the most cutting-edge contemporary art is exhibited. Kassel has been constituted in the artistic imaginary as a fertile ground for the exhibition of works of art. It is the darker story of the city that *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* sought to unearth to both the spectator, and the artworld at large. As an exploration of the local memory of the place, or lack of memory, Bruguera's *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* activated in the present the historical

construction of a place highlighting that which is known (Kassel as site of documenta) and that which is typically hidden (Kassel's Nazi history). As Edmundo Desnoes argues,

In Germany, the artist used light as the truth we all refuse to see although it is shining in our eyes. And without using any of the traditional objects and symbols of the holocaust, Tania recreated the horror by simply having the sound of weapons being loaded, readied to fire over and over again. The terrifying eternity of hearing the cocking of the weapon: the most dangerous moment: in the endless instant before death. Light, sound, darkness.⁵¹

In *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)*, it was the spectator who was under pressure and constant scrutiny. The work tried to provoke a reaction from the viewer to a particular situation, in this case, political, repressive violence. By putting the spectator at the core of the work, not only formally but also conceptually, *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)* included and phenomenologically implicated the viewer in the discussion of power and its deployment. *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)*, as Posner suggests, forced the audience to 'explore the past as well as the conditions of their own vulnerability'.⁵² Bruguera's play with light, with visibility and corporality, according to Jonathan Griffin, placed 'the audience themselves under interrogation'⁵³ as if they were in a compromised situation such as a war or under custody for some undefined crime. The viewer, therefore, was made aware of the historical continuity of such political violence while at the same time, he or she was also held responsible for either continuing and fostering these situations or reacting against them. The question of what society is willing to acknowledge, to see, to remember, and what it chooses to ignore, was brought to the forefront of the discussion, and one's personal responsibility towards

these situations highlighted. As Posner suggests, in *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)*, 'Bruguera encouraged the audience to recognise the global reach of political violence as personal threat by placing them directly in the line of fire'.⁵⁴ In other words, the work sought to perversely impregnate the present of the spectator with the historical past of a specific site.

Ghosts of Futures Past

Although Francis Alÿs and Tania Bruguera are two prominent contemporary artists, as evinced by Alÿs' travelling retrospective exhibition *A story of deception and* Bruguera's recent intervention at the Tanks, both at Tate Modern, only very few studies have brought their practice together.⁵⁵ However, as I have argued in this paper, works such as *Rehearsal* series and *Untitled (Place, Year)* are akin in several ways. In the first place, as temporal models, they both rely on strategies of repetition that aim at sustaining, holding on to, the present. In their works, we can sense that the past is never really past —neither for Lupita, nor the red VW, nor the stripper(s), nor Havana, nor Kassel— as they compulsively repeat certain stages thought to be surpassed. Like the protagonists of *Song for Lupita*, the subjects of these artworks are not bound to a chronological narrative that plots a straightforward evolution from one stage to the next. At the same time, Bruguera's *Untitled (Kassel, 2002)*, for example, constantly shifted Kassel's historical coordinates forcing the spectator to recognise the continuity, and insistence, of political violence in the present. In this sense, Bruguera's re-activation of the present can be compared to the temporal

structure in Alÿs' *Rehearsal* insofar as they both conflate beginning and end, past and present. These operations can be described as temporal models that seek to rethink the validity, relevance and function of the categories of past, present and future.⁵⁶ They articulate the present as the ghost of futures past.

¹ For images of the works discussed and further information see the respective artists' websites:

www.francisalys.com

www.taniabruguera.com

² Tate Modern, 'Francis Alÿs. A Story of Deception: Room Guide, Song for Lupita', <<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/francis-aly/francis-aly-story-deception-room-guide/francis-aly-7>>

³ Ibid.: 92.

⁴ The 'Entries' section of the catalogue was a part of the volume given entirely to Alÿs and Medina for describing and addressing 61 works that they thought were pivotal in Alÿs' career. Although the texts are written in the first person, they purposefully conflate Alÿs' and Medina's voice making it impossible to determine who is saying what. For this reason, when referring to the "Entries" section of the catalogue I make reference to both Alÿs and Medina explicitly.

⁵ Francis Alÿs and Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'Entries', in Mark Godfrey, Klaus Biesenbach, and Kerry Greenberg (eds.), *Francis Alÿs: A Story of Deception* (London: Tate, 2010): 92.

⁶ Boris Groys, 'Comrades of Time', in Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle (eds.), *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2010): 29.

⁷ Francis Alÿs and Russell Ferguson, 'Interview: Russell Ferguson in Conversation with Francis Alÿs', in Cuauhtémoc Medina, Jean Fisher, and Russell Ferguson (eds.), *Francis Alÿs* (London: Phaidon, 2007): 15.

⁸ Ibid.: 15.

⁹ Ibid.: 92.

¹⁰ Helaine Posner, *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary* (Milano: Charta, 2009): 76

¹¹ Edmundo Desnoes, 'Both Faces of the Moon', *Arte al Día*, (2005): 28.

¹² Ellen Pearlman, 'The Fallacy of Utopia: The Artworld and Current Dialectic in Havana', *The Brooklyn Rail*, (2002): 18.

¹³ Roberto Pinto, 'Exercise of Resistance', in Galeria Soffiantino (ed.), *Exercise in Resistance* (Turin, 2003): 33.

¹⁴ Tania Bruguera, 'Untitled (Havana, 2000)', <<http://www.taniabruguera.com/cms/146-1-Untitled+Havana+2000.htm>>

¹⁵ Tania Bruguera, 'Workshop Talk. Cátedra Juan Gris', in Universidad Complutense De Madrid (ed.), *Cuadernos de la Cátedra Juan Gris* (Madrid, 2010): unpaginated.

¹⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 1985).

Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity - an Incomplete Project', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998): 1-15

¹⁷ Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*.

¹⁸ John Jervis, *Transgressing the Modern* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999): 6.

¹⁹ Francis Alÿs, Rafael Ortega, and Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'Politics of Rehearsal', (New York, 2004).

It is important to mention that although the work has been widely circulated and debated, none of the volumes produced include a full transcription of the video's 'dialogue' nor a detailed analysis of its content. In this respect, this is the first place such analysis has taken place. For a full transcript of the dialogue see my PhD.

See also:

Harry S. Truman, 'Inaugural Address. January 20, 1949', (1949).

Habermas, 'Modernity - an Incomplete Project'.

²⁰ 'Historical succession, that is, suddenly the view of places that had been under colonial rule, or were simply poorer countries, became a promise of a process of reaching the North American model that considered itself to be developed, to have realised all the potentiality of the era, of capitalism. And the others seen as already in the process of getting there, but still not reaching that point.' In Alÿs, Ortega, and Medina, 'Politics of Rehearsal'.

²¹ Cuauhtémoc Medina, 'Fable Power', in Cuauhtémoc Medina, Jean Fisher, and Russell Ferguson (eds.), *Francis Alÿs* (London: Phaidon, 2007): 95.

²² 'As Jürgen Habermas specifies, the secular concept of modernity conveys the assurance that "the future has already begun": it lives for the future as well as the novelty that the future is presumed to bring about. The caesura defined by each new beginning has therefore been transferred to the past, to a temporal dimension in opposition to which modernity is declared as a new age, so that it is the past which is somehow always too late, behind, not on time. In such a caesura, "time becomes experienced as a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise —that is, as the pressure of time." Zeitgeist, or spirit of the age, defines the present "as a transition that is consumed in the consciousness of a speeding up and in the expectation of the differentness of the future"; as a temporal dimension "that understands itself from the horizon of the modern age as the actuality of the most recent period." Because of modernity's deployment of the present as a transitional moment heading towards a continuously different future, it must reaffirm its rupture with the past as a "continuous renewal.'" (Emphasis in original)

Christine Ross, *The Past Is the Present, It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012): 66.

Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance', *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: MIT 1990).

²³ Truman, 'Inaugural Address. January 20, 1949'.

Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, *Modernity and Difference* (London: INIVA, 2001).

²⁴ "The argument of underdevelopment puts it as a linear situation in which some lag behind others but have the resources and potential to do like the other, to be identical to the other, and that they simply need to throw off the shackles that prevent it."

Alÿs, Ortega, and Medina, 'Politics of Rehearsal'.

²⁵ Alÿs and Medina, 'Entries': 103.

²⁶ Russell Ferguson, *Francis Alÿs: Politics of Rehearsal* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007): 79.

²⁷ Ibid.: 79.

²⁸ Francis Alÿs and Martin-Gropius-Bau, *Blueorange 2004* (Martin-Gropius-Bau, 2004): 10

²⁹ Alÿs and Medina, 'Entries': 103.

³⁰ Ibid.: 110.

³¹ Ross, *The Past Is the Present, It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*: 67.

³² Alÿs and Medina, 'Entries': 110-111.

³³ Medina, 'Fable Power': 40.

³⁴ Truman, 'Inaugural Address. January 20, 1949'.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ A full transcript of Truman's edited video included by Alÿs reads as follows,

'We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.

I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realise their aspirations for a better life. And, in

cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development.

What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalising force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies-hunger, misery, and despair.

If we are to be successful in carrying out these policies, it is clear that we must have continued prosperity in this country and we must keep ourselves strong.'

Alÿs, Ortega, and Medina, 'Politics of Rehearsal'.

My transcription.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Alÿs and Medina, 'Entries': 144.

⁴⁰ Alÿs, Ortega, and Medina, 'Politics of Rehearsal'.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Tania Bruguera, 'Untitled (Bogotá, 2009)', *Encuentro 2009: Staging Citizen: Cultural Rights in the Americas* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia & Hemispheric Institute, 2009).

⁴⁷ Roselee Goldberg, 'Being Cuban', in La Biennale Di Venezia (ed.), *Tania Bruguera* (Venice: Prince Claus, 2005): 21.

⁴⁸ Posner, *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*: 18-19.

⁴⁹ Silvia Höller, 'Every Gesture Is a Political Act', in Sivia & Matt Höller, Gerald (ed.), *Portraits* (Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006): unpaginated.

⁵⁰ Pinto, 'Exercise of Resistance': 34.

⁵¹ Desnoes, 'Both Faces of the Moon': 29.

⁵² Posner, *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*: 80.

⁵³ Jonathan Griffin, 'Tania Bruguera: Cuba, Performance and Society's Relationship to Its History', *Frieze*, /118 (2008): unpaginated.

⁵⁴ Posner, *Tania Bruguera: On the Political Imaginary*: 18-19.

⁵⁵ Notable exceptions being the exhibitions "Arte No es Vida," and "Dominó Canibal".

Museo Del Barrio, Deborah Cullen, and M. Bustamante, *Arte [No Es] Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas 1960-2000* (New York: El Museo Del Barrio, 2008).

Cuauhtémoc Medina, *Dominó Canibal* (Distributed Art Pub Incorporated, 2011).

⁵⁶ Ross, *The Past Is the Present, It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*: 12.

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Garden of thought: Emily Dickinson and her page

Mariya Ustymenko

Abstract

The article presents a case study analysis of two of Emily Dickinson's later texts in the context of their original manuscript pages, reinstating the historically undervalued significance of their extra-textual capacities.

'Weeds without paper are necessary'

Gertrude Stein, from the poem, 'Sacred Emily', 1913.¹

Emily Dickinson is known today as one of the major nineteenth century poets, enthusiastically embraced by many twentieth century creative innovators, including authors such as William Carlos Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Susan Howe, to name a few. Regarded as one of North America's predecessors of modern writing, alongside Walt Whitman, Dickinson received appraisal in many countries outside the English speaking world where her texts reached in translation.² In this article, I will closely examine two instances of Emily Dickinson's writing with special focus given to the poet's visual experimentation, lost for her international readership in particular, as her readers are accustomed to seeing the poet's texts in translated print editions. This experimentation will be discussed in the context of Dickinson's original manuscript pages, with special attention given to the material objects (clippings and insertions) placed by the poet next to her written lines. By

resurrecting these often overlooked extra-textual elements, my aim is to better our understanding of Dickinson's multilayered poetry, reinstating the importance of the visual and material to literary studies.

In an online entry discussing major differences between a manuscript and a printed publication, Wim Van Mierlo (2010) calls attention to what he terms 'the plasticity of the manuscript,' viewing the latter as a three dimensional page where the text can move in any direction not subjected to linear form.³ Print, states Van Mierlo, cannot adequately represent all of the idiosyncratic features of the writing process, arguing early in his entry that, metaphorically speaking, 'print flattens text.'⁴ It is in the process of this 'flattening' for print that all of the major editorial decisions are made, the extra-textual features of a given manuscript assessed for their significance, and their reproduction or omission decided upon. As an outcome of such 'surgery,'⁵ the text gets separated from its immediate material environment with only the most obvious features preserved, much of which is reserved for the commentary (a privilege often given to only major scholarly editions).⁶ But can the result of such 'flattening' produce the same effect as the original manuscript? Or, are we dealing with two completely different versions – the manuscript and the editor's 'reproduction'?

Having intrigued readers and scholars for more than a century as an Amherst recluse who left approximately eighteen hundred unpublished poems, Dickinson has attained the status of one of North America's most discussed poets in the field

of literary studies. In 1998, Marietta Messmer⁷ talked about the enormous amount of research conducted on the poet during the last two decades of the twentieth century, stating that, on average, there had appeared more than fifty entries in the annual MLA⁸ listing for each year (with a peak of eighty-three listings for 1986). According to the researcher, English-language book-length studies alone had been published at a stable rate of five to seven per year since the 1980s, while 1989 saw the foundation of the Emily Dickinson International Society, which issues the biannual *Emily Dickinson Journal* as well as the *Emily Dickinson Bulletin*.⁹ The first decade of the twenty-first century proved to continue this trend of high academic interest. The annual number of entries in the MLA International Bibliography in the years between 2000 and 2010 had soared to an average of sixty-nine entries per year, with a slight decline in the book-length publications which went down to an average of four (peaking, however, with seven books published in 2010).¹⁰

In contrast to the rich and systematic research conducted on the author's life and work over the years, no definitive answer exists to one of the key Dickinson questions: why did the poet remain almost entirely unpublished during her own lifetime? Sharon Cameron has persuasively argued that 'the problems of reading and the problems of choice are in this [Dickinson's] poetry inseparable'¹¹ as 'it is not that Dickinson couldn't publish, or that she chose not to,' 'it is rather that she couldn't choose how to do so.'¹² Another distinguished Dickinson scholar and

editor, Martha Nell Smith, has supported the argument that it was not ‘publishing’ but ‘printing’ that Dickinson rejected, as the poet retained complete control over her work and “published” herself in her letters and in the forty manuscript books (or fascicles) left in her drawer.¹³

It is important to note that in recent Dickinson scholarship there seems to be an increase in research focusing on the author’s manuscripts as the primary materials. In 1998 Suzanne Juhasz observed:

In the 1990s we have been struck by certain material facts about Dickinson as writer: that her writing exists almost entirely in manuscript; that she regularly suggested alternative words or phrases to her poems and produced alternative versions of her poems; that she wrote letters with poems attached to them, embedded in them; that her writing forms possess such fluidity that we cannot precisely say what is prose and what is poetry. As a consequence, the way she wrote, the materiality of her writing, has everything to do with what and how we read when we are “reading Dickinson.”¹⁴

Over the decade that has passed since the essay’s publication, Dickinson scholarship had gradually moved on, shifting its focus from scholarly works aimed at analysing what can be treated as prose and what constitutes a poem in Dickinson’s body of work, to the exploration of issues that encompass not only text-related features of her manuscripts but also include materials not usually associated with literary analysis. This kind of research is represented by scholarly publications that deal with such issues as the gaps between the words and pages of the fascicles, positioning of handwritten lines, paper embossments and their

relation to the written texts, as well as the study of many other features of Dickinson's artistic production that would be otherwise left outside of the traditional scope of academic interest had the author chosen to print as opposed to home-publish.

I am not arguing, however, that the materiality of Dickinson's writing came to her readers' attention only toward the end of the twentieth century. Conversely, nearly a century before, the poet's first literary editor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, paid tribute to this aspect of the author's writing in an article for *Atlantic Monthly*. The article was written in response to 'a constant and earnest demand by her readers for further information in regard to her.'¹⁵ In it the editor shared with the readers aspects of Dickinson's first letter to him,¹⁶ including details of her handwriting, which was 'so peculiar that it seemed as if the writer might have taken her first lessons by studying the famous fossil bird-tracks in the museum of that college town,'¹⁷ as well as her unusual punctuation¹⁸ and capitalization: 'the Old English and present German method of thus distinguishing every noun substantive.'¹⁹ He also pointed out the intriguing lack of signature at the bottom of the address – instead of signing the letter, its author chose to write her name on a card and include it in a smaller envelope inside a larger one. To quote from the words of the letter's recipient, 'even this name was written – as if the shy writer wished to recede as far as possible from view – in pencil, not in ink.'²⁰ Even though Higginson's editing of Dickinson's texts for printing purposes became notorious for

its high amount of adjustments, especially within the same sphere of punctuation and capitalization, as the editor set out to *improve* the writing of the poet, who in his opinion was 'utterly careless of ... irregularities,'²¹ it is significant that Higginson dedicated so much attention to the description of the materiality of Dickinson's letters. Apparently, the editor considered this description beneficial to the readers of her poetry, familiar with the author's work only through the printed *Poems*.²²

Notwithstanding the significance of the above-described idiosyncrasies of the author's style, and her readers' increasing interest in all aspects of the poet's life and writing, it would take nearly one hundred years for the material features of the author's papers to come to the fore. The phenomenon of this potential 'oversight' is inevitably bound to the issues of access as throughout the majority of the twentieth century only a very small number of Dickinson's secondary readers²³ had the privilege to draw themselves 'intimately near' to the poet's originals.²⁴

The manuscripts, divided between two feuding Amherst families, first saw the hand of a literary scholar as their editor in the 1950s, when Thomas H. Johnson returned to the originals to compile *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1955), as well as *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1958).²⁵ Johnson consulted the poet's original papers instead of using other editors' transcriptions, and thus more accurately (even though in print) presented all of the author's texts to the public. Unlike his predecessors, who organised the poems in thematic clusters, Johnson arranged Dickinson's texts chronologically in his edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* by

carefully studying the changes in the poet's handwriting, as Dickinson herself rarely dated her work. As the original papers still remained largely scattered, having two major repositories at Amherst College and Harvard University, a large majority of Dickinson researchers from the 1960s onwards used Johnson's editions to reference Dickinson's texts.

The practice of relying on Johnson's editions as primary sources of information on Dickinson's texts started to change in the 1980s, triggered first by the publication of R.W. Franklin's double-volume *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson: A Facsimile Edition* (1981), printed by Harvard University Press, and propelled further by the creation of Dickinson Electronic Archives (DEA) in the late 1990s. The shift towards electronic reproduction appears to be an important one for the perceptual change it brings about. Is it the 'democratization' of access that draws attention to the visual aspects of Dickinson's texts, or the contemporary fascination with the visual, which feeds the demand for broader access to the author's work, with all its aspects reproduced as closely as possible to the original context?

Although many scholars may voice their doubts about what might be called a 'fetishization of Dickinson's "body" in holograph,' in this article I will show what can be lost when an image, or any other extra-textual aspect of the author's work, gets separated from the author's text to take its place as a commentary note.²⁶

I will begin with an example of a seemingly minor misrepresentation of one of Dickinson's later manuscripts.²⁷ Fred D. White mentions in passing a sole surviving example of the poet 'writing to her father,' and describes the document as 'the startling "Dear Father – [large blank space] Emily" written on the back of the manuscript of Fr1333; J1325 ("Knock with tremor –") at the time of Edward's death.'²⁸ Even though White references Franklin's Variorum Edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, containing detailed descriptions of the manuscript [Fig.1], he fails to mention one detail which would have made the note less 'startling': 'between the salutation and the signature are two pinholes where the message was held in place – a flower or other object.'²⁹ Omission of this detail in White's description may lead the reader to consider several possible interpretations.

