The artist as a multifarious agent:
an artist's theory of the origin of meaning

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FOR INFORMATION

ORIGINAL THESIS CONTAINED SOME
3D IMAGES
THE ORIGNAL THESIS CONTAINED A
PAIR OF RED AND GREEN LENSED 3D
GLASSES

This thesis is presented as a written text and an exhibition.[1] Both parts result from interdisciplinary research in writing and visual art.

Its problematic is the origin of meaning as addressed by recent textual theory, and how that represents an artist's experience of this.

Here, 'recent theory' designates 'postmodernism', which includes 'poststructuralism' and refers, too, to 'modernism'. This is reviewed and compared to an artist's experience, using *my* empirical encounter with art, as an artist, as a possible example. As the comparison occurs in writing and visual art, the latter is, at once, the research data, and a site of its investigation. And writing is a site for exploring art practice (via a case study), and the source for further art.

Finding that an artist experiences the origin of meaning as far more multifarious than it appears in recent theory, the comparison additionally proposes a role for the expressive self in art's meaning, in contradistinction to much of postmodernist theory. The typicality of *an* artist is discussed via a deconstructive notion of exemplarity. And Derrida's deconstruction, which explores diverse features of the textual process, informs the theoretical method throughout.

However, it is not just an artist's experience that proposes a critique of postmodernism's version of the origin of meaning. This is proposed, too, via Richard Rorty's pragmatism, when that opposes 'realism' (which includes empiricism) and idealism (which includes deconstruction). This thesis concludes that it is *useful* (in Rorty's sense) for the artist to believe in a multifarious agency including the expressive self - experience notwithstanding.

In moving from postmodernism's notion of the origin of meaning to the artist's, and beyond, to pragmatism's, this thesis attempts to recognise its reflexive dimension. So its voice (as the ambiguous index of its origins) diversifies postmodernism's voice, tending towards a cacophony, without abandoning a conclusion.

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[1] Note that this Abstract pertains to both parts. Material relating to the latter can be found in the volume that accompanies this.

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In the Beginning

In the Autumn of 1969 there were two stories of how the world began. There was one in Assembly in the morning, and another in the classroom and especially in the afternoons when it came to doing Art. In Assembly we did Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden and it got rather confused with Harvest Festival probably to do with all the fruit. In Art - at least I think it was in Art, for we were using plasticine - we learnt about the dinosaurs and the primordial swamp before them. And then how the dinosaurs died out making it safe for man to begin. I was utterly confused by the choice that these competing accounts - one so grown-up and the other so exciting - implicitly proposed. Unable to plump for one or the other, I finally decided that each occurred in different quarters of the globe, far apart, oblivious of the other's existence.

The subject

Much preoccupied with issues to do with meaning as recent textual theory is, it has powerfully framed my preoccupations as an artist. This is hardly surprising, given that I first went to Art School in the late eighties, when the variegated theories of postmodernism - typified by Barthes, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard - were becoming unavoidable. And maybe it is also not surprising that five or so years later, I began to question this legacy, and that even then, the frame of postmodernism which I thought had entirely formed me, was straining to constrain its obstreperous contents: an artist, me - whoever I may be. For sure, on the margins of postmodernism, I am now asking: how, if at all, does postmodernist textual theory look after *the interests of the artist* on the subject of the issue of the *origin* of meaning? *Origin and meaning had to come together at some point...* Of course, this question begs another question: what *are* the interests of the artist, and firstly, with an eye to the problematic status of my typicality, the interests of this artist, me?

Such are the questions that this project pursues, encouraged by a hunch that the interests of the artist are not provided for by postmodernist theories of the origin of meaning. Clues to a possible response have been suggested by the title and, in the manner of all detective stories, these will be confirmed or denied later on.

Responses to the question of how this artist understands the origin of meaning will be assessed in the context of a detailed survey of the way in which this topic is addressed by recent textual theory. This survey, which comprises Chapters 3

and 4, takes 'recent theory' to include writing on art by other artists, including that theory by artists which engages directly with the origin of meaning. If this artist's account alone is found to look after an artist's interests on this score - and possibly *the* artist's - then it offers a critique of recent theory, and will be pursued as such - as original - and as the basis for a new theory of the origin of meaning.

fig. 2 centrosaurus apertus; to view this as a 3D image use glasses inside back cover

As 'recent theory' has been tacitly defined as 'postmodernist textual theory', which includes artists' writing, an explanation might be owed, although I am not convinced that this collocation is so remarkable. Writing on the cusp of two millennia, I sense that postmodernism *should* be over, and yet when I look around me - when I visit bookshops and libraries, when I talk to colleagues, fellow artists, and contemporaries, I do not see that this is so. Granted, there are murmurs of dissent, or things that are happening which, by any of the multifarious understandings of postmodernism, seem a little alien - the totalising quest of the Human Genome Project; the foundationalist simplicities of single-issue politics; the technocratic threat of the terminator gene... But tellingly, none of these has prompted the coining of a new term to designate the change in sensibility of which they might be token.

The disciplinary context

In bringing an artist's interest in the origin of meaning to bear upon a topic in postmodernist (textual) theory, this project adopts a methodology that might be identified with Fine Art research, which is certainly the discipline which frames it institutionally. (Though this discipline may be divided in comprising Fine Art - as art practice - and Art Theory-History in itself a hybrid, divided field; an interdiscipline.) If there is a hesitation in ascribing this project's methodology to Fine Art research, then that is because the discipline is very much emerging, and therefore more than usually provisional. Thus as such, this project might also contribute towards the definition of the field, more so than usual.

Certainly, in framing an enquiry into postmodernism with the interests of an artist examined *by* an artist, I am wanting to inscribe a method in this written part that is *not* Art Theory's, nor Art History's (old or new), nor Philosophical Aesthetics', nor that of Visual Culture. Indeed, I am hoping to suggest that, precisely in the way in which it is *not* all these disciplines, Fine Art research, here, in this written part, acquires its character; and also that it does so as it features an artist as the writing subject, who is also the subject (as the object) and the purpose of their writing.

The rationale[1]

'Well yes, it's OK - but why bother in the first place?' Such is the refrain that peppers the crueller conversations in the art school studio - especially in group crits. Someone has to ask this, if the whys and wherefores of a project are not obvious. For immaculate production comes to nothing if the conception is inherently flawed.

There are several rationales for taking on this project.

(In fact, when I really think about it, there are more than several: there are many. Some, however, might be less than rational. And some are not the sort of explanations that you put in a thesis. Though I *can* say that I wonder to what extent this thesis started in the sixties curriculum of Mount Stewart Infants School and my childish preoccupations with the why and how of things.)

Originality

Such is one reason for doing this work, and for undertaking it *as research*. Within the academy, innovation is often reason enough for undertaking research, formalistic though that may seem. It is also too often reason enough for producing and promoting art, as postmodernism notwithstanding, 'the new' has been the cry of the avant-garde across this century; the cry of those who claim with Marinetti: 'Museums: cemeteries!'[2] (The rationale behind originality as the research imperative is imbricated with a richly woven history of ideas and centrally, the new as the locus of augmented knowledge, power and wealth.) That this project might lead to the discovery of new facts, is a wager that it makes on the basis of an artist's hunch concerning the origin of meaning. But originality has an interest here, as well, for a very different reason: by virtue of its semantic imbrication with the title of this project and its chief topic: origin.

'Originality' and 'origin'

Disentangling the two terms, Raymond Williams notes their historic nexus in their common etymology '(from fw *origine*, F, *originem*, L - rise, beginning,

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[1] There are several reasons for including this rationale. In the first place, because a rationale is a type of origin, it is reflexive upon the subject of this project and so, it can be contended, has a heuristic value. In the second place this endeavour is fringed with prohibitions, largely by virtue of its novelty as such. 'Artists do not have to think' is one such provocation. 'The theory will illustrate the practice' (or vice versa) is another; a prognosis intended to stifle theoretical endeavours at birth.

[2] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti 'The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism' in *Art in Theory* eds. Harrison & