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# Doing the Crease: Text and Subjectiness in a Liberation of Folds

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# Lay Summary

My research project *Doing the Crease: Text and Subjectiness in a Liberation of Folds* comprises five text-based art projects that investigate whether text can become 'subjecty' through methods of folding. Characteristic of the fold is its expansion: going in and out, overlapping and reoccurring, the fold takes shape in repetition or by sticking out and getting in the way. This can be recognised in my art projects as the doubling and looping of text, image and sound, but also in the recurring themes that overlap throughout the thesis and feed back into the work. Because my methods involve repetitive, plain language, the work often appears to acquire a deadpan, slapstick-like quality. As such, it demonstrates that slapstick, too, may be a type of fold. Inspired by what Deleuze calls a 'liberation of folds', I see the fold as a form of action that finds freedom through its reiteration. What began as research on subjectiness thus becomes an enquiry into the mechanism of the fold as an emancipatory movement.

# Research Abstract

Text appears ordered, yet so much can go wrong. It has a form and a sound, needs to be put together and deciphered, and inherently serves to deliver a message. Inspired by the potential of clumsiness, my research project *Doing the Crease: Text and Subjectiness in a Liberation of Folds* comprises five text-based art projects that investigate whether text can become 'subjecty' through methods of folding. Deleuze speaks of the fold as an 'operative function' that is almost self-generating. I argue the fold is what Heidegger might call 'subjectival' or 'in itself eager to represent', derived from the Greek word *hypokeimenon* that denotes the subject as *that-which-lies-before*. Characteristic of the fold is its expansion: going in and out, overlapping and reoccurring, the fold finds its form in repetition or by sticking out and getting in the way. This can be recognised in my art projects as the doubling and looping of text, image and sound, but also in the recurring themes that overlap throughout the thesis and feed back into the work. Because my methods involve repetitive, plain language, the work often appears to acquire a deadpan, slapstick-like quality. As such, it demonstrates that slapstick, too, may be a type of fold. Inspired by what Deleuze calls a 'liberation of folds', I see the fold as a form of action that finds freedom through its reiteration. What began as research on subjectiness thus becomes an enquiry into the mechanism of the fold as an emancipatory movement. In addition, it appears that the quality of subjectiness naturally invites interaction. Engaging other subjects and bringing them into focus, the research project establishes the possibility that, in a meeting of subjectiness, emancipation means the fold moving away from one narrative to fold again and join another.

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# Introduction

This research stems from my practice situated between writing and visual art and comprises a collection of five text-based art projects in various media. Each of these started on the page, where I tend to scrape away at my writing until I am left with a sequence, word or letter I can use to explore instances of positioning and dialogue in sculptures, videos, installations and sound works. Important is how the elements within the text influence each other and how they relate to their environment. Looking to write 'physically' rather than metaphorically or descriptively, I edit my texts so that they 'act'. Because the methods I use lead to repetitive, plain language, the work often seems to acquire a deadpan, slapstick-like quality. It made me wonder if, instead of describing a character, text itself can take on something subject-like.

I proceeded to look for a quality I coined textual 'subjectiness'. The term is related to 'thinginess', which has to do with the so-called 'materiality of language' but instead refers to subject-like qualities. Starting out by looping sentence structures and doubling words, I soon realised that most of my methods involve a type of folding. It brought me to Gilles Deleuze's theory of the fold as an 'operative function' which, interestingly, he links to the process of subjectivation. Through colourful descriptions of folds in Baroque artworks and buildings, Deleuze speaks of a 'liberation of folds' that is almost self-generating. I argue this mechanism is what Martin Heidegger might call 'subjectival' or 'in itself eager to represent', after the Ancient Greek word *hypokeimenon*. This term, from which the Latin *subiectum* originates, denotes the subject as *that-which-lies-before* or a substratum on which a world gathers. Fittingly, it also became the theoretical grounding for my research project. Investigating whether text can become 'subjecty' through methods of folding, the etymology of *hypokeimenon* offered insights into what it means to have spatiality; a way of being in the world; a 'subjectiness'.

## Research Background

My work is text-based and often sculptural. I am inspired by uncomplicated forms and look for a kind of banality in language by using single words and easy phrases. It is a method that has its place in a tradition of writers and artists who write 'small', relying on simple language or a limited number of words. For example, Lydia Davis tells stories through what she leaves out:

> An outburst of anger near the road, a refusal to speak on the path, a silence in the pine woods, a silence across the old railroad bridge, an attempt to be friendly in the water, a refusal to end the argument on the flat stones, a cry of anger on the steep bank of dirt, a weeping among the bushes.
> 'The Outing' (Davis, 2013, p. 298).

Whereas Davis is known for the 'ultrashort' story, I suggest that Aram Saroyan, a concrete poet active in the 1960s, may well be called the master of the ultrashort poem:

> night
> again
> again
> (Saroyan, 2014, p. 17).

The repetition of the word 'again' in this poem is a direct expression of its meaning. Such formal treatment of language is further emphasised by there being only three words in the poem: 'night' appears once and 'again' twice. The poem thus doubles from one to two, reflecting the essence of repetition or where the process of duplication begins. Additionally, Saroyan's minimal approach also means there is a lot of white space left around the text. The placement of just one poem on a page, in the middle and quite small, evokes a resonant moment that reaches beyond its form.

A similar quality can be found in the work of Gertrude Stein, who, although 'wordier' than Saroyan and other concrete writers, also generates resonance through repetition. The rhythm this creates in her stories generates a sense of both expansiveness and immediacy:

> Any one is one having been that one. Any one is such a one.
> Any one having been that one is one remembering something of such a thing, is one remembering having been that one.
> Each one having been one is being one having been that one. Each one having been one is remembering something of this thing, is remembering something of having been that one.
> Each one is one. Each one has been one. Each one being one, each one having been one is remembering something of that thing.
> Each one is one. Each one has been one. Each one is remembering that thing.
> Each one is one. Each one has been one. That is something that any one having been one, any one being one is having happen. Each one being one is having it happen that that one has been that one.
> Each one is one. Any one is the one that one is. Each one is one.
> […]
> There are very many being living. Each one is one. Each one is one being that one. Each one is like some. Each one is one. There are very many of them. There are many kinds of them. Each one is one. Each one is that one.
> (Stein, 2006, pp. 84 and 89).

It seems as though the language in this example lingers in one moment, bringing about a certain presentness that embodies a visual approach to language. Stein is known to have been inspired by Cubism, concentrating on what is directly visible rather than using knowledge or memories of what things look like. It creates a flatness that, at the same time, is very 'here' and

'now' because it is written from direct experience, much like how cubists painted only what they saw – the surface of things and not their other sides. About Picasso, she writes:

> Really most of the time one sees only a feature of a person with whom one is, the other features are covered by a hat, by the light, by clothes for sport and everybody is accustomed to complete the whole entirely from their knowledge, but Picasso when he saw an eye, the other one did not exist for him and only the one he saw did exist for him and as a painter…. He was right, one sees what one sees, the rest is a reconstruction from memory and painters have nothing to do with reconstruction, nothing to do with memory, they concern themselves only with visible things. (Stein, 1984, p. 15).

Returning to a sentence that is more or less the same as the previous one yet slightly altered might be a bit like looking at the same object and seeing it change in the light. In a similar fashion, artist and writer Tim Etchells uses a technique he calls 'loops'. These texts are composed of a looping sentence structure that keeps returning to the same beginning while ending differently, or the other way around, featuring changed beginnings with the same ending. It is, however, less visually as it is linguistically operative, playing with the construction of meaning:

> a web of lies, a tangle of lies, a bed of lies, a hoard of lies, a stack of lies, a cycle of lies, a veil of lies, a pack of lies, a heap of lies, a pile of lies, a wall of lies, a mountain of lies, a pyramid of lies, a prison of lies, a grave of lies, a flood of lies, a deluge of lies, a forest of lies, a thread of lies, a pit of lies, an avalanche of lies, a stream of lies, a sea of lies, a sword of lies, a sickness of lies, a ligature of lies, an empire of lies, a swamp of lies, a knot of lies, a glut of lies, a cauldron of lies, an enclosure of lies, a feast of lies, a charm of lies, an infestation of lies, a dullness of lies, a

festival of lies, a trap of lies, a blight of lies, a house of lies, a seepage of lies, a swarm of lies, a sack of lies, a shame of lies, a rut of lies, a curse of lies, a cancer of lies, a syphilis of lies, a hole of lies, a cacophony of lies, a confusion of lies, a sewer of lies, a crown of lies, a thicket of lies, an agony of lies, an epidemic of lies, a pestilence of lies, a residue of lies, a blindness of lies, a nightmare of lies, a storm of lies, a terror of lies, a blanket of lies, a fistful of lies, a malady of lies, a straitjacket of lies, a plague of lies, a shambles of lies, a hovel of lies, a patina of lies, an emptiness of lies, a punishment of lies, a pornography of lies, a furnace of lies, a dance of lies, a dictionary of lies, a stupidity of lies, a gulag of lies, an overdose of lies, a parade of lies […]

(Excerpt from *How the Land*, Tim Etchells, 2021).

Presenting language like a collection of possibilities, Etchells lets a word, in this case, 'lies', pass by again and again in a different capacity. Through unusual combinations, such as 'a gulag of lies' or 'a blanket of lies', the word transcends its ordinary status, becoming elevated to an exalted albeit vertiginous trap from which there is no escape, quite literally a 'web' of lies.

That looping text can evoke a sense of claustrophobia also emerges in the work of Bruce Nauman. Consisting of colourful neon tubing on the wall, his piece *One Hundred Live and Die* (1984) forms a collection of word combinations in two categories that are spread over four columns. One category ends with 'and die', the other with 'and live'. In a randomised order, one sign after the other lights up, forming ever-changing combinations. With statements such as 'spit and live' or 'piss and die', the work addresses the metaphysical concern with life and death, which, at the same time, becomes terribly mundane.

Less existential but similarly concerned with the banality of language is Lily van der Stokker, whose work celebrates trivial content with a dose of humour. Her large-scale murals look like inflated doodles incorporating gossip, shopping lists and other casual remarks, often accompanied by

Bruce Nauman, *One Hundred Live and Die*, 1984

items of furniture.

Van der Stokker presents material that seems to be copied from a piece of paper next to the telephone or a page from a personal diary. These elements of the private domain are not usually brought into the public sphere. Yet it is not so far removed from the work of Nora Turato, who, at the other end of the spectrum, incorporates into murals precisely what we might call 'hyper-public' texts taken from social media. Both artists treat the texts they work with as found material to present to an audience outside their original contexts. But whereas van der Stokker's work presents the narrow world of personal household or private gossip, Turato shows a large, unwieldy realm of information that continues to become increasingly splintered. Her work reinforces this fragmentation by cutting up found

Lily van der Stokker, *Thank you Darling*, 2022

messages in a collage-like manner or by placing alienating single sentences against a background of hallucinatory colours.

    Turato's work also suggests interaction: do you scroll along or stay

Nora Turato, *explore heaven now*, 2022

with it? Will you engage? Text on social media is there for clicks, shares and likes. Extracted, it breaks up into loose remnants — messages that no longer work, that have lost their functionality but still demand attention. It alludes to a type of broken interaction that also resonates with the work of Richard Artschwager, which I discuss in the first chapter. Much of his work contains confusing calls to action, the purport of which remains unclear.

As Turato demonstrates, we have never before been so surrounded by text. Today, text is everywhere, permeating our daily lives through email, text messages, apps and social media. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly fragmented. Text has become fast: messages are kept short, and news on social media consists mainly of headlines. Yet as I progressed with my research, I increasingly noticed I was making typed text physical, taking it out of the digital realm and bringing it into the world of objects where we can relate to it with our bodies. Perhaps it could be called a countermovement in this day and age where content on screens ceaselessly appears fleeting and streamlined. I do not present slick letters smoothly

running across a screen but hand-painted, crumpled, clumsy-looking 'typed' words that are awkwardly positioned. Perhaps that is where the slapstick method comes in, as a reactive mode that stays behind the times. Slapstick comedy emerged during Industrialisation, a period of profound changes of scale that dramatically impacted all aspects of life, at work and in the home. Emphasising how a person may not adapt to their changing environment, slapstick challenges the viewer by turning things around and deliberately doing the wrong thing. In art, this translates to clumsy objects or stumbling blocks, and I argue it may even be found in text that gets in the way.

There is a tendency to take art seriously. However, the recognition of a slapstick method may lead to the question of whether art, as Jörg Heiser puts it, 'is actually what people think it is' (Heiser, 2008, p. 15). Of course, there is Bas Jan Ader, who purposely and with full conviction cycles into a canal and films it (Ader, 1970). Here, the connection with slapstick is obvious, and there are other contemporary examples of art that tie in with this. However, the phenomenon may be even more widespread than it appears at first sight. Sally O'Reilly writes, 'Modernity, violence, narrative, repetition: slapstick shares as much with contemporary art as it does comedy' (O'Reilly, 2007, p. 256). The tradition may have started as early as the beginning of the 20th century when Marcel Duchamp mounted his first wheel on a stool (Duchamp, 1913). One cannot sit on a stool with a wheel on it, or the other way around, use a wheel that has a stool attached to it. Duchamp made this work in 1913, the same year in which Charles Chaplin signed a contract with production company Keystone (Heiser, 2008, p. 22). A coincidence? Heiser does not think so. A few years later, Duchamp famously submitted a toilet bowl to the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists at the Grand Central Palace in New York (Duchamp, 1917). What was considered a disgrace at the time was later honoured as perhaps the most important moment in contemporary art history, recognising that with this act, Duchamp opened up the entirely novel perspective that anything can be art. It is therefore often considered the beginning of

conceptual art; however, is it also not just plain funny to place a toilet bowl in a highbrow art show?

Duchamp's work is defiant and caused a profound shift in thinking about art. It is an example of how the slapstick method may be what drives art history, coined by Heiser as 'a central triggering mechanism' that is 'responsible for bringing art into being and making it go somewhere' (Heiser, 2008, p. 17). Looking at it this way, one might recognise the slapstick method across genres and periods. Heiser argues one may even rethink minimal art that, on the contrary, is often seen as the epitome of seriousness. He mentions Donald Judd as an example, who made 'specific objects' in response to the serial industry of the time: 'From the front, a headache pill; from the back, LSD' (Heiser, 2008, p. 37). Theatrically placed under a spotlight, these strange geometric forms of galvanized iron, aluminium and stainless steel, coated in vibrant candy colours, seem to have escaped an odd fantasy. Caught in a paradox of familiarity and strangeness, they taunt



Left: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1991, enamelled aluminium, anodised aluminium, acrylic sheet
Right: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1967, lacquer on galvanised iron

the viewer as to whether or not they 'get' it. Yes, Judd's 'specific' objects present themselves as monotonous and restrained. But what are they specific in, exactly?

Sometimes, the story of art, or what it is 'about', is less important than how it is told. In fact, what it may really want to show is how the story is disrupted, and this is where art especially resonates with slapstick. Film theorist Donald Crafton explains the slapstick genre as 'the vertical, paradigmatic domain' that ruptures the 'horizontal, syntagmatic domain of the story', leaving them 'antagonistically separate' (Crafton, 1987, p. 50). Similarly, Heiser argues that slapstick is 'essentially antinarrative' and 'less about *what* than about *how*' (Heiser, 2008, p. 16). I argue that this emphasis also relates the slapstick method to the late ancient and medieval idea that 'every accident denominates its subject' or '*accidens denominat proprium subiectum*' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200). Accident, here, should be understood in the philosophical meaning of the word as a non-defining property that determines not what something is but how it is what it is.

My research is linked to the idea that text is material and can, therefore, assume a variety of capacities: it can take up space, deform and crumble, and gradually deteriorate. As mentioned earlier, it came from my venture into writing 'physically' that the question arose as to whether text can also acquire subject-like characteristics. Or, more precisely, if text itself can act out a character instead of describing one. Looking at the etymology of the word 'subject', it seems to mean something like 'under-throw'. The Latin word *subiectum* derives from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, translating as 'that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66). Martin Heidegger refers to *hypokeimenon* to describe a subject that has *being-in-the-world* as its essential state. As such, Heidegger argues that even a stone can be a subject because it lies before itself no less than a person does (Heidegger, 1991, p. 97). It is the pre-Cartesian idea that all things are subjects; however, I argue it may also mean, in return, that human beings are things. If there is something like a quality of 'subjectiness' to be

recognised in Heidegger's definition of the subject, it seems to be very similar to his 'thingness' (Heidegger, 2001, p. 165). He states that the 'thingness of a thing' is emphasised when an object is just that: a thing and not much more, for example, when it was formerly a tool but can no longer be used (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 102-103). Suddenly, we 'see' the object instead of using it. I argue that, similarly, when the material qualities of text are more pronounced (concrete or sound poetry are good examples), the 'arranged' or 'posed' language lingers in perception before disappearing into meaning. Does this not also resemble what Heidegger writes about the subject, which may even be a stone, 'lying before itself'?

I came across Michel Serres's concept of the 'quasi-object' that captures a subject-*like* quality in things that are not subjects (Serres, 1982). For example, a ball's condition falls somewhere between object and subject when it directs people to go after it. Interestingly, I also found the opposite in Henri Bergson's essay *Laughter: an essay on the meaning of the comic*, in which he explains the comedian as a subject that acts like a thing (Bergson, 1913). It occurred to me that where there is one, there may be the other. A human being acting like a machine will most likely resemble a flawed device, and the other way around, because of its 'moodiness', a broken machine can resemble a human being. This resonates with my work: through my language experiments, I understand Bergson's idea of the comedian resembling a mechanical arrangement. However, I use this method the other way around, mechanically arranging texts to come across 'subjecty'. I feel that by using this method, text may take on a mechanical quality that, although thing-like, seems almost emotional.

Besides writing, I look for forms in materials such as clay and paper. The sculptural form should not be a literal translation of the text; however, still somehow match it. Gradually, I began to notice that I am often busy folding and creasing, looking for an undefined or indifferent quality that brings friction between the word and the form. Hence, the wrinkles in my sculptures began to reflect my use of looping sentence structures and doubling words,

which I also identified as a type of folding. My eye fell on an interview with Anish Kapoor in which he defines the fold as a 'sign of being', inspired by Baroque paintings that often show folds in fabric to emphasise volume as an expression of three-dimensionality and movement (Goldstein, 2019). This idea emerges most profoundly from Deleuze's work *The fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, describing the Baroque fold as generative, multiplying and expansive (Deleuze, 2006). The folds depicted in Baroque art are often greatly exaggerated in towering heaps that seem to be constantly extending, a principle that can also be recognised in the repetitive use of columns and arches in the architecture of the time. Pointing out that the folds in robes depicted in Baroque paintings often do not seem to be determined by the shape of the body underneath but instead go their own way, multiplying and expanding in all directions, Deleuze describes a mechanism by which the fold acquires autonomy (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 139-141). I would argue this corresponds to the idea of an editorial fold that interrupts the linearity of text to give it a kind of spatiality, a way of being in the world.

 A Baroque painting is often entirely made up of folds. These help the painting look realistic, as the great light-dark contrast achieved by the *chiaroscuro* technique makes them appear very three-dimensional. And yet, conveying realism does not seem to have been the Baroque artists' main concern. Deleuze talks about the fold as an operative function that is almost self-generating, appearing again and again as an original while at the same time representing a pre-existing form that folds for the sake of folding. Hence, it seems not a by-product but an origin: bodies assuming complex poses and mingling with fluttering, intensely creased robes almost suggest it is not the body that pushes the fold into its form but the fold that manipulates the body. As such, I argue the fold can be seen as what Heidegger calls 'subjectival' or 'in itself eager to represent' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 181), perhaps to bring a spiritual message regarding nature and becoming. And although it may seem a completely different topic, I see in the Baroque fold what also struck me when I studied slapstick comedy, namely the principle of mutation.

Slapstick heroes usually mean well. They do not end up on the floor because they are stupid but because they are too invested in their actions. They show 'extreme care' (Dillon, 2007, p. 214). Brian Dillon states that slapstick characters exaggerate the 'mechanics of thought as such — the (perfectly rational, therefore idiotic) decisions' (Dillon, 2007, p. 213), and I see this as a type of mutational behaviour. Similar to how Baroque artists paint robes with an appropriate shape, colour and texture, the slapstick mutation is subtle. The difference is in the folds: where the Baroque painters release additional, defiant creases into their compositions, a slapstick character expands the details of a gesture. Doubling or reversing an unfolding situation or rerunning it from the start, slapstick becomes a mechanism that traps the protagonist in a perpetual loop of errors.

In his writing on the comic, Bergson states that laughter is incited by 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living' (Bergson, 1913, p. 49). Yet, apart from simply creating a clash with nature, I found there may, in fact, exist a connection between the mechanical behaviour of slapstick characters and the excessive regularity in which some plants mutate. Particularly double flowers that keep growing the same petals in places where they should be growing something else — sex organs, for example — show that they, like slapstick characters, do not lose attention but are rather too focussed on one particular element. Contrary to the views of his contemporaries, botanist Robert Sharrock (1630-1684) wrote as early as the 17th century that in irregularities, there often seems to be 'a greater curiousness' and even an excessive order (Arber, 2012, p. 6). Similarly, Chaplin's character, the Tramp, is not lazy but rather too preoccupied with details, which, in all his diligence, leads to his demise.

Robert Sharrock lived in the Renaissance when biology was considered the work of God and every deviation as that of the devil. Inspired by this idea of divine nature, artists and architects sought to work with 'ideal' proportions. In the Baroque period that followed, however, they became more liberal with their columns, arches and pictorial elements. At the time,

the term 'Baroque' did not exist, and the building style now associated with it was then referred to as 'gotico' (Hills, 2007, p. 50). Seen as 'bizarre', gotico was not appreciated by critics at the time: the 'excess' of elements was considered 'empty' and 'decadent' (Hills, 2007, p. 54). In the same fashion, people began to describe gotico as 'baroque' after *perles baroque*, French for 'irregularly shaped pearl'. From the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, this word had connotations such as 'unreasoned', 'licentious' and 'bizarre', and was deemed to contain 'implications of immodesty' (Hills, 2007, p. 49). It was around the same period that one spoke of 'monstrosities' to denote mutated life forms; people were aware that growth is not always orderly, and they were afraid of anything that did not conform to their interpretation of nature. I argue that the way in which the Baroque was perceived at the time, as an unlawful deviation from the classical ideal, should be seen in a similar context.

While in the 18th century, the word Baroque made its debut as an art term to denote art made according to a bad taste, a century later, it was called 'emancipated decoration' (Hills, 2007, p. 55). Emancipation is the power to cast off old, imposed meanings and create a new, self-serving story. I argue this relates to Deleuze's idea of the Baroque as 'an operative function' that 'endlessly produces folds' as well as to his praise for the associated 'liberation of folds' (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 3, 140). Yet I also suggest one could find emancipation reflected in comedy: a humorous situation breaks away from the status quo and laughing is the result of shattered expectations. In my work, such reactions have led me to investigate how the slapstick method can function as an editorial device, although laughter is not necessarily the aim. I work from the idea that language does not have to be large to be considered for what it is. However small or uncertain, it has a weight, and as such, I wish to emancipate text and meaning.

Language, as already discussed, is a growing feature of today's landscape. Thanks to the smartphone, there is hardly any difference between an email and a text message, and there are numerous other apps one can

use to communicate. But what are those forms, those signs we keep sending each other? I address this question by creating tactile vernacular. Converting idle chitchat into sculptures, I explore what it looks and feels like — e.g., the phrase 'oh come on then' stretched out on the sofa where one might also be texting on a mobile phone. Thinking about the possibility of textual subjectiness, I found myself looking for warmth, touch and affection in language. This emanates from the inherent invitation to sit on the sofa with *oh come on then*, but also in my offer to the cows to use the letter W as a scratching post. There where it does not belong, in a cow field, the letter expresses the clumsiness of the subject that, although it does not fit with its surroundings, nevertheless forms a hub of interaction and intimacy.

## Methods

I use the fold as a method to write, sculpt, and reflect on theory. Characteristic of the fold is its expansion, taking shape and becoming visible. Going in and out, overlapping and reoccurring, the fold finds its form in a repetition or loop, or something that sticks out and gets in the way. This can be recognised in my visual work as the crumpling, doubling and looping of text, image and sound, but also in the recurring themes that overlap throughout the thesis and feed back into the work. As mentioned before, I examine how the fold relates to the slapstick method. Slapstick comedy is a visual and bodily genre that revolves around the stumbling physicality of individuals, 'subjecty' objects and machines. Treating text as material and emphasising the 'thinginess' that might lead to 'subjectiness', my methodology seeks to express a linguistic struggle or textual performativity.

I discuss my visual work in more detail in the thesis. Each chapter is dedicated to one project that I analyse and fold into theory, films and the work of other artists. Reflecting through writing, I work with folds that are essentially shifts in perspective. The topics I deal with are beacons to fold between, to move away from and come back to. I read the theories by Deleuze on the fold and Heidegger on the subject through each other and

project these onto other material taken from a variety of disciplines such as philosophy, biology, art and film. This interdisciplinarity is inspired by Deleuze's idea of the fold entering 'into an infinite convergence' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 38) and prompted me to utilise the fold as a means to liberate a narrative or, as Deleuze might say it, free it 'from its usual subordination to the finite body' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 139). I talk about how the mutated flower is emancipated; the Baroque is emancipated, and, in the first chapter, I make mention of the football player Zidane whom I suggest is emancipated by Douglas Gordon's film *Zidane* (2006). Folding is freeing: describing how the camera moves away from the ball, the text moves with it in search of things that may not be so demanding but still deserve a place.

A special role is given to Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958), as this film focuses on visual humour generated by the relationship between person and object. Each chapter is loosely based on a description of a scene taking place in or around Madame and Monsieur Arpel's garden that has a prominent role in the film. I speak about this garden in the second person singular, 'you', directly addressing the reader as an experiment to shift them; to detach them from their substrate; to fold them into something that is not only human. George Perec described his use of the second-person singular in *A Man Asleep* (1967) as "mix[ing] the reader, the character and the author" (from an interview with Pierre Dumayet in *Lectures pour tous*, 1967 (television broadcast), as quoted and translated by Parker, 2011, p. 167). I would say that in this thesis, the reader mixes with the writer and an object: the garden. The second-person singular is the most direct form of address; however, by speaking to the reader directly and at the same time giving them a role that is so distant, I wish to get close to the reader and far away at the same time, othering them while drawing them in. It is an inward fold that is at the same time an outward fold: upon the reader, but also upon the scene I discuss, an ekphrasis that takes on a life of its own.

Ekphrasis is traditionally competitive, not just describing its topic but also transforming into a story of itself, a 're-presentation, re-writing and

translation or … transformation and metamorphosis' (Clüver, 1997, p. 31). A description may grow into an independent form that becomes detached from its substrate, just as Deleuze describes the Baroque fold that 'no longer merely reproduc[es] the finite body' and 'flow[s] out of the frame' (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 140-141). Where there are folds, there is life, or, as mentioned earlier, a 'sign of being' (Goldstein, 2019). Juxtaposed with observations from the first-person perspective, I use second-person garden descriptions to create a fold in the writing that, unsure of its location, does not simply move back and forth between the deixis 'you' and 'I' but also sideways in a negotiation of perspective, dialogue and positioning between the reader, the writer, the garden and its guests.

OH COME ON THEN

*oh come on then*, 2021
Paper, glue, epoxy clay, enamel paint
54 x 44 x 36 cm
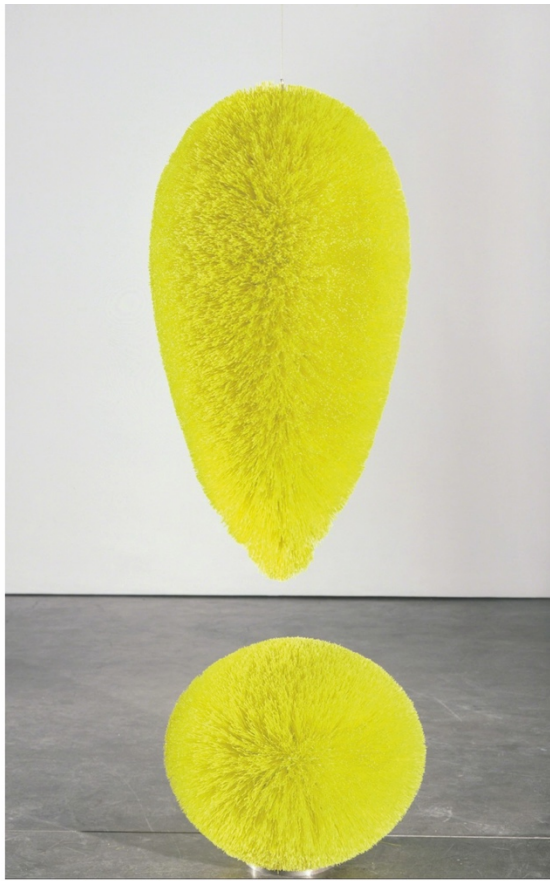On Sarah and Henry's sofa
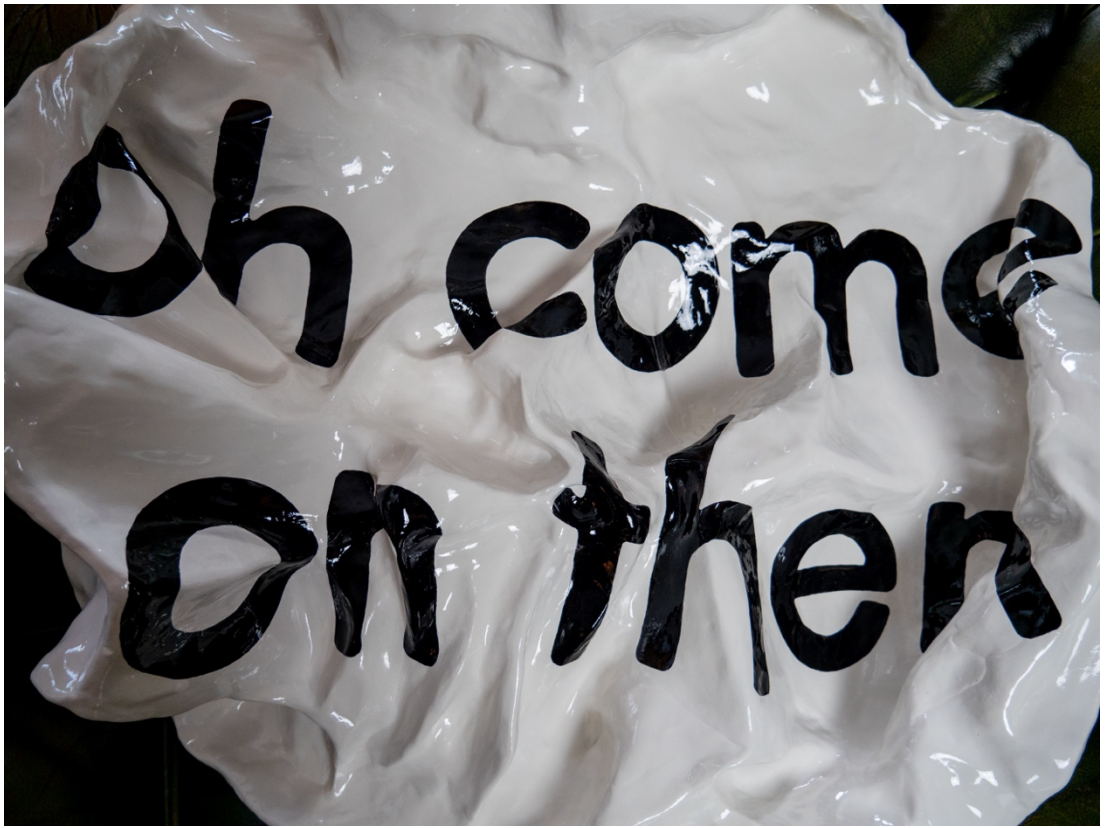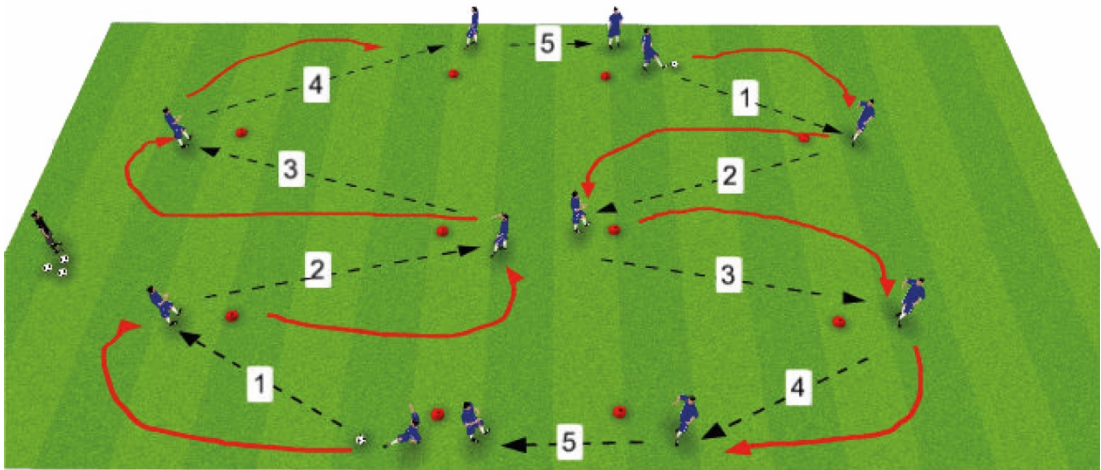
# Figures

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

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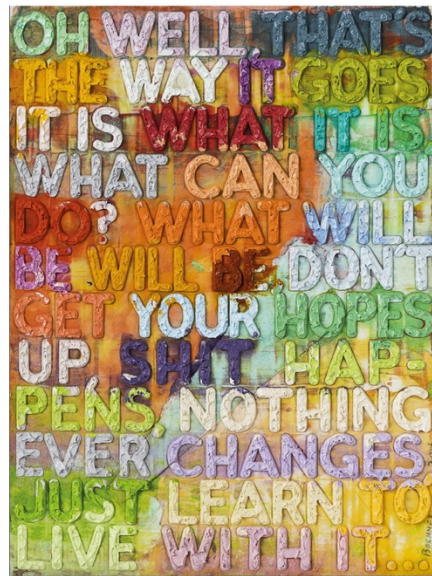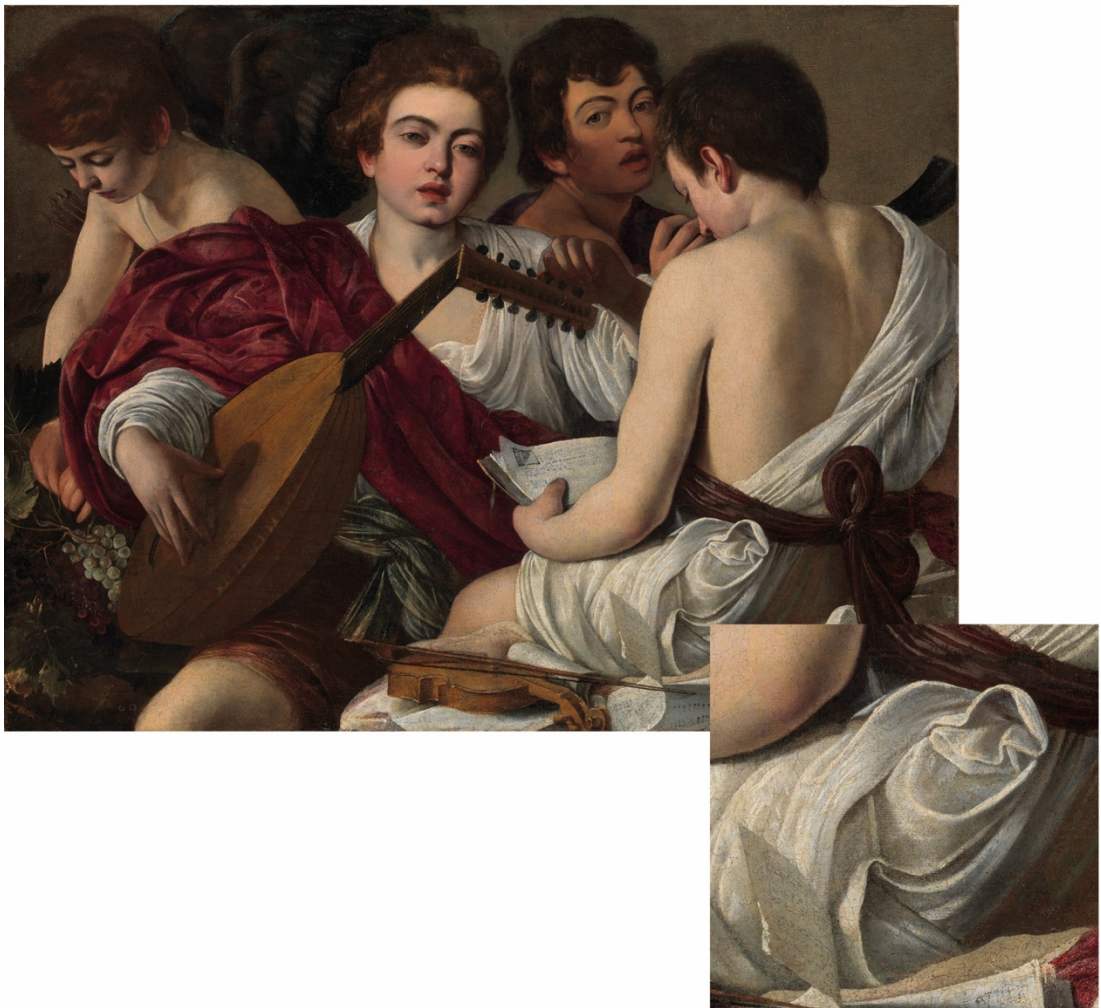IT WAS THE FIRST AND LAST TIME

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

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Figure 9

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I

The object has a different shape from a planet; it is roughly round in circumference but not spherical. Instead, it is flatter, perhaps a bit similar to what people used to think the Earth looked like; however, it is a lot smaller, about fifty centimetres across, such that it can easily be held with two hands or placed on top of another object — a mossy green Chesterfield sofa, for example, made of glistening leather with buttons and a seating area formed of two cushions (pp. 27–28). One of these cushions would be taken up almost entirely by the object, but the other would be free — if someone wanted to, they could sit down next to the object and tap its surface to discover it is hard and hollow.

The flat planet has a crumpled surface painted a glossy white and black, although mainly white and only a little black. The black is placed over the white and takes on specific shapes. People call these 'letters': symbols for sounds people make with their mouths, which together form words that have meanings. The letters on the object are not formed by handwriting but have a designed shape, a typeface. Large enough to wrap themselves around the object's creases, the letters fold into its hills and valleys. Painted in clean, evenly black lines, however, they look neat and retain their shape even though they are crumpled, whilst spelling: 'oh come on then'.

The phrase "oh come on then" is encountered more frequently in speech than in writing. It often starts with a medium pitch to pronounce 'oh'. Then, the voice will shoot up a note for 'come', drop down for 'on' and finally slide up a concluding half note to say 'then'. Sounding a little higher than the rest, the emphasis on 'come' is meant to encourage someone. It is a melodious sentence — the lilting up and down of the voice perhaps suits the creases of the object, its hills and valleys, as if the folds of form meet the folds of sound. These creases are not random but deliberately and carefully moulded in epoxy clay and painted a brilliant white gloss. It makes them hard, smooth and shiny, as if, for whatever reason, petrified and immortalised. This also applies to the sentence painted onto the object, the

'oh come one then'. If it used to be part of a conversation, it has now become detached; however, its deliberate brilliance, so meticulously painted, demonstrates it did not end up there by chance.

Maybe you are a garden and maybe you are hypermodern. Maybe your surface is divided into geometrically shaped sections, about thirty in total, or maybe twenty, or maybe twenty-five, and maybe these are demarcated by white stone borders. Each area might have a different filling: maybe bright green and neatly trimmed grass is contrasted by pink, or maybe anthracite, or perhaps by blue and beige gravel zones. It might be a play of colours, reminiscent of a Supremacist painting by Malevich. Apart from the grass, the only other plants found on your surface could be geometrically trimmed privet hedges. Perhaps without even the smallest weed or any pebble out of place, it could be that nothing disturbs your composition. Maybe a grey wall demarcates your borders and acts as your frame. Made from the same material, the smooth wall might blend in perfectly with the, perhaps, cubic sculpture at your back — maybe featuring large square windows and

vertical blue stripes — in which the Arpels live.

Do I opt for chance, or do I prefer to make a firm choice? The object on the Chesterfield sofa is deliberate. Is the garden, as described above, as carefully planned? The colourful arrangement of grass and gravel belongs to Monsieur and Madame Arpel in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958), a modern couple who fully embrace the novelties of their time. Monsieur holds a high position at a plastic factory, and Madame dresses exclusively in the most extravagant Avant-garde fashion. Madame's brother, Monsieur Hulot, is a lot less modern. Played by Tati himself, Hulot finds it difficult to adapt to the Arpels' living environment. The meticulously groomed garden, with its vibrant colours and oddly laid out steppingstones, is part of a universe where all objects seem to agree with each other but perhaps less so with the visitor of the garden. On his journey through the villa, Monsieur Hulot struggles to sit down on designer chairs and discovers that cabinet doors only open at the push of a button. Alone in the kitchen, Hulot takes a water jug from a cupboard and puts it on the counter; however, it rolls over to one side. The jug cannot stand because it has a rubber, ball-shaped bottom. When Hulot tries again to put the jug down, now with a little more force, it jumps like a ball. Fascinated, he drops the jug on the floor, after which it bounces all the way back up (figure 1). Then, Hulot eagerly grabs another object from the kitchen cupboard, a glass this time, and drops it on the floor too.

A jug rolls over,
then bounces up from the floor.
Monsieur breaks a glass.

The jug prompts Monsieur Hulot to drop a glass, which breaks. Why does the jug bounce? Does that make the jug more practical? Ordinarily, a jug moves through space because it is passed around, put on a table or lifted off again.

The Arpels' jug, however, jumps up. Its round and rubbery base is clearly not an accident. Not only has someone designed the jug, it has also been manufactured. Therefore, one would think there must be a reason. Does a level of bounciness benefit the jug's jugness?

Probably not. A jug is meant to pour, not jump. Heidegger writes that the 'problem' of any jug is that it is impossible for humans to understand it. However, if one were to make an attempt, it would be necessary to consider what makes the jug a jug: 'what and how the jug *is* as this jug-thing' (Heidegger, 2001, p. 166). The jug has sides and a bottom that encompass a void that can be filled with liquid. On its bottom, the jug can stand. But what if it does not stand? If it just falls over? Then, says Heidegger, the jug is still a jug, for only a jug pours out its contents:

> What would a jug be that did not stand? At least a jug *manqué*, hence a jug still — namely, one that would indeed hold but that, constantly falling over, would empty itself of what it holds. Only a vessel, however, can empty itself.
> (Heidegger, 2001, p. 167).

It seems that this is exactly what the ball-jug wants to do, and maybe it is even one of its strongest points. But is it also useful? May one comment on a jug's usefulness at all? The Arpels' jug exists and embodies the jug-thing as a ball-jug — who am I to judge it? Bouncing around the kitchen, the ball-jug is there: playing with Monsieur Hulot, riotous and buoyant.

So, perhaps not very useful then. The Arpels' ball-jug may be reminiscent of one of the vases made for Sen no Rikyii (1522- 1591), founder of the modern tea ceremony in Japan. Like the ball-jug, a vase is a vessel that holds liquid. One vase in particular, however, was slightly cracked, and therefore named *Enjōji* after the cracked bell of a temple. Later on, the vase was passed on to Sen Sōtan, and when a guest commented that it was leaking on the tokonoma, Sōtan replied that this was, in fact, the essence of

the vase (Weiss, 2010, p. 92). Sõtan shows that, like *Enjõji*, the essence of an object can be at odds with its function. I wonder what that means for the ball-jug, the bottom of which resembles a ball. Balls are used to play games, but the ball-jug holds more than a single reference — its essence may be found in the quirky contrariness of not doing what it is supposed to do.

This, I suppose one could call it 'attitude', reminds me of the work by Richard Artschwager, according to Jörg Heiser the 'Jacques Tati of Geometric Abstraction' (Heiser, 2008, p. 39), who used the formal language of Minimal Art to charge it with playfulness. While the pure minimalists were trying to avoid any references to everyday objects or 'illusionary effects' (Heiser, 2008, p. 38), Artschwager made slick, geometrically shaped objects that resembled abstracted versions of everyday utensils. Although these objects are not at all usable, they do give the illusion of usability while, at the same time, resembling minimalist art that is completely devoid of function. The object is thus situated between form and function, both a comment on the underlying principle of minimalism and a play on its form. Take, for instance, *Counter I* (1962), an object made of wood veneer and acrylic paint (figure 2). It looks like a lectern with four black legs; however, its transparent lacquered reading surface is so slanted and polished that any sheet of paper would immediately slide off. In fact, if one even tried putting anything on it, the wheels attached to its slender legs would cause the thing to roll away.

Besides minimalist furniture depictions, Artschwager made objects referring to signs and language as well. For example, his *Exclamation Point (Chartreuse)* (2008), made of neon yellow plastic bristles, is a huge brushy exclamation mark (figure 3). What is it doing there? Hysterically coloured and 'puffed up or embarrassed', Heiser suggests it mocks the idea of astonishment felt by the viewer in front of an art object (Heiser, 2008, p. 39). Or take his heavy-looking *Yes/No Ball* (1974) (figure 3). About twenty-five centimetres in diameter and made of black plastic, it looks exactly like a bowling ball. One side has the word 'yes' engraved on it, the other 'no'. It would seem that one could use the ball the way one flips a coin were it not

for the fact that the ball can roll in all directions and, therefore, more often ends up *between* yes and no. As Artschwager himself explained, "If you have a lot of these balls, then you have a model for inductive reasoning, which is the only kind of reasoning we've got" (Saltz, 2012). Inductive reasoning derives a 'probable' assumption from inconclusive evidence (Bradford and Weisberger, 2021), and Artschwager seems to suggest one could throw a lot of balls, count the noes and yesses, go for the answer that occurs the most and hope for the best. The uncertainty this method implies is typical of Artschwager's work, in front of which one is never entirely sure what to do.

Perhaps similar to how Artschwager's works implicate interaction, the Arpels' ball-jug stimulates Monsieur Hulot to take it from the cupboard and let it bounce on the ground. It is as if the jug tells Hulot, 'oh come on then, try to bounce that glass as well!'. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the glass breaks, and so perhaps Monsieur was not supposed to do that. Or was he? Similarly, it is not entirely clear what exactly *oh come on then* is trying to stimulate; however, there is something convivial about the encouraging message. Is it telling one to sit down, or is it a stimulus to get off the sofa and do something?

## IIII

The ball-jug is there: in the world, thrown around, upwards, downwards. Now, the lunch attendees at the Arpels will have to deal with it. But where the average jug is functional and often aesthetically pleasing, the Arpels' jug is partly a ball causing problems. Because the ball-jug is round and cannot stand, it has to be passed around. I wonder if it works similarly to how basketball players pass a ball, bouncing it from one person to another. How far do people need to be apart? Do they bounce the jug on the table? Most other jugs do not require specific treatment, and it is rare for people to fight over a jug. With the ball-jug, however, there is a lot at stake, as most guests would not want to be the one ruining the drink.

A ball, typically made of rubber and leather, is an object designed to

play with in a game. When play becomes battle, however, the ball forms the spill of the game and, although kicked and roughened, hypnotises and governs anyone around. In *The Parasite* (1982), Michael Serres calls the ball a 'quasi-object', which is, at the same time, a 'quasi-subject' because it determines whom of the players may stand out:

> This quasi-object is not an object, but it is one nevertheless, since it is not a subject, since it is in the world; it is also a quasi-subject, since it marks or designates a subject who, without it, would not be a subject. (Serres, 1982, p. 225).

When a player kicks the ball, they emerge as a subject — subjecting; shooting forwards; their foot thrown under the ball. As soon as the ball is gone, however, the player disappears: 'He is not an individual; he is not recognised, discovered, cut; he is of the chain and in the chain' (Serres, 1982, 225). There is the team, and there is the one with the ball. As discussed before, the subject 'defined by *perceptio* and *appetitus*' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65) shows an urge to put itself forward, and because of this, each subject not only shows itself but also represents the essence of what it means to be a subject. During a game of football, however, it seems to be mostly the ball that exhibits this behaviour — rolling, spinning and bouncing in front of the camera.

Perhaps this is why Monsieur Hulot is so keen to let the ball-jug bounce in the kitchen; it is simply the effect of the ball. And in return, it allows Hulot to extend his body into the world. Unfortunately, however, not everyone is granted such a moment of *placing-before*. During a match, those wanting to make an appearance will need to learn a technique reserved for those willing to put in time and dedication: 'The ball isn't there for the body; the exact contrary is true: the body is the object of the ball; the subject moves around this sun' (Serres, 1982, p. 225). White, smooth and functional, the Arpels' jug's top half is a subservient tool, ready to be used. But its bottom is

rubbery and rounded, and has a will of its own: refusing to simply stand on the table, it jumps the other way. This means that the jug does not conform to Madame; Madame has to obey the jug. Similarly, the best football players are the ball's assistants, humble and not pushing themselves forward. To 'serve' the ball not only means to pass it on to another member of the team but also to do the ball a favour. Players need to strategise, think ahead, not obsess over the ball, not keep it too long and not blindly run after it. This conjures up the question: how does one 'serve' the Arpels' jug-ball? It must be a tough job to keep such a half-ball in rotation when it is filled up with liquid, assuming that is its function — the drink will spill everywhere.

Before a football receives its first serve at the start of an important match, such as the UEFA Champions League, it is often placed on a pedestal. The football has status, and I imagine its appeal is similar to that of the ball-jug that does not fail to impress Monsieur Hulot even when it is on standby in the kitchen cabinet. However, where the ball-jug has to work with Monsieur Hulot, the football is privileged enough to have a skilful footballer lift it off its pedestal for kick-off and be gloriously hurled into the field. The other players wait around and do not matter; the many live cameras focus on the ball and barely register anyone who does not have it in their possession. Outside the frame, players may just stand around waiting, stretching, or jogging back and forth in an attempt to reach the coveted object — undiscovered, unseen, forgotten.

What happens when the focal point of a match registration shifts away from the ball? This is captured by Douglas Gordon's film *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* (2006). Lasting ninety-one minutes, it registers the Spanish La Liga competition played between Real Madrid and Villarreal on 23 April 2005 at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in real-time. Instead of following the ball, however, Gordon uses seventeen synchronised cameras to film just one player: Zidane. The footage is filmed from a low angle, giving the viewer the experience of being on the field right beside him. Occasionally, the image zooms in on Zidane's face or legs as he walks back and forth in anticipation

of the ball. It is an intimate portrait, with the camera registering subtle changes in Zidane's facial expressions, such as his lips moving in conversation with other players, and how he transfers his weight from one foot to the other. Not only do we see clear, glistering drops of sweat on his face, but we also hear him: his respiration when he runs out of breath and gasps, and his voice when, every now and then, he shouts 'hey!'. Zidane is the team captain; the film frequently zooms in on the white band around his wrist. Occasionally, the camera slides down to record how he pulls his socks up (figure 4). The latter is touching — the way Zidane adjusts his attire looks vulnerable yet reassuring. It is an intimate glimpse into how, even during a tough battle, Zidane cares for himself.

It should not be forgotten that footballers deal with many emotions and have to persevere each time things go wrong. By taking a moment to focus on themselves, if the situation allows for it, they prepare to resume the fight. It may be that a little tenderness at times provides a counterbalance to the relentless battle on the field. Having the ball is dangerous — aggressive virtuosos will try to take it away, causing accidents such as tackles and elbow punches; Zidane regularly makes a head roll. The ball marks a player as a defender or attacker, a winner or loser, turning one into a subject or, as Serres might say, submissive: 'Fallen, put beneath, trampled, tackled, thrown about, subjugated, exposed, then substituted, suddenly, by that vicariance' (Serres, p. 227). To be 'important' may mean getting an elbow in the eye. Yes, on the field, it seems, there is not much space for feelings. Even though each player is a sentient being, their individual experience is of little interest. If we read this through Serres' theory of the ball controlling who receives attention, Zidane's act of paying attention to himself is a form of emancipation: he is somebody, and his socks are on wrong.

Halfway through the film, there is a brief shot filmed by a camera far above the pitch, from where the field becomes a tiny rectangle surrounded by five layers of spectators stacked on top of each other. Zidane can no longer be distinguished from the twenty-two dots that move around on the little

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green patch in the distance. It evokes a feeling similar to realising that the earth is just a small rock in an infinitely large universe. Then, immediately after this overview, the camera zooms in on Zidane's intimately sweaty neck, too close, too soon. Embroiled in battle, the perspective is gone. Equally striking are the intro and outro of the film, zoomed in so far on the televised broadcast of the match that the pixels form an abstract pattern. Only after the image zooms out does it become clear what one is looking at — that those dots are forming a field with football players or individuals with thoughts and emotions. This goes right to the heart of the film, which, focusing entirely on one player, has the individual experience as its main concern.

Apart from visual material, there is text taken from a separate interview to convey how Zidane feels about the game, occasionally appearing in the form of subtitles. Zidane's noises remain in the here and now of the match while one reads, 'Sometimes I arrive at the stadium and feel as if the game has already been decided. As if there is a script and we just follow it.' From above, everything seems organised indeed: the grass looks even, the players pristine in white or yellow, and the pattern of the ball is easy to recognise. Gordon alternates his shots of Zidane with television footage of the same match filmed from the top of the stadium. On television, the game changes into marks — yellow dashes, white dashes, white ball — moving across a plain green rectangle. Contrasting this calm overview, however, Gordon's own cameras remain with Zidane, moving up and down his body and showing every individual smudge on his shorts. It is chaotic: footballers bump into each other, and there are running feet and panting sounds. The evolution of the game is unclear; the ball keeps flying off-screen. At one point, the camera zooms in so far on Zidane's feet that they become blurred, their movement a jerky image. It is reminiscent of the way people get so caught up in their thoughts and emotions, and experience them so up close, that they lose sight of their position in a larger context. It seems not possible to not be oneself, to switch from quasi-subject to quasi-object: a ball lying lifeless in the corner, a thing made of rubber and air.

There he is — undeniably present on the field, Zidane's body collects accidents. It is typical of the subject. As mentioned before, the Latin word *subiectum* derives from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, which translates as '*that-which-lies-before*, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66). Through extension — the leg reaching out, the head shooting up — the footballing subject occupies space. There, its features may change with a smudge on the shorts, a narrowed gaze, an injury. The medieval idea that 'every accident denominates its subject' or '*accidens denominat proprium subiectum*' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200) manifests on the field. Here, 'accident' is the philosophical term for a non-defining property that determines not *what* something is but *how* it is what it is. A football player can have blond or brown hair, and none of these colours cancel their humanness. However, such features are what distinguish one from the other. And although the philosophical *accident* is not identical to the colloquial mishap, there is a relationship: both contrast routine. Trouble befalls the football players just as their hair colour does.

Of course, football players are subjects even when the ball takes the viewer's attention away. However, to deny these subjects their visibility or 'representedness' is unethical because, as mentioned before, to be perceived lies in the essence of the subject. With presence should come visibility — football players, too, are defined 'by *perceptio* and *appetitus*, by the representing urge which presses for the placing-before' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65). With *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait*, Gordon acknowledges this need of the subject and gives back what it potentially loses in collective activity: *repraesentatio*. It shows Zidane as a subject at the centre of his own world, where he belongs and where he remains, even when no one watches.

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

What I pay attention to and what I, albeit temporarily, forget appears as suddenly as it vanishes — the football; the player; Madame Arpel in her turquoise dress; the sentence 'oh come on then'. Similar to the players

strolling around off-screen, pulling up their socks and stretching their backs, there are also many words that lead a secret life outside my attention. See, for example, *hindrance*. I had forgotten about the word, and now it has, suddenly, pushed itself into my consciousness to hinder the sentence, forcing me to write about it.

Hindrance is back with the ball and has gained a new role. It is easy to compare written language to a football match because both have a linear structure with a beginning, middle and end. Within this structure, football players have their own roles, just as words have semantic functions. Words are forms or units, and they are participants in sentences — a word like 'a' comes before a noun, and an attacker will aim to move the ball towards the opposite goal. Meaning on such a small scale – of two words joining together or a player hitting the ball – is functional within a larger whole. Words become part of a sentence, and sentences together form a greater body of text. However, because Zidane's subjectivity is channelled through cameras that are fixated just on him, the wider context is mostly lost. A lot of the footage is shot at very close range, giving the impression that the cameras cannot get loose, as if they are stuck to Zidane's skin. He is I, continuously. Normally, it seems, only the player who shoots the ball emerges from the group as the subject of the sentence, positioned as the word that all other words gather around. When the ball rolls away, the player is forgotten and the 'I' is passed on: 'The "I" in the game is a token exchanged' (Serres, 1982, p. 227). As such, the 'I' folds with the ball over the field, supported by the camera or the gaze that drifts from one person to another. In *Zidane*, however, the 'I' remains, at all times, hauntingly close with Zidane.

Of course, the 'I' cannot denote more than one person in the same sentence. It does, however, change its notation between sentences depending on the context. It is for this reason that the 'I' is called a 'shifter'. Other examples are 'now', 'here', 'there', 'today' and 'tomorrow'. These words, described so fittingly by Serres as 'token[s] exchanged' (Serres, 1982, p. 227), are common but drifting and not given much attention. Perhaps for

that reason, Tine Melzer made *Shifters' Ode* (2010), consisting of a series of typical challenge cups awarded at a local sports club during its annual club competition, e.g., a wide cup made of metal covered in silver paint with a thick stem and slender, curly ears (figure 5). As is traditional, a round metal plate decorated with a silver laurel wreath sticks out from the lid. Normally it would hold a small picture showing a type of sport or the number 1, 2 or 3 but this one is empty. The cup does, however, have a small black marble base attached to which is a silver plate engraved with 'NOW'. Next to the silver 'NOW' cup stands a small silver and gold cup that says 'I', a silver one with 'TOMORROW', two large silver-gold cups with 'HERE' and 'YOU', a small silver 'THERE', and a golden 'TODAY'. Although the trophies seem to award whatever suits them at that moment, the title of the work, *Shifters' Ode*, suggests the cups are not just denotational prizes but also an ode to the words themselves. Language is always around and easily glossed over. Jumping from one meaning to another in nearly every sentence, shifter words, in particular, are commonly used words or 'conventional forms' (Melzer's website). They do a lot of work; however, most of it is underappreciated, as such words do not, typically, stand out. *Shifters' Ode*, on the other hand, presents common shifter words as objects we can hold and admire even before their meaning is assigned.

Without consideration, words can easily lose their value. Where one remark was of great significance before, in a different context, it may no longer be useful. Interestingly, Serres describes how even the ball, that 'quasi-subject', loses its power when the game is over: 'Over there, on the ground, it is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function, and no value' (Serres, 1982, p. 225). No longer in use, not carrying the excitement of winning or losing, of highs and lows, the ball may represent not more than dreariness. Some of the air might have gone out, and the ball is no longer 'pumped' as before but deflated – slack and deplorable.

It reminds me of Mel Bochner's *Oh well* (2016). This small painting measuring thirty by twenty centimetres shows embossed words smeared

with a blotchy mess of pastel colours. It is a series of platitudes one often hears when things are not going so well, such as 'oh well, that's the way it goes' and 'what can you do?'. Like a ball that has lost its vigour, these phrases, once used to cheer someone up, now appear depleted. Repeating what is essentially the same message, the language in this work takes on a mechanical, soulless quality — a slurry of meagre consolations in the dreary colours that match them.

What, then, about *oh come on then*? Although this is another frequently heard phrase, it is certainly not dreary — the object appears much perkier. What does it mean, and why is it there? Seated on the sofa, it could be that the essence of this thing is cushioning, providing the soft comfort of familiarity. Unlike with a football in action, there is no life-and-death struggle involved but simple cosiness. And, just as Zidane is *placed before* and remains present, the phrase 'oh come on then' still exists when not in use — available, servant, ready. Can *oh come on then* also be played with? Can I take the object from the sofa and pass it on to someone else? Perhaps 'oh come on then' is not so much about me having to sit down or get off the sofa but about the object that needs to be handled — an encouragement to pick up a phrase. Black and white and crumpled, however, the thing does bear resemblance to a half-deflated football, an object that was fully pumped a moment ago and has now shrivelled up — is it a spoilsport or a provocation?

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

The way *oh come on then* sits crumpled on the sofa looks convivial. The creasy thing is, as already mentioned, carefully crafted from a rigid material that is destined to last. Although a wrinkle often occurs by accident, this is not the case when it is reproduced. Hands have shaped those creases. It fits into a tradition seen throughout art history of delicately executed pleats and wrinkles. In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (2006), Gilles Deleuze describes how the fold is explored as a pictorial device most profoundly by Baroque artists. Around 1595, for example, Caravaggio painted *The*

*Musicians* (figure 8). It shows four young male musicians who not only wrinkle the air with the tones of their instruments but also crease the image. Arranged in a zigzag formation, the men fold in and out like a harmonica. All the way on the left is a figure in the back who has wings and eats grapes, followed by one in the front tuning a lute, one in the back holding a wind instrument and lastly, all the way to the right, a figure in the front with a book. The lute-playing figure's scarlet shawl is spectacular in the way it rises above his shoulder — as if held up by starch — and the white clothes worn underneath feature a dazzling myriad of finely painted wrinkles.

There is one area in *The Musicians* that particularly grabs the attention: peeping out from underneath the belt of the figure holding the book, a piece of robe crumples into a curious little wad. Here, the fabric moves away from the body, not curling down but up, outwards even, surpassing both body shape and gravity. The crumpled little fabric wad takes up space, is three-dimensional and present. Although it does not seem natural for the fabric to be elevated in this fashion, it is not an accident; Caravaggio has executed the wad with sensitivity and in great detail, rendering every nuance of colour and tiny little wrinkle visible. Could a crumpled wad be an expression of conviction?

The little wad in *The Musicians* does not conform to the body beneath but goes its own way. In a sense, the Arpels' ball-jug does this too: bouncing up from the kitchen floor, the jug goes up where it should stay down. Effectively, the jug also makes a folding movement: by moving up and down, the jug folds itself through space. It is as if, through their folding movements, both show behaviour: the wad seems to come forward as if moving out of the painting, and the jug refuses to be put down on the table.

Interestingly, Deleuze describes how folds become independent, as 'in every instance, folds of clothing acquire an autonomy and fullness' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). Because a fold emphasises volume, it is an expression of three-dimensionality and, according to Anish Kapoor, a 'sign of being' (Goldstein, 2019). Furthermore, it indicates movement, as a fold always

develops from dynamics. Each new fold is again an instance of foldedness, original in each instance but at the same time representing a pre-existing form that folds for the sake of folding. Hence, one could even say the fold becomes what Heidegger calls 'subjectival' or 'eager to represent' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 181). It is as if foldedness demonstrates an 'urge' to put itself forward, representing not only the essence of the fold but also that of the overall *placing-before*.

In *The Musicians*, one could see such eagerness to represent become rather literal, with foldedness resulting in a crumpled body of fabric that holds itself upright. The wad shows that the stiffer and more creased the fabric, the more it will function as an independent form. Deleuze calls for such independence: '[F]abric or clothing has to free its own folds from its usual subordination to the finite body it covers' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 139). As if announcing a revolution, he speaks of a 'liberation of folds' that 'are no longer merely reproducing the finite body' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). This can be recognised in both the fabric wad and the lute-playing figure's scarlet shawl. As they move away from their substrate, these folds appear to have found freedom. Liberated from that what is underneath the fabric, Deleuze might say these folds are not to 'be explained by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 139). In garments so profoundly wrinkled as in *The Musicians*, I would suggest the fold acquires autonomy by *placing-before* its foldedness.

I reproduced the curious little fabric wad in *The Musicians* with a sheet of A4 paper (figure 9). Never used before, the standardised A4 paper was flat and boring. But look at it now: a unique, three-dimensional shape featuring dramatic angles. Typically, an A4 page serves as a background that disappears in the service of what is written or printed on top of it. But my crumpled paper wad, no longer flat, has taken on a plastic form that lands on the floor with a 'phluth'. Its creases look exaggerated — not soft and evenly distributed but angular and rough. Part of the untouched, smooth side of the paper protrudes forward into a curl as if it were a wing. It reminds me of

another canonised artwork: the ancient Greek statue of *Nike of Samothrace* (unknown artist, c. 200–190 BC) (figure 9), famous for the profound movement expressed by its shape. This is due in great part to the creases in Nike's robe, giving it the illusion of real fabric touched by the wind. It curves in correspondence to Nike's body, visible beneath the fabric that looks so light and thin that it appears wet. Around her legs, however, Nike's dress blows in all directions. The wind and wetness indicate a storm, amidst which the goddess of victory stands firm.

Inspired by classic sculptures such as *Nike*, the later Renaissance, with the Baroque period as its overture, used the fold to explore depth and form. Renaissance art often looks 'real' — figures caught in sculptures and paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries look as if they could just walk away. It is, therefore, easy to think that artists sought to enhance this realism by adding illusionistic folds to the robes and tablecloths they portrayed. Indeed, the illusion of depth was an important preoccupation of this era, for which the invention of perspective is the best-known trope. Artists added a horizon to their canvases with a vanishing point and depth lines to give the viewer the experience of looking through a window. Additionally, a beautifully painted or sculpted fold creates a sense of depth and can, furthermore, evoke the illusion of movement.

Baroque art stands out for its exquisite rendering of textures such as skin and fabric and, as discussed, spatial depth; however, realism may not have been its most important motive. As mentioned before, many paintings from that time show fabric folding exuberantly in places where, logically, it would not do so in real life. These folds look 'liberated'. But also, there are paintings showing folds not only in fabric but in other elements too, such as air, clouds and bodies. Observing *The Baptism of Christ by El Greco* (1608-1614), Deleuze recalls how 'the counter-fold of the calf and knee, the knee as an inversion of the calf, confers on the leg an infinite undulation, while the seam of the cloud in the middle transforms it into a double fan….' (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 38-39). It seems that El Greco did not add folds as an effect but

used them to create the composition. Pushing from one substance into another, the painting appears to be governed by a folding force.

One might say that El Greco shows how Baroque artists used folds not to enhance the illusion but to construct it or, as Deleuze puts it, 'realis[e] something in illusion itself' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 143). Bodies often assume complex poses mingling with fluttering, intensely creased robes. This almost suggests it is not the body that pushes the fold into its form but the fold that manipulates the body. As such, I would say the fold manifests an origin rather than a consequence. It indicates a driving force. Deleuze writes about folds that unfurl 'all the way to infinity' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). It sounds spiritual but perhaps could also mean the perpetual continuation of becoming or the never-ending process of nature. Indeed, Deleuze also compares the fold to the elements: 'We need to recall that water and its rivers, air and its clouds, earth and its caverns, and light and its fires are themselves infinite folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). It can be recognised in the ripples on the water's surface, clouds in the sky, gusts of wind and caves and crevices.

Consider the river: as it makes its way through the landscape, the folding motion of the river negotiates between the shape of the earth and the water's volume. Deleuze recognises that the elements 'mediate' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). It can even be seen in the way our clothes interact with the atmosphere, as 'the elements are now going to mediate, distend, and broaden the relation of clothing to the body' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). Water that creeps into fabric, for example, makes it stick to the skin in wrinkles that render the body visible: 'Skintight fabric will still be a watery fold that reveals the body far better than nudity' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). Wind does the opposite; by causing fabric to bulge, it reduces the body's prominence. Deleuze writes that it is through this type of negotiation that the elements make the world evolve: 'Even compressed, folded, and enveloped, elements are powers that enlarge and distend the world' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 142). Of course, the elements are what constitute our physical reality — their ability to stimulate growth and change has shaped our planet.

I am tempted to return to the ballgame here. After all, the art of football also builds on process, and by playing the ball back and forth, footballers, too, mediate their position. The trajectory of the round object is rarely straightforward: to get past the opposition, the ball needs to fold over the field in complex patterns. It does not stop; the ball keeps zigzagging. This continuous weaving of the ball might be what Deleuze describes as 'an operative function' that 'endlessly produces folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). To practise fluidity, the team performs various exercises during their training. Figure 6 shows one where the players are positioned in triangles. Moving from one person to the next, the ball folds inwards and outwards over the field. There is subtle room for variation; a wider curve or a harder kick can each in their own way contribute to the wavelike shape of the ball, much like the Baroque 'trait' that 'twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). Relating football to the Baroque fold is not to say that the weaving of the ball is an aesthetically pleasing movement that serves no purpose, but rather to show that the only way the ball can become operational is through these folds.

The football is real: people fight over it with sweat and tears. It is also magical: the stadium is a theatre. Footballers are sold for surreal sums of money, as if they were part of the highly abstract stock exchange (in the next chapter, I will relate the fold to a financial bubble). Indeed, folds can occur anywhere. The Baroque's 'infinite work or process' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 40) wrinkled all substances: not only clothes, draperies and tablecloths, but also a flower still life with intricately shaped stems and leaves, ornamentation in architecture and the ornate postures of figures. These folds extend in every possible way: 'The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 42). Again, there is that notion of negotiation that aims to take the fold as far as possible. The model for Nike's garment would most likely not have had so many wrinkles, and yet they are there — oh come on then! And how about the awkward ball-jug, bouncing around the Arpels' kitchen? Since it cannot

'just' be used, this object, too, has the potential to generate an infinite process: jumping, passing and pouring (or spilling) the lemonade.

The essence of Baroque paintings lies not in an accurate representation of reality, i.e., what folds look like, but in the employment of folds to render a world of becoming. Baroque art represents growth, an emergence, a formation of nature. Of course, this theme is not confined to just that period. It is reminiscent also of the later painter Paul Cézanne, who perceived his landscapes to, as it were, 'grow' on the canvas. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who had a life-long fascination for Cézanne, cites him saying that 'the painter takes hold of a fragment of nature and makes it entirely painting' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, pp. 95-96). Hence, Cézanne's landscape paintings are not so much a representation but rather a new landscape made of paint: '[P]ainting does not imitate the world but is a world of its own' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 96). Not without reason, paint is called a 'medium' — the outside world folds in upon the painter, who folds it back out again. Cézanne said, 'The landscape thinks itself in me' (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, p. 67). This suggests the painter unifies with what one might call the 'being' or 'essence' of landscape, mediating its subject on canvas. Merleau-Ponty even says the painting 'stand[s] 'bleeding' before us' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004, p. 93). It contains an element of confrontation, as the 'bleeding' material gains presence and may even become a stumbling block. Such an extension — when presence becomes a hurdle; a hindrance; a pain in the eye — may be where subjectiness thrives.

As mentioned before, Heidegger considers being to be characterised by representability, pressing for the '*placing-before*' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65). I would argue that not compromising on presence is a form of emancipation. Like the cheeky crease in Caravaggio's *The Musicians*, subtectiness curls the other way, folding not by accident but to show itself. While the force with which the ball-jug shoots up exposes its urge for the *placing-before*, its bounce shows flexibility. Perhaps that is subjectiness too — to be not fixed but moving; acting; a hindrance; taking up space and being in the way.

Fittingly, Heidegger states that even a stone can be a subject: 'Stones, plants, and animals are subjects — something lying-before of itself — no less than man is' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 97). Of course, the Arpels' jug is not just *that-which-lies-before*, but more of a *that-which-bounces-up-and-down*. There is a kind of performativity emanating from both the ball-jug and the crumpled fabric wad, induced by their apparent extension into space. On its journey through the kitchen, the ball-jug almost hits Monsieur Hulot in the face. And, sticking out from below the book-reading figure's belt in *The Musicians*, the fabric wad folds as though it is moving out of the painting towards the viewer, saying, 'oh come on then!'.

Looking at *oh come on then* on the sofa with all this in mind, I can see how this is language *lying-before*, providing one the opportunity of sitting with a phrase. It can be placed in the tradition of language that becomes visible, most notably in experiments with poetic form, but also corresponds to accidental spelling errors, slips of the tongue and grammatical inconsistencies. In these instances, language becomes 'thingy'. It is similar to art that separates stone or glass from functions such as wall or window to present material as matter. Often, art cannot be touched, so what it gives the viewer is not a thing but the image of a thing. It seems, therefore, that art is not so much about the matter itself as it is about making matter apparent. It is reminiscent of how a stone may come to our attention — we trip over it.

A rolls jug over,
the floor then up from bouncessecnuob.
Oh, come on then!
glass breaks a Monsieur.

# SITUATED
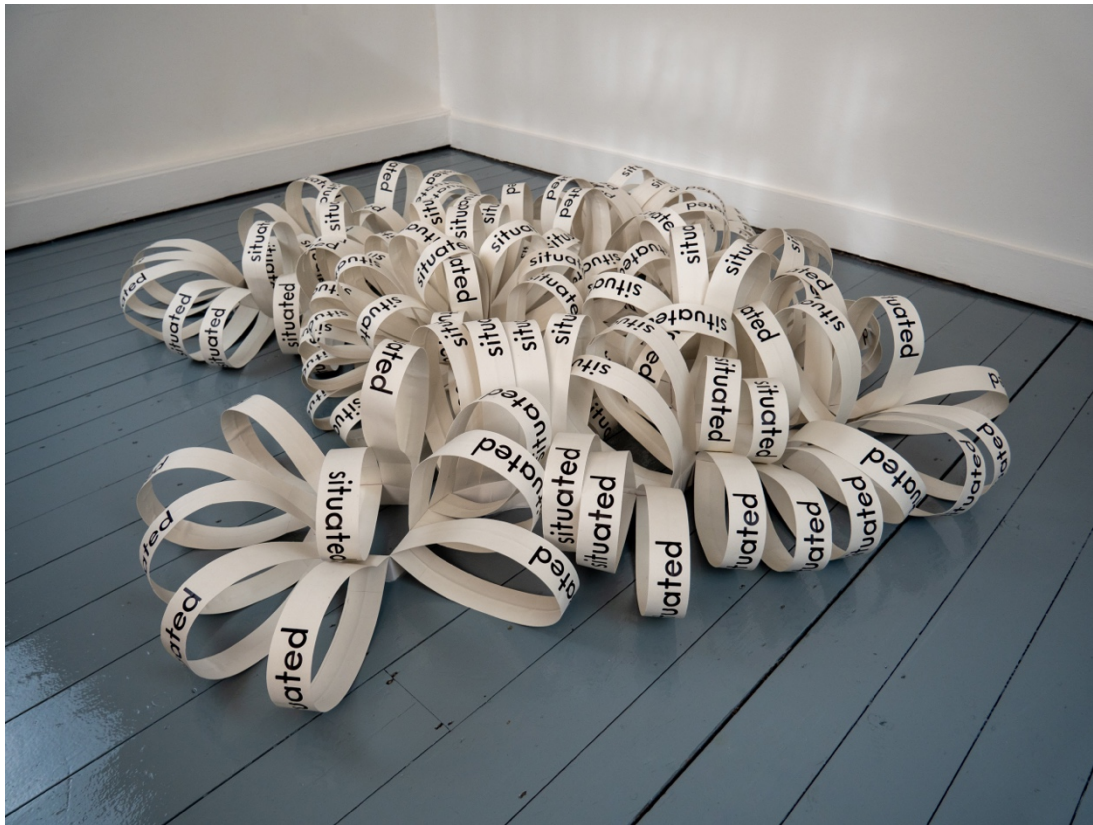
*Situated*, 2021
Sculpture with sound (01min 52sec loop)
Paper, glue, wire, tape, speaker, sound recording
176 x 123 x 40 cm

Please listen to the sound here: https://soundcloud.com/daphne-de-
sonneville/situated

The sound was also broadcast on Resonance Extra during the launch of
*The Happy Hypocrite – Without Reduction*, issue 12, on 25 September 2021
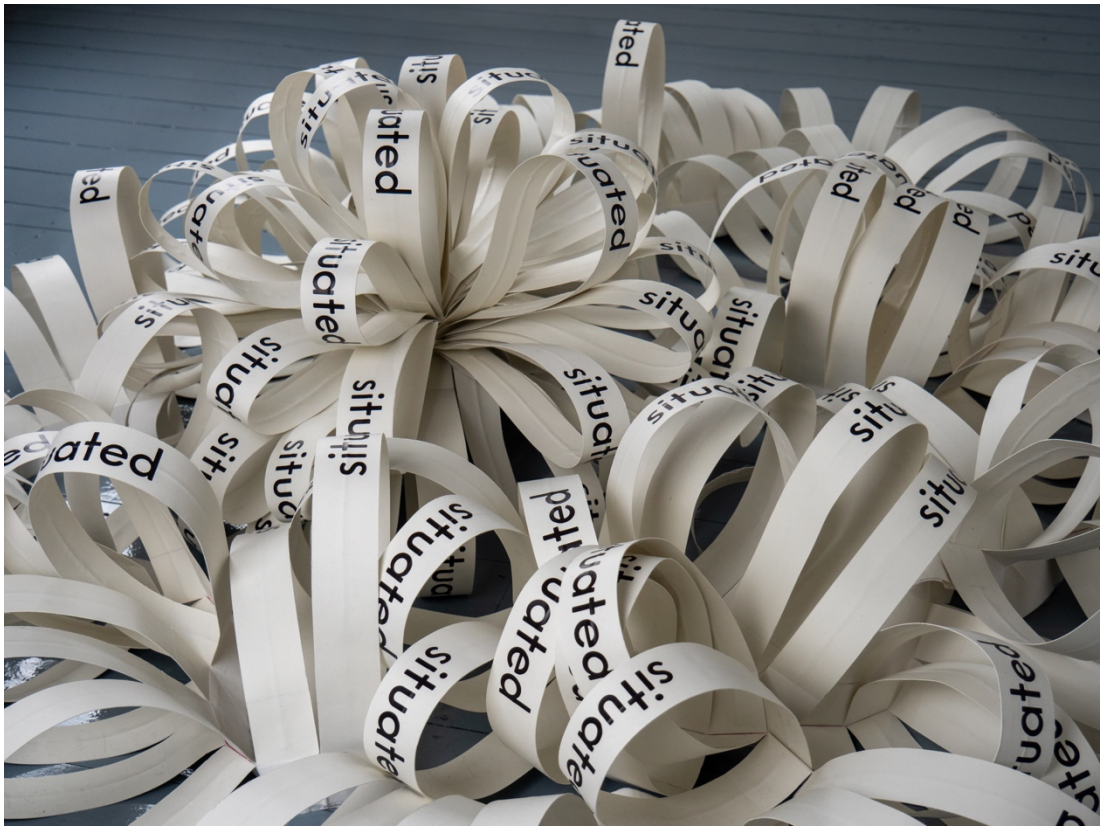
being         situated!!!          being          SITUATED          between!
being     situated     beneath!     being     situated     in!!     being!
situated,        being        situated!!!        in        being        situated
in. being situated in being situated! *situated* on. situated. in. BEING SITUATED being
situated,        on,        being        situated        between!        being
s     i     t     u     a     t     d     beneath     being     situated     being     situated
on          being          situated          in          being          situated
on        being        situated        in        being        situated        *in*
in being situated!! on being situated in being situated on being situated
*on*          being          situated          beneath          being
s          i          t          u          a          t          e          d
in        situated        in        *being*        situated!!        on        situated
in        being        situated        on        b.e.i.n.g.        s.i.t.u.a.t.e.d.

# Figures

*Nymphaea* 'Darwin'.
All water lilies
appear to be double,
because all have
more than five petals.
True doubles arrange
their petals in a
regular, formal shape.



Figure 10
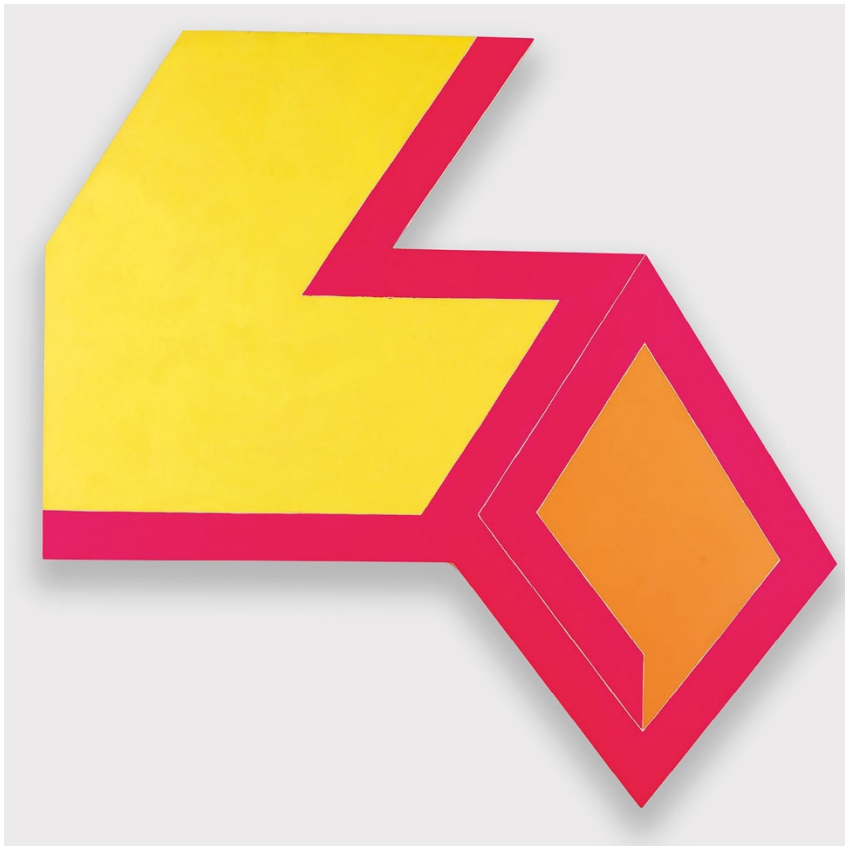
The flowers of *Tulipa* 'Double Flaming Parrot' start off as neat, formal buds, but eventually open out into wacky disorganized swirls.

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Hydrangea
macrophylla
Romance. The double
forms of lace-cap
hydrangeas have
extra petals to the
sterile florets.

Figure 14

*Dahlia* 'Franz
Kafka' exemplifies
the neatness and
complexity of
Pompon dahlias.

Figure 15

Figure 16

## List of Figures

I

The object consists of about a hundred strips of paper that are bent into loops, occupying the floor like a sort of disintegrated metal scouring pad (pp. 59–62). It seems something of a mess, but there is also order: all paper loops have the same off-white colour, the same width, the same length, and on top of them, the same word is printed in the same black font: situated situated situated situated. In the middle of the object, these looping situateds are arranged in a sort of pompom. It looks much like that typical gift wrap decoration made of shiny ribbon loops rolled into a bouffant half-sphere, although enlarged and not representing glitz but rather something one might call 'words in delirium'. Around the pompon, the loops fall into a looser, tangled structure and tumble over each other as they spread across the floor.

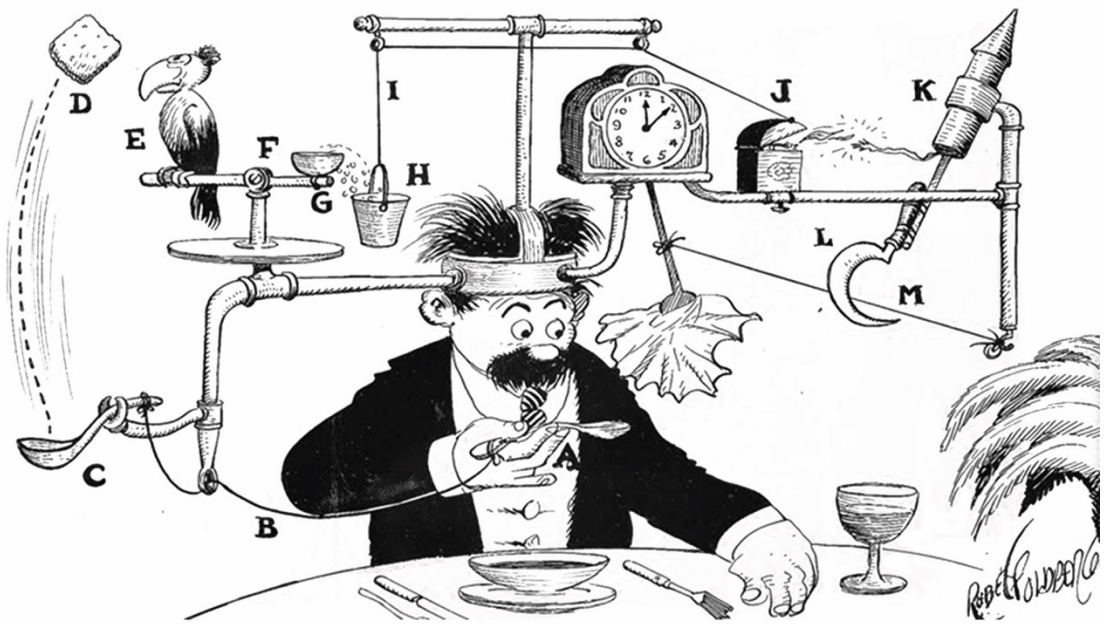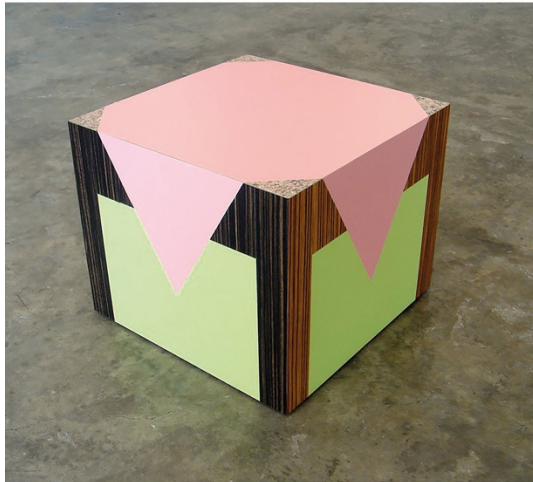There is also sound: from within the paper object, an audio recording starts with a voice that says 'being', followed by another and another and another (and another, etc.). The voices are pitched differently and enter the recording one by one, coming in from low to high like notes on a musical scale. It is almost as if each situated paper strip has its own voice. Stating they are situated "in", "on", "beneath" and "between", the voices slide past and through each other like pins in a music box. The rhythm that emerges is characterised by short staccato words puncturing the piece like a perforator between layers of longer words that flow into each other. What they are saying is true: each voice is situated amongst other voices, speaking through each other just as the paper strips are jumbled up on the floor.

Situated situated situated situated — each separate loop, cut loose, appears individual but remains attached to the rest at the bottom. In the previous chapter, I spoke of the ancient Greek word for subject, *hypokeimenon*, denoting all that is exposed in the world, even a stone. *Situated* is also out there, and its paper strips resemble vulnerable individuals. Because there are so many of them, each one a copy of the other, it is noticeable how their circumstances differ: below, on top, freely protruding or flattened under the weight of others. There is something

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nervous about it; the jumble of situateds looks unresolved. As the audio progresses, its rhythm becomes more and more of a knit, culminating in a waterfall of 'being', 'situated' and 'between'. Then, before looping back to the start, the piece ends with the voices spelling out b-e-i-n-g s-i-t-u-a-t-e-d as if they want to end pedantically with a gesture towards clarity; however, hearing all those voices mixed up does not help intelligibility.

Perhaps you represent order. Nature would never form tiny cone-shaped shrubs by itself, yet you present minimalist sculptures that are green and alive. Perhaps it is a demonstration of how Madame and Monsieur Arpel (Tati, 1958) wish to be seen. Life for Madame and Monsieur has everything to do with order and regularity. Madame Arpel continuously cleans, both indoors and outdoors, and Monsieur Arpel is in charge of several production lines at the factory where he works. At home, he is part of a streamlined process too: while Madame dusts the doorframe, Monsieur passes through it like a product on a conveyor belt. Madame hands him his hat and briefcase after she has cleaned them with her duster. She wipes the gate before she opens it for Monsieur and polishes his car while he slowly drives by. Now Monsieur is 'finished' and enters onto yet another

conveyer belt — a road with cars aligned in perfect rows of three — to deliver himself to work.

Streamlined production is usually carried out in lanes. It involves a passing of objects that all look the same, lined up in rows behind or next to each other. S*ituated,* consisting of rows and rows of the same word — situated situated situated — may also be seen through the lens of production. But although the words appear to have been rolled out of a machine, they are situated in a disorderly fashion on the floor. The repeating word, 'situated', reflects this notion of positioning, of where and how the 'situateds' are placed. At the other end of the spectrum, the Arpels' garden displays a similar emphasis on the arrangement of elements, although more organised — there is, for example, always the same distance between the tiles running across the gravel or the shrubs marking the border of the terrace, and these are all identical in size and shape as well.

 As is obvious, the Arpels' gardening practices leave little room for natural development. They adopt a rigid approach that only allows a limited range of shapes and colours. It is true, however, that regularity is not, by definition, unnatural. On the contrary: the essence of nature – growth – is regular and consistent. Nature is driven by reproduction, and as demonstrated by the *situated* object, repetition leads to growth. Cells divide into more and more cells; hence, growth is exponential, a mathematical affair. Deleuze compares the process to the folding of a tunic:

> The division of the continuous must not be taken as of sand dividing into grains, but as that of a sheet of paper or of a tunic in folds, in such a way that an infinite number of folds can be produced, some smaller than others, but without the body ever dissolving into points or minima. (Deleuze, 2006, p. 9).

One could say that a piece of cloth divides into folds, just as the cells of a body split in order to grow — but it does not stop there. Moving the material backwards, forwards, and then backwards again, a fold produces volume. This is how a flat surface turns into a three-dimensional shape. Take a look at the situated object, the many paper loops of which form a series of folds that push the paper inwards and outwards. It renders the text spatial: the strips of paper thrust the word 'situated' upwards in an arc. It is like the opening of a flower or a sapling folding out of its seed: 'The simplest way of stating the point is by saying that to unfold is to increase, to grow' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 9). Nature, so it seems, exists through folds.

And well, some plants exaggerate this principle. The 'double' or 'extra-petalled' flower unfolds blooms much larger than its counterparts. It is an anomaly that can spontaneously occur in the wild but is mostly found among commonly cultured garden plants, including roses, camellias, peonies and carnations. Doubles are loved for their large flowers; however, not many people know they are only meant to have one row of petals. Full and sumptuous, the double or multi-petalled flower looks as if, after completing its original task, it has continued growing. Its extra petals, however, develop in place of something else, such as leaves or stamens. It is a form of homeosis, a biological process in which one organ develops instead of (or transforms into) another (Weigel and Meyerowitz, 1994, pp. 203-204).

The process is explained by the ABC-model of homeotic variation, based on the three parts of a flower called 'whorls' (Weigel and Meyerowitz, 1994, pp. 203-204). From the outside to the inside of the flower, these whorls are A: the sepals (usually green), B: the petals (colourful and showy), and C: the stamens (the thin powdery sticks in the middle, i.e., its reproductive organs). In a mutant double flower, the extra petals (B) occur in a place where a different type of whorl is expected, e.g., instead of sepals (A) or stamens (C). The incredibly fluffy English tea rose demonstrates how this type of mutation leads to an aesthetically pleasing effect. Like the block-shaped shrubs in the Arpels' garden and the multitude of loops in *situated*, it

may be said that the double flower, too, is a repetitive celebration of form.

In *Double Flowers: the Remarkable Story of Extra-Petalled Blooms* (2018), gardener Nicola Ferguson divides double-flowered mutants into various visual categories. For instance, her 'formal' double flowers appear even and perfectly symmetrical, 'with petals so regularly arranged that they might have been designed by a geometrician' (Ferguson, 2018, p. 141). Here, wild means restrained — the mutant 'growth' in these flowers is not a strange pimple but excessive regularity. They look synthetic: with their vivid colours and poised design, some almost seem to resemble minimalist art from the 1960s. See, for example, the pink, slender petals of the *Nyphaea* 'Darwin' that are elegantly arranged around a yellow centre (figure 10). It is reminiscent of Dan Flavin's *Untitled (to Barry, Mike, Chuck and Leonard)* (1972), in which eleven evenly spaced fluorescent tubes stand side by side in a square passageway, forming a stripy square field that is pink on one side and yellow on the other (figure 10). Or see figure 11 for the *Tulipa* 'Double Flaming Parrot' that starts with ordered double buds but then opens into 'wacky disorganized swirls' (Ferguson, 2018, p. 170). It would hardly look out of place next to *Effingham II* (1966) by Frank Stella (figure 11). This red and yellow canvas can also be considered rather 'wacky' because it is not an equilateral geometric shape but a polygon that zigzags across the wall as if to — in a rather systematic manner — let it all hang out.

The English word 'formal' comes from the Latin *forma*, meaning shape or mould. Calling a flower 'formal' implies the flower looks as if it has not been allowed to grow naturally. Showing a restrain in shape and form, one could also say that the formal flower is 'unemotional'. According to Ferguson, it is therefore considered ideally suited for occasions such as funerals and parades when propriety and moderation are in order (Ferguson, 2018, p. 146). When Shakespeare wrote 'To make of him a formal man again', he meant for him to recover from his madness (Arber, 2012, p. 1). A derivative of this is still found in the expression 'to be on form', indicating an excellent performance within the line of expectation.

Now, the formally mutated flower would be less conspicuous if it did not also have an unruly sibling with a more erratic appeal, categorised as the 'romantic' flower (Ferguson, 2018, p. 101). This flower has a strong link to 'nature' conceived of as wild, passionate and elusive, and is, therefore, more suitable for the 'wild garden'. Hence, where the formal flower seems to have a penchant for rules, the romantic flower looks 'free'. Of course, these are human associations. Both occur naturally in the wild but are also grown, cloned and manipulated for the commercial market. In his *The herball, or, generall historie of plantes*, the English herbalist John Gerard describes several double-flowered varieties growing in his garden in 1597 (Gerard, 1597, pp. 111, 115, 296, 472, 510, 609, 636, 671, 783, 812). His records indicate that both formal and romantic double flowers were already highly popular with growers at that time.

Botanists first observed the phenomenon of the double flower some 2,000 years ago (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 209) and the double rose made it into Theophrastus's *Inquiry into plants* (286 BC) as the earliest description (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 209):

> Among roses there are many differences, in the number of petals, in roughness, in beauty of colour, and in sweetness of scent. Most have five petals, but some have twelve or twenty, and some a great many more than these; for there are some, they say, which are even called 'hundred-petalled.'
> (Theophrastus, 2020, p. 39).

Around 1840, the double rose was so popular that the entire market was geared towards novel, even fuller and more resilient varieties, with breeders introducing hundreds of new strains each year (Ferguson, 2018, p. 107). Today, this means that all modern roses seen in gardens are the result of crossbreeding (Ferguson, 2018, p. 107). In fact, the rose or 'world's most romantic flower', is the most manipulated of all flowers (Ferguson, 2018, p.

107). Apart from being market-driven, however, another reason for all these experiments is that without cloning and breeding, the world would not see many double flowers.

Although extra-petalled varieties occasionally occur in nature as a spontaneous mutation, they are a rare find because they are less likely to survive. When flowers develop petals instead of sexual organs, it logically compromises their reproductive health. But as there is much variation in the number of extra petals in double flowers, botanists speak of fully or semi-double flowers (Pollock and Griffiths, 1998, p. 245). This means that not all extra-petalled flowers are sterile; it is actually a rare phenomenon (Ferguson, 2018, p. 39). Still, some non-sterile extra-petalled flowers have modified stamens that confusingly look like petals next to regular stamens. Others have so many extra petals that it is hard for bees to find access to their nectar. This is why the British Horticultural Society urges people to avoid multi-petalled as well as fully double flowers in their gardens in order to stimulate wild bees and other pollinators (British Horticultural Society, 2019). The insects are not used to it — although the double flower does occur in the wild, it is not common. Whilst the mutation occurs at the genetic level and can potentially be passed on (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 211), it is unlikely that there will be offspring without sexual transmission.

Plant mutations are caused by small accidents during the formation of the plant body. Poor timing of cell division, for example, can lead to disturbed floral patterns (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 213). Why this happens is not entirely clear, but it seems it could be due to low temperatures (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 213). Of course, some mutations turn out to be advantageous for the plant, and when the mutation survives more successfully, it becomes the new norm. This way, mutations help nature adapt to new circumstances and have led to immense biodiversity. More often, however, a mutation does not benefit the species. When a developmental accident leads to less reproductive success, biologists do not speak of a transformation but a 'malformation'. It is a

classification that testifies to failure. Fittingly, another word for malformation is 'monstrosity': '[C]ertainly it is arguable that the natural form of an organism is that which allows it to thrive under natural conditions. Any form that would not would be a malformation — that is, a monstrosity' (Harris). This word, from the Latin *monstrositas*, dates back to the mid-16th century (Lexico Dictionaries, 2021), when the early modern Christian belief began to see non-reproducibility as a deviation from God's plan. The aversion continued well into the 19th century: 'Monstrosities represent a chaos without law and order' (Keller, 1897, p. 284). The real scare came mainly from the realisation that men and monstrosities, as living beings on earth, are both part of the same life (Ganguilhem, 1962, p. 27). Seeing life fail is a reminder that humankind can fail too.

Of course, what the human and the plant have in common is a physical presence. Bodies are subject to accidents. They are situated as they are: vulnerable and exposed. A flower that has grown too many petals has to live with it. And, like any flower, it runs the risk of being trampled. Something similar, one may find, appears to be at stake for *situated*'s paper loops. They look mutated: the word 'situated' seems endlessly multiplied without being part of a grammatical construction. However, with their matter-of-fact appearance of black letters printed on white paper, the situated loops make for a rather deadpan situation. After all, without any other words to add emotion, they do what they say and are what they mean: situated. Also, their literal 'stuckness', with its potentially self-satisfied quasi-spiritual connotations, has something slapstick-like because it is recursive (looped), repetitive and not going anywhere. Perhaps *situated* is a form of physical theatre, performing the word 'situated'. This performance lies in its deviation, its break with grammar and the page, and, most of all, its break with the linearity that helps text go somewhere. Featuring characters that are equally stuck, it can be said that deviation is the essence of slapstick comedy. Its protagonists, arguably, represent mutations of society not so much because they fail in life but rather because they distort human behaviour. Charlie

Chaplin or Buster Keaton, for example, can be caught copying gestures and distractedly rearranging their order or isolating and repeating a single movement. Unfortunately, this behaviour stops the men from moving on in life and achieving what they want.

Looking through the lens of mutation, one may see slapstick as a form of behavioural growth that sometimes even spreads over a whole group. Take Oliver Laurel and Stan Hardy, squabbling on the doorstep of a restaurant in *You're Darn Tootin'* (1928). It gets so out of hand that Hardy kicks Laurel in the shin and he starts hopping on one leg. When the restaurant owner comes out to reprimand the two, he too is kicked in the shin and starts hopping. Now, two men are hopping in front of the restaurant. Soon a third one joins in, and so do a fourth and a fifth, and before long a dozen men have gathered in front of the restaurant, hopping on one leg. The absurd situation has long since ceased to have anything to do with the original reason for the quarrel, and most likely no one knows why they are all hopping around.

Both the plant mutation and the slapstick mutation cause a deviation in the way bodies behave. However, whereas a mutant plant body may look strange, the slapstick body often looks normal at first. The classic black-and-white slapstick film usually features a respectable, well-groomed man in suit with a snazzy moustache and bowler hat. Soon, however, it becomes clear how odd the slapstick body moves: walking with large, bouncy steps or, on the contrary, short and waggly. The slapstick body needs to resist the outside forces that are out to get it, all the dangers lurking around to cause an accident. See, for example, how Buster Keaton walks against the wind in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), his body almost horizontally leaning in, with one leg upwards, as he runs over the mud, slipping, sliding and not moving an inch (figure 12). Another example is the scene in *The General* (1926) where Keaton, after being rejected by his sweetheart, mistakenly sits down on the coupling bar between two train wheels. No longer walking, his body now moves in circles. Unfazed by this sudden change, however, he stares blankly

at the ground, pondering his broken heart.

Given such strange situations, which, moreover, result in pain and discomfort, it may be no surprise that slapstick characters are perceived as the ultimate misfits. Although some compassion might be in order, the audience laughs. Henri Bergson describes how after 'an individual or collective imperfection' follows 'corrective laughter' that functions as 'a social gesture' to 'singl[e] out and repre[ss] a special kind of absentmindedness in men and in events' (Bergson, 1913, p. 87). It seems that this 'corrective laughter' reflects a desire to separate propriety from impropriety in a way that could be considered analogous to the early modern Christian who labelled anomalous plants as monstrosities. This holds for flowers too. In the 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau warned young ladies against 'disfigured' double flowers:

> Whenever you find them double, do not meddle with them, they are disfigured; or, if you please, dressed after our fashion: nature will no longer be found among them; she refuses to reproduce any thing from monsters thus mutilated: for if the more brilliant parts of the flower, namely the corolla [petals], be multiplied, it is at the expense of the more essential parts [sex organs], which disappear under this addition of brilliancy.
> (Coen, 2001, p. 525).

Both Bergson's 'corrective laughter' and Rousseau's warning about double flowers stem from a rather harsh judgement of imperfection. It may be a relief, then, to discover that 'monstrosities' are not simply useless. In her book *The Natural Philosophy of Plant Form* (2012, first published in 1950), Agnes Arber gives an overview of scientists through the centuries who considered mutations a valuable tool for studying plant development. Francis Bacon (1561–1626), for example, wrote about 'the Errors of Nature, things strange and monstrous' that 'he who knows her deviations will describe her

ways with the greater accuracy' (Arber, 2012, p. 5). Better known is Goethe's research from the nineteenth century that made a significant contribution to plant science (Coen, 2001, pp. 523-528; see also Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, pp. 209-210 and Weigel and Meyerowitz, 1994, p. 204). He showed that much can be learned about the growth pattern of an organism precisely by looking at how an anomaly differs.

Goethe shared his ideas on plant morphology with other researchers who gradually came to understand that anomalies follow the same rules as regular plants: 'The attitude of these pre-Darwinian writers was determined by the truth — obvious but often overlooked — that macroscopic nature is never really anomalous, so that even the so-called 'abnormalities' are essentially law-abiding' (Arber, 2012, p. 5). Focusing on the plants' similarities rather than their differences, Goethe showed how an anomaly reveals an organism's potential. 'Abnormalities, like other exceptional cases, at least show incontestably, what the plant *can* do' (Arber, 2012, p. 6). Or, as Deleuze puts it: 'The organism is defined by its ability to fold its own parts and to unfold them, not to infinity, but to a degree of development assigned to each species' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 9). As mentioned earlier, early modern Christian society feared that mutations presented 'chaos without law and order' (Keller, 1897, 284). Yet, instead of devolving into chaos, mutants follow — to the extreme — the prescribed rules.

The pre-Darwin discoveries in plant science not only led to a better understanding of plant development and that 'macroscopic nature is never really anomalous' (Arber, 2012, p. 5) but also to a better chance of survival for the double-flowered species itself. Over the last three centuries, increased knowledge of plant development has led to asexual propagation methods assisting the spread of the species without the need for pollen or bees. These include various cutting techniques that generate new plants from the vegetative parts — stems, roots or leaves — of a parent plant (The University of Maine) and genetic cloning (Meyerowitz, Smyth and Bowman, 1989, p. 214). These methods are effective and have contributed to the

popularity of the doubles to such an extent that many of the flowers we know from gardens today are extra-petalled. Hence, in terms of propagation, the asexual double flower may have done even better than its wild, single-flowered counterparts. Rather than simply multiplying, mutated flowers have cultivated an organisation of human breeders, traders, and speculators to help them spread worldwide. This idea is also highlighted by Ferguson, paraphrasing Michael Pollan who suggested that 'humans instinctively find blossom attractive because it indicates where fruit will be found at a later season' (Ferguson, 2018, p. 14). If this is true, it may explain why people feel attracted to those flowers that are most flashy.

So much is clear: unable to naturally reproduce, the double flower still found its success. Although the involvement of humans to cultivate double flowers may be more cumbersome than simply letting the bees arrange it, it does do the job. I find it somewhat reminiscent of the Rube Goldberg machine that involves a lot of extra steps to complete a rather intuitive procedure. As you may know, Goldberg drew cartoon machines to take over everyday tasks in the most complicated way possible. Goldberg's makeshift machines are typically cobbled together with objects (and sometimes pets) anyone might have at home. For example, Goldberg's *Professor Butts and the self-operating napkin* (1931) functions via thirteen steps (figure 13). It starts with a man eating a bowl of soup at a table. Attached to the soup ladle he holds in his hand is a rope that pulls when he brings the spoon to his mouth. The rope is attached to another spoon, which, by pulling the rope, launches a biscuit into the air. The biscuit is caught by a parrot sitting on a seesaw above the soup eater on the left. When the parrot jumps off the seesaw to catch the biscuit, the other side of it drops down. This end of the seesaw holds a bowl with seeds that fall into a bucket. The seeds increase the weight of the bucket so that it pulls down a rope attached to the handle. The rope runs upwards and makes a turn to the right via hooks on a horizontal stick above the soup eater. A box opens, releasing the flame of an automatic lighter. The flame reaches the wick of a rocket. As soon as the

rocket shoots away, a sickle attached to the underside of the rocket cuts a rope to a pendulum. Attached to the pendulum is the napkin, now moving back and forth in front of the soup eater's mouth to wipe it off. According to Goldberg, it is also possible to replace the napkin with a harmonica to entertain guests with music.

Goldberg's 'self-operating napkin' demonstrates a process whereby one movement sets another in motion. The interplay between elements forms a pattern that increases the number of steps towards the final goal by tenfold. In the process of making, the machine expands. Each step on the way builds on the previous step, a growth process in which a simple action slowly mutates into a complicated operation. It can be seen as what Deleuze might describe as 'an operative function' that 'endlessly produces folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). This means that the Goldberg machine is not there simply to accomplish a task, but to accentuate the way in which it does that. What folds in, folds out. Although the growth process follows a pattern, its various steps leave room for slightly differing outcomes. It can be compared to nature, in which no two leaves are the same: 'whence the figure of the leaves of a tree, two never being exactly alike because of their veins or folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 9). This means each fold is unique. But it also means that failure is looming in the background, as with every new development comes a chance of a mutation: wind blowing against the strings, the parrot flying away, the biscuit jumping off course.

Both the Goldberg machine and slapstick comedy play with the possibility of it all going wrong yet bring attention to the nuances of a procedure. There is care for all the different steps, and pleasure in the process. A slapstick film often emphasises the details of an unfolding situation by showing a breakdown of how it all falls apart. Sometimes it can seem as if one part of a behavioural sequence is magnified under a microscope so that it no longer fits in with the rest of the events. The scene involving Laurel and Hardy in front of the restaurant in *You're Darn Tootin'*, discussed earlier, is caused by an inflated reaction which, in turn, triggers an

equally excessive response. This succession of events means the situation spirals exponentially out of control.

Another example is Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator* (1940), who is so focused on one aspect of his actions that all else escapes. As a barber, he shaves his customer's beard with a razor, shaving soap, brush and water. Accompanied by Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5*, however, his focus shifts to his own bodily experience of the rhythm of his shaving rather than how it looks or feels for the client. As the music occasionally accelerates or intensifies, Chaplin is passionately prompted to brush the soap on faster or dramatically elongate the movements of his razor. He also observes the chorus, making sure to perform the same gesture each time. The man in his chair does not look pleased. Chaplin, however, seems to be unaware of any wrongdoing. He may shave in a manner that is unsatisfactory, a little dangerous even, but that is not out of disinterest. Rather, he is too emotional, showing a sensitivity that is certainly related to shaving but not in the way the client expects it.

When it comes down to it, slapstick heroes usually mean well. They do not end up on the floor because they are stupid, but because they are too invested in their actions. They show 'extreme care' (Dillon, 2007, p. 214). It is an exaggeration of the 'mechanics of thought as such — the (perfectly rational, therefore idiotic) decisions' (Dillon, 2007, p. 213) that leads to a mutation of normal behaviour. This, too, corresponds to the excessive regularity in which flowers mutate. Already in the seventeenth century, Robert Sharrock (1630–1684) wrote, contrary to the views of his contemporaries, that 'even in these irregularities themselves, there often seems to be a greater curiousness, and most proper order' (Arber, 2012, p. 6). This 'greater curiosity' and 'most proper order' are what make any organism do its best. Yet, it may be that its attention drifts to a particularly narrow focus and petals appear instead of reproductive organs. Similarly, Chaplin is not lazy, but confuses what is important with what is not. This may be because of a temporary loss of focus or 'a special kind of

absentmindedness' (Bergson, 1913, p. 87) but does not mean there is no attention at all. Similar to how Baroque artists paint robes with an appropriate shape, colour and texture, the slapstick mutation is subtle: there is a salon, razor, soap, water and a man. The difference is in the folds: where the Baroque painters release additional, defiant creases into their compositions, a slapstick character expands the details of a gesture. Perhaps it is the effect of the fold that doubles to the side. Chaplin's hairdressing is a dance dominated by details such as rhythm, tone and crescendo. His form may hide the nectar but brings another virtue: style.

The most popular roses today are full and round like pompoms: a fully double rose has more than thirty petals. These types of flowers put up a real show: silky soft and deeply coloured, perfectly round or frilly like a fringe. It looks sensuous: even without stamens, a fully double flower continues to express fertility. But one might say that it is an empty reference. Extending its colour, doubling its petals, folding its growth, it is as if the double flower has been 'liberated' from its function. Like Deleuze's 'liberation of folds' that 'are no longer merely reproducing the finite body' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140), the petals of the fully double flower have mutated away from their earthly affairs, freed from the body they cover. Elegantly arranged around an empty core, double flowers offer nothing but a spectacle of sumptuous petals that is rich, bold and charming. And can the same not be said about the *situated* object, which does not use its many words to reason, to articulate clear sentences, but rather allows them to break free? Although stuck in situatedness and looping in mutation, both the *situated* object and the double flower depart from their substrate, hence suggesting a paradox at the heart of both instances that means they are simultaneously liberated as well as tied.

When it arrives, the bee may be lost and not provided with the nectar it came looking for, but at least its environment is stylised. Similarly, the Arpels have created an environment where everything is so strictly designed that nothing works intuitively. How does a bee behave when it flies into their garden? It seems Monsieur Hulot often has trouble with navigating their

premises, as he does not understand how the kitchen cupboards work and only sits awkwardly on their designer furniture (figure 14). Perhaps it relates to a flower that, as a result of homeosis, has replaced all its stamens with petals and is sterile (Coen, 2001, p. 525). There is no nectar there. The flower still looks like a flower but has lost its sexual function. See, for example, the *Hydrangea macrophylla*, deceptively called 'Romance' (figure 14). Its deep pink, diamond-shaped petals are arranged in a star shape around a centre that, small and round as a pinhead, is merely the end of its stem and devoid of any stamens.

Similar to the examples discussed earlier in the chapter, the *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Romance' is reminiscent of a minimal artwork. See its pairing with *Follow Table (Wannabe)* by Richard Artschwager (2009), a Formica cube with evenly inlaid areas of colour (figure 14). It has upright dark-brown stripes in all four corners, connected by a horizontal stripe in the same colour that runs just below the top of the cube and is intersected by pink triangles pointing downwards, symmetrically bisecting each of the otherwise green upright surfaces. With its clean lines, even colours and symmetrical composition, the interplay of colours resembles abstract colour field art but, amusingly, also forms a schematic representation of a wooden table with a pink tablecloth. Heiser mentions that in this way, Artschwager has sneakily brought figuration back into minimalist art, an art form that originally wanted to banish all resemblance to objects in the world (Heiser, 2008, p. 37-38). I would say his amusing intervention also toys with the idea of art being useless.

With their sweet colours, the *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Romance' and *Follow Table (Wannabe)* would both look attractive in a confectionary shop. The candy-cane flower sits beautifully next to the slightly lighter, spun-sugar pink of the sculpture that is contrasted by a minty green. However, sweet colours come with mouth-watering expectations that neither of them can live up to. Both deceive the eye into seeing non-existent functionality: the flower has no reproductive organs, and the table is a solid cube. Interestingly,

however, the hydrangea plant does produce clusters of fertile flowers in addition to its sterile ones. Where the doubles steal the show with their colourful abundance of petals, the small fertile flowers look modest. Yet, they receive a horde of visitors. Research shows that the sterile, flamboyant flowers of the Hydrangea may have an auxiliary function as an eye-catching billboard for the plant (Morales, Traveset and Harder, 2013, p. 104). Featuring sterile, showy flowers alongside fertile flowers to attract attention, these double-flowered plants have evolved to thrive in the wild and prove yet again that success is not always what it seems. There is joy in process, in the folds that generate new folds, in getting lost and finding new places. Natural, intuitive behaviour can also take form in actions that seem illogical. After all, the world is complex. Nature jolts and '*accidens denominat proprium subiectum*' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200), but the bee is guided to its sweet nectar at last.

## IIII

*A poster-poem* by Aram Saroyan (1965-66) is a one-letter poem (figure 15). There is something odd about the letter: it looks like an 'm' but has an extra leg. This is particularly strange because it appears to be a typed letter. If Saroyan had written the letter by hand, he could have accidentally drawn an extra leg, but a typed letter is normally a standardised form. The question is, of course, whether *A poster-poem* really is a letter. Although reminiscent of one, maybe it is just a graphic shape. Yet, as Ganguilhem puts it, 'To say that he no longer is a man, […] is to say that he still is one' (Ganguilhem, 1962, p. 28). In biology, a mutant is seen as a member of the species from which it originated until it has mutated so far that it becomes a new species. Clearly, the letter 'm' in *A poster-poem* can still be recognised. Saroyan mutated the letter by simply repeating a leg, turning a triple into a quadruple. Hence, with the fourth leg of the 'm' continuing on the same line, Saroyan's *A poster-poem* sticks to a pattern of expectation.

This principle is similar to how, as discussed before, mutations follow

order. Hence, one may consider Saroyan's *A poster-poem* an expression of failure, recognising the shape as an 'm' gone wrong. In biological terms, it could be called a mutation, a monstrosity even — one that would be unsuccessful in the wild. Cut loose, however, it becomes a standalone, pleasing form to look at. As the title indicates, Saroyan's m is a poem. Around the letter is nothing but the white space of the page. Hence, it seems that the letter is given extra space to develop its own meaning, residing in a singular form that does not need to be part of a word. This way, Saroyan's *A poster-poem* is yet another example of a form that is liberated and surpassing its function. And, as with Charlie Chaplin in his role as the barber described earlier, the letter is not to be considered lazy or disengaged. One could say that *A poster-poem* does not conform less to the basic principles of m-ness but rather exceeds them. Hence, the letter seems a nervous form that, in its awkward attempt to do it right, has just gone slightly overboard.

In the same way Saroyan's *A poster-poem* transcends the letter 'm' and turns it into a poem, folds in clothing can outgrow the body beneath. With their wide, stiff collars and puffed sleeves, the clothes worn by nobles in the Baroque era were lavishly pleated. These costumes were not worn just to cover or decorate the body, but to convey status. In *Portrait of a Woman* (c. 1650) by Frans Hals (figure 15), a millstone collar forms the centre of the painting and takes up so much space around the woman's head that it creates depth in the image even though the scene takes place in front of a flat beige background. There is no space visible behind the woman, we see no room, but the collar extends 'into' the painting behind her and almost seems to protrude from the front. The clothing worn by the woman below her collar further enhances this voluminous feeling: a bulky suit, wide and dark, with puff sleeves and olive-green floral patterns. The costume looks stiff and so large compared to her head that it is hard to imagine her body underneath. In contrast to the dark colours, the thick, stiff structure of the fabric and the massive shape of the robe, the white millstone collar stands out as the opposite: a light, transparent, floaty disk of delicate material.

The millstone collar in *Portrait of a Woman* consists of two layers of tubes that splay from the figure's neck and run all the way around her head, delicately painted with a lot of transparency, and is finished with fine bias binding. It is a typical piece of seventeenth-century fashion that happens to look very similar to the mutant Dahlia 'Franz Kafka' (figure 15). This purple Pompom dahlia has a perfect spherical shape, categorised by Ferguson as 'formal'. The flower consists of many small petals that are curled into tubes and organised in neat rows. It looks like a complex bulwark of different units that all do what is expected of them. A complex tangle of folds, these are not accidental pleats but stylised air pockets. However, where the millstone collar is pristine white, the Dahlia 'Franz Kafka' is purple. For insects, its many tunnels may be a tempting place to explore, its intoxicating colour making it a bedazzling collar to disappear into.

Around the same time that millstone collars were fashionable, so were tulips that had been infected by a virus. Similar to the mutant flowers discussed earlier, these were not successful in the wild. Still, during the Dutch 'Tulipomania', infected tulip bulbs were sold for the price of a spacious canal house with garden and coach house in the centre of Amsterdam, ten times as much as the average annual salary of a skilled craftsman (Brunt and Walsh, 2005, p. 70). The most expensive were special varieties, especially tulips with the TBV virus causing depigmentation of the petals (Brunt and Walsh, 2005, p. 70). However, after only a few years of growing from the bulb, the TBV virus kills the plant (Brunt and Walsh, 2005, p. 70). The most expensive bulbs were thus the weaker ones. Although the tulip that conquered the world was essentially dysfunctional, disease did not stop this flower. Not only had the TBV-infected tulip spread itself all over the globe, but it also became the star of Dutch seventeenth-century still life painting (Brunt and Walsh, 2005, p. 71). As the craze for tulips made them a popular topic of conversation, many well-to-do people not rich enough to afford a tulip bulb would buy a still life of tulips by a famous painter. The tulip mania lasted only a year; after a while, there were more sellers than buyers, and the market

collapsed. Hence, tulip mania has become known as the first documented financial bubble in Europe (Shiller, 2000, p. 71). There was also a dip in the production of tulip paintings; however, this picked up later, and tulips remained a popular subject for paintings even a hundred years later.

Just before the crash of tulip mania, the total sum for all the tulip bulbs on offer was ten times as much as the total amount of money in circulation. In a financial bubble, bids folding on top of each other are speculative and have nothing to do with the real market, which should logically rest on the money that is in circulation. When one folds a paper in half and then again, air gets between the layers. It shows how paper changes from a flat surface to a three-dimensional shape and rises from the table into the air above. Again, the fold is liberated from its substrate: someone bids, someone else folds another bid over it, and so the market folds into a collar of bids that becomes so light it soon begins to float. It is in the world — extending, growing — and then it disappears. Like the airy millstone collar worn over a heavy, log-like cloak in *Portrait of a Woman*, the financial stack of folds is so much lighter than its background that it loses contact with the ground.

The bee flies in but cannot find the money. It has come loose, disconnected, a mirage. There it is: the Baroque ruff floats the head like a castle in the sky. Along with the other 'thousand folds of garments' the ruff has 'overcome[s] […] bodily contradictions, and […] make[s] […] heads look like those of swimmers bobbing in the waves' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). Clothing that follows the body's natural shape renders that body visible, but the clothes worn by the lady in *Portrait of a Woman* leave a lot to be imagined. Both the financial bubble and millstone collar detach from the physical body to support an illusion. This too, is 'a liberation of folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 140). However, unlike the Dahlia 'Franz Kafka', Tulipomania did not survive. It was just a small, mutational growth of air that burst almost as quickly as it was formed.

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

During the Industrial Revolution, machines enabled factories to set up standardised production lines. Earlier, during the Renaissance, rules were drawn up about the width and length of columns, arches and vaults, and the use of statuary, pilasters and cupolas in a building. Architects and artists sought to work with 'ideal' proportions inspired by nature, and buildings were a translation of the relationship between different parts of the perfect human body. The Renaissance is also the origin of the Baroque period; however, Baroque artists were more liberal with their columns and decorations. At the time, the term 'Baroque' did not exist, and the building style now associated with it was then referred to as 'gotico' (Hills, 2007, p. 50). Seen as 'bizarre', however, the gotico building style was not appreciated by critics at the time: the 'excess' of elements was considered 'empty' and 'decadent' (Hills, 2007, p. 54). In the same fashion, people began to describe gotico as 'baroque' after *perles baroque*, French for 'irregularly shaped pearl'. Such a pearl is not symmetrical but erratic with ridges, dents and bumps.

Even today, the shape of the pearl determines its worth: the more regular, the more costly. But from the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, the word 'baroque' implied more than a pearl's market worth, with connotations such as 'unreasoned', 'licentious' and 'bizarre', and was considered to carry 'implications of immodesty' (Hills, 2007, p. 49). Eventually, the word Baroque was recorded as an art term in 1757, when Antoine-Joseph Pernety included it in his *Dictionnaire Portatif de Peinture, Sculpture et Gravure* to denote art made 'not according to the rules of proportion, but of caprice' (Pernety, 1757, p. 24). To say that 'the figures in this painting are baroque' meant, according to Pernety, that 'the composition is in a baroque taste, to say that it is not in good taste' (Pernety, 1757, p. 24). Half a century later, Quatremère de Quincy denoted the term Baroque in his *Encyclopédie Méthodique: Architecture* (1788-1825) as 'a nuance of the bizarre': 'It is, if you like, its refinement, or, if it were possible to say so, its abuse' (Hills, 2007, p. 50). It was around the same period in which one spoke

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of 'monstrosities' to denote mutated life forms; people were aware that growth is not always orderly and afraid of anything that did not conform to their interpretation of nature. As Baroque architects allowed themselves to deviate from what were considered ideal proportions, for example, by adding extra columns and enlarged arches, I argue this building style can be seen as a mutation of the classic ideal. The Baroque was perceived to 'give birth to a system destructive of nature's order and forms' (Hills, 2007, p. 51), and as such, I believe the aversion to it should be placed in the context of the general revulsion against monstrosities prevalent at the time.

Irregular pearls do not comply with the notion of the divine aspired to in the Renaissance. Yet, with today's knowledge, it is strange to think of pearls either following God's plan or deviating from it. After all, a pearl is formed by an oyster applying a layer of nacre around an intrusive element, such as a parasite or larva, molluscan egg, plant particle or sand grain (Chellam *et al.*, 1991), which should not have been there in the first place. Infiltrating the shell, the intruder irritates the oyster's soft body and is incapsulated. Fortunately for the oyster, such infiltrations are rare and not every oyster needs to make a pearl in its lifetime. In fact, as wild pearls are a rare phenomenon, one could say that they are aways an anomaly. The pearl, be it 'regular' or 'baroque', is not part of the plan. It is, therefore, even more impressive that the oyster, like the mutated double flower, has become successful in its propagation by seducing humans to cultivate it. They use similar methods: where the double flower grows extra rows of petals, the oyster, too, expands through its folds. First, its shell forms a fold inward. Then, an infiltrating piece of seaweed becomes part of the architecture surrounding the oyster's body, encapsulated by the same material. The infiltrating element thus not only enters the fold of the shell but is also folded in by its material. It can be seen as a mutation: when making a pearl, the oyster creates an extra fold in its built environment, which, in architectural terms, could be called creative freedom.

In line with this view, the Baroque was later called 'emancipated

decoration' instead of 'empty' and 'bizarre'. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, critics said that 'what the fifteenth-century Gothic was to the Gothic style, the Baroque style was to the Renaissance: a period of the running wild of emancipated decoration' (Hills, 2007, p. 55). Emancipation is the power to cast off old, imposed meanings and create a new, self-serving story. As mentioned before, Deleuze introduces the Baroque as 'an operative function' that 'endlessly produces folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). It is about making the fold independent, liberated from its substrate. By multiplying decorative elements and enlarging them, they become less dependent on the building they were meant to 'serve'. It is fair to say that the liberated fold exists not to deny but expand the rules, which today, looking at the overall appreciation of 18th century architecture, is highly admired.

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There is no way around it: the Arpels' garden's surface, with all its sparkling colours of gravel and grass, is like the inside of an oyster's shell formed by the garden walls. Sometimes an intruder — usually a friend of Madame Arpel — enters and becomes encapsulated. The oyster garden will not be influenced by the foreign element; on the contrary, the intruder will need to adapt to the garden. This starts as soon as she arrives: Madame's friend cannot simply walk in but must ring the bell at the gate and wait there. Then, as a form of enchantment, Madame activates the fountain but does not open the gate until it gurgles properly. The aluminium fish — large and shimmering, turned vertical with its mouth sticking up into the air — produces its liquid just for visitors. Similar to nacre, the colour of the fountain's water is mesmerising: from the mouth of the fish, an azure-blue liquid sputters down into the pond. The sight of a flowing fountain in the centre of the Arpels' garden is a temporary delight, there to create an image that is only sometimes visible. It acts as a kind of clapperboard, signalling that the show is about to begin. At that moment, the Arpels' garden becomes a physical manifestation of the imagination, a place where ideas and expectations

become part of the landscape.

As soon as the pearl has followed Madame all the way into the house and remains out of sight, Madame deactivates the fish. This switching on and off of the fish appears to be a sneaky affair that no guest is supposed to witness. Hence, it seems that Madame strives to maintain a reputation in line with her designer garden and automated fence, turning her garden into a place Foucault might call a 'heterotopia', related to the more familiar 'utopia'. While a utopia is an ideal place that does not exist, a heterotopia does exist and at the same time it does not. For example: when I look in the mirror, I see a reflection of myself, almost as if there is a duplicate of me standing in a space inside the mirror. The mirror is flat and the reflection a mirage while, at the same time, the mirror is a real object in my physical space. This is an extreme example of a heterotopia as a space that is both real and not real, with 'hetero' denoting it is two places at once. Other examples are Disneyland, Polynesian holiday villages (Foucault, 1984, p. 7) and gardens. Foucault calls such places 'spaces of illusion' that should seem as real as possible, like Disneyland, or represent an idealised version. The word 'idealised' comes from 'idea', and both the utopia and heterotopia are based on concepts. For example, formal gardens feature straight lines, while 'wild' gardens mimic the presumed irregularity of nature. A beach resort is a place in a real country with accommodation and actual beds to sleep in, while at the same time it refers to an idea, often of what constitutes 'exotic' and 'holiday'. Such a place has objects and real organisms — straw umbrellas, palm trees — but relies in part on a fantasy.

As a space where imagination is meant to materialise, a heterotopia is guarded by a set of rules. Entering the heterotopia and performing the required movements means actively choosing to support the fantasy. The Madame-of-pearl in the Arpels' garden acts as the gatekeeper of her world, and the dance that visitors need to perform upon entering it is a ritual to gain access: 'To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures' (Foucault, 1984, p. 7). Most visitors at the Arpels are female friends

of Madame, for whom a gurgling fish indicates the beginning and end of a choreographed sequence. Moving along the odd paths, dressed in her eccentric attire, the shared fantasy materialises in her appearance. At the same time, Madame begins slowly winding towards her guest and both ladies chatter enthusiastically until they meet in the middle of the path. Their high-pitched voices merge, and their gestures, too, are identical. Madame does not need to smear nacre all over her guest to assimilate her — although that would be a diverting sight — because the guest has already dressed up in the appropriate style. Women wear hats, skirts and jackets, preferably a little quirky. What a man should look like — suit, neat trousers, Italian shoes — becomes clear as soon as Monsieur arrives at the gate, where he nervously straightens his bow tie before ringing the doorbell.

About halfway through *Mon Oncle*, the fish fountain stops working because Monsieur Hulot accidentally punctures the waterline with a candle stand. It may mean that Hulot is the ultimate irritant (figure 16). Unable to adjust, he now also sabotages the Madame-of-pearl's source of nacre. A jet of water sprays upwards in the wrong place and everyone at the fashionable party is in a state of alarm. The iconic fish fountain has folded over; the sentence is interrupted; Madame-of-pearl is in panic. Quickly, Hulot switches the fountain off. Then, a man wearing a black tie insists on helping to repair the waterline. Enthusiastically handling shovels and spanners, his neat suit becomes all smudged. While the man is working, everyone else awkwardly parades chairs and tables around the geometrical, highly colourised fields of the garden in order to move the party to another location. It is chaotic. The fountain acts as the symbol of everything the Arpels and their guests choose to believe in. Around the broken fountain, members of the party behave like ants without a queen: no one knows what to do. Finally, when the fish is back to gurgling its blue water, the guests clap and cheer. They are happy; the fountain is repaired, and so is their fiction.

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A mutation may be a performance. The body is formed or steered differently, while still respecting the principles by which the organism was designed. Hence, the rules are merely folded or, if you will, 'bent', not to go off the rails but to shift them. It is important to remember that a fold can turn a flat surface into a three-dimensional shape and expand the space available. Slapstick characters may struggle with their endeavours yet fold into a beautiful choreography exemplifying the choreography of folds, the 'twist[ing] and turn[ing], pushing […] to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 3). Part of the beauty lies in the paradoxical amplification of both the mundane and possibility, finding freedom through being stuck. Where that leaves the *situated* object is yet to be decided — situated on a shelf but not wanting to fit, the loops slowly crawl out of their box; leaking onto the floor; hanging over the edge downwards or upwards; stacked on top of each other. The lower ones are being crushed while the loops on top stretch out into the air. They do not fit, but they are there — all are situated. Are they aspiring to more than this?

# SIT

*Sit*, 2021
Poster with sound (08min 28sec loop)
Paper, bench, headphones, sound recording

Please listen to the sound here: https://soundcloud.com/daphne-de-sonneville/sit

Sit on a chair. Sit on a sofa. Sit on a bed.
Sit on a blanket. Sit on a floor. Sit on a table. Sit on a letter.
Sit on a sales item. Sit on a potted plant. Sit on a radiator. Sit on a printer. Sit on a kitchen sponge.
Sit on a chocolate bar. Sit on a newspaper. Sit on a flyer. Sit on a takeaway menu. Sit on a toilet. Sit on a sidewalk. Sit on a car.
Sit on a box. Sit on a road. Sit on a doorstep. Sit on a cat. Sit on a wall. Sit on a television. Sit on a pair of scissors. Sit on a slice of lemon cake.
Sit on a leather couch. Sit on a hand. Sit on an arm. Sit on an elbow. Sit on a fingernail. Sit on a scoop of ice cream. Sit on a carrot. Sit on a pile of laundry.
Sit on a T-shirt. Sit on a soup bowl. Sit on a pizza. Sit on a spear of broccoli. Sit on a bin. Sit on a shampoo bottle. Sit on a duvet. Sit on a keyboard. Sit on an
envelope. Sit on a calendar. Sit on a tulip. Sit on a milk bottle. Sit on a tea bag. Sit on an orange. Sit on a coffee bean. Sit on an ice cube. Sit on a stool. Sit on a
doorknob. Sit on a cup. Sit on a pillow. Sit on a bath towel. Sit on a spoon. Sit on a sheet of chequered paper. Sit on a house key. Sit on a cherry. Sit on a curtain. Sit on
a cornflake. Sit on a pair of head phones. Sit on a comb. Sit on a terrace. Sit on a souvenir. Sit on a crumb of blue cheese. Sit on a truffle. Sit on a screw. Sit on a nail.
Sit on a hair. Sit on a shower head. Sit on a frying pan. Sit on a macaroon. Sit on an origami bird. Sit on a lamp. Sit on a sock. Sit on a ballpoint pen. Sit on a novel.
Sit on a shoe. Sit on a lasagne sheet. Sit on a grain of rice. Sit on a bowl of couscous salad. Sit on a hill. Sit on a bench. Sit on a rubber band. Sit on a tomato. Sit on a
pea. Sit on a painkiller. Sit on a garden fence. Sit on a tree branch. Sit on a barbecue. Sit on a pebble. Sit on a brick. Sit on a blade of grass. Sit on a rope. Sit on an
electric drill. Sit on a cleaning product. Sit on a dirty plate. Sit on a plug. Sit on a can of beans. Sit on a bar. Sit on a piano. Sit on a ferry. Sit on a wine glass. Sit on a
beach. Sit on a mountain. Sit on a fork. Sit on a photograph. Sit on a pair of trousers. Sit on a toothpick. Sit on a stair. Sit on a cupboard. Sit on an autumn leaf.
Sit on a plastic bag. Sit on a beer. Sit on a hair. Sit on a drawer. Sit on a sand dune. Sit on a swing. Sit on a phone. Sit on a receipt. Sit on a cord. Sit on a crisp.

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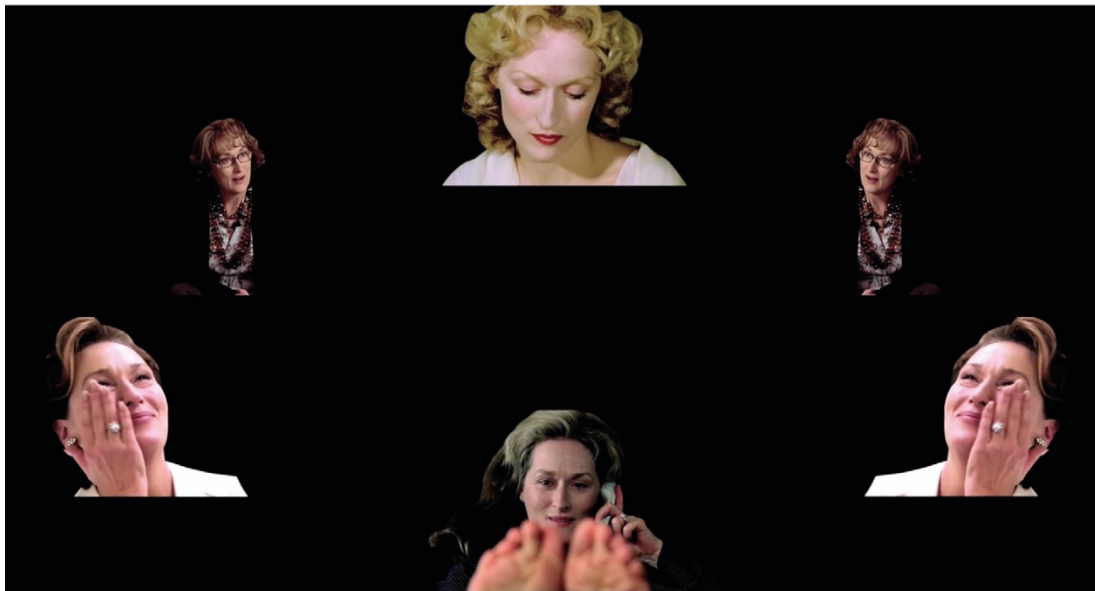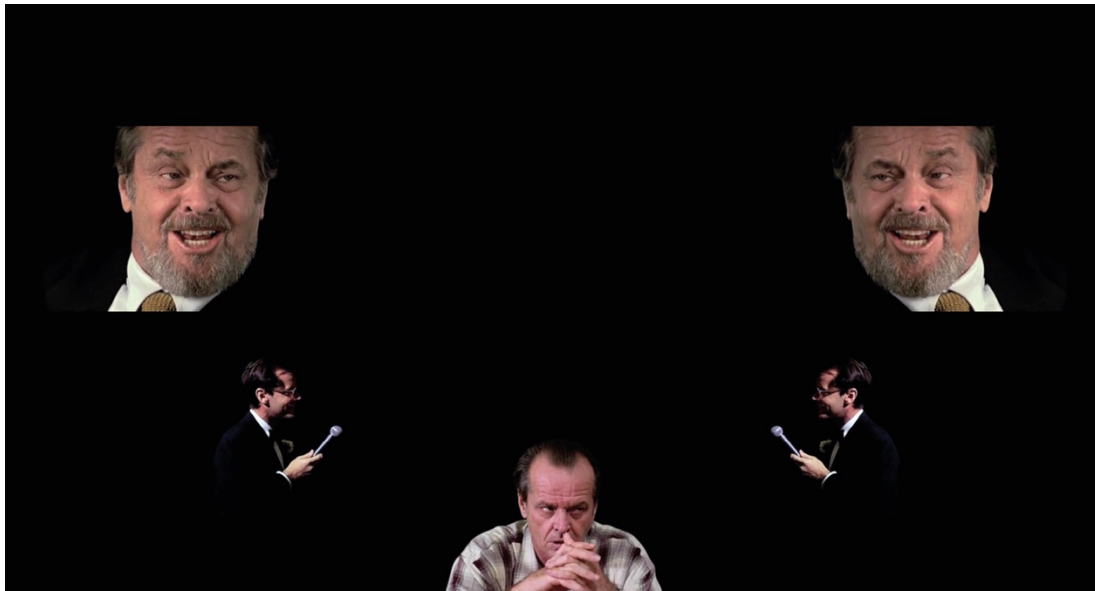
# Figures

Figure 17

Figure 18

Figure 19

The tender leaves on Ma Ginger's
goosberry bushes were unfurling

There is not much to see around here.
Wretched town.
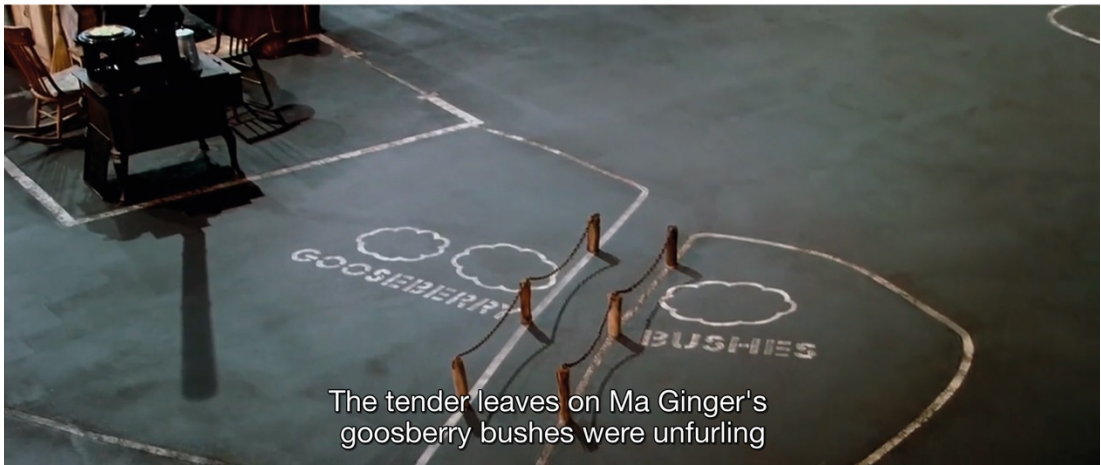
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I

There is a poster on the wall and in front of it is a concrete bench with headphones (p. 96). The poster, grey with a black text, shows a collection of sentences that suggest sitting on a wide variety of objects. It looks like a sort of pile or mound: the start of the text is centred in the middle of the poster and as the text progresses, it expands sideways until it fills the page. Each successive sentence gives a new suggestion: 'sit on a chair', 'sit on a sofa', and, further on, 'sit on a crisp'. A person sitting on the bench in the gallery in front of the *Sit* poster can listen to the text through headphones, which lasts a total of twenty minutes. This person faces the room and cannot, at the same time, read what is written on the poster behind. Another person standing in front of the work can read the text whilst looking at the person who sits on the bench. The listener thus becomes a reflection of the poem, an example of how to sit, and the bench a universal model of objects to sit on.

Some paths are emphasised by upright surfaces, such as walls that line a narrow backstreet. A long alley twisting through a city is made visible by walls on either side, which are effectively two large surfaces folding around corners. Your S-shaped garden path does not have such walls. The Arpels render its shape with the upright surfaces of their bodies, their legs extending outwards while their hips turn to the side. Soles of shoes, mostly with pointy heels, follow the path that directs bodies into folds. To meet Madame is to meet in the middle, waving the arms and clicking the heels. They are

symmetrical: when Madame walks down the path to the right, her friend turns to the left. Swinging from side to side, the ladies fold in and out of a mirror dance.

Madame and her friend demonstrate the shape of the path and mirror each other. Using their bodies, they reproduce how the path writes an S, a language they emphasise with exaggerated gestures. They not only perform the dance as prescribed but also embody its symbolism: moving back and forth, the great oscillation through the garden serves a dramatic effect; a sensory experience; a journey. Like the *Sit* poster, the S-shaped path is also an instruction — Madame and her friend follow it to perfection, unlike Monsieur Hulot who rushes onto the path and almost slips up. He is out of place, not synchronised with the garden of forms in which everything seems so perfectly maintained. How different that is for Madame and her friend who, with their animated arm movements and neat, little steps, fold in and out in unison, synchronously, like two sides of the same paper.

When a piece of paper is unfolded, a symmetrical image appears. Following this principle, the Rorschach image (figure 17) is made of ink dripped onto a paper that is subsequently folded in half and then unfolded again. What emerges is a pattern of ink blots that appears symmetrical, used in psychology as a test to examine emotional functioning by having the subject say what they see. The Arpels' garden contains exactly such inkblots: Madame and her friend moving symmetrically amongst evenly spaced privet hedges; blue gravel fields; stepping-stones. At the centre of everything, the fish fountain spits out blue water that stains the air. As mentioned before, it is turned on only for the Arpels' visitors, their 'subjects'. But where the Rorschach image is an organic-looking image in which many people see representations of nature, such as plants, butterflies and other animals, the Arpels' garden is strictly geometric. People are prevented from integrating

with the garden because they must stay on paths that are incredibly awkward. Like Heidegger's broken tool that, by losing its function, becomes an image (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 102-103) so does the Arpels' garden. In a sense, the difficulty of use makes both the garden and the broken tool more noticeable — they 'appear'.

The colourful, abstract patterns in Arpels' garden have little to do with nature. As an ideal form that remains at a distance, the garden resides simultaneously here and somewhere else. Maurice Blanchot describes this quality of the image as a mediating role. He compares the principle with a dead body that looks like someone even though the person is no longer alive (Blanchot, 1989, pp. 257-260). Hence, a corpse, too, may not be so different from a broken tool, as both resemble something they are not. As a dysfunctional hammer can no longer be used, Heidegger might say it is not, anymore, a hammer (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 102-103). In a similar fashion, one may wonder if a corpse is still a person. Yet it does come with an imposing quality: distant, emotional, 'more beautiful' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 258). Blanchot suggests it is as if the body 'doubles' into a resemblance more powerful than when the deceased person was alive (Blanchot, 1989, p. 258). Occupying a strange double role, it embodies both death and life but is neither. It has an 'elemental strangeness' that relates to the 'formless weight of being, present in absence' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 258). Perhaps this quality also implicates that, while the corpse facilitates an encounter with death, it simultaneously makes clear that we, the living, do not know what death is. The corpse 'no longer entertains any relation with this world, where it still appears, except that of an image, an obscure possibility, a shadow ever present behind the living form which now, far from separating itself from this form, transforms it entirely into shadow' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 258). And although the corpse is already a shadow of the person it once was, incomprehensible and fleeting, it also deteriorates in time. It shares with the image that both, at some point, will perish.

This degenerative process does, however, take time; Blanchot calls it

a 'slow disappearance, this unending erosion of the end' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 260). First, the image may expand and take over: 'No matter how calmly the corpse has been laid out upon its bed for final viewing, it is also everywhere in the room, all over the house' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 259). Because it has no clear place or resides, as Blanchot would say, 'at every instant […] elsewhere than where it is' (Blanchot, 1989, p. 259), the image is at the same time both elusive and persistent. A nostalgic image has the power to transport one to another era, demonstrating that this time remains somehow present. It is a sort of afterlife; never aging, the same moment lingers on forever. Fitting to this idea, the Arpels' garden is filled with inorganic material. It is no site for clumsy bodies that, under their weight, shift the gravel or carry dirt on their way in. Like a kind of holy place, this garden creates the impression that one must have already died to be there.

## IIII

The seven-channel video installation *HIM / HER* (2008) by Candice Breitz shows clippings from well-known Hollywood films (figure 17). *HIM* shows Jack Nicholson, *HER* features Meryl Streep. These are famous actors, and the scenes come from a range of well-known productions made at different stages of their lives. The clippings show just the actors, their bodies neatly cut out from their surroundings and pasted onto a black background. The image is folded: sometimes the actor is shown eight times in the same shot, mirrored to the left and right. This composition of the actors, symmetrically spread across the picture frame like inkblots, is reminiscent of a Rorschach image. It is, however, moving. Switching back and forth between different cut-outs, the Rorschach video invites an analysis of not only the viewer but, most notably, the characters played by the actors. For him, the central question is 'who am I?' and for her, the most important is 'will I marry?'.

Where *HIM* mainly deals with the man as an individual, all of the questions in *HER* are about the relationship of the woman to a man. Streep asks and answers critical questions about love or is seen wailing on the floor

in her dressing gown. Because the subjects are questioned by characters played by the same actors, even the questions and answers are mirrored. There is no way out: the stereotypes they struggle with are multiplied; taking over; dizzying. The corpse-like image that is 'nowhere' is everywhere. It is a paradigm that has become independent and may compare well to Vilém Flusser's analysis of the word 'stereotype', in that it 'means that there are gestures that are made largely for their own sake and for which we have models' (Flusser, 2014, p. 123). Like some sort of Frankenstein constructed of ideas about men and women, this stereotypical model now functions autonomously to haunt 'him' and 'her' with questions:

"Just tell us who you are."
"Who are you?"
"I am a great guy."
"I think we're getting a picture."
"Are you out of your mind!"

One scene in *HIM* shows a mirrored, middle-aged Jack Nicholson on either side of the screen with his mouth slightly open in a grimace and one eyebrow raised higher than the other: a cynical expression. This image is proportionally larger than the other cuttings on the screen. In the middle of the frame, at the bottom, he is shown slightly younger but already balding. With his hands clasped in front of his face, tilted slightly downwards, and his eyes raised under eyebrows in a deep frown, he looks as if he is engaged in a difficult conversation. His posture, in which he presses his forehead forward, has something stubborn about it. He looks at his interlocutor over his clenched hands as if over the barrel of a gun. Between the bloated, cynical Nicholson on either side of the screen and his defensive figure below, the actor appears as a cheerful young man with thick brown hair, his stature slightly shrunken in comparison to the other cut-outs who enthusiastically point their microphones forward.

The clippings not only appear mirrored on the screen, but also return in different scenes. Additionally, the repetitive editing folds the sound so that the same questions and answers pass by in ever-changing configurations. In *HIM*, the man is confronted with "Who are you?" and an angry "Tell us who you are!". Nicholson passes through what can be called a 'rollercoaster' of emotions, all focussed on how the man sees himself, how others see him and how he wants to be seen. He is successively picked apart: "Tell us about your unhappy childhood"; judged: "You are a neurotic mess"; complimented: "You are one of those great portraits you see over a fireplace"; and judged again: "Oh, what a sad guy." Madness is always lurking in the background. Footage of Nicholson in a white robe shuffling about on the floor (from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) regularly returns to the screen. Or he sings all too happily: "Always look at the bright side of your life!"

In *HER*, the situation is not great either. Her first question, which is regularly repeated throughout the video, immediately implicates failure: "Tell me what it is you are trying to say?" Whatever she is *trying* to say, it does not get much better. First, there is much doubt about who to marry: "You want to marry him, don't you?" She fails in a career: "Oh, you keep house. That's terribly interesting." And marriage is disappointing: "No, it's not what I dreamed of." When the woman eventually tries to give her life direction by writing a book — autobiographical, of course — she is told in a disparaging tone: "Oh, that's nice." Worst of all, the main question is still what he thinks:

"I know he really loves your writing."
"He said that?"
"He says he's missing you."
"He said your intelligence is pulp."

The desperation in *HIM/HER* becomes funny because of the frantic repetition of situations and their stereotypical recognisability. It gives the work a machine-like quality — 'him' and 'her' keep returning to the same phrases,

the same gestures, the same hopelessness. I am reminded of the daily repetition of sitting down and standing up again. Indeed, *Sit* uses a similar mechanism of repetitive cuts and highlights the recurring phenomenon of sitting by repeating it in the text. At the same time, however, it also insists on change through the choice of a different object to sit on each time. These alterations expand the action in a way similar to how the repetition of scenes in *HIM/HER*, shown in ever-changing combinations, allows for a close reading of gestures and vernacular.

Meryl Streep at the bottom of the screen in *HER*, sitting on the floor with a phone in her hand and her legs extended in front of her, appears bored. She looks at her toenails, which are freshly painted. In the same scene, she is also shown as a young woman with blonde curls, red lips and a white dress floating at the top of the screen, resembling Marilyn Monroe. Her eyes are downcast with her head tilted to one side, somewhat like the Virgin Mary. It is Meryl Streep as the immaculate beauty. Mirrored, on either side of the frame, there is Streep looking up at the sky, crying with one hand covering her face — feminine hysteria — and a middle-aged Streep with a short brown haircut, wearing glasses and lots of large, beaded necklaces around her neck, her head tilted, and her eyes and mouth engaged in conversation: the anthroposophical therapist.

All of these are stereotypes. The woman is focused on the man, mostly at home, and the man on himself, mostly away. In that sense, *HIM/HER* almost seems a modern retelling of the myth of Echo and Narcissus. After all, Narcissus is only concerned with himself, and Echo is fixated on him. Because Echo can only speak by repeating what Narcissus says, she continuously adapts to him. Narcissus falls in love with the reflection of himself in the water, in which he sees a real person, and this may be a portrayal of Baudrillard's 'successive phases of the image' (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 6), which, similarly like the Frankenstein model of stereotype, is born from reality but then separates itself. Initially, Narcissus sees a reflection of something that exists, namely his own flesh and blood: 'it

is the reflection of a profound reality' (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 6). But Narcissus's reflection is blotchy, mirrored, and sometimes the waves reflect him double. Narcissus looks into these inkblots but does not recognise himself. The image he sees is that of a fictitious other, beautiful, desirable. He falls in love with someone who does not exist. This same principle may also apply more generally to stereotypical Hollywood films. After all, do those not often focus on a distorted reflection of love? Most films entail a glamorous glorification of actors, and romantic films are led by a dogmatic focus on 'finding the one' to become 'happy ever after'.

Because Narcissus romanticises his reflection so much, it turns into a truth for him. However, what he sees is a deception. His own appearance, folded into a double, conceals reality. Echo, who can only repeat what Narcissus says, folds his speech by doubling it. Narcissus has no eye for poor Echo until finally, starved to death, he falls into the water. Perhaps Baudrillard would say that his reflection 'denatures' the 'profound reality' (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 6) of his own flesh and blood. This tragic course of events shows how the image becomes more important than real life, in a way similar to how the stereotype removes authenticity.

Deleuze describes how subjectivity evolves from the way in which the world is folded inwards and outwards (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 39-40). Here, however, Narcissus falls in love with his own image and folds in upon himself. In contrast, Echo folds away from herself by copying Narcissus and losing her own voice. As both lose touch with reality as they forget that what they desire does not exist, perhaps their fixations 'mask[s] the absence of a profound reality' (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 6). Now, the stereotype has taken over and there no longer is anything else. Narcissus' reflection is his outside, and Echo's sound is a copy. They are emptied out. Baudrillard's final stage of the image is that 'it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum' (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 6). Normally, a fold outward is made by a fold inward. A reflection in symmetry connects both sides. But in this story, the outer surface, reflection or copy, has become detached and takes over. It

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gains life. Eventually, however, the image Narcissus admires fades away with him. It is disturbed and subsequently destroyed when his corpse breaks the water surface.

## IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

Narcissus becomes so obsessed with his image that he ceases to eat and drink. This means that he is, in fact, romanticising a reflection of something that, in reality, is increasingly diminished. I am reminded of Ming-liang Tsai's film *The Hole* (Tsai, 1998), depicting a deteriorating situation while simultaneously showing a glorified reflection. Compare, for example, two stills (figure 18) that both show a foot entering a room:

1. The first still shows a woman's raised leg elegantly protruding from behind a corner into the hallway of an apartment building, dressed in beige tights and a golden pump. The leg enters the image from the left, drawing a diagonal line hitting the centre of the image and creating a dynamism that is further enhanced by the vigour of the leg. It is extended and lifted high; the considerable distance to the floor shows resilience and muscular effort. One might imagine how, just a little while longer, the rest of the body will appear with as much vitality as the raised leg.

2. In the second still, a man's bare foot, followed by more of the leg, protrudes through a hole in the ceiling of a deteriorating apartment. In contrast to the leg in the first still, this one is devoid of any sort of sparkle and hangs vertically into the frame — a static image. The scene has something sad about it; not only does the leg hang down, but the wallpaper, too, droops, and a massive pile of packs of toilet rolls situated in the background tips slightly to the right as if it could collapse any minute.

These two stills both tell, in their own way, the story of a woman and a man who live stacked on top of each other in an apartment building located in an evacuation zone somewhere in Taiwan. A virus spreading across town causes 'bug-like' behaviour in people: crawling, photophobia, and a tendency to hide in dark and humid corners. As the city's residents slowly evacuate their homes or creep around like cockroaches, the city falls into disrepair. Information about the epidemic is transmitted through a TV that is usually turned on in the apartment of the female main character. The man who lives in the apartment above her has a shop but does not do much apart from lying on his couch and occasionally serving one of the few customers left on the estate. Their two apartments form a mirror image: isolated at home, the residents suffer a miserable existence with continuous rainfall, wallpaper that curls off the walls and nothing but brown water coming from the tap.

Early in the film, a hole appears in what is his floor and her ceiling. It is due to a leak in the man's kitchen. Although the woman is disturbed by the hole above her head, the man seems unaffected. She orders a repairman and regularly telephones her neighbour or knocks on his door, but he refuses to cooperate and intentionally makes the hole even larger. Soon, it becomes a portal he uses to infiltrate her apartment. He vomits and drops the ash from his cigarette through the hole, pours water into it or sticks his leg through. When she reacts with shock and anger, he only seems to like it all the more. Although not in agreement, the hole lets the man and woman connect, their isolated lives becoming more and more intertwined. Eventually, when no one else is around anymore, they talk on the phone for hours. And although the woman cannot stand the man, a sexual attraction seems to take hold of her when she fantasises about him in her bathtub.

In the raw reality of a decaying building, the continuous struggle between the two neighbours is real. All the more entertaining is how these scenes are punctuated by a musical version of the story that turns the same plot into a glamorous love spectacle, dealing exclusively with love, desire and being together. The soundtrack of incessant rain is interrupted by dazzling

performances in which the two protagonists seductively emerge from elevators and dance around with fire extinguishers. Dressed in glitzy, colourful costumes, the man and woman sing duets in typical showbiz style, often accompanied by a background choir stationed in the post-apocalypse decor of the dilapidated apartment complex. Amusingly, the film concludes with the title: 'In 2000 [the year of the disaster] we are grateful that we still have Grace Chang's songs to comfort us.' It is as if to say that the display of excessive glamour would bring relief to this very grey reality.

Sadly, the woman becomes infected with the virus at the end of the film. Finally, the hole becomes useful: looking down, the man above finds her on her knees, crouched over, hiding from the light at the bottom of a fortress constructed of toilet rolls. She can no longer speak but is panting heavily. Only now do the man's profound feelings for the woman come to the fore. Visibly shocked, he sticks his arm through the hole and theatrically lifts her out of her pile of toilet paper up to his flat so they can finally be together. The mirrored images converge: fantasy joins reality as the neighbours unite through the hole, their centrefold.

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

Narcissus and Echo are each other's doubles. Both produce a copy: his is an image and hers is sound. It is Narcissus tripled: he reproduces his own image by having his appearance mirrored in the water surface and Echo mimics his words. Both doubles are empty copies that are also single-sided: image and sound are split up, just as Narcissus and Echo themselves remain detached. It is a separation between image and language; seeing and hearing; text and picture. Looking again at *Sit*, one could perhaps see a similar division embodied by the person who sits on the bench. Listening to the audio, they cannot read the poster at the same time. Meanwhile, a second person standing in front to read the poster sees the first person sitting but does not hear the audio. Still, it all works together: the text on the poster is about sitting, as is the sound recording, and when someone sits

down on the bench, that person becomes another iteration of sitting.

The principle may be reminiscent of Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), which raises the question as to whether it shows the same thing three times: a chair, a picture of the chair and a dictionary definition of 'chair' (figure 19). It is a modern version of 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (*La Trahison des Images*, 1929), René Magritte's famous painting of a pipe bearing the inscription that it is not a pipe (figure 19). What it is: an image of a pipe, a painting, an illusion. There is Narcissus and an image of Narcissus: he sees a man but that is not what is there; it is an image. This tension between perception and reality, and what language one assigns to that or what Echo hears and reproduces, remains relevant.

In 2003, Lars von Trier made *Dogville*. This film is set entirely on a stage floor with white markings for buildings (figure 20) to depict the village 'Dogville', located in the Rocky Mountains. The titles at the start of the film announce: 'The film "Dogville" as told in nine chapters and a prologue' (Von Trier, 2003). This 'telling' is provided by the warm voice of a friendly-sounding middle-aged man who describes the village and everything that happens there. The main event in the film is the arrival of Grace, a young woman on the run from the mob. While she hesitantly enters the village, the voiceover talks about its location amidst mountains and speaks of its residents as "good, honest folks". The question is whether this is true, as all the viewer can see is a floor plan. Rounded white lines indicate the shape and size of Ma Ginger's garden and its position in relation to the street and surrounding houses. There are also three gooseberry bushes drawn into it with the generic shape of cartoon clouds, all three the same size. Their schematic outlines are accompanied by the explanatory line 'GOOSEBERRY BUSHES' stencilled in large letters on the floor. Apart from this, nothing else is drawn within the boundaries of the garden. The path running between the bushes, however, does have an actual fence on either side, as if to make the garden real, and the soft male voice says the leaves on the bushes are unfurling and "tender".

One of the main characters in the town is Tom, and he too fantasises about something not there: fame and his authorship. His authorship is feigned, for he does not actually write. He does spend long hours fantasising about all the novels he is going to produce in a technique he calls 'illustration'. This is how Tom symbolises the role of language in the film, which, like his own technique, illustrates the film through storytelling. None of the narration, neither by Tom nor the voice-over, is visibly based on anything. Perhaps the blind man called 'old Jack McKay' (figure 20) gives the most viable descriptions, proving that no one in the film can see his surroundings any more than he can. Although everyone knows about his condition, the man himself pretends he can see. His incredibly detailed accounts of sunlight shining on, for example, a church tower in Los Angeles or "the underestimated qualities of the light on the East Coast" are without end. When Grace is about to open the curtains to the window in his living room, the man defensively says, "There is not much to see around here." This is, in fact, the case — with the camera panning out, Grace opens the curtains to a window placed in a pitch-black space, revealing nothing. The richer the role of language in the film, with its flowery descriptions of countless curiosities, the more impoverished its visual dimension.

The black floor with white stripes on which the actors in the film operate can hardly be flatter and less accessible. On this impenetrable surface, Grace tries to integrate into the village. She is welcomed by Tom, and with his help gradually tries to win over the other villagers. During most of the film, Tom helps Grace. For example, he convinces the other villagers to allow her two weeks to prove that she is an honest person; however, are they sincere themselves? All the viewer can rely on are the outlines on the floor, filled in by descriptions by the narrator. But the friendliness of the voice is deceiving, and his story could be false — its 'chapters' and flowery descriptions make it sound like a tale from a storybook. Perhaps this is to emphasise that the story of Dogville is indeed a fable. Interestingly, the residents seem to be aware of their precarious storyline as they exert a

considerable amount of control to preserve the myth. Not everyone is allowed to speak up: every time Ben starts a sentence, he is cut off with a short yet determined "Shht" or "Ben…" by Ginger. She may be as manipulative as the film's narrator, who keeps on twisting the story as it unfolds. Depending on who enters the frame, kind words suddenly turn into vicious remarks when the lovely voice starts spreading town gossip. As for Tom, he does not realise that he, the great 'illustrator' himself, is merely an illustration of the voice-over's story: telling the viewer what he thinks and feels, it is as if the voice invents and constructs Tom on the spot.

What is real in *Dogville*? Contrary to the absence of any real scenery, the people who live there are portrayed realistically. The film is entirely composed of jerky hand-held camera footage and close-up shots of their faces, typical of the Dogme 95 film movement started by Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995. The contrast between this realistic way of filming and the stage floor with its theatrical lighting could not be greater. It is as if a documentary maker is walking through a fake village. The viewer can hear crunching noises when Tom walks over the village path without gravel, the sounds of non-existent birds and the blowing of no wind. These sounds augment the construction of the characters, but the emphasis on the handy-cam effect combined with the unreliable narrator's story leave the viewer unsure of what to believe.

Even Martha, portrayed as devout, reliable, and helpful, plays the organ without pressing any pedals, every single day. In her case, it is not the image but the sound that is missing. As her organ, commonly a church instrument, remains silent, Martha acts in line with a model of good behaviour to fit herself into a viable role without having any impact. Flusser writes, 'When we gesticulate in this sense, we don't do it to change the world as we do with work, or to convey a message to someone else as we do with communication, but to perform movements within parameters established by a model' (Flusser, 2014, p. 123). It seems that Martha could be a model for Grace, who, although she is subjected to increasingly unfair criticism, does

everything that the residents of Dogville ask of her without complaining or raising any objections. Grace desperately wants the villagers to like her, and she shows them gratitude for their hospitality by adopting a serviceable role. Except, they are not really hospitable. Demanding a humble attitude, the people of Dogville increasingly force her into a position of exploitation. After the police hang up a 'wanted' poster in the village centre, showing a picture of Grace accompanied by a monetary reward, Grace finds herself being abused. It is hard to watch — as a grateful guest and 'city girl', she is told not to complain about hardship and humiliation. Her conditions worsen until she is regularly physically and sexually harmed, even by her best friend Tom, who initially presents himself as her ally.

The excruciating situation ends when Grace is picked up by her father — the mafia boss — in a black limousine. Together, they return to the village where she takes a rifle and shoots everyone, reversing her role as victim. This happens after her father tells her she should allow people to receive her vengeance. By simply forgiving the residents of Dogville, he says, she would place herself above them; she and the villagers can be equal only if she makes them pay for what they did to her. And so, she regains control of her life, doing something no one had seen coming. She is no longer constructed by the voiceover or the people of Dogville, no longer an 'illustration' or the empty echo of an image, but fully inhabits her physicality.

Many of Von Trier's films are about female victimisation; the theme also recurs in *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). In *Breaking the Waves*, it goes from bad to worse. At the end of the film, after the main character dies, a mirage of larger-than-life church bells appears in the sky. With the bells ringing, *Breaking the Waves* seems to convey a message similar to *Dogville*, although in this case, the main character rises above the people by folding in. Absorbing the sins of others, she acquires sainthood. In contrast, Grace takes revenge by folding out. Manifesting as a tangible form pressing forward, the outward fold is a literal 'ex-pression'. Grace breaks through that flat interplay of lines on the floor and leaves her

mark in the spatial world of bodies.

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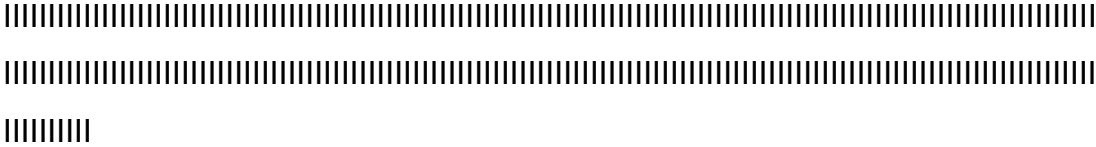
Like *Dogville*, *Sit* occupies two domains: image and language. In *Dogville*, these form two constituents that meet but do not fit together. Perhaps this lack of fit is where Franco "Bifo" Berardi marks the difference between a connection and conjunction. According to Berardi, a connection locks two parts in place that fit perfectly together, whereas in a conjunction they keep moving around because they do not interlock (Berardi, 2012, p. 125). Between image and language there is no 'connection', or the seamless match Berardi describes as 'the punctual and repeatable interaction of algorithmic functions, straight lines, and points that overlap perfectly' (Berardi, 2012, p. 125). Instead, language enters into a relationship where it can gradually manipulate the image as if it were constantly changing position, 'weaselling [its] way about without precision, repetition, or perfection' (Berardi, 2012, p. 125). This may also apply to the bee from the previous chapter that does not fit into the sterile symmetry of the double flower or Tati as the irritant infiltrating the garden. However, the degree of this weaselling is variable, as the 'round and irregular shapes' (Berardi, 2012, p. 125) combining into a conjunction vary in size and surface texture.

Although text and image always belong to a different order, they seem less conflicted in *Sit* than in *Dogville*. This may be due to the clear, simple language from which *Sit* is constructed — it contains no deceptive language to manipulate or fool one unwittingly — but also because the voice, the bench and the poster convey what is essentially the same story. Yet there is something strange about the repeated utterance of the text, given that, pretty quickly, the objects mentioned are not logically suitable to sit on. The text, so it seems, enters a process of corruption, diverging from a straightforward premise into a distorted logic by using an imperative and a direct object that

do not quite fit together. Here, the conjunction seems to have slipped into the text itself, where the words rub against each other like jagged, bumpy objects. It is a phenomenon that works across fields and genres — modern figurative painting, too, frequently combines elements that do not seem to originate from the same world.

For example, *Korridor* (2006) by Matthias Weischer (figure 22) depicts a corridor, recognisable as such only because of the illusion of a corner from around which light enters the space depicted. What lies beyond cannot be seen. The location of the corner is mysterious, and this is reflected in the white canvas on the wall that does not depict anything to see either. Green wallpaper covers the walls. On top of a Persian carpet stands an object. It is some sort of industrial tube that is bent to stick upwards. The carpet itself is not straight — it looks warped as if it got stretched on its way there. Generally, a painting can be seen to fold the world in and out by arranging certain elements into a new composition. *Korridor* folds in a rug and deforms it on its way out. It represents a strange collection of things that each refer to another place, yet somehow it is as if the objects depicted adhere to the same code, a particular order, a set of rules according to which their conjuncted world is organised. The division of space is important: all figurative elements remain within their own defined area. The bent tube stands on the carpet; the carpet lies to the left of the orange floor; the light shines on the bare piece of floor next to it, and the visible walls are two rectangles of roughly the same size.

I am inclined to compare this painting to a scene from *Mon Oncle* that presents a space equally carefully divided (figure 22). It takes place during a garden party, and each element present in the garden has been assigned its own area. The guests are seated on chairs on a square terrace surrounded by a low bar-shaped hedge with an opening on each side of the square. On their tight, strictly vertically designed metal garden chairs, they protrude from the garden like pawns on a chessboard. Interestingly, the black and white squares of the notional board can be recognised in the playfully distributed

stepping-stones elsewhere in the garden. One often sees the guests jumping from one tile to another to make their way across the grass, and, like real chess pieces, they are not allowed to step outside their squares. The metal fish fountain sticks out, too — its resemblance to the metal pipe in *Korridor* is striking. Similar to how the fish stands upright with its mouth in the air, rising from the rather flat garden, the metal pipe in the painting, curved in an odd shape, emerges from the carpet. Both can be seen as symbols of what is perhaps the essence of their environment: divergence.

Although *Sit* combines spoken and written language, and *Mon Oncle* is a film with actors, I wonder if, like *Korridor*, they, too, fit into the category of still life. After all, the careful placement of objects, curated and in a particular order, seems to be their main focus. In *Mon Oncle*, there is the garden with curious furniture and a ball-jug in the kitchen. It fits with the genre of still-life that, traditionally, uses paint to give objects a new appearance. The way the object is treated, be it with paint or in some other way, changes how one perceives it. This may explain why the Arpels' garden is flat and looks like a drawing — it is almost as if the inhabitants have crawled into a still life to interact with extraordinary objects that are not really meant for that purpose.

In a painting, even one that does not exactly resemble anything real, there might be something about the way the paint is used that evokes a certain similarity to how objects manifest in reality. It may be that items are positioned in such a way that they are well-lit and appear untouched. Often, brushstrokes are deliberately left visible on the canvas to show that it is indeed paint, and that because of, for example, the thickness of the paint, or a certain way of handling the brush, a discovery has been made with the paint that can tell us more about the appearance of the object in the world. It does so precisely because it was produced with a visibly different material, and this means that, at the same time, the painting also tells us about the nature of paint and the image, both of which are radically different to anything else. Paint is a distinct material that evokes a world inimical to the one surrounding it. Moreover, the paint is applied to a flat surface, for which,

when figurative, the natural laws of space and depth have to be transformed. This is not a disadvantage but an asset: the painting wants to be different.

Perhaps this bending of the rules is what Rancière calls the 'artistic regime', in which artistic phenomena adhere to a 'specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 22). The idea seems to be a twin of Foucault's heterotopia that I discussed in the previous chapter. Similar to a garden, which, as artificial nature, is effectively a contradiction in itself, the heterogenous power, too, forms a paradox: 'a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, logos identical with pathos, the intention of the unintentional, etc.' (Rancière, 2011, pp. 22-23). It is reminiscent of how *Sit* distorts logic and *Mon Oncle* plays with the rules of garden design.

How often does one sit on a grain of rice? And is it at all possible to sit on a doorknob? For the text, it does not matter as long as it stays consistent with the laws of the mini universe that prevails within the work. A painting of a lemon can show the yellowness and waxiness of its peel, the juiciness and transparency of its flesh, or that velvety softness of the white protective layer around it. The painting does this, for example, through the use of thin, transparent paint. However, by sharing this incredible transparency with the flesh of a lemon while still remaining strikingly recognisable as paint, the painting becomes real precisely because it is fake.

During the Venice Biennale 2017, Phyllida Barlow made a series of columns called *Folly* for the British Pavilion, which, fittingly, features a colonnade of its own (figure 21). Barlow's tall, stately columns, however, are made of cheap, everyday materials such as plaster and slats from the hardware store. Interesting is that they have been cut open lengthwise to deliberately expose the inside and reveal their DIY 'splendour'. Like in a painting, the 'brushstrokes' are visible: the entablature, white and sharp as carved marble, is clearly recognisable as a stack of standard-sized

Styrofoam plates. The columns are tall, reaching all the way up to the roof as a reference to infinity, but stay connected with the earth as they reveal their construction. Hence, Barlow's pillars break with their illusion, not pretending to be anything other than what they are: cheap, make-believe material. The work renders visible that it belongs to another order and, thereby, it transcends reality.

Resembling a 'poor' copy of pillars in a building with a classical appeal, Barlow's *Folly* shows how an obvious imitation ceases to be simply a copy. It is reminiscent of the process of mutation as discussed in the previous chapter, which, if successful, will be considered a new species. Perhaps it is a similar principle that prompted the Gelitin artists' group to start a manual 'copying machine' for objects called *Tantamounter 24/7* (2005). This work, made up of a plywood partition wall with a hatch through which visitors can slide an object, divides the gallery into two spaces: a visitors' area and a sort of hidden 'machine room'. Written on the wall is a user manual, promising 'the tantamount will be ready for takeout after an average processing time of 30 minutes' (Gelitin, 2005). During this time, the 'tantamount' is tinkered together with materials that were gathered beforehand inside the copy machine.

Take, for example, the bottle of Versace perfume the *Tantamounter 24/7* copied with a piece of pineapple, half a grapefruit, the screw neck of a plastic bottle and a wooden block labelled 'ZUG 1' (figure 21). The proportions of the various elements composing the copy are not the same as in the original, but their appeal is entirely correct: the surface of the pineapple resembles the tessellated, spherical cap of the bottle and is exotic — perfect for conveying the luxury feel of the product. The bottle top formed by the pineapple and grapefruit is exaggerated in size and is immediately eye-catching with an allure that compensates for the triviality of other materials used. Of course, this is symbolic: as anyone could guess, the fruits probably originate from the same supermarket as the plastic bottle used to create the bottle's neck, rendering the object even more comical. The cube with 'ZUG 1'

is, because of its lettering, a logical choice to replace the 'Versace' plinth and even the detailing is right: a leather lace knotted around the neck to finish it off serves as the bottle's golden rim. More than a repetition, Gelitin's version is a form analysis: the Versace bottle's original shape is emphasised because the copy is different.

If Narcissus looked into the water at *Tantamounter 24/7*, perhaps his reflection would not seduce him. What would it be made of? A net of tangerines? It would be an amusing intrusion, pointing to a human intervention rather than mere mechanical confusion. Similarly, the objects in *Sit* are curated, perhaps to evoke a certain feeling. By suggesting to sit on them, the mundane, banal reality of these household objects becomes strange. Like the bad copy that turns into a new species, *Sit* builds on a process of accretion rather than nullification. Passing through a corridor (flyer, takeaway menu), bathroom (shampoo bottle, toilet) and the outdoors (autumn leaf, sand dune), there seems to be a calm self-confidence emanating from a strange logic that causes each repetition of the instruction to shift and deepen.

W

*W*, 2021
Concrete, steel, white cement, enamel paint
74 x 19 x 132 cm
Tsarino, Bulgaria

*W*, 2021
Four-channel 4k video with sound (07min 30sec)

Please watch the video here: https://vimeo.com/643669840

# Figures

Figure 23

Figure 24

Figure 25

Figure 26

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Figure 27

What would you do if you were stuck in one place...

...and every day was exactly the same, and nothing you did mattered?
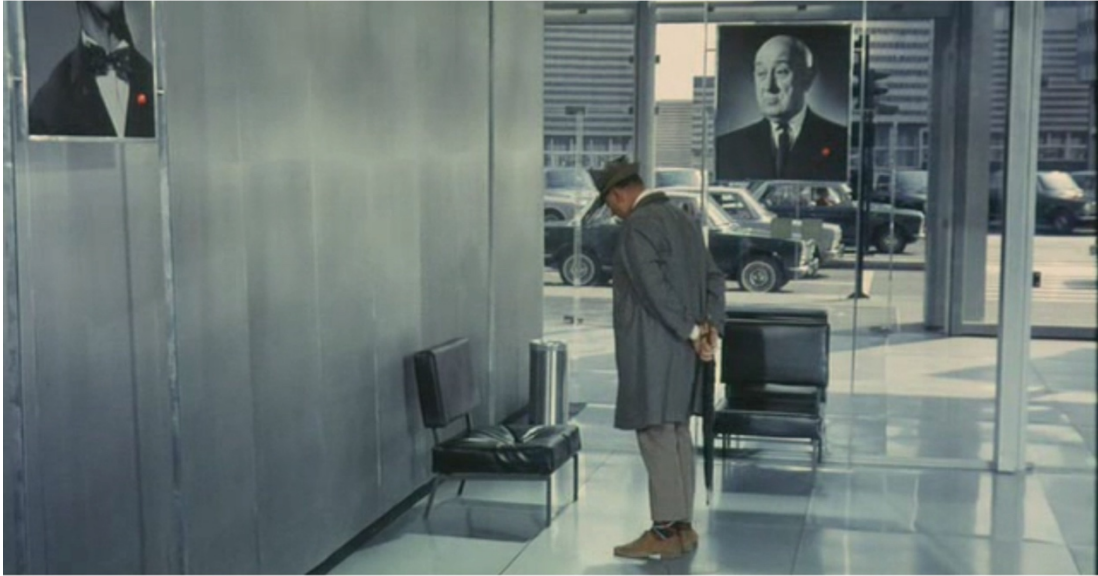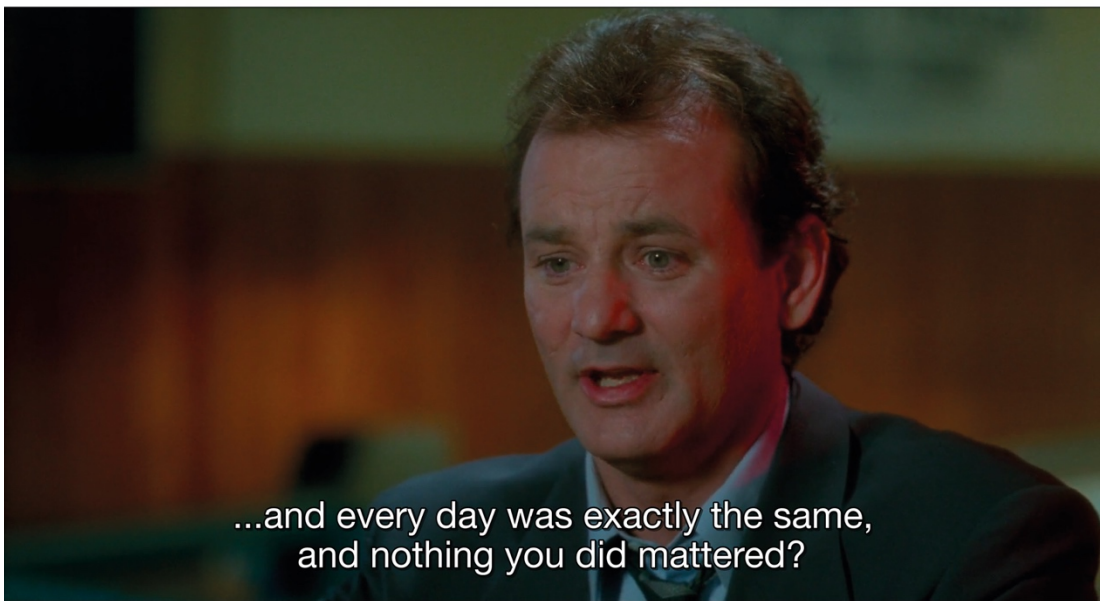
Figure 28

Figure 29

Figure 30

## List of Figures

I

A video split over four screens shows a cow walking through the image on the bottom left; the other three screens are switched to black (p. 126). The cow walks right past the camera and grazes eagerly, sharply defined in a close-up image of brown fur, udders. Then, as the cow slowly trudges out of the picture, chasing away the flies with a final sweep of her tail, a shape becomes visible in the background. The camera shifts its focus to an object standing in the field on two poles. It is a gigantic capital W (pp. 124–125). The bottom left screen goes black when the top right screen switches on with a close-up of the sculpture. It is made of concrete looking blotchy with a white border that accentuates the letter against the light blue hilly landscape in the background. The front and back of the W are covered with thin metal rods, diagonally protruding from the concrete in a pattern that follows the shape of the letter, a bit like hair growth on an animal's back. It is not immediately clear why the sculpture has been placed there.

With a thud, the top left screen turns on: a calf bumps into one of the black steel poles and flinches. The animal moves to form a group together with two other calves that are now examining the object from head to toe at a suitable distance. One calf cautiously begins to sniff it out, and soon, they all join in. The screen turns black. Then, top right, another cow walks straight towards the sculpture, approaching it vigorously and without hesitation. She raises her head and scratches her chin on the side of the W. Bottom right and left, more cows approach the sculpture to scratch themselves, and calves, reaching less high, use the sculpture's poles for the same purpose. The metal rods combing through the cows' fur make a whistling sound, and necks moving along the concrete scrape audibly. Similar to how different instruments start and stop in an orchestra, the different screens of the video switching on and off channel a cacophony of scratching noises, a harmony of motion and rubbing, scrubbing and scraping.

After an awkward start, most of the cows now deliberately walk up to the sculpture and scratch on the W as if they had years of experience. The

sculpture has become a way station on their daily route between various pastures: they stop for a moment at the tree on the corner and then walk straight on to the W to take another break. The cows stand or sit next to the W, and calves run towards it enthusiastically. Alternately, the animals use it to scratch an itch along the steel rods sticking out or along the letter's corners, which start narrow at the bottom and then beautifully protrude at the top. This W, in particular, has a serif, which means that two small edges at the top corners thrust outwards. Those edges are excellent for scratching the neck and chin, and the metal rods seem to be good for the trunk. For the calves, the object offers exploration and play. Just like the big cows, the calves manage to scratch their chins when they stretch out far enough to reach the bottom of the letter. They also stick their heads between the two posts the sculpture stands on to scratch both sides of their necks. Or they chase each other between the posts until, tired, they fall asleep, forming three little heaps around the sculpture in the grass.

Now some questions remain. Is the letter W the best form for a scratching post? Is it ergonomic? Is it placed in a convenient location? What is the reason behind this particular design?

You have pathways that are designed more like an obstacle course than a convenient route to the veranda or terrace. From the driveway to the pond, a rectangle of grey gravel is traversed by a row of tiles alternating with tiny spherical shrubs. Forming a straight line, these tiles resemble a path; however, one would have to leap over a shrub with each step. Further back, there is a path that runs from the veranda to the square terrace, itself

framed by more tiny shrubs (angular and just fifteen centimetres high), formed by circular tiles that zigzag through the grass. As these tiles are spaced a good twenty-five centimetres apart, one needs to jump sideways to follow their course. Watching people tiptoe from tile to tile on the strangely laid out tracks crossing your different geometric areas is amusing; anyone who visits you automatically becomes part of a performance. Some move in a precise manner, but most jumps are awkward, clumsy and hurried. It is impressive that all guests manage to stay on your paths most of the time, except for one occasion when a dog brought in by a visitor starts running around. In an attempt to catch the dog, a man speeds right through the gravel zones and — punished immediately — sprains his ankle.

A garden design is a drawing with lines and fields traversing a flat surface. Normally, these fields are filled with voluminous elements, e.g., shrubs, trees or flowers. The Arpels, however, have kept their garden flat; the design visibly remains a drawing in which only its users are three-dimensional. A letter W is also flat, intended as a sign on a surface. It can be printed, engraved or written. Three-dimensional letters, such as illuminated plastic letters above shops, usually still have a flat shape, albeit thicker. The same goes for *W*, thick and robust, standing upright in the field. But although the

letter has a body that is independent and not part of paper or any other surface, it remains a sign for those who can read it, which is still easiest from the front. For the cows, however, it is different: scraping their bodies along all of the W, they emphasise a form that is equally useful on its side.

In classical philosophy, a distinction is made between two kinds of subjectivity: thought and extension or the mind and body. Letters, words and language in general are usually associated with thinking. But language also has a material quality; over time, it can crumble and deteriorate. Moreover, it requires a body to be expressed via the throat and mouth or the hand and a pen. This is not surprising since thought and extension may not be as far apart as is sometimes assumed. Contrary to the common Cartesian understanding of the subject, split between body and mind, Deleuze insists that inside and outside are like two sides of the same fold. As mentioned before, a fold inward is at the same time a fold outward on the other side. This, for Deleuze, means that the inside pushes out and the outside pushes in: '[T]he line of inflection is actualized in the soul but realized in matter, each one on its own side' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 40). Although the front and back of the fold are inextricably linked, they are also forever separated. To illustrate what this looks like, Deleuze makes a comparison to Leibniz's theory on the monad as pure interior and the facade as its exterior counterpart (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 30-32), based on the idea that the monad produces the rules that shape the facade without physically manifesting itself.

Explaining the concept of the monad as 'an inside without an outside' and the facade as 'an outside without an inside', Deleuze draws an analogy with a Baroque church (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 30-32). Most of such buildings house a small room that, high up in the tower, exists as pure interiority. It is usually of a sober decor and has no view onto the outside world. Directly opposing the monad is the facade of the building, which, because of its extensive decorations executed in various luxurious materials, can be called highly physical and nothing but outside. Where the small room at the top of the tower houses a private sanctuary for serene spirituality, the usually

impressive, three-dimensional relief of the facade is directed outwards as if it were pushing itself into the world. It creates a duality in the building Deleuze describes as a folding movement (Deleuze, 2006, pp. 32, 39), in which the opulence of the facade can be seen as the earthly expression of the serene, spiritual peace that reigns in the monad.

To come back to thought and extension, Deleuze compares the Baroque church to a person whose mind or soul is their monad and the body their extension or façade (Deleuze, 2006, p. 39). The person moves between these dimensions in a fold that 'separates or moves between matter and soul, the facade and the closed room, the outside and the inside' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 40). As with the monad and facade, what a person thinks is manifested through their body. It is how language finds a way out, pressed onto paper or pushing the throat into a shape. Or it can be a big letter W for cows, a facade rough enough for a good scratch — an ultimate physical experience. In contrast, the Arpels seem to prefer an environment with gravel, tiles, small bushes and many chairs, which does not comfortably accommodate the body. It is a physical space that stems from an idea, a flat drawing in which one can walk or otherwise extend in, albeit not very conveniently. The Arpels do not scratch on letters but hop from stone to stone, delicately moving on their tiptoes in an attempt to have as little impact on the garden as possible.

## IIII

Among the various terraces, the Arpels' garden features bordered areas filled with gravel. The seating area situated at the back of the garden contains peculiarly thick, rectangular white tiles. Apparently, these are to stand on, as the terrace features a standing table with an umbrella in the middle. The gravel fields give the Arpels' garden the appearance of a Japanese dry rock garden or *karesansui*, not at the least because it looks so undisturbed. To avoid stepping on the gravel, several, although awkward, paths have been created (figure 23). In the back of the garden are a few long narrow strips of

gravel in blue, grey and white, separated by white stone borders. Because of their lane-like shape, these gravel strips would resemble a boules court were it not for the tiles forming an odd path across them. It seems as though this is the route from the veranda to the standing terrace. To follow it, one needs to place one foot slightly too far in front of the other and, as a result, balance on one leg after each step. It is a bit like how one might cross a river over a row of stepping-stones.

The Japanese word *karesansui* means dry landscape, denoting a garden that consists mainly of inorganic materials such as gravel and stones. Vegetation is minimal and exists only in the form of shrubs and moss covering the rocks. Apart from its materials being virtually dry, the garden's name also refers to the modest use of austere materials such as stone and gravel compared to the luxurious traditional gardens in Japan, rich in blossoms and intricate water features (Casalis, 1983, p. 350). Interestingly, the gravel in the dry garden symbolises water and is raked into various wave-like patterns. Art historian Yoshinobu Yoshinaga observes the *karesansui* as 'an attempt to represent the innermost essence of water, without actually using water, and to represent it even more profoundly than would be possible with real water' (Weiss, 2010, p. 92). I would say this analogy is reminiscent of the Arpels' garden in which the gravel beds — under no circumstances to be stepped into — resemble ponds.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Arpels' garden also has something of a supremacist painting by Malevich, featuring bright colours and geometric shapes. This, too, relates it to a Japanese dry garden, which, usually grey, is referred to as a 'monochromatic three-dimensional painting'. This is mainly because the *karesansui* serves as a composition to look at from a single viewpoint (Casalis, 1983, p. 349). Walking through it is not allowed. Take, for example, the famous temple garden of Ryōan-ji in Kyoto. Similar to the villa of the Arpels, the residence or *hōjō* of the monastery's abbot has a veranda from which one may look out over the garden in silent contemplation. More striking, however, are the many visual similarities

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between the Arpels' garden and the *Zuien-no-niwa* or 'contemporary dry garden' at the Shinnyo-dō temple, also in Kyoto (Shigemori, 2010) (figure 24). This *karesansui* features gravel in various colours, in contrast to the centuries-old traditional temple gardens that are filled with one type of grey sand or gravel. White contrasts with black, and especially the ochre-coloured gravel bears great resemblance to that of the Arpels. Moreover, the *Zuien-no-niwa* also uses stone borders in a light colour similar to those used to separate different areas in the Arpels' garden, although they do not form rectangles but polygons. One would almost think that Tati used the *Zuien-no-niwa* garden as inspiration were it not that this garden was completed in 2010. It was designed by the contemporary landscape designer Chisao Shigemori, grandson of the iconoclastic 20th-century master Shigemori Mirei.

Like the Arpels' garden, the Ryōan-ji *karesansui* in Kyoto (Katsumoto, 1450) has a long, rectangular shape framed by a clay wall. It contains grey gravel that is delicately raked into fine, even lines running parallel, interrupted by occasional rocks protruding from its surface. Around these rocks, the Ryōan-ji monks have raked circles that follow the rocks' natural shapes. These circles disturb the parallel lines in the gravel in a way similar to how raindrops strike a water surface. It gives the rocks a resemblance to islands in a lake. Another example of dry water is the garden of the Daisen-in temple in Kyoto (1509-1513), where the gravel looks like a natural rock pool situated amidst shores that are overgrown with moss. The pool has an irregular shape, which is accentuated by the gravel patterns that follow the shape of the rocks. Straight through the mossy rocks and gravel runs a trail of stones. I imagine that, just as guests in the garden of the Arpels are prevented from stepping into the grass by oddly positioned tiles, one could keep one's feet 'dry' in the Daisen-in *karesansui* by jumping from stone to stone.

No flowers, no footprints —
Where is man?
Is he in the transporting of the rocks?

Or in the traces of the rake?

Or in the work of writing?

(Barthes, 1992, p. 102).

In the 'dry water' of the *karesansui*, wave patterns are said to represent deceived, restless thoughts: 'The waves in Ch'an and Zen Buddhism […] often symbolise the endless agitation of the deluded mind' (Casalis, 1983, p. 359). These thoughts then flow into the gravel to become one with nature, the garden with stones and gravel. The careful arrangement of lines turns raking into a form of meditation: 'Raking patterns have a different content at the connotative level: they are the expression of an activity, namely raking' (Casalis, 1983, p. 361). Immersion in this activity allows for presentness, the here and now, away from any further implications. Beyond this, there is no goal, no consideration or intention. Perhaps, one could say, the work *W* also accommodates such a ritual; every day, cows arrive at the sculpture to scratch themselves. They seem to become absorbed in the scraping process, moving their bodies back and forth or up and down along the letter. The steel wire protruding from the front and back of the W combs through the cows' fur and produces a scraping sound like that of a rake in the gravel — the cow is present in the relief of an itch.

One could see the meditative rake as a metaphor for the way in which intangible laws shape the earth. Thought, the circles in the gravel, is effective and, as such, has an impact. As mentioned earlier, thinking is linked to the monad, which itself has no form but does produce the rules by which the world is organised. According to Leibniz, '[e]very being is *subiectum*, a monad' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 179). He might be saying here that the subject is a monad that shapes its facade, its physical outside or body. The body is governed by rules that seek to establish it in the world, to make it move and be present. Heidegger writes that through Leibniz 'all being becomes "subjectival"—that is, in itself eager to represent, and thus effective' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 181). Barthes writes, 'Where is man?' Is he 'in the

traces of the rake?' One could say that Barthes's 'man', the monad, does indeed become visible in the traces of the rake, as the monad rakes nature to find an expression in material. In *W*, however, this might occur the other way around. After all, the letter is a symbol of thought, and nature — the cow — rakes herself with it.

As discussed earlier, Heidegger states that 'the "representation," of the whole of beings […] presses for their being first of all and only in […] *repraesentatio* and as […] *repraesentatio*' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65). Steered by the monad, they find their form in their facade, their body. Heidegger suggests that even a stone can be a subject: 'Stones, plants, and animals are subjects — something lying-before of itself — no less than man is' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 97). Around the cows, the *W* field is strewn with such subjects: grass to trample, stones to trip over. And those stones may trip themselves, kicked away by someone to clear a path. Perhaps one stone hits another and splits. Hence, it appears that a stone also has its problems; like any subject, it cannot escape its extension. The Greek word *hypokeimenon*, from which the Latin *subiectum* is derived, denotes the subject as a substratum on which a world gathers. It translates as 'that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66). Even the stone *W* collects events and cannot escape them — scratching cows push against the letter with all their weight, leaving fluffy tufts of hair that flutter in the wind.

As mentioned before, late ancient and medieval philosophy saw that the subject is characterised by *accidents* (De Libera, 2008, p. 194): 'every accident denominates its subject' or '*accidens denominat proprium subiectum*' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200). Stones, moss and gravel are all subject to change and, similarly, the W sculpture will discolour, the steel rods protruding from its body will rust, and perhaps lichen will grow on its surface. The *karesansui* is designed to show how elements in nature appear and transform. The patterns raked in the gravel erode with time or are deliberately altered by the monks to demonstrate just how everything in the

world changes. Additionally, they position large stones in the garden as if 'emerging' from the gravel to constitute a perceptive event taking place whilst looking. These rocks are often emphasised by raked lines, and it is as if they stand out extra clearly against the background of gravel which is often of a lighter colour. This way, looking at the garden from the temple's viewing platform can bring focus to the appearance of things or the 'representedness' of being. One might even recognise oneself as a part of being, becoming visible as lines in the gravel; as moss; as stones. But one is not supposed to then go and move one's body between the objects; in contemplation, one is to remain on the veranda.

Taking a different approach, the Arpels do walk regularly through their garden — albeit only via the awkward stepping-stones — rather than contemplating the gravel from a distance. They also do not rake patterns in their gravel. That is, however, if one does not recognise the waveform implicit in their S-shaped path (figure 25). This widely undulating walkway traverses several gravel beds, and its shape is reminiscent of the pattern raked in the Jotenzen-ji *karesansui* in Fukuoka. The Arpels walk this path from the house to the gate and vice versa, and in their ritualistic way of walking, they 'rake' the S. I wonder if the letter S is not a bit similar to the letter W that, too, graciously folds back and forth. Walking the S may not be all that different from scratching the W, as both gestures accentuate the shape of the letter and accompany it with sound: the clicking of heels on tiles and the scraping of fur against concrete and steel.

When Barthes asks, 'where is man?' he not only suggests 'man' to be in the traces of the rake but also suggests he may be 'in the work of writing' (Barthes, 1992, p. 102). Raking the trace, walking the S, scratching the W? Inscription, like raking, leaves a trace; a pen imprints letters on a page. The shape of the S is emphasised by the bodies that walk the path and, conversely, the S also leaves traces on the body by imprinting onto their muscle memory how it curves. Language shapes the body; both mouth and hand are affected when learning to speak and write. To be articulated means

being able to use the mouth correctly; to produce the sounds belonging to a specific culture. It is learned behaviour. Hence, articulation depends more on practice than anatomy: 'Articulation does not depend on any peculiarity of structure in the human organs of speech, but on the manner of their use, as developed by education and practice: it is not physical, but historical' (Whitney, 1881, p. 348). This principle is also demonstrated by the cows, who, as they become more familiar with the W, approach the letter with increasing agility. The work shows how cows learn the language of the W — how best to rub against it and which angle is most efficient or satisfying.

The word articulation comes from the Greek *enarthros,* meaning 'jointed' (Whitney, 1881, p. 347). Just like a train, 'language moves on by a succession of parts similar and yet distinct' (Whitney, 1881, p. 347). The continuous current of uttered tone that enters the ear is made up of joints, and the point is to combine these sounds in such a way that they form words. But what if there is only one letter in isolation, such as an S or a W? That sound is then disjointed, on its own, repeating itself in a loop. Even so, however, one cow will scratch differently than the other, and the form of the S still depends on accent, e.g., supple hips, small steps or long strides. Small tonal differences join or 'articulate' families and, perhaps, even the various subgroups within a herd of cows. Articulation belongs to culture and is not congenital but learned. As such, the rules of pronunciation may change over time. It may be what Monsieur Hulot has to deal with when he visits his sister, who, unlike himself, leads a state-of-the-art life. The degree of difference becomes clear when *Mon Oncle* moves from his family's modern universe to the part of the city he resides himself — a rather crooked apartment block around a labyrinth of lopsided staircases where children still play with spinning tops and, thankfully, everything, for a long time, has remained the same.

After *Mon Oncle*, Tati made *Playtime* to continue this theme, revolving around a hypermodern building in Paris (Tati, 1967) (figure 26). The building is multifunctional, housing several offices, a department store and a

restaurant. Immediately after entering the building, it is clear that the authentic but somewhat old-fashioned Monsieur Hulot does not fit into the modern environment: he drops his umbrella onto the smooth, carefully polished marble floor, causing a loud, distracting noise. *Playtime* — the title says it all — is about the rules of the game. Although Tati has claimed to feel more connected to Buster Keaton (Maddock, 1977, p. 20), there is one classic by Charlie Chaplin about an individual in the modern world that is often compared with Playtime: *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936) (Maddock, 1977, p. 17). Both films portray an individual who is overwhelmed by societal developments that transcend the human scale. Chaplin's character, the Tramp, is similar to Monsieur Hulot (Powrie, 2006, p. 66) in that both find themselves responding awkwardly to a mechanised world.

In *Modern Times*, the Tramp works at an assembly line in a factory and struggles to keep up with the pace. A look into the engine room shows a futuristic super machine with a built-in monitor on which the director of the factory can be seen via a live connection (in 1936, this is prescient). Similarly, the gigantic, multifunctional building in *Playtime,* housing a department store, restaurant and various offices, is kept running via an impressive system of lights and buttons. Monsieur Hulot is let in by an older man: the 'operator' of the building, wearing a cap and uniform. After showing him a piece of paper, the operator starts pressing a variety of buttons on a mysterious 'control panel', not unlike how the operator of the machine room in *Modern Times* pulls on all sorts of levers and wheels to get the conveyor belt up and running.

The *Playtime* building's operating system takes its time: several lights come on, and there are electronic sounds that form odd, winding melodies. Finally, the man in uniform refers Monsieur Hulot to the waiting room, a clinical space constructed of steel and glass. It features some larger-than-life portraits of important-looking men gazing down at Hulot from their high positions on the walls. These portraits are reminiscent of the live video connection with the director of the factory in *Modern Times*, who even

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appears on the wall of the toilets to admonish Charlie after he sneaked out to smoke a cigarette. Not much later, the director tells the operator of Chaplin's factory to turn the speed up "to the limit". Poor Charlie cannot keep up; the pace is killing him. His job is to tighten nuts on metal parts sliding past, and soon he is left far behind. Meanwhile, in *Playtime*, Monsieur Hulot has to wait, becomes bored and starts walking around. Just after he gets up to look out the window, the man he is meant to meet passes him from behind and leaves the room. Spotting the man just in time, Hulot goes after him and, similar to Chaplin who is driven up by the speed of the conveyer belt, he has to hurry to keep up with the man.

Now it all starts kicking off: determined to do his job, the speed of the conveyor belt literally sends Charlie 'round the bend'. Trying to tighten even the bolts on parts that have already passed him, he slides onto the conveyor belt himself and is swallowed by the machine all the parts end up in. In the next shot, Charlie is being processed in the giant interior clockwork of the factory (figure 26). For Monsieur Hulot in *Playtime*, the trouble starts when the man he is trying to see disappears into another room. While Hulot waits for him in the hallway, he notices a picture that shows a schematic representation of sorts. It looks more like a work of graphic Op Art than something useful. Hulot walks over to study the drawing, but does not realise the picture, which may be an evacuation plan, is located inside the elevator. Unintentionally, Monsieur Hulot is taken to another floor while Charlie, pressed between two wheels, rolls into the internal clockwork of the factory.

Charlie folds forward with his stomach over a wheel, moving straight down, and then rolls on his back over a wheel opposite the first one in a slight S-movement. Folding again, rolling with his back over another wheel, he comes up, his arms and head first, and then folds forward with his belly over yet another big wheel. Similar to Charlie, Monsieur Hulot is folded into the department store building, driven by escalators that are here analogous to pulleys and gears (figure 26). Sliding along floors and floors of offices, Monsieur Hulot looks out over uniform grey cubicles laid out in a grid

structure, each equipped with a red and green traffic light. Regular short, coded messages sound via the intercom. Resuming his search for the man he is there to see, Hulot becomes entangled in the system of corridors that separate the cubicles and fails to find him.

The building has cleverly folded Monsieur Hulot in — mechanically led along by people who follow invisible codes, he is regularly mistaken for the wrong person and receives much unsolicited and mainly unhelpful assistance. Then, back on the ground floor, Hulot sees the intriguing chair he sat down on in the waiting room for sale in the department store located in the same building. It is made of black leather and has shiny chrome legs. There is something strange about it: when one sits on the chair, the seat cushion forms a considerable dent which, seconds after the person gets up, suddenly 'pops' back into shape (figure 27). This gives the piece of furniture something of a human quality, as if the chair takes a moment to think before deciding to do it anyway.

Earlier, the chair left Hulot confused and alienated, and even the men in the waiting room's portraits looked down on the scene with raised eyebrows. Now, Hulot has a short, amicable conversation with the chair representative and then decides to leave. Inconveniently, however, a group of gentlemen enter just as Hulot wants to go through the glass door. A doorman in a suit who is giving out brochures for the department store enthusiastically welcomes the group. Confused by this man who frantically waves papers in his face, Hulot accepts one even though he already has the flyer and clings awkwardly onto the group of men. As they walk through the glass door, Hulot is led back into the building — unlike the stubborn chair popping back into shape, Hulot is unable to 'undent'.

Charlie, finally rolling back out of the machine in exactly the opposite direction, returns onto the conveyor belt but is not equipped to bounce back either. He keeps wanting to tighten bolts with the two spanners he holds firmly in his hands, even as he gets off the belt and walks around. It seems that, although his body has returned, his head is still stuck in the machinery:

no longer thinking straight, he even attempts to tighten his boss's nose and nipples.

The magnitude of industry the Tramp faces and the overwhelming department store Monsieur Hulot gets lost in quite literally consume the men. Both try to operate within a new scale. The effect is similar to what Marshall McLuhan might call 'the consequences of any medium' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 1). The 'message' of the medium, says McLuhan, 'is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 1). New scales of industry and production permeate the whole of society and have far-reaching consequences for the social fabric. This affects people in an integrative fashion, as 'any technology could do anything but add itself on to what we already are' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 4). In *Playtime*, the effect of industrialisation already becomes clear at the start of the film when Monsieur Hulot is in the waiting room. The man sitting next to him in one of the black chairs performs a highly rhythmic series of actions: putting his suitcase on his lap, taking out an A4 sheet, pulling out his pen, scribbling on the paper, and then repeating the process. He also takes a box of mints from the inside pocket of his jacket, puts one in his mouth, puts the box back in his pocket, looks at his watch, takes a nasal spray from another pocket, sprays it into both nostrils and puts it back. The sound, controlled and regular, is as tight as the suit the man is wearing and with his rhythmic movements, he could easily be mistaken for an assembly unit in Monsieur Arpel's plastic factory.

In slapstick comedy, such mechanisation of behaviour is a commonly seen trait of city life. The protagonist stands out as someone who cannot keep up with the pace, which some, sadly, will interpret as pathetic: 'If the criminal appears as a nonconformist who is unable to meet the demand of technology that we behave in uniform and continuous patterns, literate man is quite inclined to see others who cannot conform as somewhat pathetic' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7). The slapstick character tries hard to keep up with this mechanised world, perhaps so hard that they turn a little bit into a machine themself. In his essay *Laughter: an essay on the meaning of the comic*, Henri

Bergson states that laughter is incited by a 'momentary transformation of a person into a thing' (Bergson, 1913, p. 57) because it reveals 'that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life' (Bergson, 1913, p. 87). In a fast-paced factory environment, one might think that this is the only way to fit in, true for everyone. Yet there seems to be a difference between those who succeed and those who fail. The latter, it seems, are more likely to be noted for displaying machine-like behaviour, as if the object must first fail in order to show itself. Again, I think of Heidegger, who says that the broken tool becomes visible as an object, as thing-like, because it cannot be used (Heidegger, 2001, pp. 102-103). However, as we have seen in the first chapter, does this type of emergence not also give the object something subject-like? Take Monsieur Hulot dropping his umbrella on the marble floor of the department store and the Tramp panicking at the assembly line — it seems that, as soon as the so-called 'thing' becomes too disruptive, it emerges as a human.

Although the slapstick genre has its origins in theatre, Jörg Heiser claims it was because of the invention of film that slapstick could fully flourish. It is not surprising that the birth of slapstick film coincided with the Industrial Revolution, when factories started manufacturing goods on a large scale and transformed the pace of everyday life. Film proved the ultimate medium to explore industrialisation because it used yet another new machine: the film camera. One can imagine how, like Chaplin tripping and slipping into a factory's internal machinery, a filmstrip can be accidentally played too fast or run off the tape and derail completely. Most impactful, however, were the techniques that came with film: 'The movie, by sheer speeding up the mechanical, carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure' (McLuhan, 1964, p. 4). The revolutionary medium of film, incorporating a linear, transparent strip of consecutive images running along a lamp, was ideal for playing with the principles of speed, rhythm and uniformity.

As discussed in the second chapter, misfortune befalls slapstick characters because they are too invested in their actions. They show 'extreme care' (Dillon, 2007, p. 214). Often, the slapstick protagonist studies an aspect of human behaviour so well they can repeat it endlessly. It ties in with Bergson's assertion that comedic methods relate to the machine, playing with 'repetition, inversion, and reciprocal interference of series' (Bergson, 1913, p. 89). Machines are designed to perform repetitive work and produce an outcome that is the same each time in situations where people are slower and less reliable. Natural ontogeny means that events in an individual organism's lifespan never loop back to the start: 'Life presents itself to us as evolution in time and complexity in space. Regarded in time, it is the continuous evolution of a being ever growing older; it never goes backwards and never repeats anything' (Bergson, 1913, p. 88). As living beings, people are part of an organic whole that moves, grows, renews itself and, as a rule, does not get stuck. The counter-natural, mechanical behaviour of the slapstick protagonist, coined by Bergson as '*some rigidity or other* applied to the mobility of life' (Bergson, 1913, p. 38), is what Heiser might argue to be further reinforced by the partnership of comedy and film. He paraphrases Gilbert Seldes, who wrote in 1924 that slapstick exists by virtue of assembly, camera angle, projection and technical tricks; without these factors, it would lose its tempo and rhythm and be not much more than mere acrobatics (Heiser, 2008, p. 19). Hence, what seems to make slapstick comedy especially effective is the interplay between the actor's machine-like behaviour and film's ability to isolate and repeat, speed up or otherwise manipulate certain fragments.

If, however, you meet him again the same day, and then a third and a fourth time, you may laugh at the "coincidence." Now, picture to yourself a series of imaginary events which affords a tolerably fair illusion of life, and within this ever-moving series imagine one and the same scene reproduced either by the same characters or by different ones: again you

will have a coincidence, though a far more extraordinary one.
(Bergson, 1913, p. 90).


Although released 80 years later, the scene Bergson imagines here is reminiscent of the motion picture *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993), revolving around the protagonist Phil (Bill Murray), who wakes up on the same day over and over again. It is what is called a 'time loop film', made possible by the technical trick of actually repeating bits of film. As if by some strange mechanical error, Phil has become stuck in what seems a never-ending nightmare: he keeps seeing the same people speaking the same words in the same hotel at the same time, followed by a sequence of events to do with the local celebration of Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, which he and his TV-news team are sent out to cover. Even after a car accident or a suicidal jump into a canyon, he wakes up in the same hotel again. Feeling desperate, he sits at the bar of a bowling alley and chats with two other men. Phil asks, "What would you do if you were stuck in one place and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered?" (figure 28). The man replies: "That about sums it up for me." He does not realise that for Phil, the general sense of being stuck in a grind has become a literal reality.

The repetition, coupled with the total arbitrariness of it being Groundhog Day, touches on a common philosophical problem: what is the point? I recognise this theme also in the wall-filling work *One Hundred Live and Die* (1984) by Bruce Nauman, which flashes through various imaginable paths of life. Consisting of colourful neon tubing on the wall, the work forms a collection of word combinations in two categories spread over four columns (figure 29). One category ends with 'and die', the other with 'and live'. In a randomised order, one sign after the other lights up, forming ever-changing combinations, e.g., 'eat and die', 'feel and live', 'cry and die', 'stand and die' or 'spit and live'. The various options, both tragic and joyous, irrational at times ('yellow and live'), may change at any moment. In exhilarating neon,

*One Hundred Live and Die* seems to suggest that 'and live' and 'and die' are the only certainties in life; the rest is arbitrary.

Responsible for the activation of the neon lights is a clunky mechanism that gives the work a rhythmic quality, which, in combination with the simplicity of the language used, suggests automation. Some of the word combinations are quite strange, which makes for a comical effect and alludes to a distortion of human logic. As discussed earlier, Bergson describes how comic accidents are mostly provoked by 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living' (Bergson, 1913, p. 49). The 'conclusions', as you might call the word combinations Nauman's machine comes up with, are directly connected to the larger questions of life. As a mechanic force that has indeed taken hold of the living, the work appears to provide an automated translation of the essence of existence.

## IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

The name 'slapstick' comes from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, where a type of baton known as a slapstick was used to convey the sound of physical accidents. Every time a performer slips or trips, the same loud sound is heard: a bang of wood on wood. This sound is much fiercer than the real sound of falling to the floor or a slap in the face. Hence, one could say the slapstick bang is a symbolic sound rather than a realistic one. It is not surprising that the later cinematic form, although silent, took the slapstick as its name. It does not only symbolise all the hits taken but also the rather mechanical way in which the characters keep colliding with their surroundings. It is as if the actors find themselves inside a machine that jams every time they make a mistake.

Considering the mechanisation of fault and punishment, it may be impressive that, however violent and clumsy, most slapstick characters perform their parts with utmost delicacy. The way Chaplin takes out his spanners and, with dedicated, dainty gestures begins to tighten the factory's machinery is nothing short of a refined choreography, with great attention

paid to the shape of the body and the objects it encounters. Brian Dillon also touches on this when he calls Oliver Hardy 'a great balletic infant', 'whose every precise and prissy little gesture (a twirl of the hat, that thing with his tie) expresses his total concentration on the phenomenal realm' (Dillon, 2007, p. 214). It seems, therefore, that Bergson's 'mechanical arrangement' not necessarily implicates inelegance. Acting like a thing can be sensitive, sensuous even. This is also demonstrated by Bauhaus member Oscar Schlemmer in his *Das Triadisches Ballett* (1922), which follows geometric shapes based on Bauhaus aesthetics (figure 30). Because Schlemmer wanted to mechanise their dancing, the dancers wear stiff costumes inspired by dolls. Moving around in large, rigid objects such as a ball or cone, they are admittedly awkward but also endearing and graceful.

Using a similar aesthetics to *Das Triadisches Ballett*, the video work *A conversation is a risk to lose your own opinion* by Feiko Beckers features him on stage with another man wearing elementary coloured, geometric sculptures made of plywood (figure 30). According to Beckers's website, these were inspired by Russian avant-garde costumes. The work depicts Beckers and the other man having three discussions in which the topics are mundane — a washing machine; a chair; a restaurant. Each discussion ends in a half-hearted 'solution' that makes neither of them happy. For example, Beckers's friend wants to visit Beckers's favourite restaurant, but Beckers is afraid that if his friend will be disappointed, his favourite restaurant will lose its lustre. Eventually, they decide to go to a restaurant Beckers has never been to and of which he has low expectations. Mainly focusing on 'the principle' and 'that it has to be right', they achieve very little: apart from the restaurant fiasco, the washing machine handover will fail and Beckers's friend will be left with a broken chair.

If Beckers's rhetoric can be called rigid, it is reflected by the stiff manner in which both men behave on stage: apart from a half-turn at the beginning and end of each situation, they do not move at all. Of course, fashion is often uncomfortable, and Bergson finds most clothing trends

ridiculous: 'It might almost be said that every fashion is laughable in some respect' (Bergson, 1913, p. 38). As discussed in the second chapter, fashion in the 1700s was not the most practical either. But Beckers and his friend move a lot less gracefully than the dancers in *Das Triadisches Ballett* (1922). Stiff as boards, they look funny in their outfits. As Bergson writes, '[w]e laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing' (Bergson, 1913, p. 58). Quite literally demonstrating this principle, Beckers and his friend behave like clunky wooden sculptures.

Interestingly, the Russian avant-garde costumes Beckers took as an inspiration date back to the period from 1913 to 1933 when artistic, literary and musical traditions underwent radical changes. It formed the backdrop for the first black square Malevich painted: an uncompromising act that, at the time, required audacity. Because it was a time of courage and bold choices, one spoke of a cultural revolution (see the *Anarchism Manifesto* by the Gordin brothers from 1917). However, where the Russians positioned themselves as pioneers with a vision of a new society, Beckers and his friend do not even manage to make a proper arrangement to move a washing machine. As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Leibniz saw the physical world to be organised by the rules of the monad: the mind, soul, or what Heidegger might call 'pressing urge' that leads to extension and manifestation. The Russian Avant-gardists had a philosophy that drove them to manifest bold new visions. Conversely, *A conversation is a risk to lose your own opinion* shows that if one were to arrange the world according to Beckers's logic, any envisioned revolution would not come off the ground.

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'Doing the crease' is about being a subject through extension. Creasing is the frilliness of the facade (figure 30); the ritual; doing for the sake of doing. Where are thought and logic when doing the crease? Or: 'Where is man?' (Barthes, 1992, p. 102). The slapstick genre shows what happens when the composite subject is split up, and only its actions remain. Instead of a natural

symbiosis of monad and façade, the monad is eliminated. This leads to automated behaviour or movement without thought. Interestingly, however, Beckers shows it also works the other way around. Not physically moving, he and his friend seem to be stuck in a rather formal train of thought that drives but never reaches a real destination. It may be what Bergson calls the 'machine mind' that 'gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement' (Bergson, 1913, p. 69). Considering this analysis, however, it is rather curious that Deleuze uses the term 'machine' to denote not the thing but the organic, saying that an 'organism is infinitely machined, a machine whose every part or piece is a machine' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 8). If nature is a machine, then people are logically a part of this; like the cows in *W*, we have rules that shape our movement, how we walk and talk, play football, handle a jug or scratch our backs. This is our driving force, urging us to move through the world, to follow that path to the W and use it for our needs.

What happens when things go wrong? Is one 'no longer life, [but] automatism established in life and imitating it' (Bergson, 1911, p. 25)? Or is the human perhaps not 'adequately machined' or 'mechanical enough' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 8)? In my search for ways to let text appear 'subjecty', it occurred to me that one might have to use methods operating precisely at the border of thing and human being. A human who acts like a machine will most likely resemble a flawed device. This principle can also be reversed: because of its 'moodiness', a broken machine can bear a striking likeness to the human being that behaves mechanically. Cartesianism asserts that an action always involves a subject performing the action (De Libera, 2008, pp. 200, 210). Hence, if something is done, then there is something that does it. This is the acting subject; however, may it also be the thing acting 'subjecty'?

The question remains: what about animals? Just like Oscar Schlemmer's dolls, Feiko Beckers in his clumsy costumes and the Arpels in their garden, the cows in *W* deal with an awkward design. The letter W is not the most ergonomic shape for a scratching post, nor was it originally meant

to be. Nevertheless, the cows learn to move elegantly, scratching just the right spot and, as a result, generating a beautiful zinging tone, a real W-sound. Are these cows not also dancers? One by one, they enter the stage and show their skills. Their performance could be viewed as physical theatre, a choreography of movement with a striking array of distinctive sound effects. One can distinguish various scraping noises, sometimes accompanied by a 'boing' or a 'krk' — triggered by a foot on the microphone — until finally, at the end of the video, the snoring of three calves is brutally disturbed by barking dogs, followed by the trampling of hooves: a wild spectacle!

# ON LEGS

*on legs*, 2021
Acrylic sheet, string
104 x 20 x 153 cm

Please watch the video registration (47sec loop) here:
https://vimeo.com/643930538
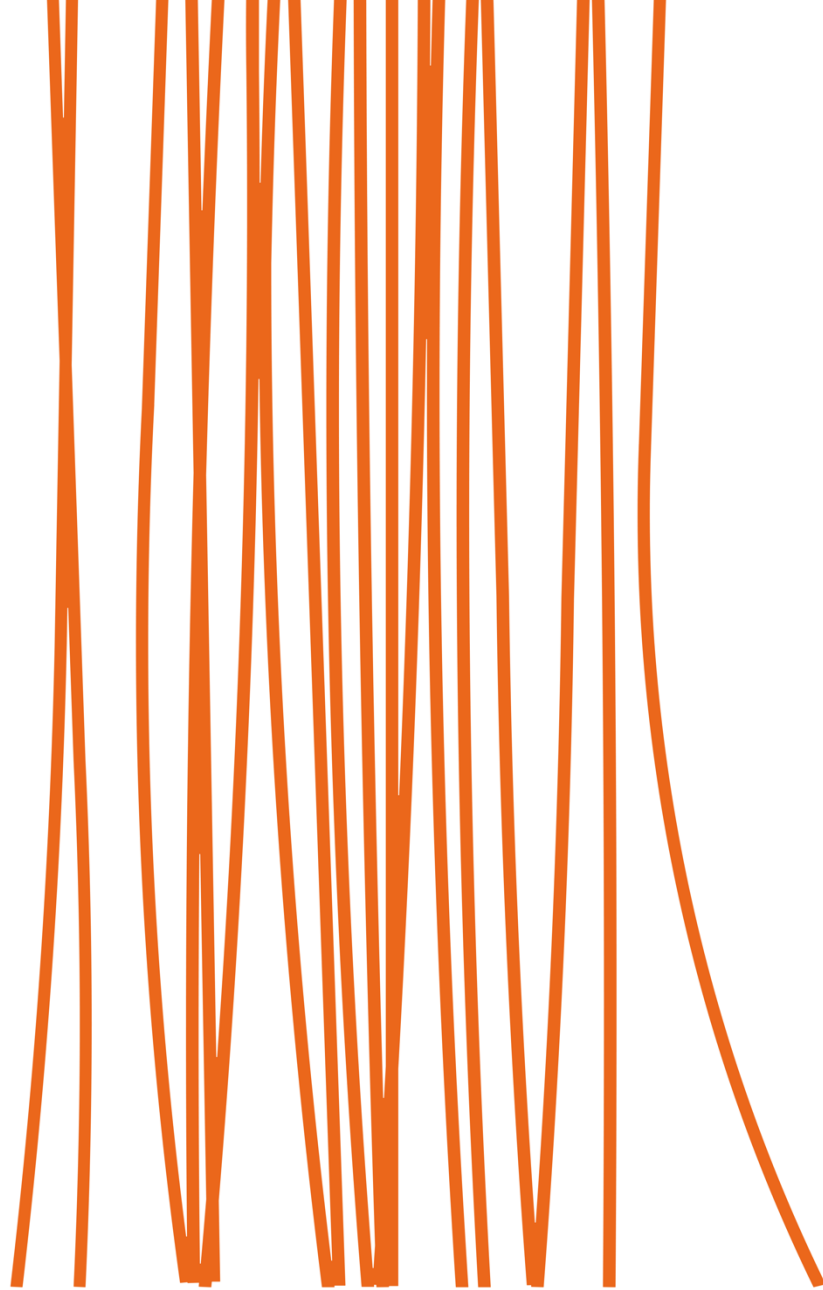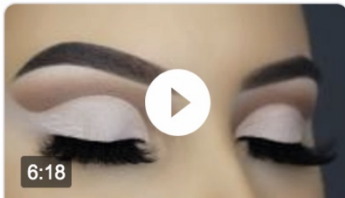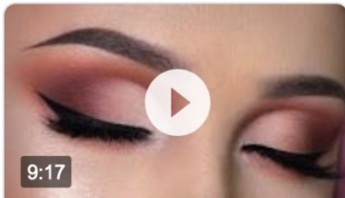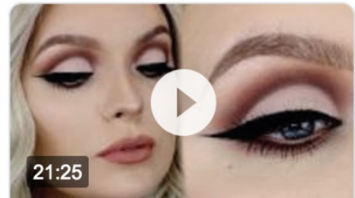
# Figures

Figure 31

Figure 32

# A Man Fell Into Anish Kapoor's Installation of a Bottomless Pit at a Portugal Museum

Luckily, the pit was only about eight feet deep in reality.

**Sarah Cascone**, August 20, 2018



Figure 33
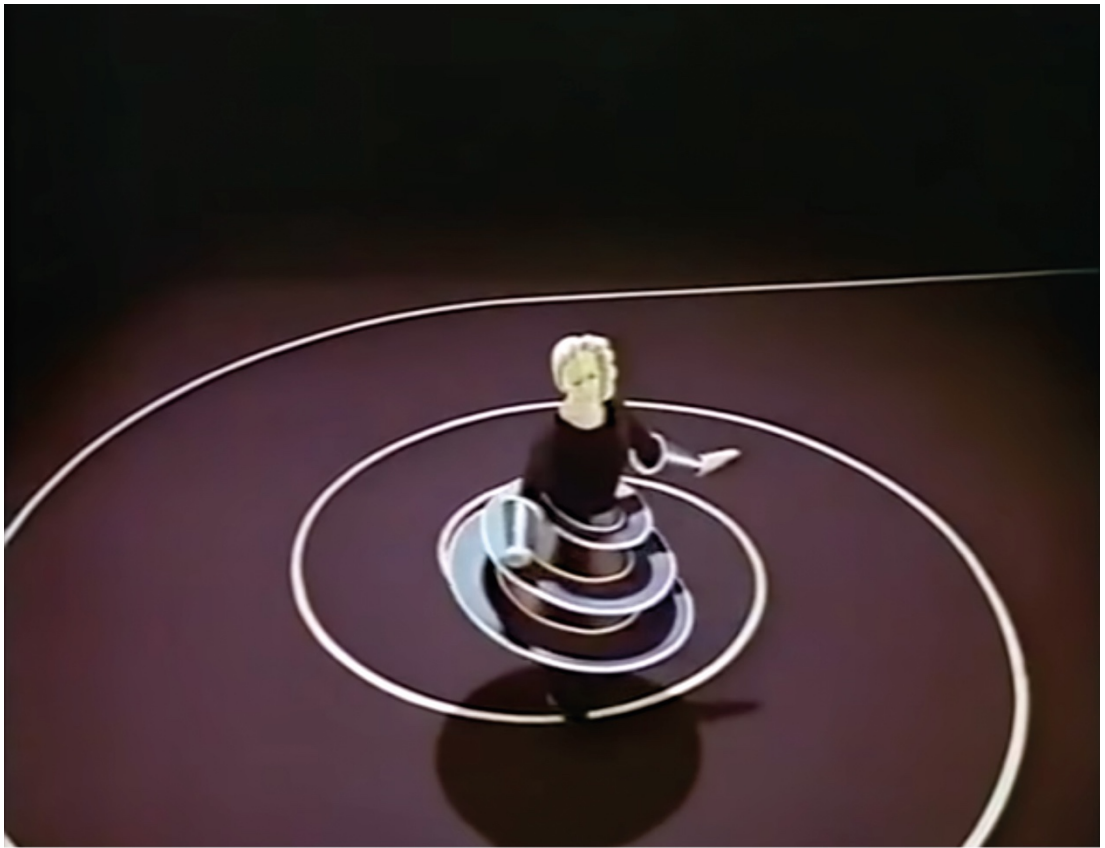
Figure 34

Figure 35
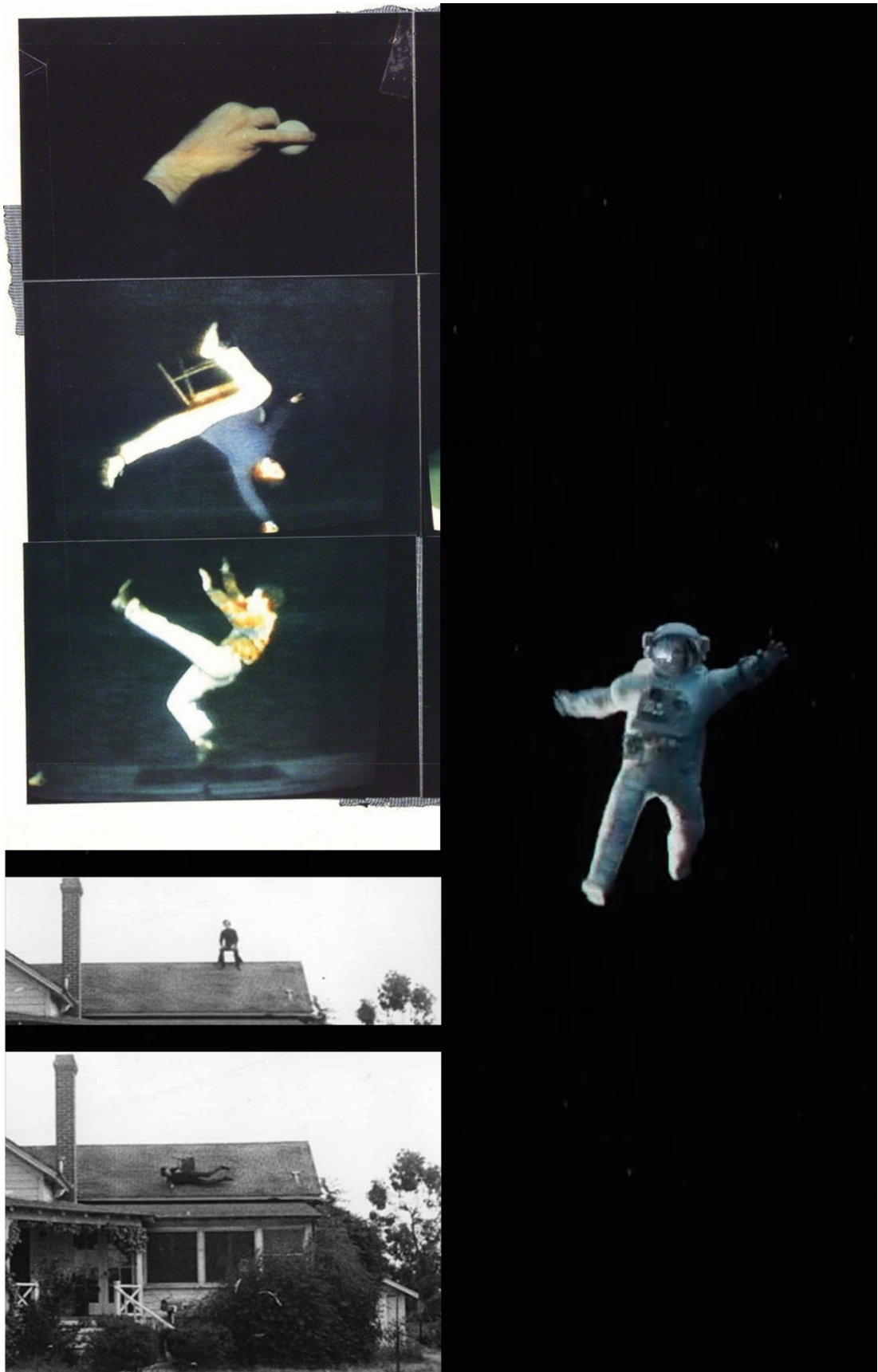
Figure 36

Figure 37

Figure 38

Figure 39

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What looks like the alphabet has been cut from neon orange acrylic sheeting, except there seem to be a few letters missing (pp. 158–159). Accentuating the edges of the letters with a bright glow, the sunlight lets their orange colour contrast sharply with the green surroundings. Remarkably, the letters stand on very long stick legs that sway in the wind. It explains why not every letter is included: *on legs* consists only of letters that have legs. At the top, the letters are attached to each other; at the bottom, their legs point in all directions. With legs so long that they bend, the letters sag down and have to be held upright; the whole thing is carried by strings attached to a tree branch. Only just leaning on each other, the letters wobble so much that without the strings, they would fall apart. Their frolicking does not benefit readability, as with every gust of wind, the letters rock back and forth while moving in front and behind each other. Now and again, the letters come into conflict with a tall bunch of pampas grass, the slender blades of which bear a resemblance to the letters on their long, thin legs. It similarly moves in the wind; however, the grass needs no support.

You are melting down. At the very heart of one of your terraces, a jet of water spurts upwards just as the party had moved there. People show emotion, there is laughter and panic. The guests have come down from their chairs, which they hold in front of their chests or lift above their heads. A lady with a small white headdress moves her head back and raises her eyes to heaven. A man wearing a wide Panama hat makes wild gestures with his arms. In the middle

of the crowd, a woman wearing a

red poncho balances on high heels

in the gravel. She stands there

huddled behind a white garden chair

that she holds out in front of her,

as if seeking cover from

approaching disaster. Her striped

poncho, red and black,

white and cream, blows in the wind

and flutters wildly around her. I

cannot see her face

because it is hidden behind the chair

she is hoisting up.

The dynamic excess of

fabric expresses her

state of mind.

The woman stands but has fallen.

Her body

tumbles

beneath the white garden chair

she

is clasping with both hands,

as if she is trying to get back on it. The

fish

fountain

gracing your centre

suddenly looks desperate.

Now that its water jet

has moved to the terrace,

nothing

comes out of its mouth.

The order

of

your

so carefully manicured universe has

fallen

apart. Your neatly

coloured squares, separated by clean

lines

of

kerbstone

and geometrically

shaped mini

bushes, have

now

become

a

stage

for

chaos

and

despair

.


The Latin *subiectum* or English 'subject' means 'under-throw'. The human
subject is thrown out there and made to stand. As mentioned before, the
Latin word *subjectum* derives from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, which

translates as 'that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66). The walking subject extends into the world to collect change while growing, falling, injuring and ageing. It has *accidents*, determining not *what* something is but *how* it is what it is, setting it apart from others: 'every accident denominates its subject' or 'accidens denominat proprium subiectum' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200). Exposed, with its *accidents* prone to accidents, the walking subject has something worryingly inescapable: to be thrown out there, to walk, to fall.

The Arpels' garden scene (figure 31) described earlier reminds me of Tintoretto's *Deposition of Christ* (c. 1560), an oil painting that depicts a group of five figures with Christ in their midst (figure 32). They are outside where it is dark; of the bushes behind the group, only a few leaves are visible. The figures look as if they are being lit by a torch, their skin and clothing flaring up against the dark background. Christ has a white cloth draped over his loins. He appears to have fallen, but his cloth looks carefully placed. The others share an abundance of fabric in different colours. Not only are the various materials folded in an intricate manner, but the different robes also crumple into each other as the figures fold over each other's bodies. It is difficult to distinguish where one unit ends and another begins.

Joseph of Arimathea, dressed in a beige robe, supports the body of Jesus with his visible, muscular arms while looking at Mary Magdalene. Similarly, in the garden scene of the Arpels stands a man in a costume of the same beige colour. He, too, is looking at another attendee while making movements with his arms. At the other side of the garden scene, there is a woman who, like the Virgin Mary situated on the right side of Tintoretto's painting, has her face turned towards heaven. And lastly, the middle of the painting shows Mary Magdalene in front of the cross. She looks to be in despair, with her arms sticking up from her red and white robe. In the centre of the garden scene, the woman with the red and white poncho similarly panics while raising her arms. She does not stand in front of a cross but holds up a chair instead.

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The figures in *Mon Oncle*'s garden scene and Tintoretto's *Deposition of Christ* are subjects that suffer. They either stand or have fallen. However, the lighting conditions are very different — in Tintoretto's painting, the figures are enveloped in darkness while they themselves are very light, whereas, in the Arpels' garden, there is no such contrast. Tintoretto uses a dark red-brown colour as a background, to which he adds lighter tones and darker shadows that make everything stand out. One may wonder whether the Arpels would look as radiant had they held their party in the evening. They probably would not unless they were lit up by stage lights.

Tintoretto's technique of using a light colour over a dark one was a Baroque invention that has maintained its popularity ever since. As the famous TV painter Bob Ross once said, "If you have light on light, you have nothing. If you have dark on dark, you basically have nothing. You absolutely have to have dark in order to have light" (Bob Ross, 1991). This may be because of the way the light falls onto an object's surface, emphasising its three-dimensional shape by grading its colour from dark at the bottom to light at the top. To convey this on a canvas, one paints a highlight at the top of the object and a shadow at the bottom. By increasing the contrast between these light and dark areas in *chiaroscuro*, the object will appear more three-dimensional than in reality, enhancing the illusion of liveliness.

Ross's famous TV show *The Joy of Painting* stopped airing in 1994, but now there is YouTube with makeup tutorials. Painting the eye is not so different from painting a canvas when it comes to entertaining the viewer with magic strokes of illusionism. Makeup artists from around the world have millions of followers who watch them transform the shape of their face, eyes or lips, using just colour and many different brushes. A current makeup trend to do at home is the 'cut crease' technique that accentuates the fold of the eyelid (figure 32). To create this effect, the makeup artist colours the part above the eyelid with a darker shade of eye shadow and then 'cuts' this colour by painting a sharp edge in the crease of the eyelid using a light colour concealer or foundation. As is known in painting, a high contrast

makes figures jump out from their background: 'It slides as if through a slit in the middle of shadows' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 35). Similarly, the 'cut crease' eye makeup technique is meant to, as it were, 'conjure' the eyelid from the shadow: '[A] lot of people have used a plastic spoon to hack the perfect shape' (Crowther, 2017).

The 'cut crease' makeup artist does not blend the eyeshadow with the concealer but uses additional colours to increase the illusion of shadow and three-dimensionality around the eye. This accentuates a structure that is already present: where the eyelid folds inwards, it is dark, and where the eyelid extends outwards, above the convexity of the eye, it is lighter. Emphasising this contrast, one creates an illusion of greater depth. It is the same principle that applies to every fold and one of the reasons why folds are so often used in painting to evoke a sense of space. The *Deposition of the Christ* uses many folds as well as a stark light-dark contrast, both of which evoke the appearance of a three-dimensional world that makes it look 'real'. Likewise, the 'cut crease' technique demonstrates how a sense of depth helps the eye to, so to speak, 'come alive': 'Many makeup enthusiasts use neutral-toned colours to make their eyes appear more open' (Crowther, 2017). I argue the success of this technique stems from the perception of depth as a representation of life.

We live in a three-dimensional world that is characterised by the appearance of objects. What appears in the world, is. It is for this reason that Anish Kapoor defines the fold as a 'sign of being' (Goldstein, 2019). I would argue this has to do not only with the fact that the fold is a three-dimensional form accentuated by a strong light-dark contrast but also with the movement of the fold inwards and outwards as a representation of the dynamics between withdrawal and emergence. It connects the fold to the subject: recognising 'representedness' as one of the subject's key features, Heidegger speaks of Leibniz, who states that 'all being is defined by *perceptio* and *appetitus*, by the representing urge which presses for the placing-before, the "representation," of the whole of beings, presses for their

being first of all and only in such *repraesentatio* and as such *repraesentatio*' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65). Folding in and out of appearance, light and shadow, Tintoretto recreates such *repraesentatio* on canvas.

The *chiaroscuro* technique used by many Baroque painters excels at showing the way the light hits an object, allowing its particularities — its *accidents* — to stand out. Light is made up of particles that, by travelling around, reveal the three-dimensional structure of the world. It readily reflects against easy-to-reach surfaces that therefore look light but only poorly penetrates the less accessible areas. Black is the colour of the inside, as well as the back, bottom and far sides of an object. It is also represented by the side of the earth that is turned away from the sun. Every twelve hours or so, depending on the season, the earth folds out from the sun, only to fold back towards it the following morning. It shows how, as discussed earlier, a fold has two sides: where fabric folds inwards, it folds outwards on the other side. Day on one hemisphere means night on the other. The inside is a fold of the outside and vice versa: inside and outside fold around each other like two sides of the same coin. It may be comforting to think that the deep black space of an inward fold eventually ends, delimited by an outward fold formed around it. The darkness is not infinite; there is another side.

Also dark and very much (to us) the 'outside' is the universe; humanity knows little about space. It is not even possible to get there without the use of extra oxygen, a proper space suit and a high-powered rocket. And although it sounds contradictory, this utter outsideness may be the ultimate fold inwards: a region furthest away from the light. Existing almost only of utter blackness, space shows only a few dispersed dots that form our system of nearby stars and planets. But even in that already black universe, there exists an even blacker phenomenon: the 'black hole', which is not actually a hole but an immense amount of matter (Nagaraja, 2021). Because of so much matter packed together, the gravitational pull of the black hole is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape.

Looking beyond the atmosphere into outer space, the difference

between black and even blacker cannot be seen with the naked eye or even through a telescope (Nagaraja, 2021). Hence, scientists discover black holes because of the effect they have on their environment. Because of its strong gravitational pull, a black hole draws in surrounding matter. Folding into the black hole, this matter accelerates in its movement and heats up. As the rise in temperature causes the material to emit radiation that clusters around the black hole (Nagaraja, 2021), this activity can be picked up by radio telescopes. As such, the ultimate fold inward — a black hole forming a fold inside the already black universe — is only visible because of the activity surrounding it. Scientists see not the thing itself but its shadow, the radiation of matter that, as it is pulled in, pushes out into a detectable fold of warmth.

## IIII

In Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013), actress Scarlet Johansson drives a van through Scotland in search of young male hitchhikers. Those moments balance on the edge of documentary and fiction: the young men getting into Johansson's car are not actors and unaware that they are being filmed with a hidden camera. Amusingly, none of them recognise the world-famous actress. Glazer later explained that after Johansson dropped them off (sometimes much further than they needed to go — "I only wanted to go to Tesco's" (Glazer, 2013)), they were cued by the film crew about what was next if they were to continue (Buchanan, 2014). When asked how the men responded once they found out they had been flirting with a world-famous actress, Glazer says: 'I think they were all surprised! [Laughs.]' (Buchanan, 2014). Hiding in the back of the van and letting Johansson drive around unscripted, he produced an alienating picture born from the awkwardness between the men and a Hollywood actress whom they, although they may not recognise her, may find attractive.

The footage captured inside the van looks raw, and the men are ordinary. Driving the vehicle through the eerie mists of the Scottish country roads, Johansson gazes around as if she is on another planet. With her red

lips and fur coat, she looks like a film noir actress who is indeed far from home. But there is something else, a peculiarity about Johansson's character that remains mysterious for a long time. She drives into a city where she visits a shopping mall and just keeps looking blank, aloof, as if she is vacant. This is accompanied by a haunting soundtrack of rapid violins interspersed with low, falling drum sounds, like a heartbeat. The men she picks up in her van are between twenty and thirty years old and, most importantly, alone. Instead of taking them to their destination, she seduces them and brings them to a freestanding, faded pink house. It is a very strange place: as soon as the door opens, a smooth, deep black floor appears that shines like a mirror. What happens is impossible: the internal walls of the house seem to have disappeared, and the floor is at least the size of a football field. There, Johansson precedes each man, walking backwards over the black floor with her body turned towards him while she undresses. Each time, the man follows her in a dreamy, bewildered state. He stumbles, can hardly believe his eyes, but is in a state too intoxicated to be alarmed.

The black floor in *Under the Skin* is reminiscent of the one in *Dogville* (Von Trier, 2003), discussed in the third chapter. But whereas the surface on which Grace tries to integrate into the village is hard and impenetrable (figure 20), in *Under the Skin*, the situation gradually becomes even stranger: the floor, which at first seemed hard and slippery like ice, starts to soften underneath the feet of the men Johansson lures in. Like extraneous matter encircling a black hole in the universe, the young men are pulled into the black substance. This does not happen quickly: the black floor is a dense, gooey substance, sluggishly swallowing the men until they are completely submerged (figure 33). They are helpless — sunk deep into a mysterious substance where surface no longer exists.

At the end of the film, the strange woman turns out to be an alien wearing Scarlet Johansson's skin. From underneath it emerges a creature with coal-black skin and a stereotypical egg-shaped head. At this moment, everything falls into place: the familiar representation of the alien forms a

contrast with the abstraction of the far too large black floor inside the pink house. Because it is impossible to comprehend and so black and enormous, the latter seems to be a representation of that gigantic, dark universe humanity knows so little about. At first, it is hard and impenetrable, like the universe to which humanity has so little access. But then, suddenly, it becomes soft and all-consuming, as it is for the astronaut on a mission that goes wrong. The poor men who are absorbed into the blackness are digested; from time to time, their guts can be seen floating around in the black gooey substance. It resembles a sort of machine, a digestive system similar to the stomach, in which the men float around until first the skin dissolves, and then their intestines are discharged onto a conveyor belt. That is how insignificant and powerless one is in the universe or under the gaze of the desirable Scarlet Johansson.

Johansson's men are completely absorbed by blackness; for them, light no longer exists. Upon entering the house, the contours of the world — the walls — have already disappeared, and the black surface reigns supreme. The colour black has that power; a really deep black can cancel the effect of light so that depth is no longer visible. This effect, of an all-absorbing blackness, is also utilised by Anish Kapoor, who, in collaboration with the British Ministry of Defence, developed Vantablack or 'the blackest black', a nanomaterial that can be applied to a surface to absorb all light. After application, an object treated with Vantablack is placed in a reactor until its particles are arranged in an upright position. This causes any light falling onto the material to be trapped and unable to return.

Because Vantablack evokes a lost sense of depth, a surface treated with the colour does not show any texture. In an interview, Kapoor says, "The interesting thing about this material, this black, is that when you put it on a piece of cloth, and you make a fold, the fold is invisible. You cannot see the fold. So I say this material is therefore beyond being" (Goldstein, 2019). Also, it is impossible to judge whether the substance is near or far: Kapoor has made a number of works that involve a hollow space made completely black,

covered by the gallery floor with a hole in it. Because of the light-absorbing black underneath, such a hole does not look like a hole but a black polka dot lying on top of the floor — space appears flat.

In August 2018, a visitor of the Serralves Museum in Porto fell into Kapoor's 1992 installation *Descent into Limbo* (figure 33). He literally did what the title suggests. Although this is an unfortunate accident, it is typical of Kapoor's work: many of his sculptures evoke the feeling that it is possible to 'fall' into them. Kapoor's work often plays with reflective cavities that, depending on where you stand as a viewer, reflect the surroundings and flip them over or even project them into the air in front of the sculpture. Moving around the sculpture, the viewer sees their reflection being sucked into the sculpture, reversed, flipped, or launched into the air in front. Even Kapoor's marble works, heavy and rough, contain a polished cavity that projects a reflection towards the outside. Suspended in the air, the reflection forms an ethereal illusion that contrasts the massive block of marble. Furthermore, his mirror works are also dazzling, especially *Non-object (sphere)* (1998-2013), which has a shape similar to his marble works but is completely covered in mirrors and pierced by a hole that is also reflective (figure 34). Standing in front of this work, a reflection of the entire gallery space and all its visitors — reduced to tiny upside-down puppets — twists into the hole like a cork.

The opposite of depth is surface. But this statement forgets that surface is part of depth. Depth is formed by a movement from outside to inside and vice versa. It is a type of fold. As discussed in the previous chapter, Deleuze makes an analogy between the fold and the Baroque church. This building has a richly decorated facade that powerfully pushes out but also retreats inwards, into the main hall or the public space of the church that, although inside, is still the outside, or an 'infinite 'receptivity'' (Deleuze, 2006, p. 40). The monad, on the other hand, is a small room hidden in the attic to which the public does not have access. But there, too, the outside comes in with the light and air that enter through the windows. In his work, Kapoor takes this idea, of the monad and facade being

interconnected, a step further: with black holes that look like surfaces and with reflective surfaces that project depths, he blurs the distinction entirely.

## IIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

The man who fell into Kapoor's artwork and those seduced by Johansson in *Under the Skin* were each consumed by surface. A surface is an exterior that reflects light and is usually a barrier people cannot pass through. It must be rather confusing when such a barrier becomes porous and, all of a sudden, sucks one in. Surface is all around us: even the blue of the sky is surface, wrapped around tiny water droplets. In the midst of such surfaces we move, past and over them, or underneath. We will not be swallowed by thin air, just as we will not sink into the floor. Extending into the world, we exist; our shape is what distinguishes us. Heidegger might say our being is defined by representedness (Heidegger, 1991, p. 65), which, in turn, is characterised by our three-dimensionality; our roundness; our lights and shadows. But how, then, does one disappear?

In 1970, Margarete Hasting, Franz Schömbs, and Georg Verden reconstructed *Das Triadisches Ballett* (Schlemmer, 1922) and filmed it with cinematographer Kurt Gewissen. In this ballet, also mentioned in the previous chapter, puppet-like dancers move mechanically (figure 30). The film features sets comprised of silky, candy-coloured planes, creating a world that looks unreal. One scene focuses on a puppet-like figure that turns around her axis in a completely yellow space composed of smooth walls without features. The space is shaped like a box, reminiscent of a diorama. Another scene shows two dancers dancing in squares, following a chequered pattern on the floor of a room without corners. The geometrical patterns optically melt the space together into a surface in the midst of which the dancers seem to be 'squaring' into infinity. Then, a woman in a dress made of spirals, spins around in spirals over a spiralling pattern on the floor (figure 34). Her skirt has the same white stripes as the floor, making it difficult to tell her apart as she swirls around in a dizzying play of graphics.

For the eye, each puppet in the film disappears into the surface that surrounds it. The clash of flatness and depth is cleverly overcome with patterns, e.g., stripes, dots or squares. Some of these designs are reminiscent of natural camouflage that occurs in the wild. Think of zebras that, with their black and white stripes, move together as a group. For a lion, it is hard to see any depth in the stripes and, therefore, near to impossible to distinguish one zebra from the other, let alone anticipate their next move. Another clever trick is the phenomenon of 'countershading', first discovered in 1909 by the artist Abbott Handerson Thayer (Cott, 1957, p. 36). As mentioned earlier, the three-dimensional shape of objects is emphasised by the way the light falls onto their surface, producing a gradation from dark at the bottom to light at the top. Animals, however, are often countershaded. This means that they have a darker colour on top of their body and a lighter colour on the bottom. The effect of countershading is that it cancels the natural effect of light. It is the opposite of what *chiaroscuro* painters do when they increase the contrast between light and dark colours to make their objects appear extra three-dimensional. Cott explains that 'the artist, by the skilful use of light and shade, creates upon a flat surface the illusionary appearance of roundness: nature, on the other hand, produces on a rounded surface the illusionary appearance of flatness' (Cott, 1957, p. 36). Hence, countershaded animals look less voluminous, as if their form has been flattened out. Squirrels with a countershaded brown colour are hard to detect when they climb up an object that is also brown, e.g., a tree. Cott states they seem to 'fade into a ghostly elusiveness' and pass 'for an empty space through which the background is seen' (Cott, 1957, pp. 36-37). The animal's surface is no longer recognisable as a three-dimensional object; space appears flat, and the squirrel disappears.

IIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII

Westkapelle, 1971. Bas Jan Ader stands on a road leading to the lighthouse that has often been the subject of paintings by Piet Mondrian. Dressed

entirely in black, Ader forms a vertical black line. Then he falls sideways into a diagonal, stalled by a trestle (figure 35). Ader documented the event in a video and a series of stills entitled *Broken Fall (Geometric)*. One might recognise the stills as 'frozen moments' — a term often used in relation to painting — representing a clash between painterly ideas. The lighthouse in the background provides a context to the work, alluding to the conflict between Mondrian and Van Doesburg about lines. Dutch art movement De Stijl, of which both artists were members, limited itself to using black lines in combination with primary colours and white. However, where Mondrian only used vertical or horizontal lines, Van Doesburg, contrary to Mondrian's beliefs, introduced the diagonal.

De Stijl reduced its imagery to the essence of form and colour in order to promote universality as well as subjectivity: 'Through the exact depiction of the cosmic relation it is the direct expression of the universal — through the rhythm, through the material reality of the depiction it is the expression of the subjective, the individual' (translated from Mondrian, 1917, p. 6). De Stijl was against creating an illusion: 'If art is to depict perfection, it must free itself from the natural appearance of things to such an extent that it does not depict them; then it must depict the tension of form, the intensity of colour and the harmony of nature in an abstract form' (translated from Mondrian, 1917, p. 14). In his fall, Ader translates the domain of abstraction back into a physical representation. It is not a figurative painting of a still life but a real-life scene that depicts an abstract painting. The work creates tension between abstraction and figuration, turning abstract lines into a figurative allegory, the famous conflict depicted as a battle scene with a falling man.

Ader was interested in gravity, both the physical and emotional kind. A video from 1971 shows the artist crying for three minutes. The video is accompanied by several different photographs of the artist, also crying, and several postcards with the inscription — 'Sept. 13 1970. I'm too sad to tell you.' — which he sent to friends. The reason for his sadness is unclear because he is too sad to tell us. The effect is that, by not providing an

explanation, his suffering is abstracted. Similar to how members of de Stijl sought universality in their abstraction, Ader reduces his experience to a pure form. There is, however, a difference: where Mondrian states that 'the material reality of the depiction […] is the expression of the subjective, the individual', Ader's *I'm too sad to tell you* breaks its materiality down into several postcards. It is 'dematerialised'. Jörg Heiser explains how the term does 'not mean simply to do away with physical objecthood but to do away with the cohesiveness of the artwork in terms of where it "resides"' (Heiser, 2011, p. 2). Abstraction here causes a loss of body, even though his body is Ader's most frequently used material.

When a glass falls to the ground, it shatters. An emotional low is called a breakdown. Falling can be failure: a collapse of the hero; a downturn; decay. It is not surprising that Ader, fascinated by gravity, made work in media that are not heavy but light; intangible; dematerialised. 'All is falling', he wrote in one of his notebooks (quoted by Brad Spence in the catalogue for Ader's exhibition at the Art Gallery, University of California, Irvine, in 1999). But, although tragic, the act of falling is also a classic slapstick comedy trope. It looks funny how Ader, like a deadpan clownish stuntman, just lets himself fall. In his *Fall 1*, he sits on a chair on the roof of a house in Los Angeles (figure 36). This already is a strange situation in itself; however, then he falls off his chair and rolls over the roof, lands on a lower roof above the veranda and from there launches into the bushes beside it. It is not an unexpected and sudden accident but a premeditated act. The only other individuals who would deliberately throw themselves off a roof are stuntmen in films. However, where a film usually offers a reason for such a fall, e.g., to escape from a predicament or a chase, Ader does not present a reason — he just falls.

The follow-up video, *Fall 2*, is filmed in the Netherlands. Ader rides a bicycle into a street scene typical of Amsterdam and then, deliberately, cycles into the canal. By doing this on purpose, the action takes on a lightness — it is not an accident; it is an absurd choice. There is something

comical about the event as, going against the grain of normal life, most people will want to avoid such a situation. Because each of Ader's falls — off the roof of his house, from a tree, into a canal — is stripped-down and emptied of any narrative, the events acquire the radicality of some sort of pithy statement, but: is it funny or tragic?

A fall means a loss of control over one's own body, submission to the earth instead of the other way around: "When I fell off the roof of my house, or into a canal, it was because gravity made itself master over me" Ader said in an interview with *Avalanche* (#2, winter 1971). By isolating and enlarging this, he seems to draw attention to what Paul De Man might call 'absolute comedy', based on Baudelaire's text *De l'essence du rire* (De Man, 1983, p. 212). De Man explains that falling can make a person realise they had been mistaken into thinking they are superior: 'As a being that stands upright, man comes to believe that he dominates nature, just as he can, at times, dominate others or watch others dominate him' (De Man, 1983, p. 214). Hence, a fall reminds the human being that one is corporeal and powerless, and that nature 'can at all times treat him as if he were a thing' (De Man, 1983, p. 214). The human is used to moving vertically through the world. This is how the subject acts: walking and thinking in the position in which one is largest, with one's head away from the ground. Thought and extension are in balance; gravity does not take over. In contrast, a proper fall will land with one stretched out on the floor. There, close to the earth, one comes into contact with one's materiality. Extension may now overtake thought; the body is in pain, and the shock pulls the person away from their musings. Perhaps the individual was distracted in the moment just before falling, drifting off into great ideas. Now those thoughts are gone, and the person has become a thing: a thing that falls to the ground.

> By the same movement with which language falls from the heights and then plunges below, we must be led back to the surface where there is no longer anything to denote or even to signify, but where pure sense

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is produced.'

(Deleuze, 1990, p. 140).

The way Deleuze speaks of language that falls and plunges below may be similar to the experience of the crashing person — no longer elevated but a thing — in how it impacts denotation: 'Every denotation is prolonged in consumption, pulverization, and destruction' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 140). A word stops to mean what it did when it crashes down, shattering every presumption or expectation. Language, introduced into the world by its inhabitants, can disappear or slip away from us. With this in mind, one may notice that the letters 'abdfhiklmnpqr' are no word, were never part of one, not together at least, and, in this condition, have no denotation. The sequence does, however, have significance by standing so high on its feet. Perhaps *on legs* shows how vulnerable meaning is — when it falls over, *on legs* becomes part of the ground, the horizontal surface, as a body on the ground that is no longer recognisable.

A fallen person has a changed appearance, experience and perspective: instead of being vertically positioned, they are now horizontal. On top of that, one may say that the act of walking has failed. Perhaps a fall is an outward fold — away from the head or monad, out into the material world, with its facade smashed to the ground. A fall is a fold or a *falld*: the body has crumpled into a physical, external experience of intimacy with the raw, material world. Interestingly, when talking about humour, Deleuze speaks of a 'descent' that eventually leads to a place of 'pure sense' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 140). Deleuze's descent, ultimately, is a type of falling. It has to do with the idea that a joke is often not about a story but its disruption: the unexpected punchline. Deleuze links this to surface because there, in all of the facade's materiality, sensation prevails over reason. Falling can be fun and funny – a mirthful and slapstick occurrence if there is a soft landing – and *on legs* may be its celebration: festive neon orange sticks with glowing edges form a construction of possibilities with letters that can form words but

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rather mix up on the ground.

So, what, then, does De Man mean by 'absolute comedy'? This seems to take place just after the fall when the victim reflects on what happened. The unexpected decline from standing to lying is disorienting and spurs thought. Hence, *fallded* outwards, the person now also folds inwards, as if one is folded into two directions at once: thought and extension. Perhaps, this is what De Man calls a 'doubling' — '*dédoublement*' or 'self-duplication' (De Man, 1983, p. 212). It means that the reflective activity of the self, 'thought', is separated, as it were, from the empirical self or 'extension' that is immersed in the world. One could say that the experience of 'thingness' — as mentioned before: the realisation that nature 'can at all times treat him [man] as if he were a thing' (De Man, 1983, p. 214) — causes thoughts consisting of language to deflect into a separate experience.

Although language is something that exists in the world as an entity amongst other entities, it is unique in being the only entity through which the self can distinguish itself from the world (De Man, 1983, p. 213). This observation might shine a light on why *on legs* has such an incredibly bright colour orange: written language is fundamentally different from everything else. De Man's 'absolute comedy' seems to relate to the fact that our language is typically human and, more importantly, tied in with our thinking subject: the self. On the ground, the self is confronted with something that is not a self. Hence, 'absolute comedy' concerns not the relationship between two individuals who are essentially the same, but the relationship between two entities who are essentially different, or specifically: 'man' and 'nature' (De Man, 1983, p. 212). It becomes visible between the tall grass and swaying trees, where *on legs* is language that can fall but still stands upright, surrounded by all those things that are neither language nor people. And yet, they move together, tenderly teasing each other in the wind.

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In the second chapter, I discussed the bottle of Versace perfume reproduced by Gelitin's *Tantamounter 24/7* (2005). The produced object, made of a grapefruit, pineapple and plastic bottle cap, is a 'copy' of the original: not an exact imitation, but bearing some resemblance. Another visitor brought a small disco ball and, half an hour later, walked out with a grapefruit (perhaps from the same net) on a string (figure 37), with tile-shaped incisions in the peel and some pins, an artificial rose and other decorations pricked into it.

Although colours can vary and size can be manipulated, an office copier normally delivers a more or less exact copy of what is put on the machine. This is called 'photocopying'. In contrast, the objects that come out of the Gelitin machine are not exactly photographs. However, they do show characteristic properties that correspond to the original and that have been rendered in another specially chosen material. The moment such a strange object —assembled with fruit, other groceries and items from the sewing box — comes out of the machine, any expectation that existed about the so-called 'copy' is forgotten, and for a moment, there is only the experience of the amusing 'copy' that has taken its place.

> We are going to imitate what is mimicked, we will shatter what is shown. The important thing is to do it quickly: to find quickly something to designate, to eat, or to break, which would replace the signification (the Idea) that you have been invited to look for.
> (Deleuze, 1990, p. 140).

Now there are two objects; a doubling has taken place. As discussed in the second chapter, this doubling lets one reflect on the characteristics of the original because the copy looks so strange. It may not be so different from

De Man's *dédoublement*, which causes one to realise one is made of material. On the surface of sense, the clunky object draws attention to its thingness, similar to how pain in the limbs makes the body apparent. It is an expectation-shattering experience. Where the upright human first thought they were superior, it has now come under the attention that their body is also just an object under the influence of gravity.

This sudden realisation, in turn, relates to Kant, who said that laughing is the result of an expectation that suddenly leads to nothing (Bergson, 1913, p. 85). In his essay on the meaning of the comic, Bergson further cites Herbert Spencer, who said that 'laughter indicates an effort suddenly confronted by emptiness' (Bergson, 1913, p. 85). Not only is one suddenly a body like the rest of things, the story of the self – the identity that ties in with 'I' – and the language of thought may be disrupted. On the ground, as discussed earlier, the self is confronted with something that is not a self (De Man, 1983, p. 212). Perhaps it is not just the doubling itself or the fold in two directions — thought and extension — at once, but also the story tied up with the self that is disrupted. The modern thinking subject has come to believe it is 'I', the logical subject taken from language. It is a clash between self and subject, the 'I' and the ground: 'We must at first remove the concept "man" — and therefore the concepts "I" and "I-ness" as well — from the concept of the essence of *subiectum*' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 97). I am unsure what is more shocking — the realisation that one resembles a thing or the automatic consequence: other things resemble the person.

In the end, all objects on earth can fall. Maybe that is what we share. In Fischli and Weiss's *Der Lauf Der Dinge* (1987), this 'cycle of life' is simulated with a constellation of various objects in a large hall, one after the other of which falls over, catches fire or is launched by a rocket, setting the next object in the cycle in motion (figure 38). It is easy to recognise 'subjectiness' in this work: moving about independently for about thirty minutes, the materials in the hall create somewhat of a 'performance'. As discussed in the previous chapter, Cartesianism saw that an action always

involves a subject performing the action (De Libera, 2008, pp. 200, 210). If something is done, then there is something that does it. Of course, thinking is also a form of action, and, at times, it almost seems as if the materials show a slight 'hesitance' before proceeding, 'as if reflecting upon what it is they are about to do: the tyre resting amongst the burning newspaper before moving on, and resting again before rolling on once more' (Millar, 2007, as quoted by Dillon, 2007, p. 213). Is this the acting subject?

Late ancient and medieval philosophy saw that the subject undergoes *accidents* (De Libera, 2008, p. 194), conceived of as 'every accident denominates its subject' or '*accidens denominat proprium subiectum*' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200). As mentioned earlier, even a stone can be a subject: 'Stones, plants, and animals are subjects — something lying-before of itself — no less than man is' (Heidegger, 1991, p. 97). One could say *Der Lauf Der Dinge* is almost the definition of such a subject, demonstrating how things are launched into the world to fall over and change appearance. What matters here is the attitude towards material, 'that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66), which, apart from being headed for destruction, is all rather trivial: pieces of tape, bin bags, clothes pegs, small pieces of planks, etc. Perhaps this is what life looks like from space: small and insignificant yet caught up in the inescapable process of *placing-before* with spectacular emotion.

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There is a woman who falls from her chair, a man who slips on a banana peel and a magician performing tricks. Bruce Nauman's video installation *Falls, Pratfalls and Sleights of Hand (Clean Version)* (1993) (figure 36) captures accidents in which the comic aspect usually relies on the staccato effect: it has to be quick, unexpected and hard. However, Nauman has slowed the tape down. Instead of accidents happening in an instant — one blink and it is over — it is now possible to dissect the events like a scientist; the suddenness in which these sorts of acts normally take place is gone. Yet the accidents are just as disturbing, if not more so: the woman keeps falling, the man keeps slipping, and a little ball keeps appearing and disappearing.

Perhaps the experience of looking at *Falls, Pratfalls and Sleights of Hand* is like fly vision. Normally it is difficult to catch a fly because when you move your arm, it immediately flies away. It is said that flies see everything more quickly. So, if you move your hand very slowly, the fly will think your hand is hanging still in the air and not realise it is being caught. This also happens in Nauman's video: the movements on the screen proceed so slowly that for the human eye, it is hardly possible to see what is happening. The tempo, so slow it feels paralysing, evokes a sense of doom. The situation looks half-frozen as if the actors are moving through treacle. There is hardly any background visible; the woman who falls off her chair floats, for what seems an eternity, through empty space. It reminds me of the film *Gravity* (Cuarón, 2013), in which Sandra Bullock and George Clooney play astronauts who move sluggishly and forlornly through the vast space outside their spaceship with too little oxygen (figure 36). Lost in space, the astronauts are continuously falling without reaching any ground. Suffocating slowness is the strength of this film, portraying a stretched-out moment that, distinctly headed in the wrong direction, offers no escape.

In the above examples, that which is taken for granted and not normally given much thought, such as the air one breathes or the ability to

get up and walk away, has disappeared. Stuck in what seems to be an everlasting moment, such details become enlarged. The oxygen, which Bullock and Clooney inhale in panic-inducing small gulps, is audible throughout the three hours of the film. Time and despair become tangible, like clay that can be moulded, while the situation itself leaves the characters powerless. Similar to Johansson's men in *Under the Skin*, the astronauts paddle around in gooey darkness. The contours of the earth are no longer visible; there is nothing to hold onto.

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The disco ball produced by *Tantamounter 24/7* is a monstrosity. It was thrown out of the machine, and now it exists as *that-which-lies-before*. The question arises: what is she going to do with it? A disco ball has the ability to blind us. The swirling reflection of many tiny mirrors on the walls of a space is disorienting and, in this respect, *Tantamounter 24/7* did a good job: the copy is even more confusing than the original. More of this sort of disorientation may be found in *Disco Bomb* by Martin Kippenberger (Kippenberger, 1989). Here, a disco ball is presented on top of a fluorescent party wig, lit by a

spotlight in a gallery space (figure 37). In his essay *Abstract Humour, Humourous Abstraction*, Robert Garnett mentions Kippenberger as an example of what he calls 'abstract humour'. This is art that does not require the viewer to know the context or to 'get' it (Garnett, 2010, p. 180). Garnett describes Kippenberger as 'no more and no less than an attitude, an ongoing series of humorous postures and gestures' (Garnett, 2010, p. 180). According to Garnett, *Disco Bomb* creates a surface effect that, although shallow, breaks through its surroundings: 'Like much of his work, it revels in its utter superficiality, while nonetheless creating a spatial-temporal breach in and out of the centre of the art space' (Garnett, 2010, p. 180). The disco ball, made of mirrors, is nothing but a highly reflective surface, the effect of which can only be seen on another surface: the walls and floor of the (in this case) gallery space. However, the work not only activates or transcends surfaces; it is their celebration as well. After all — there is also a party wig.

Every medium has its form. As discussed before, Mondrian thought it important that a painting would develop its own style rather than adopt the style of nature. When it comes to the monad and facade, discussed in the previous chapter, those both have their own style, too: the monad is a set of rules or thoughts, the facade a material exterior. There is a form of expression that belongs to the outside and another that fits the inside. On the surface, where reason gives way to experience, it is not the story that is important but its disruption. It is where sense meets nonsense: 'But where does such a descent throw us? It hurls us into the ground of bodies and the groundlessness of their mixtures' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 140). As mentioned before, the word 'subject' means something like 'under-throw'. I imagine it is not a sliding but a throwing; the subject is launched into the world to collect accidents. The Greek *hypokeimenon* or 'that-which-lies-before' is pushed into the world to 'gathe[r] everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 2002, p. 66). This essence of the subject is perhaps most profoundly demonstrated by slapstick comedy in which bodies do nothing but fall and receive blows. In the sequence of daily life, the slapstick accident forms what Heiser describes as

'a sudden jolt' or 'an absurd attack of hiccoughs in everyday life and world events' (Heiser, 2008, p. 17). Hence, although one could consider slapstick comedy to be a rather literal genre with silly jokes about bad luck, I would argue that it is actually highly abstract.

In the second chapter, I described the derailing scene in front of the restaurant in *You're Darn Tootin'* (1928), when, at a certain point, nobody knew anymore why they were all hopping around on one leg. It shows how, very soon, the slapstick accident may no longer have much to do with the situation that initially started it. I would argue that this abstraction of cause and effect is also represented by the slapstick body *lying-before*. When Ader falls from vertical to diagonal, his body falls into abstraction. Of his three-dimensional body, only the surface is important — a black line that later meets another surface: the ground. Just as painting explores visuality, Ader's body explores the form of the fall. His physique is not only a thing but also a sign: a stripe. Ader's fall looks similar to Buster Keaton leaning against the wind in *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), whose torso and one leg form a straight, diagonal line from which, with one arm reaching for ground, the other leg stretches perpendicularly into the air. This way, Keaton and Ader's falls display a geometric aesthetic (figure 39). And yet, put together, their falls look like a repeating graphic pattern that, in all its abstraction, may pose the most representational question for the human subject: how have we possibly been able to stand up all this time?

# Conclusion

Your fountain is your hallmark. Yet every time Madame activates the fish, it hesitates. Being switched on and off so often, it has lost the knack of adapting. Earlier today, when Monsieur Hulot walked in and punctured the waterline, the beak of the fish dried up. Visitors interacted with you, walked through your gravel, dug up your tubing and held it in their hands. They may not know, however, that you are the one in charge. It is clear that your stone borders are not meant to serve convenience. The various colours of gravel in your sections not only form a pleasing composition but also have a warning function: do not step here! And yet, your vegetation is kept scrupulously short. It is a trap: the small, bulbously pruned privet shrubs are teasingly low and easily overlooked — with all the ensuing consequences.

There they go: your visitors have style or swing. Most people can be identified from a distance simply by the way they walk, but that all changes when they fall. You are made of straight lines that clash with the living nature of people, inviting them to behave mechanically,

zigzagging along your oddly laid out paths where they struggle to adapt. As you know, 'every accident denominates its subject' (De Libera, 2008, p. 200). Humans may have designed you, but they, in turn, adapt to you. They 'become one with art' — it only takes a walk from the villa to the terrace to indeed become entangled with gravel; a bush; a lawn.

Do you enjoy the interaction? The delicate steps across your tiles; the vibrations through your gravel; the respect shown towards your grass? When people gather for lunch, they are not just there to meet each other; they are also there for you. Inhabiting your terraces, they move you into action; activating the paths, they run your machine. Yet with the evening comes rest: as the darkness sets in, your strict lines will fade. And when the cackling of friends has died down, Madame and Monsieur retire to their villa. The lights are off; the show is over. Your fountain is finally at peace.

This research grew out of my text-based work that, more or less by coincidence, began to behave 'slapsticky'. It prompted the question of whether text can convey a quality I have termed 'subjectiness'. Throughout my thesis, I have argued that subjectiness in text may be generated by folds

either as an editorial device or in the form of its presentation. Gilles Deleuze speaks of the fold as an 'operative function' that is almost self-generating. I argue the fold is what Martin Heidegger might call 'subjectival' or 'in itself eager to represent', derived from the Greek word *hypokeimenon* that denotes the subject as *that-which-lies-before*. This term, from which the Latin *subiectum* originates, signifies a substratum on which a world gathers and that has *being-in-the-world* as its essential state. Drawing on this etymology, I see Deleuze's Baroque fold as an example of Heidegger's 'subjectival' that pushes for its representability. However, I also recognise that a series of folds is a repetition of forms that looks suspiciously like a loop, a stubbornness or a mutation — and that circles me back, again, to slapstick.

In the first chapter, I introduce Deleuze's theory of the Baroque fold which liberates itself from its substrate. I relate this to the ball-jug in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle,* which frees itself from its function by bouncing; Michel Serres's view of the game of football in which the ball becomes a quasi-subject, folding itself across the field and taking the attention with it; and the little fabric wad in Caravaggio's *The Musicians* that appears to 'behave' decisively and autonomously. In all these instances, it becomes clear how the fold leads to both 'subjectiness' and emancipation, freed from expectation and taking control. But, at the same time, I also emphasise that this process brings with it a certain ambiguity to do with, on the one hand, operating through rules while, at the same time, doing something new. Ambiguously calling for action while sitting on the sofa, it is through a similar paradox that my work *oh come on then* prompted me to write this chapter in the first place.

In a way, this paradoxicality also relates to what I write in the second chapter about mutation. Excessively following order, the double flower reinforces the mundane before surpassing it and finding freedom. Similarly, *situated* is literally stuck in situatedness: freed from linearity, it loops in place. As such, the sculpture led me to discover a connection between the Baroque fold and the mutant double flower, as well as a link to slapstick comedy. Seeing parallels between various instances of the loop and other repetitive

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folds, I would even say that the paradox of finding liberation through being stuck runs through the entire thesis.

Looking at the twisting logic in my work *sit*, the third chapter explores a similar theme across different media. For example, the story of Echo and Narcissus, in which Echo copies Narcissus' sound and he stares at his own reflection, plays an important role in illuminating the difference between image and language, and in exploring the distortions of the fold in repetition and imitation. Additionally, it harks back to the mutation principle from the second chapter, in which the double flower represents a liberated extension of form that I also observe in *HIM/HER* by Candice Breitz.

In the fourth chapter, the notion of the object not complying with its function, which I also spoke about in the first chapter, returns with the W that I made for cows to scratch on. Although the shape of this scratching post is not determined by ergonomics, it does work: the cows scratch themselves and, in doing so, articulate a new W-sound. Their repeated scratching folds over the letter W in a way similar to how the Arpels fold over their S-shaped path. This movement, of both the S and the W, but also of the looping 'situateds' and the creasing *oh come on then*, is where the implicit part of the research project's title, *Doing the Crease*, comes from. To explore this notion of folding as a type of doing, I elaborate on how the fold manifests as an active exterior form by exploring Deleuze's analogy of the monad and façade as the inside and outside of the same folding movement. Here, I encounter that, contrary to the Cartesian idea of a split body and mind, thinking can be doing. In fact, especially in the case of reasoning for the sake of reasoning, thinking can become an automated mind game that keeps returning to the same point. Again, there is looping which alludes to stuckness, yet Feiko Beckers finds liberation. One might say the discussions in *A conversation is a risk to lose your own opinion* are almost similar to scratching an itch, which, out of satisfaction, may carry on just a little too long (and end up in a — fulfilling — nowhere!).

Here, I place Deleuze in opposition to Bergson: whereas Bergson

sees the machine mind as something that goes against nature, Deleuze sees the machine as its very essence. For him, that which appears mechanical is not sufficiently machined. I discuss this difference via Jacques Tati in his film *Playtime* and Charles Chaplin in *Modern Times*, both of whom are struggling to integrate into environments of machines and mechanics. The notion of the misfit ties in with the idea of Monsieur Hulot being the irritant in the oyster's shell from the second chapter and the idea that a conjunction relates to articulation as a standing out, or, in fact, a fold that begins to loosen from its substrate. Still, the ultimate form of detachment is what I move on to discuss in the fifth and final chapter: the fall.

The fall is a fold in which the subject moves from a vertical position to a horizontal one. After moving in the opposite direction, from flat on paper to vertical in space, my work *on legs* accentuates the wobbling threat of falling. The collection of letters the work consists of is brought together solely because they all have a leg to stand on. Cut from neon orange acrylic sheeting, these letters do not form words and are repeatedly whirled by the wind. I connect this work to Deleuze's view on humour as an event that leads language to the surface where there is 'no longer anything to denote or even to signify' (Deleuze, 1990, p. 140). He makes a comparison between humour and falling when, confused, one disappears into the depths for a moment and then returns to the water's surface, where there is nothing but pure sensation. This also connects to the idea of the comic behaving like a thing, which we explored in the fourth chapter. Being subject to gravity, the falling human comes to realise one is not as powerful as thought but a thing like other things that fall to the ground.

This, too, holds a paradox: by falling, the person's thingness, having a volume, form and weight, is emphasised while at the same time joining a surface: the ground. The chapter continues to explore how surface and depth are connected and how, in both, the other can be found. Using *Broken Fall (Geometric)* by Bas Jan Ader, in which he embodies the conflict between Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg about lines by falling sideways, I explore

how abstraction and representation might relate. Interestingly, *Broken Fall (Geometric)* uses a figure to represent abstraction. Additionally, the graphic shape of Ader's body joins that of Buster Keaton in a repeating pattern. It relates to Paul De Man's suggestion that falling causes an event he calls '*dédoublement*' or 'self-duplication'. I argue this doubling is again a fold through which the human being can find freedom, stuck in the ever-recurring pattern of being thrown or *lying-before*.

When I started this research, I had no idea that the fold would go everywhere. My editorial methods that, by doubling and looping, led to an interest in the fold, did not immediately suggest that the fold would also appear in the theoretical reflection on my work. One of the most important insights I gained from the process is that the fold emancipates by embarking on its own story. When creasing enough, the fold is no longer determined by its substrate. In a coat surrounding a body, folds cause that body to become less important, less visible and less controlling of the fabric it supports. However, although the fold finds its own form, it does not simply stand on its own. It also enters into relationships, constituting a protrusion, perhaps getting in the way and causing someone to stumble. There, it often interlocks with yet another fold, formed, for instance, by the person who falls. I began to see that all these instances are interlinked: stumbling over a fold resembles logic that twists, which in itself is a kind of tripping. And the mutation that folds outwards, overdoing its form, relates to the frilliness of the Baroque façade that was once considered a monstrosity. Even the echo of a form is a repetition of a gesture; a doing; a crease.

To my knowledge, the fold has not yet been associated with text before. It also has not been linked to the slapstick method, and neither has the slapstick method been tried as an editorial device. Hence, this research was not only concerned with the question of whether there is such a quality as subjectiness to be discerned in text but was equally an investigation into the methods of folding and slapstick in relation to language. I have chosen to work with the basics — a letter, a word, a sentence — specifically because it

renders more clearly what the method does. Here, the how is more important than the what, although the words used are also chosen with precision. Proceeding from the idea that the essence of language is communication, I now wonder how and where that starts and stops. How does language communicate when it does not convey a sentence, and how does a single word or even a letter express meaning? It seems that through the focus on 'subjectiness' in text, other subjects, too, have found their way into the work: the person on the sofa next to *oh come on then*; the person under *situated* (p. 62); the person on the bench in *sit*; the cows in *W*; perhaps even the swaying pampas grass in *on legs*. Hence, it so appears that, by folding and reaching for that subjectiness, the work naturally begins to interact. I would say it makes clear that humans can free themselves from prevailing ideas just as language may fold away from its regular grammar and that cows and flowers do this too. Yet it also opens the possibility that, in a meeting of subjectiness, emancipation means the fold moving away from one narrative to fold again and join another.

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