First of all, it could be deduced that the manuscript is a letter, as, indeed, the document may speculatively be classified as one if the reader were to judge the message by its opening line 'Dear Father –.'³⁰ Secondly, the absence of any information in the space may imply that the blank was intentional, and, thus, potentially filled with meaning. Finally, the document could be treated as the one written after Edward Dickinson's death and, thus, constitute a peculiar form of elegy. All three interpretations could indeed make the note appear 'startling,' and possibly much more appealing to the intrigued reader, eager to fill the space with potential meaning. For instance, in his edition of Dickinson's poems, Johnson, having overlooked the presence of pin marks in the body of the manuscript,

concluded in his notes that, since Edward Dickinson died on 16 June 1874, 'one conjures that the unwritten message expresses the void she [Emily Dickinson] felt his passing had created.'³¹

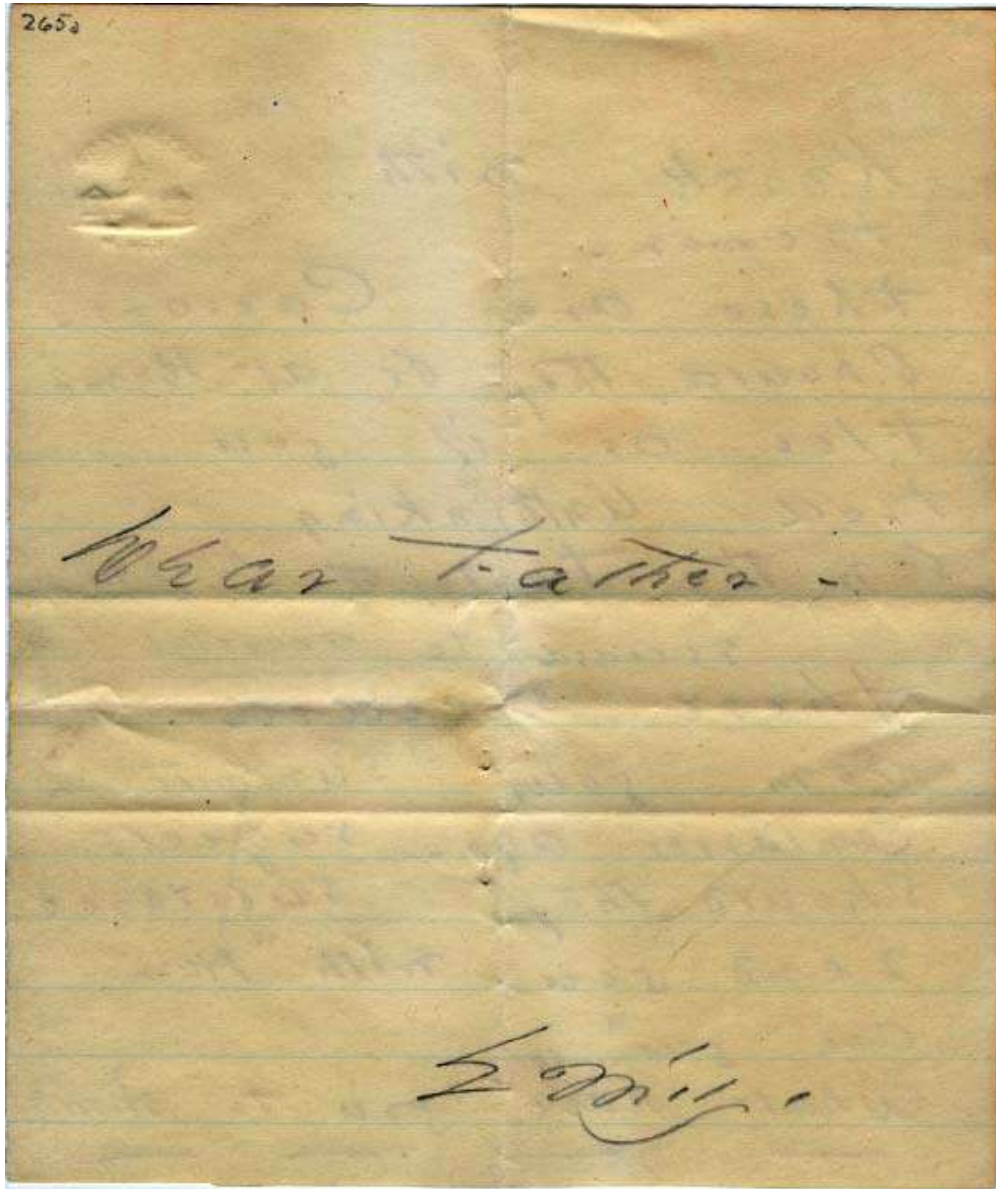


Fig.1. Emily Dickinson, Manuscript 265a © Amherst College Library Archives and Special Collections, 2013.

With pin marks accounted for or overlooked, little attention appears to be paid, however, to the potential relation of the note to the content of the other side of the paper it was written on.³² Treated separately, the text on the reverse of the sheet, known by its opening “Knock with tremor –,” presents a draft of a poem. [Fig.2] The text’s presentation and layout on the sheet may lead one to conclude that it was not written as a continuation of the “Dear Father –” note, and if indeed “Dear Father –” was a letter to Edward Dickinson, the poem on the verso was added later. It represents a raw draft with variants written in hasty hand, and does not appear to be a copied and finalised version, similar to those the poet would send to her correspondents, making it unlikely that the draft was ever seen by Edward. The arrangements of the lines are disrupted by the alternative words the poet was considering. We see the line ‘These seceded from your summits,’ in Franklin’s Variorum edition written as two separate lines ‘these seceded / from your summits’ in the author’s hand, with variants ‘subjects’ and ‘substance’ written underneath each other below the word ‘summits.’ All three are cancelled with one stroke and ‘summons’ written as a final variant above ‘summits’ on the original line, and repeated again, written vertically on the right margin of the paper, as if an additional reminder of this finalisation.

265
Knock with
tremor.
these are Caesars.
Should they be at home
flee as if you
trod unthinking
On the foot of Doom.
receded to accostal
these succeeded
from your summons
Centuries ago. subjects
Should they substance
send you with "How
are you"
What have you to show?

Fig.2. Emily Dickinson, Manuscript 265 (Fr1333 in the Franklin Variorum Edition) © Amherst College Library Archives and Special Collections, 2013.

We might never know whether Edward received and read the “Dear Father –” note, or whether the draft poem was written prior to or after his death; however, the poem known as “Knock with tremor –,” which references the stern power of those preceding as opposed to the weak ‘you’ of today, seems to reflect the poet’s sentiment towards her father. The sentence ‘These are Caesars – / Should they be at Home / Flee as if you trod unthinking / On the Foot of Doom –’ may potentially be read as a thinly veiled allusion to Dickinson family dynamics. Upon Edward’s death, the poet wrote to her mentor and long-time correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson: ‘His [Edward Dickinson’s] heart was pure and terrible, and I think no other like it exists. I am glad there is immortality, but would have tested it myself, before entrusting him.’³³ This statement reflects both Dickinson’s awe of Edward as well as a strong lifelong attachment. In an anecdote of her childhood, which the poet told Higginson upon their first much awaited meeting in August 1870, Dickinson confided that ‘she never learned to tell time by clock till she was fifteen, simply because he [Edward] had tried to explain it to her when she was a child, and she had been afraid to tell him that she did not understand, and also afraid to ask anyone else lest he should hear of it.’³⁴ Thus, the poem “Knock with tremor –” may be read as a dedication to Edward with the ‘Dear Father – [missing attachment] Emily’ note viewed as a clue to establish the connection. Written on the same sheet, both texts may also be regarded as two poems, or alternatively, as one complex work, consisting of a message composed earlier, together with a poem written as a reflection *in response* to the content of

the sheet's verso. The draft poem's final observation, 'These seceded from your summits / Centuries ago – / Should they rend you with "How are you" / What have you to show?', with each word in the final query separately underlined by the author in the original manuscript, evokes comparison with a much better known later poem, "Those – dying then, / Knew where they went –", dated about 1882, and thus written approximately eight years after Edward Dickinson's passing.³⁵ The latter poem appears to further explore the theme of the contemporary 'smallness' of behaviour in contrast to the values of the past. Thus, the removal of "Knock with tremor –" from its material context erases both the poem's conceptual as well as material connection with Dickinson's note addressing her father and breaks the potential link which may exist between its text and the themes explored in the author's subsequent writing.

Whilst the use of the material properties of this particular manuscript [Figs. 1 & 2] by its author can only be speculative when discussing the author's original intention, in my next example, I will look at a manuscript that offers strong evidence towards the poet's intentional involvement with the extra-textual as an inalienable semantic component of the poetic content. Like most of Dickinson's texts, "Alone and in a circumstance" [Fig.3] is a complex figurative structure.

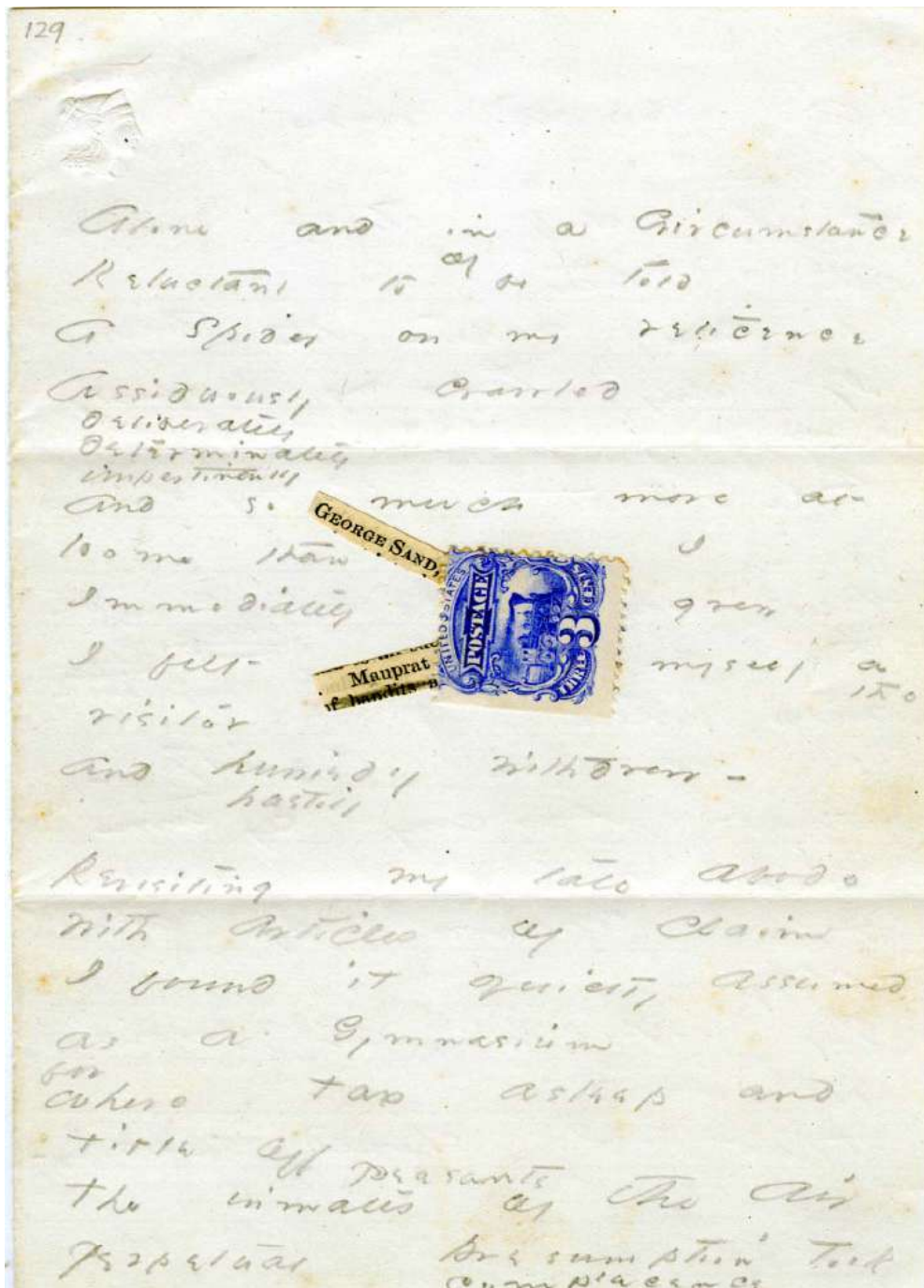


Fig.3. Emily Dickinson, 'Alone and in a Circumstance' Manuscript 129, (Fr1174 in the Franklin Variorum Edition) © Amherst College Library Archives and Special Collections, 2013.

129a
As each were special
their -
If any strike me on
the street
I can return the blow,
If any take my property,
According to the law
The Statute is my learned
friend
But what redress can be
for an offence ^{now} ~~not~~ ^{here}
nor there anywhere
So not in Equity -
that for any of time
and mind
the manner of the
very
By spiders, or furbs.
it Lord
that I should specify.

Fig.4. Emily Dickinson, 'Alone and in a Circumstance' Manuscript 129, (Fr1174 in the Franklin Variorum Edition) © Amherst College Library Archives and Special Collections, 2013.

Its placement as a plaque on the wall of the public toilet in the Emily Dickinson Museum seems to firmly secure its reputation as 'Dickinson's great outhouse poem,' the title originating from a common reading of the poem as an example of humorous light verse.³⁶ With its text widely reproduced in print, the image of its original manuscript version often seems to evade both public and academic attention. This is especially surprising taking into consideration the fact that the extra-textual features of the poem were described as early as 1951 in Johnson's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. This lack of attention can partially be attributed to the presence of Johnson's own interpretation of the poem's unusual 'illustration,' which is often referenced by later scholars but very rarely discussed further:

Pasted onto the centre of the front half of the half-sheet of notepaper on which the poem is written there is an unused three-cent postage stamp of the issue of 1869. Beneath one side of the stamp are two small strips clipped from *Harper's Magazine* for May 1870. One bears the name "George Sand" and the other "Mauprat" - the title of the novel by George Sand published in 1836. The poem was written after the stamp and strips were pasted onto the sheet, for the lines accommodate themselves to the occupied space. Such deliberateness would suggest that the poem is autobiographical; that "in a circumstance reluctant to be told" ED had been guided to *Mauprat* and had found the book a "larceny of time and mind."³⁷

This particular reading of the clippings' significance is surprising taking into consideration that George Sand was among the authors whom Dickinson admired – Sand was highly praised by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Dickinson's own role model and the poet whose portrait can still be viewed on the wall of Dickinson's

bedroom in the Homestead. It comes as even more surprising that in a recent book-length publication dedicated to Dickinson's writing practices, viewed in opposition to contemporary reading habits, Virginia Jackson argues that the stamp with a picture of a steam engine with the clippings stuck underneath it 'seems to have little to do with the lines Dickinson wrote around it.'³⁸ Jackson points out that, whatever the lines of the poem may be, 'they are not (except in the most literal sense) about the stamp and the clippings.'³⁹ This view explicitly goes against the possibilities of the poem's interpretation offered by Jeanne Holland ten years earlier. Holland provides the readers with the results of her research into the origin of the stamp and the cut-outs, presenting her readers with a reproduction of the spread from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (May 1870), from which both clippings were cut out by Dickinson. The spread showcases the editor's review of Roberts Brothers' new publication of George Sand's *Mauprat*, a novel first printed in 1837. As pointed out by Holland, 'typical of most Victorian American reviews of Sand, this one recognizes her genius but laments her facility for rendering illicit passion.'⁴⁰ Dickinson originally cut out three strips from the review but chose only two for the clipping, the three cut-outs include 'GEORGE SAND,' 'it will prove a dangerous book. *Mauprat*' and 'As to *Mauprat*.'⁴¹ Holland draws attention to the fact that, 'although the review prints the novel's title in italics and Dickinson scissored that reference, the glued strip "*Mauprat*" indicates that Dickinson used a reference to the Heathcliffian protagonist's name, not the title.'⁴² The scholar's justification for such a choice on Dickinson's part is that the name *Mauprat* in this

instance serves as a generalised representation of a masculine figure. The significance of the stamp, or rather its visual content, is viewed by the researcher as a synecdoche for the poet's father, 'as a locomotive was named in his honour in 1862,'⁴³ while the visual representation of the entire clipping within the context of the poem is explained as follows:

To view the locomotive correctly, we have to turn the paper sideways. Yet that perspective makes the poem look skewed. Seen sideways, "Mauprat," the male protagonist's name is easily legible, as is the carefully crossed-out word "bandits" underneath. But from this angle "GEORGE SAND" is more difficult to read. When we rotate the paper, privileging the father's perspective, the daughter's texts - poetry and "GEORGE SAND" - are thrown out of kilter, and vice versa. This visual pun recalls Dickinson's letter to her brother that "we do not have much poetry, father having made up his mind that its pretty much all *real life*. Fathers real life and *mine* sometimes come into collision, but as yet, escape unhurt!" (Letter 65). Locomotive and poetry collide, but neither is damaged here.⁴⁴

The presence of law terminology in the poem is further associated with Dickinson's father Edward, a statesman and a practicing lawyer, while the central figure, constructed out of the stamp and clippings, is treated as a signifier of the poet's body in relation to a male versus female power-struggle, as: 'She [Dickinson] embodies the locomotive's drive, possessing a phallus (quite literally, between the "legs" of the cutouts),'⁴⁵ while 'the cutouts lead/read into the locomotive, its power appears to derive from a female literary genius (GEORGE SAND) and male character (Mauprat) whom the genius created.'⁴⁶ 'Legs' or 'arms,' as the cut-outs are described by another Dickinson scholar, David Porter, here the 'collage' proves to be significant only in its relation to Dickinson as a poet, bearing little

relation to space around the poetic text.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding, Holland's biographical approach appears to be the first to point towards the significance of the collage, as the researcher brings examples from the poet's private correspondence to support the importance of George Sand to the author, as well as drawing parallels between the image of Sand and that of Susan Gilbert, Dickinson's sister-in-law and one of the most important figures in the poet's private and creative life.

If we were to follow the suggestion that the collage alludes to Edward Dickinson's disapproval of reading George Sand, there would be little difficulty finding further support among Emily Dickinson's surviving correspondence. In one of her letters, the poet once wrote of Edward: 'He buys me many books, but begs me not to read them, because he fears they jiggle the mind.'⁴⁸ But there are still many questions to consider if one were to interpret the collage within a biographical context. The clipping's reference to Mauprat as a character in Sand's novel as opposed to the novel's title, for instance, seems to be an arbitrary decision on Dickinson's part, as Holland treats this part of the collage as a reference to a non specific male figure that carries little significance on its own (providing we agree with Holland's suggestion that the 'locomotive' stamp signifies the poet's father). Taking such a reading for granted we would need to agree that Dickinson's attention was primarily centred on George Sand as an author while the reference to the novel *Mauprat* was made accidentally, due to a particular literary review being at hand when Dickinson made the collage. But why should we give more significance to

the image on the stamp and the words on one clipping, 'GEORGE SAND,' and discard the figure's other part – 'Mauprat'? Does the collage really have "little to do with the lines Dickinson wrote around it"? And if we were to treat Mauprat as a biographical reference who could be the hidden referent bearing similarities to the protagonist of George Sand's novel?

In 1996, James Guthrie, who concentrated his attention on a series of poems containing legal language written by the poet during the early 1860s, argued that 'Dickinson's use of legal terms and concepts in these poems laid the groundwork for her later use of them in her letters to Judge Lord.'⁴⁹ Judge Otis Phillips Lord was Edward Dickinson's friend and colleague appointed to the Superior Court of Massachusetts in 1859. Slightly younger than Emily's father, Judge Lord soon became a family friend and often visited the Dickinsons at the Homestead travelling together with his wife Elizabeth on occasions when he had to preside over court hearings in Northampton or was paying visits to Amherst College for alumni meetings. Notorious for the severity of his sentences, especially against divorce seekers, Judge Lord shared Edward Dickinson's conservative political views and Calvinist morality. Nearly eighteen years Emily's senior, Lord became the poet's last documented romance in the late 1870s, when Lord was already a widower. Drafts of the author's correspondence to Lord suggest that Dickinson was considering a marriage and a move from her home in Amherst to Lord's residence in Salem. In his article on the poems which might presumably have

Judge Lord for an addressee, Guthrie points out that, ‘although we cannot be certain that he [Otis Phillips Lord] was indeed her [Dickinson’s] lone, intended audience, circumstantial evidence and the frequency with which certain themes recur argue that she had at least Judge Lord in mind.’⁵⁰ These recurring themes according to the scholar depict comic disputes over property ownership and, more specifically, address legal battles over rural spaces. As Guthrie observes, ‘many years later, when she [Emily Dickinson] and Judge Lord began exchanging love letters, the subjects of rural property ownership and trespass reappear in a new context, one which is more overtly erotic.’⁵¹

It comes as little surprise that “Alone and in a Circumstance” is one of the poems that Guthrie discusses at length, successfully illustrating how this particular text relates to humorous exchanges documented between Dickinson and Lord and how its text fits in the context of other poems and letters appealing to the Judge’s attention. The poem follows a first person narrator who had been rudely interrupted by a spider while using the privy. After returning to the site of the incident the narrator comes face to face with a number of intruders in the form of a larger number of spiders and bugs and, thus, decides to take the case to court to clear the property rights issue. Even though Guthrie does mention the presence of the postage stamp with ‘GEORGE SAND’ and ‘Mauprat’ clippings in the footnote to his article, he seems to share Johnson’s view that Dickinson found George Sand’s novel a loss of reading time. However, Guthrie takes the possible

significance of the novel further by tying it to the text's plotline as 'Sand's novel disparages class differences in France during the *ancien regime*,' thus, leading him to conclude that 'variants within the poem, such as "Peasants" for "inmates" and "impertinently" for "Assiduously," show that Dickinson did indeed plan for the poem to be read as a miniature, comic account of a civic revolt narrated by a member of the imperilled "aristocracy," although this particular aristocrat's villa is, ironically, a privy.'⁵² If we were to follow Guthrie's train of thought and examine the novel itself for an explanation of the 'Mauprat' clipping's relevance to the meaning of the poem as well as in the review article from which the clipping originates, we would also need to touch upon other aspects of George Sand's *Mauprat* and its review that have not demanded scholarly attention.

Apart from the mention of the possible dangers of Sand's novel the review scissored by Dickinson also contained a critical biography of the novelist, providing its readers with information on the development of George Sand's literary career in relation to her personal life and her dissolved marriage in particular. It also informed the readers about Sand's current interests and occupations, stating that 'she still, at the age of sixty-five, writes romances of love and marriage,'⁵³ and summarised the novel's plot as follows:

Mauprat is brought up among the company of bandits and robbers, relics of the feudal past. At fifteen he is a mere brute, with the animal courage, but with all the animal passions, of a brute. The same catastrophe at first places Edmée in his power, and afterward at once releases her and delivers him from the diabolic companionship which

has made him what he is. The object of the story is to show how by her noble nature he is subsequently transformed from a brute to a man, his sensual passion to a pure and holy love.⁵⁴

It is from the opening sentence of this passage that Dickinson chose to cut the 'Mauprat' reference for her clipping, focusing her attention on the character and quite possibly on the story itself - the one that George Sand described in the preface as a work conceived with the idea 'to paint an eternal, exclusive love, - a love inspired before, and continuing during and after marriage.'⁵⁵ Marriage seems to be a recurring theme within the discussion, both in the scissored review, as well as in George Sand's preface, where the author discusses her attitude towards this subject matter at length, linking the time of the novel's conception with the struggles in her personal life, her divorce and the evolution of her own views on the matter:

Misery teaches those who can reflect: having learned from my own experience how painful and sad it is to have to break such ties, the conviction was forced upon me that marriage, to be anything more than a mere name, must embody principles of happiness and justice which are too elevated in their nature for actual society to be interested about them. Society tries, on the other hand, to degrade this sacred institution, by likening it to a civil contract; it attacks it on all sides at once, by its spirit and manners, by its prejudices and hypocritical incredulity.⁵⁶

Later in the preface Sand emphasises this view again, stating that the ideal of love is without a doubt in an everlasting fidelity: while the 'religious and moral laws have sought to consecrate this ideal: material facts trouble it, civil laws often

render it impossible or illusory.⁵⁷ These lines are particularly interesting, as Sand refers to law when talking about the essence of both love and marriage and criticises marriage when viewed as a civil contract as opposed to a moral and religious ideal which is above legal moderations. If one had grounds to presume that “Alone and in a Circumstance” was more than an example of the comic power of Emily Dickinson, the key argument to support such a presumption would unarguably lie in the odd collage construction, which had preceded the poem’s pencilled text, and its relation to it. Let us consider: ‘That Larceny of time and mind / The marrow of the Day / By spider, or forbid it Lord / That I should specify -’,⁵⁸ the final lines of “Alone and in a circumstance” [Fig.4]. The ‘Larceny,’ referred to in the text, hardly accounts for the loss of reading time, not only because George Sand appeared to be an unlikely candidate to bore Dickinson, but rather because this particular ‘crime’ had been committed by someone described as an active participant in the events. This active participant is referred to by the narrator as a ‘spider,’ the poet making a particular emphasis on her reluctance to give away this character’s identity. The exclamatory nature of the descriptive utterance that follows reads more as an epithet for someone, who in the poet’s view deserves a much stronger term than the description provided by a metaphoric comparison with a web-spinning creature. This possibility of interpretation discloses a much more sombre undertone inherent in the poem’s text, signalling the presence of irritation and disappointment in the narrator’s voice, both emotions that remain unnoticed within the scope of a more satirical struggle-over-the-privy reading. If

one were to agree with Holland's argument that the locomotive stamp served as a reference towards Emily Dickinson's father and concur with James Guthrie's presumption that the poem had Judge Lord as an intended audience, the allusion to marriage as a source for the poem protagonist's bitter disappointment has one obstacle to overcome – the date of the poem's creation.

As Judge Lord's and Emily Dickinson's autumnal romance is presumed to have taken place in letters after Elizabeth Lord's death in 1877, "Alone and in a Circumstance", dated by Johnson to be written around May or June 1870, seems to be created too early to be connected to Judge Lord. There are, however, several possible suggestions to be made. One of them would advocate the questioning of Johnson's dating of the manuscript as there is no additional indication of what made Dickinson's first scholarly editor conclude that this particular text had been created within the quite specific timeframe mentioned above. The author's handwriting, which had undergone visible changes during Dickinson's lifetime due to eyesight problems, does not support his decision in this instance, as another poem written in the draft copy of a letter addressed to Judge Lord and dated 1881 bears close resemblance to the hand observed in "Alone and in a circumstance," and is written in a similar manner – in pencil on the back of a pharmacist's leaflet. For this reason, the particular dating choice for "Alone and in a circumstance" made by Johnson, appears to be primarily dictated by the established date of the article from which the two clipping originate – *Harper's New*

Monthly Magazine's May 1870 issue, and the presumed time it would have taken the poet to obtain and read the freshly published Roberts Brothers' *Mauprat*. However, it would be relevant to point out that Johnson himself had noted on a similar occasion,⁵⁹ that 'the disparity in the date of the clipping and the poem leads one to conjecture that she [Dickinson] kept a scrapbook or a file of items which to her were meaningful.'⁶⁰ If such a scrapbook had indeed existed, the case of the "Alone and in a Circumstance" poem could prove to be very similar to the one included in the correspondence with Mrs. J.G. Holland – both poems written in pencil and containing 'outdated' cut-outs (and a dated stamp in the instance of the first) could have been both created in 1877. The existence of such a scrapbook or file would have also meant, in the case of "Alone and in a Circumstance," that the text of the poem could have been written at any time after May 1870. In this case, the presumed connection with Judge Lord as well as an association with marital arrangements would position the piece in the timeframe between 1877 and 1884. Furthermore, several Dickinson scholars, Cynthia Griffin Wolff and John Evangelist Walsh among them, had argued that 'there is the persistent intimation that the passion that became open in 1878 had its origins much earlier.'⁶¹ Therefore, the lines preceding the much debated conclusive observation of the poem on 'Larceny of time and mind' which read 'If any strike me on the street / I can return the Blow - / If any take my property / According to the Law / The Statute is my Learned friend / But what redress can be / For an offence not here nor there / So not in Equity –'⁶² could be viewed as the narrator's / poet's musings on the

time wasted on flirtations with a lover, real or wished for, who cannot be a candidate for marriage. The comparison between such a candidate and a spider showcases a high level of irritation on the narrator's part. Thus, the possibility of a more serious reading of the poem's theme derives from taking the author's collage into account as an equal constituent of the poem's meaning. Such a reading does not necessarily override a more jocular reading of the poem's content (even though it might add a sarcastic tinge to its humour), nor does it work against Holland's observations on the visual aspects of this artwork in their relation to the author's page but shows how the removal of certain parts of the author's artistic production, in this case a postage stamp and two newspaper clippings, during the 'flattening' for print editing stage, led to the loss of many interpretative possibilities. In other words, if Dickinson's use of language presents a challenge to the reader and is constantly compared to a game of riddles, could not her clippings and collages be weeds which are necessary for her garden's preservation?

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¹ Gertrude Stein, 'Sacred Emily,' in G. Stein, *Gertrude Stein: Geography and Plays* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999): 179.

² cf. Domhnall Mitchell and Maria Stuart, eds. *International Reception of Emily Dickinson* (London, Continuum, 2011).

³ Wim Van Mierlo, (2010) 'Research example: The plasticity of the manuscript; the flattened text', *Reclamation and Representation: the boundaries of literary archive conference blog*, 10 September. Available at: <<http://reclamationandrepresentation.blogspot.com/2010/09/research-example-plasticity-of.html>> (Accessed 23 September 2010).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ cf. Emily Dickinson in her second letter to the *Atlantic Monthly* editor T.W. Higginson refers to his editorial feedback as a 'surgery.' Unfortunately, the extent of Higginson's suggested corrections for printing purposes remains unknown as only Dickinson's part of the correspondence appears to have survived. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas J. Johnson and Theodora Ward (London: Harvard University Press, 1986): 404.

⁶ Among the commentaries of this kind one may find information about such extra-textual features of a given text as the presence of hand-drawn, or pasted illustrations, paper choice and its format, choice of ink colour, and, on more rare occasions, mention of the author's handwriting, its size, direction, and form.

⁷ Marietta Messmer, 'Dickinson's Critical Reception', *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, ed. Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbuchle, and Cristanne Miller (Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1998): 299-321.

⁸ MLA (Modern Language Association), <<http://www.mla.org>> (Accessed 20 July 2012).

⁹ Messmer: 299.

¹⁰ Information based on the data provided by the MLA International Bibliography (entries for 2000-2010), accessed through E-Resource & Database Menu, The Albert Sloman Library, available via the LION interface, <<http://0-lion.chadwyck.co.uk.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/initCritRefSearch.do?listType=mla>> (Accessed 16 January 2011).

¹¹ Sharon Cameron, 'Amplified Contexts: Emily Dickinson and the Fascicles', *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Judith Farr (Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458, 1996): 247.

¹² Ibid: 241.

¹³ Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1992): 2.

¹⁴ Suzanne Juhasz, 'Materiality and the Poet', *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*: 427.

¹⁵ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'Emily Dickinson's Letters', *Atlantic Monthly* LXVIII (October 1891): 444-456. Available online: <<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/poetry/emilyd/edletter.htm>> (Accessed 13 July 2012).

¹⁶ This letter could be considered as one of the most famous pieces of Emily Dickinson's correspondence known today. It starts with the lines: 'Mr. Higginson, / Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?' cf. Thomas Johnson and Theodora Van Wagenen Ward, eds. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986): 403.

¹⁷ Higginson: 444-456.

¹⁸ In regard to Dickinson's punctuation, Higginson stated in the same article that 'she [Dickinson] used chiefly dashes, and it has been thought better, in printing these letters, to give them the benefit of the ordinary usages' (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1891). Thus, the original 'I enclose my name – asking you, if you please – Sir – to tell me what is true?' (Letter 260) in Higginson's *Atlantic* version was reproduced as 'I enclose my name, asking you, if you please, sir, to tell me what is true?' (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1891).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² cf. Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, eds. *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1890) and *Poems, Second Series* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1891).

²³ I use the term secondary reader to denote an 'unintended' audience which broadly encompasses both the readers who received access to the author's writing through the work of editors as well as the editors who dealt with the author's manuscripts after the author's death but were never her direct correspondents (unlike Higginson, with whom the poet communicated through letters for nearly quarter of a century until her death in 1886). Dickinson sent various versions of her poems to many of her correspondents in an act of sharing, or, to paraphrase the poet's words to Higginson, 'asking for their mind.' These poetic works, shared with a specific reader, were carefully custom-crafted by the author to suit each particular instance of communication and the recipients of her poem-gifts are considered in this study as the poet's primary audiences.

²⁴ cf. Higginson: 444-456.

²⁵ Further information about the history of discovery of Dickinson's papers and their subsequent publication may be found at Emily Dickinson Museum: the Homestead and the Evergreens, in the section 'The Posthumous Discovery of Dickinson's poems', <http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/posthumous_publication> (Accessed 16 July 2012).

²⁶ cf. Melanie Hubbard's discussion of the argument at the beginning of her essay 'As there are Apartments: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts and Critical Desire at the Scene of Reading', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* v.12, no.1 (2013): 53.

²⁷ The manuscript is dated to about 1874, by both Thomas H. Johnson and R.W. Franklin.

²⁸ Fred D. White, *Approaching Emily Dickinson: Critical Currents and Crosscurrents since 1960* (New York: Camden House, 2008): 56.

²⁹ Franklin, ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, Vol. III, 1154.

³⁰ Franklin prefers to reference the document as 'what has been regarded as a vacant note to her father', while White appears to rely on Habegger's claim that Dickinson in this case was indeed writing to Edward.

³¹ Thomas H. Johnson, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Vol. III (London: Harvard University Press): 917.

³² The only critical essay I could identify discussing both A265a as well as A265 in their potential relation to each other, is Melanie Hubbard's 'As there are Apartments: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts and Critical Desire at the Scene of Reading', where the scholar argues that 'the poem makes the emptiness of the letter full by reading it as a failure to "show" before the father.' (61) Both sides of the manuscript are reproduced in facsimile accompanying the article's main text; however, the presence of pin marks is not mentioned in the article.

³³ Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*: 528.

³⁴ cf. Higginson: 444-456.

³⁵ cf. Franklin, ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, Vol. III, Fr1581.

³⁶ Martha Ackmann, 'Working the graveyard shift with Emily Dickinson Poetry does that, you know. It makes you a little crazy', *A Message From The Meadows Newsletter of the Emily Dickinson Museum*, Volume 5, No. 2 (Fall 2006), <http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/ed/files/press_releases/newsletters/newsletterfall06.pdf> (Accessed: 28 April 2010).

³⁷ Johnson, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Vol. II: 816.

³⁸ Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 166-167.

³⁹ Ibid.

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- ⁴⁰ Jeanne Holland, 'Scraps, Stamps, and Cutouts: Emily Dickinson's Domestic Technologies of Publication', Ezell, M. J. M. and O'Brien O'Keefe, K. *Cultural artefacts and the production of meaning: the page, the image, and the body* (The University of Michigan Press, 1994): 144.
- ⁴¹ Ibid: 144.
- ⁴² Ibid: 146.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ David Porter, *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981): 82.
- ⁴⁸ Martha Dickinson Bianchi, ed. *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi* (New York: BIBLO and TANNEN, 1971): 239.
- ⁴⁹ James Guthrie, 'Law, Property, and Provincialism in Dickinson's Poems and Letters to Judge Otis Phillips Lord', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 1996: 27.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid: 28.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid: 29.
- ⁵³ 'Editor's Literary Record', review of George Sand, *Mauprat*. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 40 (May 1870): 925-26.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ George Sand, *Mauprat* (Roberts Brothers, 1870), viii.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Franklin, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* Variorum Edition, Vol. II: 1016-1017.
- ⁵⁹ cf. August 1877 letter to Mrs. J.G.Holland written in pencil containing the fair copy of 'She laid her docile Crescent down' (poem 1396 in Johnson's edition) and two cuttings from newspaper, one of which originated from the Hampshire and Franklin Express published on the 12th of December 1856.
- ⁶⁰ Johnson, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Volume III: 966.
- ⁶¹ Cynthia Griffin Wolff, *Emily Dickinson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986): 401.
- ⁶² Franklin, ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* Variorum Edition, Vol. II, 1016-1017.

Padua blue between Katz and Kristeva: A naturalistic third way for visual studies

Ian Verstegen

ABSTRACT

Visual studies is at a crossroads. Partly triumphant, partly irrelevant, it is not clear exactly what edge its procedures bring to academic discourse. Rather than supporting a paradigm shift in the direction of new (neuro) materialities, this paper seeks to introduce a naturalizing strategy to connect a classic postmodern approach – Julia Kristeva’s to Padua blue – and David Katz’s phenomenology of colour. By using phenomenology as the bridge between experimental science and psychoanalytical speculation, I attempt to sketch what I believe is a more productive model for visual studies.

The 2011 Stone Theory seminar led by James Elkins bid ‘farewell to visual studies.’¹ According to Elkins, the most popular version of visual studies – the American model based on liberalized subjects and reliance on a few key thinkers – has failed. In an earlier introduction to his *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, Elkins pointed out that many visual studies departments are facing a number of problems:

visual studies is predominantly about film, photography, advertising, video and the internet. It is primarily not about painting, sculpture or architecture, and it is rarely about any media before 1950 except early film and photography. Visual culture might seem at first to be the study of popular art, but it also includes recent avant-garde art (Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger, the Guerrilla Girls) which is not at all popular in the way mass media are. Visual culture can include

documents (the visual appearance of passports, bureaucratic forms and tickets) but in general it sticks to art and design – it does not encompass engineering drawing, scientific illustration or mathematical graphics.²

Part of the failure of visual studies is precisely the realization that it really is a disciplinary question. Elkins would prefer that visual studies investigated scientific images, for example, but he argues that there are institutional factors that limit this. As it is really a hermeneutic field, it is just the latest method for cultural interpretation.

This article enacts a meta-analysis of the visual against the shortcomings of visual studies pointed out by Elkins. By using Giotto's Arena Chapel and its discussion by Julia Kristeva, I intend to demonstrate an urgent and timely approach to visual studies: a naturalistic third way between vision science and visual culture. By taking the example of the rich but speculative analysis of blue in the Arena Chapel by Kristeva and tempering it with research on colour modes, particularly work on film colour by the Gestalt psychologist David Katz (1935), I argue that a more truly interdisciplinary and therefore more powerful theory can be obtained. Kristeva's approach reinforces a closed humanistic discourse, and by opening it up to a larger audience, its insights can be shared by a wider public, which allows for their purchase beyond a small population of theorists.

I believe that if visual studies can become truly reflexive, it will no longer content to stand in the sidelines of the humanities, where dwindling resources reinforce the ascription of status. This third way in visual studies would seek a meta-stance, where it could break out of its institutional limitations. Visual studies would understand that when it habitually seeks out limited subjects, it is merely

reinforcing disciplinary boundaries. Its insights on seeing are not translatable to other disciplines that also talk about seeing. My aim in this article is to break down the boundaries that Kristeva's account perpetuates and challenge the dichotomy between theory and empirical knowledge. To do so, this article does not draft perceptual data to strengthen Kristeva's paradigm or use those same data to 'falsify her.'³ Instead, the aim is to capture Kristeva's insights in a way, that furthers an understanding of the *perceptual* foundation of her *cultural* concerns.⁴

This article first seeks to expound Kristeva's theory on the excessive joy of Giotto's blue, and then discuss related issues including: first, the phenomenological and semiotic status of colour relative to form, second, the special status of blue, and third, the phenomenon of colour without gradients. In the end, after pursuing a phenomenology of colour, we are in a better position to reflect on Giotto's joy because we can relate what is unique about colour to its experienced effects. I will conclude that, while Kristeva's specific tentative explanation for blue's special role in human subjectivity is untenable, 'film' colours can induce a feeling of a pure medium, under the proper conditions. I suggest that, rather than arguing from a fixed position in semiotics, psychoanalysis or biology, it is this middle ground with which we need to concern ourselves within a naturalistic visual culture.

In 1973, Julia Kristeva wrote an influential essay linking psychoanalysis, semiotics and art history, titled 'Giotto's Joy.' The title summarizes the role of Giotto's use of the color blue, tapping into the elementary drives in order to capture a unique emotion or excess of emotion, the well-known Lacanian *jouissance*. Interestingly, while many writers have used Kristeva's paradigm, some even relying on its semi-scientific claims relating to child development,

such as optical physiology and colour perception,⁵ there have been no critical discussions of its basic premises.

Kristeva begins her essay discussing the striking luminescence of the ultramarine blue that Giotto used for the walls of the Scrovegni chapel. The blue does not describe; it is not modelled, there is no shading. In the darkness of the chapel, the color literally challenges the figural narratives (relating to the parallel Lives of Mary and Christ). According to Kristeva, this blue in essence overrides the narrative order of the frescoes, creating a shortcut to one's unconscious drives. Narratives *represent*, while the blue is what is *unrepresentable*. The didactic quality of the frescoes is countered by Giotto's pure joy, or *Jouissance*, in colour: 'chromatic joy is the indication of a deep ideological and subjective transformation; it discreetly enters the theoretical signified, distorting and doing violence to it without relinquishing it'.⁶

Significantly, Kristeva's argument is based on a rational basis. We shall have occasion to consider the rhetoric of proof and scientific plausibility that she erects for her argument, but here we can simply say that her explanation is geometrical and ontogenetic: foveal vision of objects occurs in the centre of the retina and colour vision of environments is in the periphery, therefore, colour is de-centring. Furthermore, because peripheral rods develop first (and cones last), focused vision is implicated in the development of personal subjectivity from the instinctual (coloured) ground.

Here is the crux of Kristeva's argument:

centred vision – the identification of objects, including one's own image...comes into play after colour perceptions. The earliest appear to be those with short wavelengths, and therefore the colour blue.

Thus all colours, but blue in particular, would have a non-centred or decentering effect, lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation. They thereby return the subject to the archaic moment of its dialectic, that is, before the fixed, specular 'I', but while in the process of becoming this 'I' by breaking away from instinctual, biological (and also maternal) dependence.⁷

The major scientific plausibility for the theory is reinforced in a compact paragraph in which a number of assumptions are made.

In fact, Johannes Purkinje's law states that in dim light, short wavelengths prevail over long ones; thus, before sunrise, blue is the first colour to appear. Under these conditions, one perceives the colour blue through the rods of the retina's periphery (the serrated margin), while the central element containing the cones (the fovea) fixes the object's image and identifies its form. A possible hypothesis, following Andre Broca's paradox, would be that the perception of blue entails not identifying the object; that blue is, precisely, on this side of or beyond the object's fixed form; that it is the zone where phenomenal identity vanishes. It has also been shown that the fovea is indeed that part of the eye developed latest in human beings (sixteen months after birth).⁸

Kristeva reasons that because the rods are outside the fovea and the fovea develops late, it must be ontogenetically prior to the sense of self. Therefore, the remarkable effect that Giotto achieves is due to the very qualities of blue, which takes us out of ourselves as it were. Blue becomes a sort of primordial medium of mother and infant from which the child can differentiate itself after foveally

recognizing itself (via the mirror stage) and arrive at a sense of self. The self is the ego, the reasoned and socialized self, while the medium is the register of pure drives. When encountered later, such a drive-feeding blue is unadulterated pleasure, *jouissance*.

We must point out immediately that many details here are wrong, and were known to be wrong well before the essay was published in 1972. Principally, the statement that 'one perceives the colour blue through the rods of the retina's periphery' is not correct because the rods are not sensitive to colour at all. 'Scotopic' vision is vision in very low illumination in which only the rods are stimulated and this is achromatic, a fact known since the nineteenth century.⁹ Kristeva was in fact talking about mesopic vision, in which lower illumination has limited cone-based colour vision, privileging blue. Without this link, there is no way in which blue colour per se de-centres us to the degree that we lose our figural identity against a ground and return so to speak to a pure maternal medium. It is not that easy. What is questionable is that low wavelength colours – blue principally – therefore have some direct access to disposed drives.

It is not my primary purpose to correct some of these ideas except in passing. What is important is to understand Kristeva's rhetoric in this essay. There is both the reliance upon widely accepted truths and the assumption that they only take you so far. This is common to much continental philosophy in general and to Lacan more particularly. Michael Billig's recent analysis of Lacan's trail of citations of work on children's perception of themselves in the mirror – interestingly a subject for which there was also ample experimentation when Lacan was formulating his theory – reveals what Billig calls a 'misuse' of psychology, a sort of no-man's land between scientific authority and negation of psychology's findings.¹⁰

Of course psychoanalysis in general has alternated between claims of empirical truth and a 'deeper' truth, yet Kristeva's approach here is similar to Lacan's in invoking yet not worrying too much about following the chain of proof to the end.¹¹ I want to suggest that its style of argumentation is typical of the anti-naturalism that is found in speculative reasoning. In essence, it skips steps between base observations (physics, physiology) and encultured interpretation (subjectivity). What lies in the middle is careful phenomenology or the results of psychophysical reports that must be carefully linked. Were we to be sceptical about this skeptical mode of thinking, we could say that it reserves a space for interpretation, it jumps to the truly interesting. Indeed, it might be said that it makes the critic indispensable.

In this way, colour escapes representation but we have already seen in the discussion of mesopic vision that nothing is unusual about the colour blue per se. More likely it is the phenomenological qualities of such a blank and vivid background – in its proper low illumination – that have this remarkable effect. As I shall argue, Kristeva's ambivalence between hue – blue – or a qualitative experience of expanse, should be decided with the latter as blue is not the causal element. It is interesting that the way Kristeva's dichotomy not only opposes colour to form but to language itself.

In fact, I want precisely to move beyond the manipulation of simple facts into a 'what if?' scenario. Because such studied naiveté does a disservice to the complexity of scholarship, even as was true in the 1930s with Lacan's work on the mirror stage. I argue that, such an approach takes us back to the fundamentalist notion that we can all make up our minds by ourselves, we are all

capable of penetrating insight without consulting generations of collaborative work that has issued in a social medium of 'science.'

Colour is Different

Kristeva is on to a fundamental fact about colour. As an element of visual experience, colour *is* apprehended differently from form. Indeed, many will attest to the fact that colour is the most notoriously difficult and fugitive of all the attributes of visual works of art and above all paintings. Rudolf Arnheim has written that:

Shape lets us distinguish an almost infinite number of different individual objects. This is especially true for the thousands of human faces we can identify with considerable certainty on the basis of minute differences of shape. . . But if we tried to construct an alphabet of twenty-six colours rather than shapes, we would find the system unusable. The number of colours we can recognize reliably and with ease hardly exceeds six...This is so mainly because differences in degree are much harder to keep in mind than differences in kind.¹²

While reading Arnheim's quote, I find it useful to look at the stimulus for the so-called Stroop test, where words are coloured other than their actual colour (Fig. 2). The Stroop test is of interest to psychologists for showing the automation of reading against perceived characteristics, but juxtaposed with Arnheim's words, vividly suggests the theme he develops. Elsewhere Arnheim has written that, 'there is a ratio of perhaps 50:1 between what we can say about shape and what we can say about colour in the arts.'¹³ This means that all the problems faced by

the predominant description of forms are compounded when we enter the chromatic dimension.

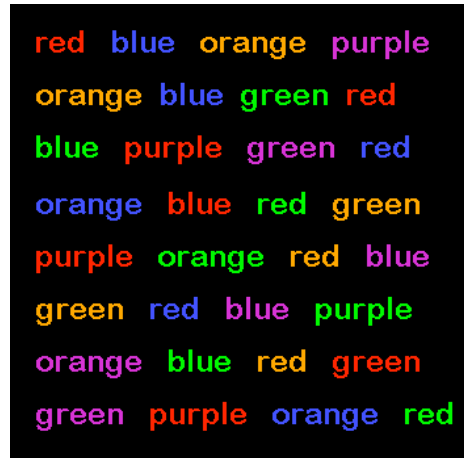


Fig. 2, Stroop Test

Historical debates bear out this situation. In the same way that we have a pretty good idea of Michelangelo's or Cézanne's figure style, we still stumble upon the characterization of their colour. Here we can make an obvious reference to the restoration of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling and note the obviously unchanged figural qualities in spite of changes in colour. In fact, beyond the question of the accuracy of the restoration, there are numerous competing theories and explanations for Michelangelo's bright *cangianti* colour combinations. When the time came to interpret the *meaning* of the newly-revealed colours of the ceiling, then controversy ensued. Edward Maeder attributed it to the imitation of oriental costume while John Shearman called it a hue-based form of modeling necessary for visibility.¹⁴

Similarly, if we consider such critical terms as *contrapposto* or 'serpentine' we can see that they are also relatively stable but colouristic terms like *chiaroscuro* or 'Venetian colour' are not. *Chiaroscuro* means for art historians anything from

mere shading to Leonardo's smoky *sfumato* to a most recent interpretation in terms of exaggerated light and dark contrasts as found in Raphael's late *Transfiguration* (Vatican, Pinacoteca).¹⁵ 'Venetian colour' is interpreted as pure hue, naturalistic lifelikeness and, indeed, *chiaroscuro*; Paul Hills' recent *Venetian Colour*¹⁶ will help clarify these various meanings but will not be the final word on the subject. We might clarify this by saying that although we disagree about the interpretation of form we agree about its description. With Michelangelo's or Cézanne's colouring, *chiaroscuro* or 'Venetian colour' we cannot even arrive at consistent, agreed-upon descriptions. I would like to see these phenomenal facts as foundational to, or at least contributing to, any semiotic perspective that is adopted.

In many respects colour has existed in semiotic discourse as an anti-sign. This is true for Roland Barthes¹⁷ and as we shall see it is also true for Kristeva. It would be uncharitable to claim that such theorists neglected a central theme in western intellectual history deriving from Aristotle, in gendering form as masculine and matter as feminine.¹⁸ But this seems partially true and in the case of Kristeva I will question what it means to semiologize at all, for if colour is unrepresentable then it would appear that semiotics is incomplete.¹⁹

The colour-form divide, in essence, encapsulates within visual theory a problem of interpretation in general: the forward progress of visual decoding on one hand, and the retreat to opaque untranslatability on the other. James Elkins describes this state as an oscillation between the 'pure picture' and the picture as substitute for writing.²⁰ More interesting is the way in which he sees this as a symptom for art history: 'I mean to suggest that the overwhelming majority of art historians entertain both ideals at once, so that they want both the possibility than an image might be purely visual and the potential that an image might probe legible or

otherwise clearly structured.²¹ A prime example for Elkins is the work of Louis Marin.²²

I introduce a semiotic circle (Fig. 3) to remind us of the difficulties encountered here. We need simply pick a spot on the circle and follow it clock-wise. Let us begin with the positive statement at the upper left that 'Pictures have their own logic.' It follows then that Pictures \neq Texts, and this leads to the further idea that 'Pictures present special difficulties to interpretation.' This can lead to relativism and the reversal of the distinction between Picture and Text to a pan-semiotic flattening of all Pictures into Texts, or Pictures = Text. This move, however, is once again positive in affirming a unified model, and so we begin again on a torturous path. Elkins is clear about the movement back and forth between interpretive possibilities and clearly has thrown in for the 'pure picture,' or in the semiotic circle (Fig. 3) 'pictures have their own logic.'²³

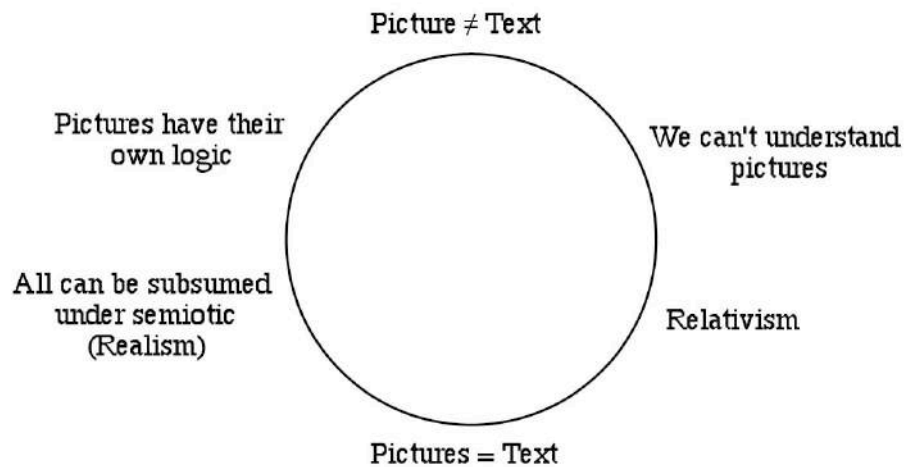


Fig. 3

Clearly, Kristeva is imbricated in this web of pictorial opacity and linguistic levelling. What I would draw attention to, is the rhetorical consequences of her

approach. It is the critic who simultaneously traces out – imperfectly – the contours of the phenomenon refusing description, as well as those other cases of semiotic capture. The author both dictates the successes and failures of her own system.

Blue

I would like to draw attention to what is principally a methodological issue of reflexivity in Kristeva. In order to move out of it, it is worthwhile examining more closely the claims made on behalf of the notion of blueness, both de-centred and ontogenetically primary. As noted, Kristeva relies on basic scientific facts, for example, Purkinje's standard law that lower wavelength colours are most visible in low illumination, that is, rod-dominated vision. In addition, she is concerned with the growth of the retina for her 'hypothesis,' referring to Mann's *The Development of the Human Eye*.²⁴

Kristeva's interest in blue is derived from both direct – phenomenological – and removed – scientific – facts. Walking into the Scrovegni chapel in modest illumination the blues pop out and predominate. From Mann, on the other hand, she knows the basic facts about wavelengths (physics) and the structure of the retina (biology). Clearly, the Padua example is special. We cannot expect the same effect of blue in broad daylight. Nor for that matter, would it be so interesting were it not for its interesting dialectical relationship with the narrative that is happening (Fig. 1). What I want to suggest is that blue was planned for such spaces and the artist controlled the effect. The result is both comforting and disturbing for the Kristevan account.



Fig. 1, Giotto di Bondone, *Rejection of Joachim's Sacrifice*, Cappella Scrovegni, Padua

One of the few people ever to discuss the Purkinje switch in relation to art history was the late John Shearman,²⁵ citing Ladd-Franklin,²⁶ who in a seminal article (that would have been accessible to Kristeva) reinterpreting Leonardo's *chiaroscuro*, noted that Purkinje's prediction ought to be kept in mind when studying the clear-cut subject of a painting. In the case of Leonardo's Louvre version of the *Madonna of the Rocks*, the conventional blue of the Virgin's mantle ensured that this eccentric figure would dominate the viewer's interest. In Giotto's case, the *buon fresco* ensured that he executed the work on site, guaranteeing

that the conditions under which we see the work were those also for the artist producing it.

There is no doubt that Purkinje's insight is useful in discussing Giotto's work or Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, for example, where the brilliant blue provides an intense and otherworldly background to the eschatological events depicted – because it would dominate the scene for the typical viewer, unassisted by modern floodlights. But Kristeva's account was about to be made problematic by Michael Baxandall's investigations into the cost and symbolic importance of precious pigments like ultramarine blue.²⁷ Although Kristeva believes that the phenomenological qualities of the blue were sufficient for it to compete with the narrative, this is more true than she thought. Its extreme cost was sufficient for people to pay attention to it.

But there is something important that this cultural clarification can add to Kristeva's argument. Giotto lived in a world that was not entirely content with pure expanses of expensive pigment or gold leaf but was becoming more interested in the intellectual content of the figural elements. Contemporaries called these blue or gold backgrounds *campi*, 'fields,' basically both applied colour and negative space, not too far from our own notion of figure and ground.²⁸ This will be useful in refining Kristeva's interpretation of colour and subjectivity because it means that the medieval mind was content with a balance of – in modern parlance – discursive and sensorial content. Or, to put it better, the blue or gold ground or any other precious material was itself a semiotic sign. This insight just brings to a head the whole limitation (and authorial elevation) of the master-critic who both crafts the system of interpretation yet gets to tell us when we cannot use it.

A World without Gradients

When we examine the problem of description relative to form and colour we can see that colour per se provides no problems. A coloured surface is no more difficult to perceive than the shape of the surface itself. As we have seen, what is so challenging is the myriad of cases of borderline conditions: transparencies, illuminations, reflections, and the like. The psychologist David Katz made the most fundamental progress for a phenomenology of colour with his distinction between film colours (*Oberflächenfarben*) and surface colours (*Flächenfarben*).²⁹ How do we describe the immaterial colour of the sky? According to Katz, film colour has no location or distance from the viewer. If asked to name it, it is indeterminate. The colour on the surface of an object, a surface colour, coincides with the surface itself. A film colour, on the other hand, always appears frontal to the viewer. Surface colours always appear compact whereas film colours are 'spongy.'

Film colours are not often seen although their qualities can be found in varying degrees in everyday, practical experience. We can achieve a film colour by viewing reality through an aperture, and therefore bounding a colour without context, or also by removing more and more cues to colour itself. If we enter an environment with no gradients, a so-called *Ganzfeld* or with stabilized retinal images, our experience changes from the perception of distinct things, of determinate colour in a determinate illumination, to a gray fog.³⁰ The sky and a fluorescent light bulb share this filmy quality.

A remarkable example of a film colour – the 'glare effect' – was devised recently and has been studied extensively³¹ (Fig. 4). He simply enclosed a figure with a gradient of brightness that taps into some primitive mechanism of the visual

system to provide the illusion of illumination. As a printed illusion it is even more remarkable and is still challenging vision scientists for an explanation. Illusory film colour appears in engravings in halos, as depicted sources of illumination and some transparent surfaces, and even the gold ground of Medieval painting or the ultramarine background of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (Sistine Chapel, Vatican) and, of course, Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel.

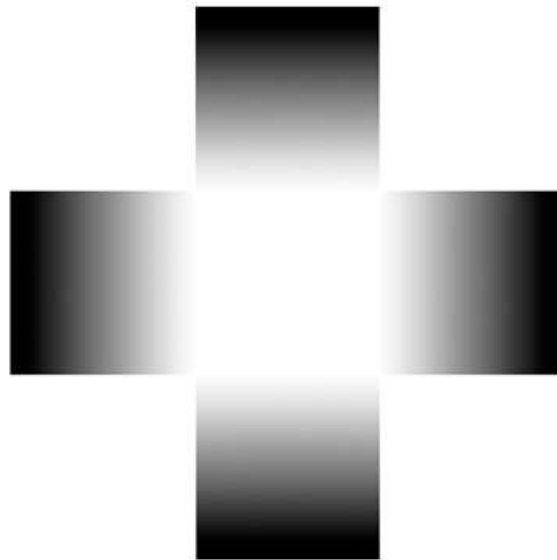


Fig. 4, 'Glare' Illusion

We need the vocabulary to describe these perceptual effects without prematurely denying their semiological or subjective import. But this 'filminess' is only one of the most compelling of the qualitative markings of colour phenomena.

Epistemology proper has lacked proper descriptive tools, working as it has with an Aristotelian legacy of substances and qualities.³² Some attempts belong to the phenomenology of colour and the phenomenology of colour in art. An early example of colour ontology was provided by a disciple of Husserl, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, who was particularly influential with a phenomenological

tradition in German aesthetics.³³ Referring to the ontology we derive from phenomenology, she wrote that, 'Material being *is* substantial fullness in space. And it is precisely the manner in which this fullness is put together in space which leads to the range of different modalities of material constitution (§ 122)'. Wolfgang Schöne's book on light in painting further elaborated on Katz and Conrad-Martius by providing an even richer taxonomy of light and illumination.³⁴ Schöne usefully distinguished between *Eigenlicht* (self-light, light incarnate in colour, typical of Medieval painting), *Standortlicht* (positional light, the light under which the objects appears to our eyes), *Beleuchtungslicht* (projected light, typical of modern painting) and in terms of illumination *Leuchtlicht* (source of light) and *Bildlicht* (light emanating from the picture).

Film colour and other little-noted colour effects only make themselves evident to the viewer who patiently attends to them. While colour, like other aspects of colour perception, can 'pop out,' and become salient features of recognition (as in extreme hue and brightness differences relative to the rest of the visual field), generally this is not the case. Are these then 'marks' (Elkins) that semiologizing cannot subsume? At first, but then it is possible that led by the phenomenological spirit we might coin neologisms in a Heideggerian way, to somehow capture the quality of some experience. This will be appropriate for a new experience or environment; the quality of light in Greece,³⁵ or a never-seen painting, that demands some verbal rendering.

On the other hand, the seeming transparent realism of another experience or a convincing realist image like a Vermeer might lull us into a false sense of obligation to simple description; The figuredness of description seems to correlate with the figuredness of the painted form. But as in the case of Vermeer a restless interrogation of the image can shake us of a false sense of

transparency. Thus Kathryn Tuma points to the vermilion ‘patch’ (or shall we call it a blob?) of the *Lacemaker* (c. 1669-70, Paris, Louvre) and calls it ‘the price tag of mimetic conviction,’ which Vermeer ‘sells with success.’³⁶

Now we can return to Kristeva’s speculations about how blue escapes representation and, ultimately, undergirds subjectivity. From our discussion we know that it is not blue per se that accomplishes this best (although the Purkinje shift indeed makes the blue especially striking without artificial illumination). Kristeva was onto something because form encompasses things but colour encompasses form. A minimal figural situation is a figure on a ground, a figure in some medium. Colour is this medium, pure space or extensity, and there is nothing more fundamental than this.

The previous discussion of film colours suggested that the brilliant blue painted on the Scrovegni chapel’s walls created a classic case of ‘film’ colour, with no microstructure and spatiality to it. Indeed, film colours obtained by the use of a Ganzfeld or stabilized retinal images are the radicalization of a film colour, because they lack all characteristics of space perception, becoming instead a pure, undifferentiated fog. What is significant is that this experience is very close to other cases of sensory deprivation that also result in a sense of destroyed spatial framework – snowblindness (arctic whiteout) or the pilot’s disorientation after prolonged periods in clouds.

Modern day Giottos have taken advantage of the experiences found in the Ganzfelder, sensory deprivation tanks and anechoic chambers to explore the aesthetic experience of losing organizational frameworks. Artists like Olafur Eliasson, James Turrell, and Mariko Mori take us out of ourselves. This experience is useful because it thematizes the origin of subjectivity. This is not so

much due to providing a short circuit to primordial drives but because film color experiences challenge the boundary between the phenomenal self and its surrounding medium. Normally, a sense of subjectivity arises in the self-caused gaps – blinks of the eye for example – that interrupt our objective grip of reality. The filmy environment minimizes the contribution of the environment, making gaps less visible. Absent the boundary, our self ‘fills-in’ the environment, not unlike the way in which colours merge in experiments on colour and filling-in or equiluminance.³⁷

Conclusion: Toward a Naturalistic Visual Studies

The foregoing analysis sees phenomenological (Katz) and psychoanalytic (Kristeva) perspectives as equally valuable, neither with any inherent explanatory precedence over the other. What I have insisted upon, however, is that they must be correlated in some way. Explanatory discourses cannot be cut off from or, worse, mystify another science. Kristeva’s relationship to physiological science is of this nature whereas I have demonstrated a surprising reinforcement of her ideas in psychology from the gestalt school, namely David Katz’s phenomenology of colour appearances.

The model of visual studies that I have outlined through the example of Giotto’s blue is one that takes a number of basic propositions to heart and seeks to be:

- Rhetorically self-reflexive about the claims that it is making.
- Challenges itself to provide nesting or upwardly or downwardly compatible sets of conditions toward a comprehensive explanation (e.g. film colour as a precondition for features of subjectivity).

- Seeks, if possible, *proximal* causes rather than opt for jumps in the explanatory structure (e.g. colour phenomenology *before* subjectivity).

These features, I contend, are required for visual studies to retain relevance within the academic community. Only by shunning a closed form of discourse and embracing the stakes of varying knowledge-claims in the university can the worth of a mode of visual analysis for all visual culture be apparent.

¹http://www.stonesummertheoryinstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=63, accessed July 16, 2011.

² Elkins, J. 'Preface' to the book *A Skeptical Introduction to Visual Culture*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1 (2002): 94.

³ The debunking spirit is amply demonstrated in Sokal and Bricmont's *Intellectual Impostures*. (London: Profile Books, 1998), in which Kristeva has her own chapter. This article follows more the spirit of Christopher Norris' (2000) review of the 'Sokal' affair, that although correct in some instances, its overall effect was the retrenchment by some of the moderate left away from science.

⁴ Davis, W. *A General Theory of Visual Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁵ i.e. Crary, J. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001): 339.

⁶ Kristeva, J. Giotto's Joy. In *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980): 224.

⁷ *Ibid* : 225.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Schultze, M. 'Zur anatomie und physiologie der retina,' *Archiv der Mikroposche Anatomisch*, 2 (1866): 175-286; Kries, J. von. Über die Natur gewisser mit den psychischen Vorgängen verknüpfter Gehirnzustände. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* 8 (1895): 1-33; Parinaud, H. *La vision*. (Paris: Octave Doin, 1898).

¹⁰ Billig, M. 'Lacan's Misuse of Psychology', *Theory Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 1-26.

¹¹ Ricoeur, P. 'The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977): 835-871.

Robinson, P. ed. *Freud and His Critics*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹² Arnheim, R. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974): 333.

¹³ Arnheim, R. 'Colors - Irrational and Rational', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, (1974): 150.

¹⁴ Both in Pietrangeli, C. ed. *The Sistine Ceiling: A Glorious Restoration*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992).

¹⁵ Hall, M. *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Hills, P. *Venetian Colour: 1200-1580*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

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- ¹⁷ Batchelor, D. *Chromophobia*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).
- ¹⁸ Reilly, P. 'Writing Out Color in Renaissance Theory', *Genders* 12 (1991): 77-99; Summers, D. 'Form and Gender', in Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (eds.) *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994); Sohm, P. 'Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia', *Renaissance Quarterly* (1995): 759-808; Jacobs, F. Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: femmina, mascolo, grazia. *Art Bulletin* 82 (2000): 51-67; Campbell, E. 'The Gendered Paragone in Late Sixteenth-Century Art Theory: Francesco Bocchi and Jacopo Pontormo's S. Lorenzo Frescoes', *Word and Image* 16 (2000): 227-238.
- ¹⁹ Kristeva famously opposes semiotic and symbolic language in her *Revolution in Poetic Vision* (1984). Of course, there the semiotic – aligned to the drive-related idea of colour and *jouissance* discussed here – is what motivates the subject. The issue really here is whether the theorization of the subject is served by an openly available element that is, once again, a short circuit to subjectivity. Is it that available?
- ²⁰ Elkins, J. *The Domain of Images*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- ²¹ *Ibid.*: 55.
- ²² i.e. Marin, L. *To Destroy Painting*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- ²³ Elkins, J. 'Marks, Traces, Traits, Contours, Orli, and Splendores: Nonsemiotic Elements in Pictures', *Critical Inquiry* 21 (1995): 822-60; Bal, M. 'What do we Want Pictures to Be?' *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 590-602.
- ²⁴ Mann, C. *The Development of the Human Eye*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928).
- ²⁵ Shearman, J. 'Leonardo's Use of Colour and Chiaroscuro', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 25 (1962): 13-47.
- ²⁶ Ladd-Franklin, C. *Colour and Colour Theories*. (London, 1932).
- ²⁷ Baxandall, M. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).
- ²⁸ Stumpel, J. 'On Grounds and Backgrounds: Some Remarks about Composition in Renaissance Painting', *Simiolus* 18 (1988): 219-243.
- ²⁹ Katz, D. *The World of Color*. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1935); c.f. Stroll, A. *Surfaces*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1988).
- ³⁰ Metzger, W. 'Zur Phänomenologie des homogen Ganzfelds', *Psychologische Forschung* 13 (1930): 6-29; Hochberg, J., Triebel, W. & Seaman, G. 'Color Adaptation under Condition of Homogeneous Visual Stimulation (Ganzfeld)', *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 41 (1951): 153-9.
- ³¹ Zavagno, D. 'Some New Luminance-Gradient Effects'. *Perception* 28 (1999): 835-938.
- ³² Mandelbaum, M. *Philosophy, Science and Sense-Perception: Historical and Critical Studies*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964): 223; Hatfield, G. 'The Reality of Qualia', *Erkenntnis* 66 (2007): 157.
- ³³ Conrad-Martius, H. 'Realontologie', *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 6, (1923): 159-333; Dittmann, L. 'Bemerkungen zur Farbenlehre von Hedwig Conrad-Martius', *Hefte des Kunsthistorischen Seminars der Universität München* 5 (1959): 20-28.
- ³⁴ Schöne, W. *Über das Licht in der Malerei*. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1954); Neumeyer, A. 'Review of Wolfgang Schöne, *Über das Licht in der Malerei*', *Art Bulletin*, 37 (1955): 301-4.
- ³⁵ See Hugo von Hoffmanstahl's description of the light of Greece in *Griechenland (Picturesque Greece*, New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1922, v-vi): 'It is dry, close-fisted, expressive, and strange as a fearful emaciated countenance. But on it shines a light the like of which the eye has never seen before, a light that fills it with such joy that it would seem the eye had first learnt the meaning of seeing to-day. This light is at the same time inexpressibly mild. It shows up clearly the slightest detail with such distinctness, a gentle distinctness that sets the heart beating higher, and it surrounds that which is nearest – I can but use a paradox – with a luminous enveilment.'

³⁶ Tuma, K. 'Un dentelle s'abolit:' The Invisibilities of Vermilion in Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*, *Qui Parle* 7 (1994): 28.

³⁷ Pessoa, L., Thompson, E. & Noe, A. 'Finding out about Filling-in: A Guide to Perceptual Completion for Visual Science and the Philosophy of Perception', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 21 (1998): 723-748, 796-802; Lehar, S. *The World in Your Head*. (Mahwah: L. Erlbaum, 2003); West, M., Spillmann, L. Cavanagh, P., Mollon, J. & Hamlin, S. 'Susanne Liebmann in the Critical Zone', *Perception* 25 (1996): 1451–1495.

I am grateful to Gary Hatfield for a decisive discussion of the Purkinje effect that helped form my argument.

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From Vacuity to Motion Pictures: the Cinematic Interval

Nawel Sebih

Abstract

In cinema, an interval is what separates two photograms or two shots. Vertov defines it as the passage from a shot to another, creating spatio-temporal transformations that participate in the harmonization of the film. In order to understand and specify the characteristics of the interval in cinema, we propose to start by analyzing the various concepts of the interval in Eastern and Western philosophy. Then, we will compare the differences and analogies of their philosophical meanings to the cinematic ones. This way, we seek to extend and deepen knowledge of this term in cinema.

Introduction

Cinematic movement is primarily based on a lightening discontinuity called the phi phenomenon. This term describes the complex mental operation thanks to which a light beam interrupted 50 times per second seems to be continuous for the viewer. Paradoxically, this luminous discontinuity creates an impression of continuous movement in the absence of any real movement. In addition to this luminous discontinuity, cinematic images are also based on the discontinuity between frames located on the roll film and on the discontinuity between shots, created by the montage that the utilisation of continuity errors, jump-cuts or ellipses emphasised. However, despite these many and varied types of gaps that punctuate the apparent unity of a film, its illusory continuum of reality has often been emphasised, very early in the history of cinema theories. Indeed, the French theorist André Bazin maintained that if 'we try to see the ruptures imposed by the camera on the continuous unfolding of the event represented, and try to

understand clearly why we normally take no notice of them, we realize that we tolerate them because they nevertheless allow an impression to remain of continuous and homogeneous reality'.¹ This is the reason why Bazin considers that the ontological dimension of cinema lies in its capacity to present a continuous reality. Thus, montage should simply be reduced to an absolute minimum, or remain at least as discreet as possible in order to make invisible any form of discontinuity that could interfere with this illusion of the continuum of reality specific to the cinematic medium. This then introduces the notions of 'transparent' cinema and forbidden montage (*montage interdit*) although the montage will not need to be strictly speaking prohibited. Each action 'could be represented by means of a succession of discontinuous film units (that is to say "shots" for Bazin) but only on the condition that this discontinuity should also be masquerade as much as possible'² thanks to the use of link shots, sequence shots and also field depth. Indeed, Bazin advocated a transparent kind of cinema from which all forms of intervals were excluded in order to focus on its capacity for continuity. It should be noted here that the cinematic use of the term interval more frequently refers to the cut between two shots rather than to the interstice between two frames. Aumont and Marie describe the term interval by referring to the French word *béance*, which can be translated as gap or void, and which they consider as not only the difference between two successive shots but also as what makes the transition between them possible.

Thus, filmmakers following Bazinian thought sealed any form of interval with continuity shots and matching actions in order to achieve their cinematic purpose. Part of their talent was based on their ability to maintain the illusion of continuity and to hide each gap that could contradict the apparent fullness of their film. Of course, not everyone followed this line: Soviet cinema for example, like modern cinema later, consistently destroyed this illusion of continuity. As Aumont explains, cinematic theory has always been divided into two major tendencies : one tendency considering cuts and discontinuity, i.e. intervals between shots, as the essential dynamic element of the cinematic language mostly incarnated by Soviet and Modern Cinema and a second tendency 'based on a devaluation of montage in and of itself and a strict submission of its effects to the narrative instance or to the realistic representation of the world, which is seen as the cinema's essential goal'³ personified by classic cinema. Thus, while Hollywood, considering any form of gaps as proof of the non-continuity of *montage*, always tried to keep intervals hidden via continuity editing, or the rational cut that 'forms part of one of the two sets which it separates (the end of one or beginning of the other)'⁴ in order to assure a continuous and closed world, Soviet and modern cinema has welcomed interstices, gaps and discontinuity. To split or to splice: that seems to be the question. However, with this question comes an affirmation: the presence intervals, which each film chooses to show or to hide. Indeed, splitting and splicing claim, deliberately or not, the existence of a discontinuity. Thus, could we not consider that the essence of cinema is precisely discontinuous, intervallic and porous? To answer this question, we must first understand what has been and still

is understood as the instigator of discontinuity in the framework of cinema. To this end, we will first address the notion of interval by examining how its definition has influenced the work of East Asian filmmakers such as Ozu or Mizoguchi. We will then contrast this with its Western meaning, encompassing both cinematic theory, and ancient Greek philosophy from which its definition draws its source in the analysis. In the light of theoretical thoughts issued from cinematic, comic and narrative theories, we will finally explore the notions of ellipsis and jump cut, as specific forms of cinematic intervals. Thus, we hope to demonstrate that, if the ontological basis of cinema lies, according to Bazin, on its faculties to reproduce the continuum of reality, this illusion of plenitude is nevertheless rooted in a perpetual discontinuity, a form of intervallic vacuity that we will try to define.

The Interval in East Asian Cinema

The term interval can be understood spatially as the distance between two points, but also temporally as the time between two moments and, finally, in musical terms as the gap between two notes played. In other words, this term can respectively designate a gap, a link of continuity or discontinuity and an abstract relation. However, the interval is mostly similar to what we commonly consider as an empty part: a spatial, temporal or sonorous void. Focusing on a historical notion of the interval, mention should be made of the Japanese concept of *ma*. The Japanese language character for *ma* 間:

is made up of two elements, the enclosing radical meaning gate or door (門) and the inner character meaning either sun (日) or moon [月]. The visual image or character, therefore, suggests a light shining through a gate or a door. If we were to take the gate itself as representing the things or phenomena and events of the world, the opening in the gates becomes a *ma* or interval between the things.⁵

Generally speaking, this term refers to the occidental definition of the interval: in that it is considered as a vacant space between two things, or the distance between two objects or actions. It links together the notions of space, time and space-time by organising the decomposition of movement. The difference between *ma* and the occidental definition of the interval lies in the fact that the Japanese concept also represents minor changes and major transformations. More particularly in the field of music, dance or theatre, it has a rhythmic meaning that is defined as a pause separating two sounds, two gestures, and two dialogues. It is simultaneously the silence preceding the actor's entrance on stage in Noh theatre and the cut which divides the Haiku into two parts, while also being the canvas that remains blank in a painted landscape: '*ma* is seen in the intervals of non-action in the Noh drama, the empty spaces in haiku poetry, and the silent pauses in the films of Ozu, as well as the blank or negative spaces in Japanese inkwash painting, architecture, and sand gardening'⁶ Indeed, as its concept is at the heart of artistic creations, so architecture, visual art, music and theatre, are called *ma* arts. In this respect, some Japanese artists structure their work around this

concept. As mentioned, the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu is one of them. Ozu's films often show 'empty shots, which generally show quiet, natural scenes that contribute nothing to the narrative line or character development and that we can easily assimilate to the *ma* concept'⁷. As David Bordwell points out, the concept of *ma* 'privileges sheer empty spots, so that *ma* is not opposed to 'void' as 'space' may be in the West (...) All of these implications can be seen in the Japanese aesthetic practices (...) And all offer tempting analogies with aspects of Ozu's work'.⁸

Ozu's films are indeed punctuated with shots that could be considered as being empty because of the absence of any actions, sounds or characters. This vacuity, whether it is of a spatial, temporal, aural or narrative nature, acts as an empty interval in order to create a sort of breathing space in the temporal continuity of the film or a pause in counterpoint to the fullness of the constant projection of the film. By appearing to be still images, these empty shots also remind us of frames, the individual components of motion pictures. Taking *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947) in black and white and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962) in colour, both directed by Ozu, as examples, we can observe several shots emptied of actions and figures. The narrative continuity is temporarily broken, interrupted by these vacant images. As the silence gives rhythm to a conversation or participates in the architecture of a musical composition, these empty shots without characters or action, punctuate the visual and narrative composition of Ozu's films. These shots that Alain Bergala calls *plans vides*⁹ are made to mark a pause, a musical

sigh in the continuity of the film); they act as freeze frame shots, creating an interval of transition that stops the temporal flux of the film. These *plans vides* can also be seen, for example, in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Miss Oyu* (1951), which shows several shots quite similar to Ozu's vacant ones, where we can identify this transitional interval so specific to the *ma* concept. These suspended moments create interstitial moments in the film's narrative. According to Aumont, the whole notion of *ma* in Mizoguchi's work should be understood as the organising concept that allows changes between shots. They determine the appearance and disappearance of the characters and emphasise the function of cuts by the film to adapt to the change of shot. Indeed, these empty shots prolong the brief intervals between shots, and articulate the diegetic world. Furthermore, this intervallic void inside the fullness of the narration frees space and time from their narrative functional roles, by suspending the reading of the film. These *plans vides* unmistakably act on the structure of the film: they operate as a contemplative interval between two narrative sequences, by following the *ma* concept. Indeed, 'although *ma* may be objectively located as intervals in space and time, ultimately it transcends this and expresses a deeper level. Indeed, it takes us to a boundary situation at the edge of thinking and the edge of all processes of locating things by naming and distinguishing'.¹⁰

The Western Cinematic definition of Interval

Having addressed the oriental notion of the interval, we will now consider its occidental definition. In the West, the ancient Greek philosophers addressed the question of interval in terms of space and according to the school of thought they belonged to. They formulated a series of questions dealing with the relationships between space and matter, the paradoxes of continuity and infinity, and the existence of the void. The Pythagoreans were the first to imagine a vacant interval that differentiates the nature of both objects and numbers, functioning as ‘a principle of the unlimited that separates out the limited’¹¹ in order to allow the transformation from a unitary whole to a multiplicity. The Greek Atomism of Leucippus and Democritus, who were contemporaries of the Pythagoreans and considered the world as only made of atoms and void, described the void as something not so different the Pythagorean vacant interval. Indeed, as Walter Burkert points out: ‘[T]he “void” of the atomists is not a single, endless space, but the plurality of interstices which make divisibility and plurality possible’.¹² In the framework of cinema, this philosophical definition of an intervallic void could be, on one hand, understood as a diegetic vacant space that separates or brings closer together figures on screen. On the other hand, the interstices of the Atomist void that enabled the juxtaposition and dispersion of atoms, like the Pythagorean vacant interstice separating units could be also equated to the cinematic intervals appearing on a reel of film that separate but also link film frames, and then shots, together.

Here, we must however differentiate two kinds of cinematic interval. First, there are the intervals specific to the process of recording moving images that allow, during the projection of the film, to create the illusion of movement to be created by linking together the twenty-four immobile frames composing a moving image of one second's duration. Secondly, the duration of the cuts is the result of an editing process and creates continuity or discontinuity between shots, that is, a series of different frames. From a material point of view (on the film reel after the movie has been edited), these two kinds of interval are the same; their differences are of an intellectual and perceptive nature. If the cut's duration is the most visible and obvious, the intervals composing a series of frames are the most pervasive, although they are invisible during projection. Indeed, according to Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction*, a hundred-minutes of any film plunges the audience into darkness for forty minutes because of all the intervals composing the film.¹³ However, these two kinds of intervals are both vacant interstices maintaining the unity of the film. They are at the origin of internal transformations, which participate in the harmonisation of the film and create meaning.

Vertov, who created the theory of intervals, defines an interval as the passage from one shot to another, creating spatio-temporal transformations. His use and definition of interval is not determined to create or maintain the illusion of continuity; on the contrary, the productive gap organises the shift between shots. For the Russian filmmaker, the raw material of cinema is not the movement itself, but the intervals where the movement occurs. He illustrates this idea clearly in his famous film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which shows how his assistant

editor, Yelizaveta Svilova, creates moving images from a series of immobile film frames. By showing the passage from the roll of film to its projection, Vertov tries to give the audience the theoretical resources it needs to understand the mechanism of motion pictures. This sequence emphasises the role of the interval in the context of moving images. Indeed, even if our perception leads us to see movement in cinema instead of motionlessness, cinema is still based on a succession of still images in the form of film frames. For, even though Deleuze dismisses Bergson's idea explained in *Creative Evolution* that 'you can bring two instants or two positions together to infinity; but movement will always occur in the interval between the two'¹⁴, we want to highlight the importance of the intervals in the context of the creation of cinematic movement.

As Thierry Kuntzel points out, there are indeed two ways of conceiving a film. First, there is the Deleuzian way of considering the film as one movement-image, which only takes into consideration the projected film. Secondly, and this is the reading we want to emphasize here, there is the Bergsonian approach that claims that 'the movement slips through the interval' (Bergson 308) because the film is composed of motionlessness pictures. This concept only takes into account the film-strip. However, as Kuntzel wrote: 'the *filmic* which will be the object of the filmic analysis therefore will be found neither on the side of motion not on the side of stillness, but between them, in the generation of the projected film by the film-strip, in the negation of this film-strip by the projected film'.¹⁵ Thus, the major difference between the film-strip and the projected films lies in the conception of cinematic movement. Christian Metz, when talking about the projected film, maintains that

motion cannot be reproduced or represented 'because movement is never material but always visual, to reproduce its appearance is to duplicate its reality'¹⁶ however, considering the film-strip, '[C]inema works by obliterating the photogram, annihilating that which is static. It appears to extract a magical continuity from what is acknowledged to be discontinuous'.¹⁷ Thus, in accepting that cinema gives us 'an intermediate image, to which movement is not appended or added'¹⁸ and that 'the movement on the contrary belongs to the intermediate image as immediate given'¹⁹ when talking about the spectatorial reception of the film, we should emphasise the key role that intervals play in the creation of movement-images at a more technical but also narrative level. If the cinematic interval is what technically creates the perception of movement on the film-strip, the motionlessness of frames can also be pointed out during the projected film by the use of freeze frame shots or strong slow motion. We should also consider that if the freeze frame such as the one at the end of François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962) highlights the motionlessness of photograms, these time-images—the freeze frame shots—are still made of a series of film frames just like movement-images are. Furthermore, the narrative role of intervals can also be emphasised via the use of ellipsis, for example, jump cut or fade-out, indicating their presence within the narration itself, as we shall see later. These intervals are also the places where space and time can be manipulated: they allow the reconstruction of a mixed space that does not take into account our spatio-temporal laws and can, for instance, in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalgia* (1983), amalgamate Italian scenes to Russian ones thanks to a simple play of shot/reverse shot.

Staged Intervals

Let us pause to remember here that cinematic space is always constructed. The viewer mentally creates continuity thanks to different spatial fragments shown by the film. This interval can then become diegetic by being staged. Therefore, the interval does not only appear on the film-strip but also within the diegetic space, and thus on the projected film, as for example in the *The Divide* (Xavier Gens 2011). Intervals are here re-created via material elements, which take place in the diegetic world. These material intervals are made of visual obstacles passing in front of which the camera passes through thanks to a sideways tracking shot, which allows it to move from one place to another. Objects, walls and spaces plunged into twilight become dark masses in order to create new forms of intervals. Even if the scene seems to be filmed using a sequence shot, these diegetic and material intervals are still the places where the real intervals—the ones coming from the *montage* techniques—take place. Indeed, this *mise-en-scène* allows the diegetic space to be reconstructed in order to give the impression that the space shown is continuous and that the scene was recorded using a sequence shot when it was in fact edited. To some extent, this is a horizontal version of what vertically happens on the film reel, only here the intervals are illustrated by concrete and material dark obstacles, which are like artificial partitions separating different spaces. Just as film frames isolate images, every space here encloses a character in a room and isolates him from the other characters. If we consider that this is the horizontal version of a vertical process when talking about the film-strip, the sideways tracking shot still recreates the

continuous scrolling of the film.²⁰

In a similar but more complex process, Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Blue* (1993) shows diegetic intervals, which appear again through the dark areas of each space shown on screen. The tracking shots, which seem to make circular movements, allow the sequence to link different small microcosms together by simultaneously isolating them from each by a dark interval, in the same way as montage. These gaps are not very different to the cosmic void conceived by the ancient philosophers. Indeed, the Stoics believed in the existence of a void located outside of our world and forming a coherent whole. While the world appeared limited to them, the void that surrounds it is unlimited and can contract and dilate when matter needs it to do so. Like the Atomic void, the Stoic one circles the full and unitary world. Here, the different microcosms that these diegetic intervals separate are like islets that the ocean, or the black void emptied of any figures, would connect. Following the ancient concept of the cosmic void, these different scenes are like lonely planets linked by a cosmic void. Music reinforces the abolition of the borderlines between these worlds and participates in their reunification, as the title of the theme music in *Blue*, *The Unification of Europe*, composed by Zbigniew Preisner, seems to indicate. As intervals in the framework of montage link shots together and create new spaces, these dark interstices allow spaces and characters to be joined together through a lyrical continuity.

Comics Gutters and Cinematic Intervals

While we have addressed the similarity between the film reel and some aesthetic or scenic compositions (Gens, Kieslowski), we should also consider the similarity between film frames or intervals and the narrative system specific to comic strips. The first element to consider is the obvious commonality of the the story board between cinema and comics. After the film narrative has been fragmented by the *découpage*, the film is then divided into a series of drawn images. Moreover, the film reel is composed of a series of still images separated by blank intervals in the same way as cartoons strips. In the context of comics, Scott McCloud uses the term gutter to describe these strips separating each comic image. These spaces between comic panels—or gutters—‘fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. However, closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality’.²¹ This closure can be assimilated to what we call ellipsis, allowing the spectator to link the different sequences together and mentally create a continuous diegetic world: ‘[H]ere, in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea’.²² Given that McCloud claims that closure and the gutter compose the original grammar of comics, can we assert that ellipsis and interval are also the grammar of cinema? As McCloud explains, in the framework of cinema, ‘closure takes place continuously—twenty-four times per second (...) aided by the persistence of vision’.²³ Cinema is indeed a sequential art, which needs fragmentation and juxtaposition to deliver its whole sense. An isolated element, such as the film frame, the shot or even the sequence, would not

be complete without being linked to other fragments. Thus, cinema and comics can both be considered as arts of interval and ellipsis (or hiatus as Noel Burch prefers to call this cut between the temporal continuity of two shots). If we can define the difference between two images as spatial when talking about the comic-strip gutter and as spatiotemporal in the narrative frame of moving images, it should nonetheless be noted that the film reel is a space not so different from that of the drawing board, certainly more reduced but nevertheless a space. Thus, comics and cinematic intervals are, technically and materially speaking, spatial. They both acquire a temporal dimension only when images are read together. Part of the major difference between them is that moving pictures impose a specific temporality on the reception of the film. The ceaseless scrolling of the film stages a time over which the spectator has no control. In the framework of comics, where the reader chooses the time needed to read every image, this temporal dimension of the interval is less dictated by the very image. Nevertheless, these cinematic or comic blanks are where time, space and movement take place, where ellipses occur.

Ellipses: Technical and Diegetic intervals

While it is obvious that every interval is not an ellipsis, the cinematic interval in the framework of the film-strip still works as an ellipsis that makes the perception of movement possible. The ellipsis is located in the vacant interval between two slightly different frames. This minor difference contained by the intervallic void is filled by the *défilement* of still images, misleading our perception. Indeed, we do

not see the full temporality of every moment shown. There is an infinitesimal gap between each frame; and this is where ellipsis appears. Nacache defines this form of technical ellipsis as invisible and subliminal, but also as the preparatory phase to the narrative ellipsis.²⁴ In this respect, the narrative ellipsis, which takes place during the projected film and within the diegetic world, can be considered as the strong and narrative form of the technical ellipsis of the film-strip. Indeed, the temporal hiatus of the technical interval, usually hidden by the projected film, is staged and highlighted to become a narrative ellipse. The vacuity and the lack are now exhibited. The term ellipsis itself (from the Greek word *elleipein*: to lack or to miss) includes the notion of absence: there is a void where there should be something. In narratology, Genette talks about ellipsis when some events of a story are missing in the text: the text slips from an event to a new one while it asks the reader to fill the gap in narrative continuity, in order to maintain the illusion of a fulfilled narrative world. He differentiates *explicit* ellipses, that 'arises either from an indication (definite or not) of the laps of time they elide, which assimilates them to very quick summaries of the "some years passed" type',²⁵ from *implicit* ellipses, 'that is, those whose very presence is not announced in the text and which the reader can infer only from some chronological lacuna or gap in narrative continuity'²⁶. He also defines a third ellipsis, the hypothetical one which is 'impossible to localize, even sometimes impossible to place in any spot at all, and revealed after the event'.²⁷ In addition, in his book *Theory of Film Practice*, Burch introduces, a cinematic difference between the measurable ellipsis and the indefinite one that is quite similar to Genette's one. Burch's measurable ellipsis

involves:

an omission of a time-span that is not only perceptible but measurable as well. The occurrence and the extent of the omission are necessarily always indicated by a more or less noticeable break in either visual or an auditory action that is potentially capable of being completely continuous.²⁸

By contrast, the indefinite ellipsis may cover an hour or a decade, 'the exact extent of the temporal omission being measurable only through the aid of something 'external'—a line of dialogue, a title, a clock, a calendar, a change in dress style, or the like'.²⁹ These two forms of ellipsis may be considered as different but, at the same time, they are both of a narrative nature. From the micro-ellipsis within a same sequence or a macro-ellipsis, revealing that a longer time is missing, a similarity exists. However, some ellipses more notably accentuate both the quality and the meaning of this narrative blank: for example, ellipsis censoring scenes of murder or rape. Ellipsis, therefore, becomes then the site of a horrific void that the imagination of the spectator has to fill to be able to visualise the atrocity the film failed to show. Marcel Martin defines all these ellipses as dramatic, although he differentiates them from a new, more structural kind of ellipsis obtained through *découpage* and *montage*. *Découpage* requires the author to choose whether an event will appear on screen. Thus, the film emerges as a result of a dialogue between continuity and discontinuity, which is spatial as well as temporal; its essence is fragmentary. The writing process involved in the screenplay, which gives rise to *découpage* in that the writing inherently divides the film into several parts, formulates not only the final need for the film to be cut and edited

(*montage*), but also the initial need to divide (*découpage technique*). If the proximity of two spatiotemporal sequences connects them and may give the impression of continuity, this proximity has still been developed through a lack—the ellipsis. This lack of information is paradoxically what links together the full information given by each part. It is no coincidence that Ozu's work, described earlier as applying the *ma* concept, always used ellipsis. The Japanese filmmaker allows these ellipses to be considered not only as a lack of information, but as the places in which metamorphoses and transformations occur.

The Jump Cut: A New Form of Ellipsis

Whether structural, indefinite, measurable, hypothetical, or explicit, all of these ellipses are the symptom of an interval of narrative time that has gone missing, in a similar manner to a jump cut. These blanks, which are accentuated by modern cinema, appeared right from the beginning with the creation of the cinematograph and *montage's* cuts. Furthermore, we know through the studies *Fragmentation et assemblage dans les vues Lumière* by André Gaudreault and Jean-Marc Lamotte,³⁰ that eighteen percent of Lumière's work and thirty-six percent of Edison's films were composed of hiatuses and jump cuts: ellipses. Indeed, even if Philippe Durand unambiguously distinguishes the jump cut from the ellipsis,³¹ it is still frequently described as a very brief ellipsis. Indeed, the jump cut 'which yields the impression that footage has been excised from within the shot'³² works as a slight ellipsis: the interruption of a visual continuity reveals that something has been elided, creating a blank within the narration. While these hiatuses were used

as tricks in early cinema, they particularly work as ellipsis in French New Wave cinema, by being used to reduce the time of a shot or sequence. Thus, it might be said that a regular ellipsis works to reduce the time of some events between sequences when jump cut allows time to be reduced within a sequence or a shot. In that sense, ellipsis accentuates the intervals between sequences, making them narrative and temporal, while the modern jump cut creates new intervals within a continuous sequence or shot in a modern way that exhibits and announces the fragmentary aspect of cinema. As Deleuze explains, the modern use of these *irrational cut*—the jump cut and other forms of hiatus—isolates each image, making its integration into a totality impossible: ‘the cut no longer forms part of one or the other image, of one or the other sequence that it separates and divides. It is on this condition that the succession or sequence becomes a series [...]. The interval is set free, the interstice becomes irreducible and stands on its own’³³. We should note here that Deleuze also considers that the interstice ‘between two series of images no longer forms part of either of the two series; it is the equivalent of an irrational cut, which determines the non-commensurable relations between images’.³⁴ This method of *BETWEEN*, as Deleuze calls it, creates ‘not an operation of association, but of differentiation, as mathematicians say, or of disappearance, as physicists say’,³⁵ standing in between shots, or in the intervals. The film then ceases to be this uninterrupted chain of images, each one the slave of the next. Indeed, images ‘are made up, each in itself and all of them together’³⁶ because of these interstices. Thus, intervals are not only set free, this void standing for itself also allows images to be freed from their associative chain and

to stand for themselves: 'that void which is no longer a motor-part of the image'³⁷ is no anymore what 'the image would cross in order to continue, but is the radical calling into question of the image'.³⁸ In some way, these modern cinematic gaps are not part of the shots anymore: 'the cut has become the interstice, it is irrational and does not form part of either set'³⁹. Intervals, which have always been used to invisibly link images, are now relinking images on to perceptible irrational cuts on 'a mode of original and specific linkage, or rather a specific connection between de-linked images'.⁴⁰

Narrative ellipses, rational or irrational cuts, freeze frame shots, they all insert a gap into the narrative continuity of the projected film, similar to the gaps located on the reel film that transforms a series of still frames into a moving image. And all these forms of intervals contribute in giving the film its look of fullness when its is in fact discontinuous. Indeed, there is only discontinuity when talking about traditional film projection because 'the technique of the *cinématographe* calls for gaps; it necessitates blinking'.⁴¹ This is why the notion of interval is a key element in the understanding of the paradox of continuous discontinuity, which characterises traditional film projection because 'to see movement in the film image is to see the failure of a certain vision's rationale: an image that gains visibility only by slipping perpetually out of sight...Those "empty" intervals between frames, far from empty, carry all of the film's movement'.⁴² Thus, the cinema object could be considered, from early cinema to the modern one, as a porous world that looks full and closed in on itself but which turns out to be haunted and punctuated

by a form of vacuity. This vacuity could be assimilated to what Marc Hiver describes as a hole which he defines as consubstantial with the moving image.⁴³

Thus, to think about the cinematic image from the gap and the void, is to recognize but also to accept the constant discontinuity from which its ontological dimension arises.

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¹ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical Review*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (London : Elm Ree Books/Hamish Hamilton, 1978): 77.

² Jacques Aumont, Bergala, Alain. Marie, Michel. Vernet, Marc. *Aesthetics of Film* trans. and revised by Richard Neupert (University of Texas Press, 1992): 55.

³ Ibid: 53.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard B. Pilgrim, 'Intervals (Ma) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan', *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives* (Wei-Hsun Fu & Heine, New-York: State University of New-York Press, 1995): 58.

⁶ Steve Odin, 'Derrida and the Decentered Universe of Ch'an/Zen Buddhism.', *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Wei-Hsun Fu & Heine (New-York: State University of New-York Press, 1995): 12.

⁷ Pilgrim: 60.

⁸ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*. (London: Routledge, 1983): 145.

⁹ Bergala, Alain. 'Fin d'automne'. In *Cahiers du cinéma* (January 1980): 43-45.

¹⁰ Pilgrim: 57.

¹¹ H.S Lang, *The Order of Nature in Aristotle's Physics: Place and the Elements*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 132.

¹² Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, (Harvard: Harvard College, 1972): 259.

¹³ David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film art: an introduction*. (London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010): 124.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 1.

¹⁵ Thierry Kuntzel, 'Le Défilement: A View in Close up', *Camera Obscura*, No.2, (Fall 1977, Los Angeles; originally published as 'Le Défilement', *Revue d'Esthétique, Cinéma: Théorie, Lectures*, 1973): 17.

¹⁶ Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New-York: Oxford University Press,

1974): 9.

¹⁷ Mary Ann Doane *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, (Harvard: Harvard College, 2002): 176.

¹⁸ Deleuze: 2.

¹⁹ Ibid: 2.

²⁰ While the movement of the film strip is generally vertical, the 1950s American process *VistaVision* allowed horizontal scrolling of the film reel from left to right.

²¹ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics, The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994): 67.

²² Ibid: 66.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jacqueline Nacache, *Hollywood, l'ellipse et l'infilmé* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001): 10.

²⁵ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983): 106.

²⁶ Ibid: 109.

²⁷ Ibid: 110.

²⁸ Noel Burch, *Theory of film practice* (New York, Praeger Language, 1973): 6.

²⁹ Ibid: 5.

³⁰ André Gaudreault, 'Fragmentation et assemblage dans les vues Lumière', *Visio, revue de l'Association internationale de sémiotique visuelle*, Vol.7, No 1, 2002.

³¹ Philippe Durand, *Cinéma et montage: un art de l'ellipse* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993): 277.

³² David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London: Routledge, 1983): 328.

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2* (London: The Athlone Press, 2005): 266.

³⁴ Ibid: 206.

³⁵ Ibid: 174.

³⁶ Ibid: 28.

³⁷ Ibid: 174.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid: 175.

⁴⁰ Ibid: 266.

⁴¹ Rene Thoreau Bruckner, 'The Instant and The Dark: Cinema's Momentum', *Octopus: A Journal of Visual Studies*, Vol.2 (Fall 2006): 3.

⁴² Ibid: 22.

⁴³ Marc Hiver, 'Les Trous dans l'image et la question de l'aveuglement', *Web-revue des industries culturelles et numériques*, 2012, (mis en ligne le 31 août 2012. URL: <http://industrie-culturelle.fr/industrie-culturelle/les-trous-dans-limage-et-la-question-de-laveuglement-3/>).

Surrealism and (un)Happy Families: *Banalité* (1930)

Hazel Donkin

Abstract

This article deals with the subject of Surrealism and the family. The French Surrealists, led by André Breton, challenged conventional views on love and sought to explode restraints on sexuality in the inter-war period in both their personal lives and in their art. The movement maintained a consistent moral opposition to the institution of the bourgeois family. How was this expressed in photographic works? In the following article, this question is examined in relation to the illustrated book *Banalité*, written by Léon-Paul Fargue, and illustrated by Roger Parry and Fabien Loris.

In Paris after World War One those who had been radicalised recognised that although a level of sexual liberalisation was evident, the fact that the family remained the nucleus of society and woman's role was still fundamentally domestic meant that women's oppression was concrete. The fact that the Surrealists insistently challenged repressive conventions proved irresistible to both male and female artists and indeed the sustained campaign that the movement conducted against the institution of the family ensured that, in terms of sexual politics, the group were perceived as radical in the inter war period as well as after World War Two.¹ Opposition to the family was not confined to manifestos, tracts, resolutions, activities and gestures but was also made plastic. This paper explores the manifest hostility to the institution of the bourgeois family in the book illustrations of Roger Parry in *Banalité*, Léon-Paul Fargue's poetic re-writing of his childhood.

In the First Manifesto of Surrealism (1924), André Breton described the French writer Léon-Paul Fargue as "surrealist in atmosphere".² In *A Wave of Dreams*

(1924) Louis Aragon listed him as one of the “Presidents of the Republic of Dreams”.³ Fargue’s work was published by Breton in both *Littérature* and *Minotaure*.⁴ He was heavily influenced by Surrealism as well as Symbolism, his imagery is strange and unsettling and he believed that the poetic image is a return to, a re-writing of, childhood, an unlocking of the most intimate passages in time.⁵ The book *Banalité* presents Paris as a site of the marvellous and the narrator is a male child. *Banalité* consists of poems and prose based on nostalgic recollections of Fargue’s childhood and adolescence, and was initially published, without illustrations, in 1922 by Gallimard’s *Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française* and republished in a new edition in 1928. Soon afterwards Gallimard announced the publication of an edition illustrated with photographs. Roger Parry, also an associate of the Surrealists, had ambitions not to illustrate the book but rather to create a series of photographs to accompany this book that had touched him personally; his friendship with André Malraux (at that time art director at Gallimard) and his contacts at *NRF* facilitated his *Banalité* project.⁶ Parry’s attraction to Fargue’s work is understandable, the author was arguably at the height of his success at this time and his work is a sensitive description of life which makes use of popular language and is filled with abundant imagery. *Banalité* brought Parry immediate critical acclaim in France and abroad. Julien Levy bought Parry’s photographs from *Banalité* as well as two prints subsequently published in *Photographie Modernes* and exhibited them in two shows *Surréalisme* and *Modern European Photography* in early 1932.⁷

In 1930 *Banalité* was published as a limited edition with 16 black and white photogravures, credited to Parry and Fabien Loris. Loris was an artist, actor and musician, and a close friend of Parry who would collaborate with him in future projects in Africa and Tahiti in the early 1930s. The photographs in *Banalité* include straight prints, photomontages, super-impressions, negative reversals and five photograms produced using paper cut outs provided by Loris. Each photograph is printed on a full page and although they relate to an aspect of Fargue's text they are visual interpretations rather than illustrations. Parry's work was influenced by Maurice Tabard, another associate of the Surrealists, Parry's apprenticeship under him at Deberny and Peignot had acquainted the young photographer with the full spectrum of modernist experimentation. Tabard had exhibited in Stuttgart at *Film und Foto* (1929) and had returned with a gift for Parry of Roh and Tschichold's *Foto-Auge* (1929) which included Moholy-Nagy's 'Peinture Photographie Film' as well as Werner Gräff's seminal anthology of New Vision photography *Es Kommt der neue Fotograf* (1929) and Hans Richter's book on avant garde film illustrated with stills *Filmgegner von heute – filmfreunde von morgen* (1929). Parry had already acquired for himself Renger-Patzsch's *Die Welt ist Schön* (1928).⁸

Parry's work demonstrates a range of photographic techniques but he shared Tabard's interest in still life and a tendency to produce darkly lit, theatrical compositions. Parry developed a distinctive modernist style, influenced by cinematic *mise-en-scène* and his work is generally characterised as surrealist because it is enigmatic and deals in the subjects and iconography of visual

surrealism. In *Banalité* Parry was clearly influenced by the developments in experimental photography, Maurice Cloche's *Alphabet* as well as Breton's use of text and photography in *Nadja* (1928) were obvious points of reference but Parry was influenced more generally by Surrealism's exploration of the interface between dream and reality. In Parry's commercial work and in his personal work Parry developed a careful *mise-en-scène* where objects function as signs.

Although the production of illustrated books flourished in the inter-war period, it was not until the late 1930s that the widespread use of photographs began to challenge the dominance of drawings. In the 1920s books which were illustrated with photographs were rare and the Surrealists were pioneers in this area; in 1922 *Champs délicieux*, inspired by Breton and Soupault's *Les champs Magnétiques* (1920) was published in a limited edition of forty copies with a preface by Tzara. *Champs délicieux* included twelve gelatin silver prints of photograms, printed by Man Ray from negatives made by re-photographing the twelve original images. Christian Bouqueret believes this publication to be nothing less than the origin of a new type of work, the prototype of a genre which would blossom at the end of the decade.⁹

The illustrated book provided photographers, in collaboration with writers, an opportunity to combine both art and illustration and further explore the potential of the relationship between text and image.¹⁰ Although Breton's comments towards the end of *Nadja* suggest that he considered the photographs (mostly provided by Jacques-André Boiffard) in his novel to be unsatisfactory, his

meaning is ambiguous. “La partie illustrée de *Nadja* fût très insuffisante” he said and, given that the photographs that he cites were retained in the revised edition of 1963, one could assume that he meant, at least partly, that he would have liked there to be more, indeed he expressed regrets about the absence of particular images.¹¹ In 1928 Breton declared “And when will all the books that are worth anything stop being illustrated with drawings and appear only with photographs”; artists associated with Surrealism rose to the challenge and the book became a site for carefully crafted experimentation.¹² Illustrated books published in the inter-war period by artists and writers aligned to Surrealism included a number of titles which developed the cohesion of text and photographic image. Surrealist books that brought together writers and photographic artists include: Péret, Aragon and Man Ray, *1929* (1929); Claude Cahun, *Aveux nos Avenues* (1930); Léon-Paul Fargue and Roger Parry *Banalité*; René Crevel and Max Ernst, *Mr Knife Miss Fork*; Paul Eluard and Man Ray, *Facile* (1935); Hans Bellmer, *La Poupée* (1936); Georges Hugnet, *Le Septième Face du Dé* (1936); Camille Bryen and Raoul Ubac (credited as Raoul Michelet), *Actuation Poétique* (1935); Bryen and Ubac (credited as Ubac Michelet), *L’Aventure des Objets* (1937); Cahun and Lisa Deharme, *Le Coeur de Pic* (1937); Man Ray, *La Photographie n’est pas l’art* (1937); Hugnet and Bellmer, *Oeillades ciselées en branche* (1939) and Bellmer and Eluard, *Jeux vagues de la poupée* (1939). It is notable that the majority of these titles deal in sexuality, *Facile* is a simple *homage* to ‘woman’, *1929* is Surrealist pornography, Bellmer’s work explores vulnerability and cruelty and Hugnet subverts mass media images in his free and violent photomontages. *Mr Knife*

and Miss Fork celebrates love while lambasting the institution of the bourgeois family. *Banalité* reveals the family to be both a 'haven in a heartless world' and a prison. Photography was an ideal medium to promote a surrealist 'love revolution' because it was (and is) widely used to disseminate ideas and norms about sexuality and is therefore ripe for subversion.

World War 1 had accelerated social and cultural changes that had characterised the early years of the twentieth century. Gender distinctions were disrupted as bourgeois women entered the workforce in large numbers and working-class women were increasingly employed outside the domestic realm in the rapidly growing tertiary sector. Many of the rights that women enjoyed during the war were lost once it ended, but there was a general belief that profound changes regarding sexuality were taking place in French society. The reality may have been that woman's role remained fundamentally domestic but there was also an aspiration for freedom and a revaluation of sexuality.¹³ The fact that women could be independent led to endless debates about the implications of 'modern woman' and demands for a return to traditional gender relationships. This tension between progression and repression was evident in every area of French life from politics, medicine and psychoanalysis to art and popular culture. Romy Golan characterised the inter war years in France as a period of increasing political, economic, and cultural retrenchment where the conservative ethos of the *rappel à l'ordre* (call to order) functioned as a backlash against women, urging a return to the pre-war status quo and a re-establishment of 'family values'.¹⁴ France lost 1.3 million men in the war and

post-war demographic concerns reinforced the identification of peace and restabilisation with women's traditional maternal roles. The state launched an aggressive pro-natalist campaign, creating the *Conseil Supérieur de la Natalité* in 1919 and propaganda events such as the *Exposition nationale de la maternité et de l'enfance* in the Bois de Boulogne in 1921.¹⁵ In 1920 a draconian birth control and abortion law was passed by an overwhelming majority of 521 to 55, outlawing all information pertaining to birth control and abortion. In 1923 anti-abortion laws were further strengthened, with four-year sentences for abortionists and six months for women undergoing an abortion. The leftist coalition, the *Cartel des Gauches*, voted into power in 1924, did nothing to abrogate these laws, the 'politics of motherhood' that identified family and maternity with the good of the nation dominated nearly all political factions.¹⁶ In Paris the Surrealists declared war on the family, as well as the Church and the State. Amy Lyford has outlined how the Surrealists 'sought to destabilize the gender roles that had cemented traditional ideas about the family, one of the key institutional building blocks of French national identity'.¹⁷ She notes that they were in a minority as many artists and writers reconsidered their practices as they looked for ways to participate in rebuilding post war culture by answering the call to order.

Banalité is exemplary in its exploration of inner consciousness at the same time as projecting ideas about love and marriage into the external world. The images contribute to the notion of the family as a sinister, tense and violent site. Parry was interested in the relationship between fantasy and reality; both image

and text in the book exemplify the understanding of the resolution of dream and reality as the source of poetic imagination. But Parry's attraction to Surrealism was also based on radical politics; Parry was born in 1905 into a working class family in the 18th arrondissement, Paris. He was inspired by the Russian Revolution in 1917 and throughout the 1920s he was associated with anarchists and communists. Loris described himself and Parry as "what you could call cheerful bohemians; passing whole evenings putting the world to rights, discussing politics and conjuring up projects that would never see the light of day."¹⁸ A central aspect of *Banalité* is a critique of the bourgeois family. This is not to say that Parry saw the project as political, or that the book itself is political but rather that it engages art philosophically with an area which is part of everyone's human experience and which constituted a live contemporary debate.

The title of *Banalité* suggests trivia but it is also a concept that has strong positive and negative connotations and Fargue invested it with a powerful emotional charge. Fargue's exploration of the implications of an ordinary view of the extraordinary, and an extraordinary understanding of the world of the ordinary is arguably indebted to Mallarmé's concept of the ordinary. Fargue had been Mallarmé's student. Fargue's readers are made aware both of the strangeness of Parisian society as seen by the child narrator, and of its ordinariness in the same way that in Mallarmé's prose and poems:

...the world of the ordinary is defined not as a one dimensional and absolute reality, but as a perception dependent on standpoint and a willingness to engage imaginatively with what could be described as different and other.¹⁹

Fargue's carefully crafted child narrator is powerful; the reader is captivated by the immediacy of the boy's narration. Tim Love notes that children have advantages as observers, they see things from fresh perspectives and their vocabulary is not restricted by convention and social mores. They may not understand exactly what is happening, whereas readers are likely to. The difference between the child narrator's and the reader's understanding can be exploited for comic or for serious effect. The reader forgives a child narrator for raising uncomfortable truths. Charles Lambert uses a child narrator to exploit their clear-sightedness and innocence. "Whether they're protagonists or witnesses, they tend to be one step behind - or to one side of - the attentive adult reader, which sets up an interesting narrative gap through which the unsettling elements can squeeze", he said, while Elizabeth Baines maintains that "children can have instinctual knowledge which we adults can lose, and these insights yet gaps can be the stuff of dramatic conflict and motor a story."²⁰ Child narrators are common in Surrealism due to its concern with 'primitivism', with a return to origins. In *Banalité* there is a dialogue between the text and image in the book, Parry's images often suggest a child viewer, they show life as perceived by the narrator, including his simple pleasures and dark memories and fantasies. The images, however, are not conventional realist representations of the boy's recollections, they are not interpretations of reality; the range of techniques create what Rosalind Krauss calls a 'kind of cleavage in reality'; these are constructions that make it clear that we are not looking at reality, instead the viewer encounters a complex array of signs.²¹ The series of images in *Banalité* function to open doors in the viewer's mind to associations

and memory, particularly childhood memories. According to Breton who believed that childhood came closest to one's "real life", these memories are the most fertile as they emanate a sentiment of being unintegrated, and then later of having gone astray.²² Parry's images express something about self-discovery, about retrieved experiences and nostalgia, and about psychoanalysis and its concern with childhood. Parry carefully positions himself, and the viewer, in the liminal spaces inhabited by the child.



Fig.1: Roger Parry, Untitled (Figure) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Plate 12 in *Banalité* [Fig.1] relates to the text which describes Fargue's adventures at the Landelle residence which he visited regularly as a boy. The large apartment on Rue Montaigne was located on the fifth floor and featured an immense balcony which ran around the whole house and from which one could look down upon five streets. Fargue tells of how he would look down at the cars and the mysterious silhouettes of passers-by with his group of friends and, excited by the recent and well publicised murders in Paris (by Gamahut and Marchandon), would predict catastrophes and wish for something terrible to happen.²³ In fact two years later, two houses along from the Landelle house, one of the most notorious murders in 19th century France took place when Henri Pranzini killed a prostitute named Madame Regnault, along with her maid and twelve year old daughter. Parry's photomontage using a paper cut out of a figure alludes to this as the bearded figure holds a large butcher's cleaver, Pranzini's murder weapon.

The image is a photomontage made using a paper cut out, a form located within the domain of memory by Man Ray and called 'objects of dreams' by Ribemont-Dessaigues, a form where the 'ghosts of objects attain psychological status'.²⁴ The image is 'doubled', the shadow and particularly the two sets of feet render it unstable, it encapsulates a transitional or 'threshold' space, what Benjamin called a 'revolving door'; it is charged with memory but open enough to facilitate the viewer to also, in imagination, move forward to what will or could happen.²⁵ For Krauss 'doubling' creates a fracture or what she calls 'an experience of fission' as "the double destroys the pure singularity of the first [...] through

duplication it opens the original to the effect of [...] multiplies burgeoning within the same.”²⁶ What seemed to interest Parry in Fargue’s text was how the extraordinary and the uncanny were related to the everyday, the domestic, the familiar. Parry’s image attempts to reconcile these opposing terms as it alludes to actual passers-by below the Landelle residence, the boy’s interpretation of them as well as murderous villains, both real and imagined. The starkness and generality of Parry’s images facilitate an intimacy with the memories and imaginings within the narrative which could not be achieved by text alone. Both Fargue’s text and Parry’s images are intense and they correspond closely. However, while the text marries an exuberance and appetite for life with melancholy, Parry’s plastic interpretations focus on the strangeness and violence of these memories and place them outside of reality.

Two photographs are presented before any text appears in the book and function as epigraphs which establish the fact that the images are not representations of actual objects but are figments of imagination. The first is the most abstract image in *Banalité*, a photogram made using cut out paper shapes, [Fig.2]. It is akin to an illustration in a children’s picture book but it is a complex image which is highly evocative and open, containing references to familiar objects rich in associations. To make the personal nature of their work clear, Surrealist artists often created individual personas based on animals or birds. The white cut out shape suggests a bird, perhaps a pigeon, perched upon a brick wall, facing a clear and expansive night sky with eyes closed. There is a sense of freedom, the whiteness suggests purity and innocence. In the text

Fargue expresses the exploratory energy of youth as well as the need for stability. The bird is grounded but has the ability to fly freely before returning home; the narrator in the text was loved and well cared for but melancholy, and could escape to the realm of dreams and imagination. The image introduces an element of mystery.



Fig.2: Roger Parry, Untitled (Bird) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The relationship between reality and dream is further emphasised in the graphically manipulated third plate, positioned before the long prose which dominates the book. The lower half of the image shows a pair of eyes and the upper section is filled with floating paper boats, [Fig.3]. The eyes do not look directly at the viewer but are dreamy with unidentifiable images reflected on the pupils.



Fig.3: Roger Parry, Untitled (Eyes) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

In *Banalité* Fargue inhabited an internal zone where reality merged with imagination. Parry's photographs are depopulated apart from several ghostly figures and a hand belonging to a dead body. However, the images are vibrant, echoing the vitality of Fargue's narration and unifying text and image. The fact that the images are mostly free from human presence gives them a generality, Fargue's reminiscences are autobiographical and emotional but Parry's photographs counter this and address a common experience of family life and youth in which darkness and cruelty are present both in reality and in imagination. The text is peppered with extreme violence, explicit and implicit, as the narrator develops an awareness of brutality in everyday life and recalls vividly imagined dangers. This is accompanied by joy and comfort, whereas the photographs highlight themes of sadness, tension and violence.

Plate 5 in the book [Fig.4] alludes to the suicide of the narrator's young friend, Albert. The text describes a tentative friendship with this boy who was an 'outsider'. Fargue was often invited to Albert's house for dinner and was impressed by the affluence of the family and their homely abode but especially by the attractiveness of his friend's mother. The boys eventually lost touch and Albert's death was reported to Fargue some years later by Albert's cousin who told of how he had shot himself in the mouth. The family, he said, had no idea that anything was wrong until they found his body on the landing. In the text, however, there are indications of discord; the mother is, by her own admission 'nervous' and Albert says at one point "Me, I need someone to pull me out of the shit." Fargue tells of how he was always keen to see Albert's collection of

framed and mounted insects but was disappointed because although they were housed in an impressive cabinet far superior to his own, they were 'not in a good state'. Fargue describes insects with broken antennas and legs and 'the top part of their mouth worn away'. He describes little piles of yellow dust on the velvet beneath the abdomens which indicated that the insects had been eaten away by parasites.



Fig.4: Roger Parry, Untitled (Man and gun) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Parry's severely cropped photograph echoes this sense of decay and disintegration. The gun and hand are the focus of the image but the flooring is central and is lit to emphasise texture and a significant amount of dust. Apart from a head and upturned hand the body is unseen and the debris evokes the powdery particles to which something is eventually reduced to by death. Parry's focus on materiality is in contrast to Fargue's treatment of the death which is simply reported in a brief quotation of the cousin's news, after which the narrator's thoughts turn immediately to the boy's mother. It is up to the viewer to imagine what lies beyond the cropped frame of the image but the text, in conjunction with the photograph, prompts contemplation of Albert's forlorn existence and his inability to find solace in a materially wealthy but emotionally dysfunctional bourgeois family. A critique of the bourgeois family runs through this work and the photographic images contribute to the notion that this institution, relatively new at this point, was poisonous rather than noble.²⁷ Fargue was deeply wounded by his personal family experience, he was born outside marriage in 1876 to a seamstress, his father was an engineer whose family refused to accept the liaison and although his parents created a family unit, Fargue senior did not legally accept his son until 1892, and did not marry until 1907. Fargue loved his parents intensely and was devastated by his father's early death in 1909 but a sense of melancholy pervades his works that deal with the family. Fargue's childhood was melancholic, he said:

I know very well, that all children suffer with intensity; but I believe truly that I went farther, deeper, than anyone else in this direction. I wandered unseen, that way, along avenues that led nowhere, through interminable ravines, in reveries marked by trepidations secret and abundant as the sea²⁸

His book *Vulture*, published by Gallimard in 1928, is also pertinent:

There was a family. Its life, its gay moments. Its child [...] The window open to the sun [...] Friends at their table, happy, at the coffee hour. Their return from work. The time of their toilette with their almond Soap [...] Their voices in the rooms, calling each other, their poor eyes, their humble gestures. They walked gently alongside life, in the sadness and the shame and the joy [...] All of that, dead!!²⁹

Plate 6 [Fig.5] in *Banalité* refers to the interest that Fargue's father had in chemistry. The illustration is placed after a passage which reveals the unhappy family life of Fargue's father and his brother, Fargue's uncle, who received no money and 'more kicks than caresses' from their parents. A story is recounted of an occasion when the two boys were taken to the *Champs-Élysées* by Fargue's grandfather who stood on the kerb and pointed to the passing carriages saying "That's what I could have had, if I hadn't had you."³⁰ Fargue tells of his surprise when finding out from his mother about his late father's intense love of chemistry and that he kept a laboratory, as he had only known him as a sad, sombre man and when 'all hope was already lost'. Parry's photograph evokes lost hope; the 'spirit of research' and 'inventiveness' of Fargue's father when young seems to be mourned here. Whereas the narrator's friend, Albert, had been unable to establish a place for himself in society, his father had relinquished the life he could have led because something else was expected of him and he was unable to resist the pressure to be a breadwinner, a provider for his family, such was its strength. Parry's psychological expressiveness conveys a profound sorrow, a sense of loss in relation to the narrator's father but also in relation to creativity. The fingers of the discarded gloves, a common surrealist symbol, uncanny in their lifelessness, are echoed in the scorch marks on the table, thus dominating the

foreground of the image. The two central measuring jugs, with their spouts aligned seem expectant but the crystallised liquid on the bottle behind them suggests abandonment. This play of presence and absence is evident throughout Parry's illustrations; the use of symbols, the photographic medium itself as indexical and specific forms such as photograms and negative reversals all denote a psychological terrain.



Fig.5: Roger Parry, Untitled (Chemistry) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The tensions created by family life and the responsibilities of motherhood in particular are expressed in two further episodes interpreted by Parry. Plate 11 shows a static, deserted carousel horse, Fargue recalls how the children imagined themselves as soldiers and a tells of a competition in which they had to hook rings onto lances as they rode, prizes were given to the most successful and to children who had shown bravery or managed to spear a particularly difficult ring. The attendant mothers also battled as their sense of injustice was fuelled by competitiveness on behalf of their offspring, “Yes madame, that is cheating! He got a prize because he went on so many times! And that great big girl, there! Would you put kids of that age on a wooden horse? I ask you!”³¹ Protectiveness spills into physical violence a few pages later. Fargue recounts an incident at the park when a big boy planted a spade in a heap of sand and said “All the kids who knock this spade over will have their ears pulled!”³² Fargue was unable to resist temptation and at the moment when the boy attacked, Fargue’s mother was swiftly upon him. She slapped the boy with deliberate and shocking force. Parry’s photograph presents a mountainous pile of grainy sand with a bucket, a sand pie battlement already made and a territorial spade atop, [Fig.6]. The bucket is decorated with a picture of an animal which, although difficult to define, resembles a bear or a lion, a symbol of ferocity in the protection of kin. Ominous dark shadows above strengthen the sense of melancholy. The presence of absence is evident once again; there is no human figure and the sandcastle, although captured on film, has long gone. The edge of Parry’s backdrop seems to be visible on the right hand side of the photograph, this is clearly a studio shot, a carefully staged ambiguity. The

viewer is unsure as to what they are looking at. In this banal but carefully composed image mimesis is undone and the viewer is once again drawn towards the liminal space, the gap.

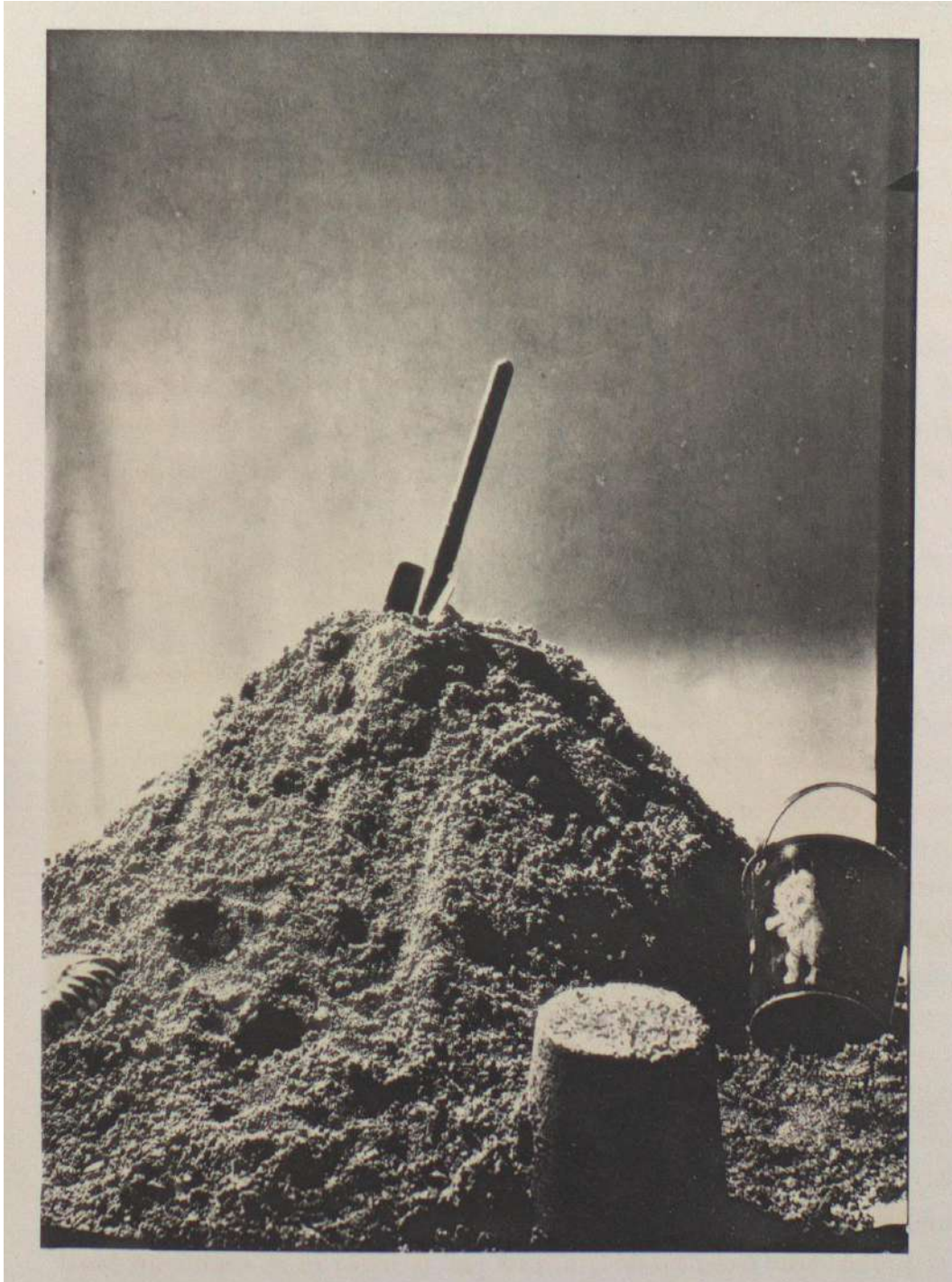


Fig.6: Roger Parry, Untitled (Sandcastle) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

Fargue communicated a desire for stability and tells of how he hated moving house and would be consumed with sorrow when he found out that the family was to leave an apartment. His response was to embrace the walls for long periods in the same way that his grief at losing a favourite housemaid '*la mère Jeanne*' was manifested in a physical attachment to her old clothes.³³ This short passage which ends the long prose finishes on a sombre note in which Fargue considers the final departure of death. Parry illustrates this passage in Plate 14 [Fig.7] with an image of an abandoned room. The lack of control felt by the narrator is echoed in the upturned photograph; this family has literally been turned upside down. The photograph also evokes finality. The space is claustrophobic despite the fact that the door is ajar, because the decoration in the hallway matches that of the room and therefore the opportunity to escape is somewhat limited. The panelling, the crossed pattern of the empty coat hooks and the shadows of the door frame on the wall contribute to this sense of entrapment. The rope lying on the floor lends the flavour of a crime scene.



Fig.7: Roger Parry, Untitled (House) from *Banalité*, 1930. Image courtesy of Nicolas Callaway.

The family may be a 'haven in a heartless world' but it can also be hellish and, as Freud noted, a potentially dangerous site where sexuality shifts around. Parry's photographs throughout the book evoke the notion of the family as a site of danger. *Banalité* appears to meet Breton's call, in the *First Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), for 'fairy tales for adults' as it is both touching and sordid at the same time.³⁴ In 1995 Annette Messenger expressed her admiration for the veracity of surrealist photography when she compared her own work to fairy tales:

And tender, like fairy tales where the ogre devours ten adorable little children. But everyday life is altogether much more cruel, surprising and tender. That's why I much prefer surrealist photography ... to surrealist painting, because it really is in touch with reality.³⁵

Banalité offered an artistic contribution to the discourse on the institution of the family in the early twentieth century. Fargue and Parry were not Surrealists yet produced a work which was essentially held together by the 'glue' of Surrealism. For Parry an important aspect of this adhesive was politics. A consistent polemic against the family was one of the aspects of Surrealism that proved attractive to some of the men and women who orientated towards the group and its legacy is evident in the work of artists such as Keinholz, Paula Rego, Annette Messenger and Paul McCarthy. Indeed, it is the totality of the surrealist vision which ensures a continued interest in the movement and although the ethical engagement of Breton's group was problematic and filled with contradictions it possessed a gravitas that seems commendable in these unsettled times when 'family values' are once again on the agenda.

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¹The relationship between female artists and writers and Surrealism is discussed thoroughly in S. Suleiman, 'Surrealist Black Humour: masculine/Feminine', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1, 2003. Available to view at:

http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/Suleiman.pdf;

Suleiman, *Risking Who One Is* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994); Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990); W. Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1995); Chadwick, *Surrealism and Self-Representation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

² A. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969): 27.

³ L. Aragon, (1924) *A Wave of Dreams*, trans. Susan de Muth, *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1, 2003: 8. Available to view at:

http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/deMuth.pdf

⁴ *Littérature*, Issue 1 (1919) and *Minotaure*, Issue 6 (1935).

⁵ P.S. Thompson and P. Gizzi, *An English translation on Léon-Paul Fargue's "Poemes"* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003): <http://mellenpress.com/mellenpress.cfm?bookid=5458&pc=9>

⁶ C. Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle Vision photographique en France 1920 - 1940: Des Années folles aux années noires, 1920-1940* (Paris: Marval, 1997): 72.

⁷ Bouqueret and C. Bertoud, *Roger Parry. Le Météore Fabuleux* (Paris: Marval, 1995): 25.

⁸ These acquisitions are documented in Bouqueret and Bertaud: 18

⁹ Bouqueret, *La Nouvelle Vision photographique en France 1920 – 1940*: 146

¹⁰ The relationship between Surrealism and the illustrated book has been explored thoroughly by René Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) and Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004).

¹¹ He used the word 'insufficient'. See A. Breton, *Nadja* (1929) (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 199

¹² "Et quand donc tous les livres valables cesseront-ils d'être illustrés de dessins pour ne plus paraître qu'avec des photographies". Breton (1928) *Surrealism and Painting* (London: Macdonald, 1972): 32.

¹³ Mary Louise Roberts provides a useful overview of the effect of the war on women in *Civilisation without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France 1917 – 1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). See also Chapter One of Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer's *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2003) which outlines modern challenges to traditional notions of femininity in this period.

¹⁴ R. Golan, R. *Modernity and Nostalgia: art and politics in France between the wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Ibid: 20.

¹⁶ R.D. Sonn, "Your body is yours": Anarchism, Birth Control, and Eugenics in Interwar France', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.14, No. 4, 2005: 415-432.

¹⁷ A. Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War 1 Reconstruction in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 5.

¹⁸ Interview with Fabien Loris, 20 January 1981 (Author's translation), published in Bouqueret and Bertaud: 19.

¹⁹ Hélène Stafford, in her book *Mallarmé and the poetics of everyday life: a study of the concept of the ordinary in his verse and prose* (New York: Rodopi, 2000) argues that in Mallarmé's writing there is the powerful pull of the craving to escape ordinariness, but also a need to rejoin it and to explore its positive and negative potential.

²⁰ Charles Lambert was an O. Henry Prize winner in 2007. Elizabeth Baines won 3rd prize in the Raymond Carver Short Story Competition 2008. Both cited in Love, T., 'Child Narrators in

Adult Fiction'. <http://litrefsarticles.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/child-narrators-in-adult-fiction.html>

²¹ R. Krauss (1985) 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism', *Illuminations: Women Writing on Photography from the 1850s to the Present*, ed. L. Heron and V. Williams (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996): 86

²² Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 40.

²³ *Banalité*: 60.

²⁴ Krauss: 83.

²⁵ Emma Cocker discusses the concepts of 'threshold space' and the 'revolving door' in relation to photographs and quotes Ian Walker who, in his book *City Gorged with Dreams* talks about the photograph as a 'scene of the crime', where something both has happened and will/could happen, allowing the viewer to in 'imagination move forward or backward.' See E. Cocker, 'Desiring to be led astray', *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 6, Autumn 2007: 11
<http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal6/acrobat%20files/articles/cockerpdf.pdf>

²⁶ Krauss: 86.

²⁷ Mark Poster argues that the modern family arose among the bourgeoisie in the mid-18th century and emerged as the dominant family structure in the 20th century. See M. Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (London: Pluto Press, 1978).

²⁸ Fargue cited in A.A. Rhides, 'The Poetry of Léon-Paul Fargue', *French Review*, Vol.9, No.1, Nov. 1935: 26.

²⁹ These biographical details are taken from Katherine Knorr's review of Jean-Paul Goujon's biography *Leon-Paul Fargue* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998). The translation of *Vulturne* is also hers. See K. Knorr, Leon-Paul Fargue (Review) *New Criterion*, Vol.16, No.8, 1 April 1998: 71.

³⁰ L-P. Fargue, R. Parry and F. Loris, *Banalité* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Francaise 1930): 3.

³¹ *Banalité*: 52.

³² *Banalité*: 55.

³³ S. A., Rhodes, 'The Poetry of Léon-Paul Fargue', *The French Review*. Vol.9, No.1, 1935: 33.

³⁴ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*: 16

³⁵ Annette Messager, 'Interview with Robert Storr', *Faire Parade 1971 – 95*, (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne, 1995): 114.

Chto Delat? (What is to be done?) – The Urgent Need to Struggle

ICA 'Dissent: A Season on Art's Relationship to Activism and Social Change'

9 September – 24 October 2010

Who's to blame if oppression remains? We are.
Who can break its thrall? We can.

Whoever has been beaten down must rise to his feet!
Whoever is lost must fight back!

Bertolt Brecht¹

Chto delat?, a collection of artists and theorists from Russia, derive their name from Lenin's *Chto delat? (What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement)*, a tract first published as a pamphlet in 1902.² Occupying a unique position in the history of political literature, Lenin's text functions, much like a manifesto, as a guide in matters of revolutionary organisation and strategy. In addition to promoting a collective revolutionary consciousness, or 'vanguard', Lenin stresses the need for a functional theory to underpin revolutionary practices, arguing that 'the role of the vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party which is guided by an advanced theory'.³ Lenin promotes literature as the basis of revolutionary activity, exploring how journals act as 'rallying-points for the adherents of the tactics of mass agitation'.⁴ Taking his cue from Engels, who recognised three forms of struggle for social democracy: the political, the economic and the theoretical, Lenin concludes that there should be a strong theoretical nucleus around which action is arranged, asserting that political action can only be achieved through effective paper work, drawing the comparative analogy that blue-prints are required for bricklayers to build from.⁵

This relationship between words and deeds and literature and action informs the practice of Chto delat?⁶ Their visual work, usually in the form of a film or recorded performance, is supplemented by critical commentary in their online journal and newspaper.⁷ The participants are not only artists, but agitators, commentators and theorists, using the platform as a means through which to explore and critique social and political issues, usually pertaining to Russia. While much of their subject matter is culturally specific, their investment in expressing social issues through the aesthetic of protest, or by deploying methods ordinarily associated with revolutionary uprising, contributes to an emergent trend in contemporary art, a theme explored in the Institute of Contemporary Art's 'Dissent' season, a programme of exhibits and events exploring art's connection to activism and social change.⁸

The show at the ICA follows a number of British exhibitions which incorporated artists whose work troubled the relationship between art and social change through an appropriation of the aesthetics of protest. Mark Wallinger's *State Britain* (2007) installed at Tate Britain, for example, was a recreation of campaigner Brian Haw's Parliament Square Peace camp. More whimsical appropriations of the placard and political slogan can be found in Bob and Roberta Smith's satirical manipulation of protest ephemera in his specially constructed installations in Nicolas Bourriaud's *Altermodern* (2009) at Tate Britain. Whilst these artists pastiche Western models of protest, drawing on a spectacle of protest we associate with May '68, involving placards and banners, Chto delat? draw on strategies of protest associated with their own political history. The Russian avant-garde, as Christina Kiaer has noted, 'seems always

to exist in a context of revolutionary upheaval and radical collectivism.⁹ Mass demonstration is both historically and culturally significant in Russia. Demonstration, for instance, was instrumental in the break-down of the communist regimes which eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1985 liberaliser Mikhail Gorbachev became head of state and initiated attempts to stimulate the economy through various forms of decentralisation and devolution of power. He began to promote 'perestroika', a shift of the economy from military to civilian production, in an attempt to increase productivity. In the period between 1987 and 1992, a distinct shift in popular mobilisation occurred; demonstrations from around 1987 increased rapidly, reaching their peak in 1990. These organised events were subsequently usurped by sporadic and violent occurrences.¹⁰

The rejection of organised collective demonstration in the early 1990s was reflected in artistic constructions. Moscow's Actionism of the 1990s, like the earlier Russian avant-garde of the 1920s, looked to emulate the form of revolution from which it had originated. Actionism was chaotic and carnivalesque, as the post-Soviet artists strived to create a 'cultural sphere that was more guerrilla theatre' with the intent of 'undermining any nascent power centre.'¹¹ Reflecting the swerve to Individualism that privatisation and the tactics of Gorbachev had promoted, any resistance to hegemony was enacted through unplanned and individual attacks, making it difficult to differentiate between 'politics', 'art', 'or some brawl of a wreckless crowd'.¹² As the nineties progressed, and the legacy of 'perestroika' faded, so too did the obsession with the individual, resulting in a rise in collective art practices. As 'perestroika' left

behind a semi-liberal state, artists declared a commitment to collectivism in a move to better articulate their positions and, through a connection with these collective ideologies, looked to 'find new forms of mediation on the basis of continuity with the past.'¹³

The Radek Community and Art Territory Expropriation

Artists began drawing on previous revolutionary epochs; looking back through history in an attempt to position themselves. The Radek Community, a group which preceded Chto delat?, invoked previous artistic practices and revolutionary forms in an attempt to establish networks between the public and other artists. Their concentration on processes of socialisation, the public sphere, and social belonging, was frequently exhibited through staged forms of collective action. Their work centred on experimentation with mechanisms of inclusion, participation and consensus, by locating what was 'common' between individual subjects. In some instances this was taken literally, in 2001 they declared themselves 'scotchers' (sellotapers) physically binding people together with adhesive. Anatoly Osmolovsky, artist and an ex-member of Radek, believes that an individual project, whether artistic or otherwise, is insufficient, rather connections must be identified between individual projects in an attempt to 'establish connections between individualities' in order to avoid a return to the situation in the 1990s which was 'a period of completely self-sufficient individuals'.¹⁴ Promoting artistic collaboration, Osmolovsky looked to initiate a mutual understanding between artists, encouraging artists 'to find a place of conjunction or alignment between his or her work and other sympathetic works as a constitutive part of his or her practice.'¹⁵ Radek's performance piece

Crossing, for example, was motivated by the duality that there is a 'certain level of consciousness in people gathering together; they do so if they have similar protesting ideas, [...] there is also a level of unconsciousness involved in the process.' Radek argued that '[i]n Moscow, for instance, you can feel an awkward energy coming from the multitude waiting at the traffic light to cross the street.'¹⁶ The artists harnessed this unconscious collectivism and, using banners and flags, created an improvised spectacle of protest when the public crossed the street. In relation to the happening, the artists declared '[t]his is our "Demonstration". It is defined by our disappointment with and our hope for the prospects of finding a new language.'¹⁷ Radek's search for a new language of revolutionary expression was located through experimentation with the traditional tools of protest. Moving beyond artistic points of reference and models of collectivism, Osmolovsky and several contemporaries shifted the focus of its activities towards a type of activism that 'imitated western models.'¹⁸ Designing his political actions in Moscow as a direct citation from the events of 1968 in Paris, Osmolovsky and his cohorts forced entry into a 'storeroom of historical (pre)images that are available for appropriation.'¹⁹ Despite forging such connections, Radek found that this 'gesture of collective political protest' was enfeebled to a mere 'artistic theatricalization which does not have a place in the privatized daily life of post-Communism.'²⁰

Osmolovsky had set out to force and divide opinion through several interventionist schemes, prior to the formation of Radek, with the group ETI (Art Territory Expropriation) which imitated the street protests of the late 1960s.

Through ETI direct interventions were staged, such as the *Against All Parties Campaign*, an intervention in the Russian voting system. The Russian ballot offers an option to vote 'Against All' if none of the candidates satisfy voter's demands. ETI's campaign was to motivate voters to choose this option in order to express their dissatisfaction with the range of nominees. The campaign failed, as a paradox emerged. Most voters, it seemed, would choose not to go to elections rather than actively go to the polling station to express their indifference. Reasons for its failure as an artistic intervention can be further illuminated by drawing comparisons with Hans Haacke's conceptual piece, *MoMa Poll* (1970). Haacke's ballot boxes were situated in the gallery with no direct attempt by the artist to influence the voting system. The success of the piece was in its visual impact; with one clear perspex ballot box looking markedly fuller participants could see that their vote made a difference. Osmolovsky's failure was rooted in the lack of an aesthetic dimension to his campaign - he was staging an entirely political act. The failure of *Against All Parties* left Osmolovsky feeling frustrated that art can not directly intervene in political systems. As a consequence Osmolovsky changed tack and in a curatorial essay noted:

[A]fter multiple and rather painful clashes with the repressive state apparatuses and private social organizations, art had to admit that there are limitations to its actions. Understanding of its own *social* limits unavoidably leads to a search of aesthetic ones [...] Tensed efforts of art to become politically important in a society, its desire to be able to influence society politically in an immediate way, are mostly pitiful and laughable. Here art is an obstacle to itself. It is impossible to be both artistically and politically effective.²¹

It became apparent that it was going to take more than art to challenge the apathetic tendencies of the public after being so radically oppressed under the Soviet regime. Osmolovsky and the Radek group subsequently experimented with alternative modes of protest, which have both artistic and political agendas. They introduced 'Mailradek', an unpublished circular, which, in 1997, turned electronic and was distributed via the Internet, in an attempt to address issues of 'communication' and 'community'.²² Whilst Mailradek was hindered by its limited readership, the premise has been elaborated by Chto delat? in correlation with a broader shift in contemporary Russian art from experimenting with protest forms, as utilised in the Moscow Actionism of the 1990s, toward a discussion based form of protest channeled through journals and artistic platforms. Through an engagement with theory, such as that undertaken in Dmitri Gutov's Lifshits Institute, to the interdisciplinary debates on the online platform *Chto delat?*, whose contributors include Osmolovsky and Dmitry Vilensky, these artists are fashioning a form of demonstration and resistance which combines theoretical ideas with artistic strategies in an attempt to elicit social change and contribute to a positive political future.²³

Agonism and Dissent

In their contribution to the Dissent programme, Chto delat? negotiate the relationship between political activism and art in the exhibition 'The Urgent Need to Struggle'.²⁴ The film *The Tower: A Songspiel* (2010), dominates the initial space, with visitors encouraged to recline on cushions to view the work.²⁵ Developing a mode of musical theatre pioneered by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, Chto delat? devised a screen play in which opposing views on the

prospective development of a skyscraper by the Gazprom corporation were expressed. The dialogue of the board members is punctuated by choral enactments, each representing a particular societal demographic, including builders who trill, 'our labour is the basis of everything!' The links between the corporate hierarchy above and society below are physically represented by thick red fabric threads which are replicated in the gallery space, snaking around the exhibition as a visual reminder of our inescapable connections with others in society.



Fig.1: Still from Chto Delat? *The Tower: A Songspiel* (2010). Image courtesy of Dmitry Vilensky.



Fig.2: Still from Chto Delat? *The Tower: A Songspiel* (2010). Image courtesy of Dmitry Vilensky.

The central compound of the second room consisted of tables in the formation of a red star, a symbol redolent with communist associations. Above the cluster of screens, a cotton garment, 'The White Dress (Androgyne)' (2010), by Natalya Pershina-Yakimanskaya and Olga Egorova, also known as Gluklya and Tsaplya, was suspended.²⁶ Screens were situated on each point of the star, at the apex of which the viewer could position themselves. Although several of these works are available to view online, their presentation in the context of the exhibition engendered a reflective and considered response from the viewer, whilst demonstrating the variety of topics, styles and theoretical approaches the collective have appropriated. This was also explicitly addressed in the newspapers which papered the gallery walls, along with caricatures and inscriptions of influential figures: Adorno, Brecht, Jean Luc-Godard, Guy Debord and Alain Badiou, as well as associated movements: surrealism, futurism and

dada. Significant periods of Russian art-history were also referenced in the film *Builders* (2005), a reworking of Viktor Popkov's socialist realist painting *The Builders of Bratsk* (1961).

Brecht's influence dominated, and was drawn upon in Dmitry Vilensky's *Angry Sandwich People, or in praise of Dialectics* (2006). Whilst aligning his work with the political traditions of the Russian avant-garde, Vilensky also meshes it with a critique of advertising, consumerism and worker exploitation within a capitalist economy. Intended as an artistic statement in memory of the centennial anniversary of the first Russian revolution of 1905, the film decries the passivity of low waged workers showing their willingness to wear advertising sandwich boards. Vilensky asserts, 'in Soviet Propoganda, these walking advertisements, sandwiched between two placards, had always served as a symbol of the utmost exploitation of a person's living labor.'²⁷ This was previously explored in *Stop the Machine!* (2003), where artists interviewed 'sandwich people' in an attempt to discover more about the profession. The artists encountered prevailing levels of passivity, describing how those forced to take up the profession do so in a personal struggle for survival, and that they are often entirely oblivious to any form of struggle or resistance against the system of alienation and exploitation that forces them into that situation. To augment the irony of *Angry Sandwich People* the artists utilised two local activist groups 'Worker's Democracy' and 'The Pyotr Alexeev Resistance Movement' to act in the sequence. The artists were keen to draw upon these organised factions as 'activists have a great deal of experience in street politics; they participate in

street demonstrations and picket lines, and hand out fliers. Hence they have retained a basic form of grass-roots political culture that has an entire aesthetic of its own.'²⁸



Fig.3: Still from *Chto Delat?*, 'Angry Sandwich People, or in Praise of Dialectics' (2006). Image courtesy of Dmitry Vilensky.

The sandwich boards donned by the activists were inscribed with an extract from the work of Brecht, a poem entitled *In Praise of Dialectics*. The artists chose Brecht's work 'because it contains such a broad range of aesthetic methods to answer the call of a concrete historical situation.'²⁹ Brecht's work, for example, has a clearly identifiable political formula; he wanted to take the dialectical materialist principle, that it was not only a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it, and apply that to the theatre. Brecht conceptualised of a theatre which could stir the political consciousness of a viewer through

evoking catharsis, which is the necessary condition for revolutionary rebirth. Significantly, Brecht aimed to inspire a sense of 'militancy in the audience', which would be vital to initiating change in the real world.³⁰



Fig.4: Still from *Chto Delat?*, 'Angry Sandwich People, or in Praise of Dialectics' (2006). Image courtesy of Dmitry Vilensky.

Despite the range of dramatic set pieces presented in the exhibition, it was the film *Bellville* (2009) which had the most dramatic impact. This twenty-two minute documentary, compiled by Rena Raedle and Vladan Jeremic, is comprised of individual testimonies of Roma people whose settlement in New Belgrade was destroyed in order to build a new residential complex. Presenting this work in a gallery context alongside staged images of protest gave potency to the exhibition's title regarding struggle. As other work actively celebrated political

conflict, in the spirit of agonism, this work forced visitors to question their own political responsibility, figuring the artists as interlocutors in communicating the plight of those who otherwise would not have a voice. Where the exhibition as a whole raises questions concerning the relationship between art and the state, capitalism, democracy, and the political efficacy of art, this single piece emphasised the power of collectivism, both artistic and political, as one Roma protester articulated – ‘solidarity is our strength’.³¹

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¹ Bertolt Brecht, *In Praise of Dialectics*, Available online at: http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=226%3Ain-praise-of-dialectics&catid=135%3A11-why-brecht&Itemid=294&lang=en [Accessed 10 January 2011].

² Available online at: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/> [Accessed 6 January 2011].

³ V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, trans. S.V. and Patricia Utechin, ed. S.V. Utechin (Panther: London, 1973): 75-76.

⁴ S.V. Utechin, ‘Introduction’, V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*: 23.

⁵ Ibid: 77 (Lenin refers to a remark made by Frederic Engels relating to Narodnaya Volya).

⁶ With reference to ‘russian criticism’ Lenin asks: ‘what should those who desired to oppose opportunism with deeds and not merely words have done?’, V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, trans. S.V. and Patricia Utechin, ed. S.V. Utechin (Panther: London, 1973): 70.

⁷ Available via <http://www.chtodelat.org/> [Last accessed 20 August 2013].

⁸ See <http://www.ica.org.uk/microsite/dissent/> [Last accessed 20 August 2013].

⁹ Christina Kiaer, ‘The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism as a Model of Aesthetic Value’, *As Radical as Reality Itself: Essays on Marxism and art for the 21st Century*, ed. Matthew Beaumont et al (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007):136-162 (137).

¹⁰ Mark Beissinger, ‘Event Analysis in Transitional Societies: Protest Mobilization in the Former Soviet Union’, in *Acts of Dissent: New Developments in the Study of Protest* ed. Dieter Rucht, Ruud Koopmans and Friedhelm Neidhardt (Berlin: Sigma), cited in *Dynamics of Contention*, ed. Doug McAdam et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 251.

¹¹ Yulia Tikhonova, ‘Russian Aesthetics Under Capitalism: An Introduction’, *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 20, Number 3 (July 2008): 347.

¹² Herwig G. Höller, ‘Moscow Actionism: Origins and Applications’, trans. Timothy Jones. Available at http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1328&lang=en [Last accessed June 2008].

¹³ John Roberts, ‘Internationalism and Globalism’ in *Chto delat?* (What is to be done?) Downloaded at www.chtodelat.com [Accessed May 2008].

¹⁴ Anatoly Osmolovsky, ‘In search of a Critical Position’, *Third Text* 2003 Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2003: 415-418.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Radek Community, ‘In Search of Our Dream (not finished yet)’, in ‘#9 What do we have in common?’ *Chto Delat?* (What is to be done?).

¹⁷ Ibid.

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- ¹⁸ Herwig G. Höller, 'Moscow Actionism: Origins and Applications', trans. Timothy Jones. Available at http://www.springerlin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1328&lang=en [Accessed June 2008]
- ¹⁹ Boris Groys, 'Privitizations, or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism', in *Art Power* (London: MIT Press, 2008): 165-173 (171).
- ²⁰ Boris Groys, 'Back from the Future', *Third Text* 17: 4 (December 2003): 323-331.
- ²¹ Anatoly Osmolovsky, ed. *Iskysstvo bez opravdani: Katalog vystavki*. 10-26 Mai 2004 [Art without Justifications: Exhibition Catalogue] trans. Irina Aristarkhova, cited in Aristarkhova, Beyond Representation and Affiliation: Collective Action in Post-Soviet Russia', in *Collectivism After Modernism: the art of social imagination after 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Scholette (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): 253-270 (257).
- ²² 'Radek Invasion' *Russian Art Gazette* <http://www.gif.ru/eng/news/radek-it/> Press Release for exhibition at the Prometeo Cultural Association for Contemporary Art, church of San Mateo, Italy. 19th March – 7th May 2005. [Accessed June 2008].
- ²³ See <http://www.gutov.ru/> [Last accessed 20 August 2013].
Dmitri Gutov, who was previously involved with the Radek Community has revisited the work of philosopher Mikhail Lifshits. Gutov with a group of other artists in 1994, formed the Lifshits Institute. Lifshits was the first scholar to compile a 'Marxist Aesthetics' which has been appropriated in Gutov's artistic practice. His participation in an exhibition entitled 'Progressive Nostalgia: Contemporary Art from the Former USSR' curated by Viktor Misiano in 2007, is based on the premise that events of the historic past inform the future. His collection 'Words are also Deeds', a selection of oil on canvas works, are colourfully painted tablets of the gestural handwriting of Karl Marx. (See Progressive Nostalgia: Contemporary Art from the Former USSR', held at Centro per l'arte contemporanea Luigi Pecci, Prato, Italy, 2007. <http://www.centropecci.it/uk/htm/mostre/07/nostalgia/progressive_nostalgia.htm>) [Accessed August 2008].
- ²⁴ *Roland*, The ICA's Magazine, Issue 7, September – November 2010. Available at <http://www.ica.org.uk/26010/Roland-Magazine/Roland-Issue-7-Chto-delat-What-is-to-be-done.html>
- ²⁵ Available to view online at <http://chtodelat.wordpress.com/2010/05/31/the-tower-a-songspiel/>
- ²⁶ See <http://factoryoffoundclothes.org/> [Accessed January 2011].
- ²⁷ David Riff and Dmitry Vilensky, 'The Story of Angry Sandwich People, or, In Praise of Dialectics' in *Rethinking Marxism* Volume 20 Number 3 (July 2008).
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Dmitry Vilensky and David Riff, 'Angry Sandwich People, 2005' http://www.chtodelat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=313&Itemid=173 [Accessed August 2008]
- ³⁰ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht the man and his work*, ed. Martin Esslin, (New York, 1969):143, cited in *Marxism and Art*: 358.
- ³¹ Vladan Jeremic and Rena Raedle, *Bellville* (2009). See also, Vladan Jeremic and Rena Raedle, 'Antiziganism and Class Racism in Europe', available via <http://www.chtodelat.org> [Last accessed August 20 2013].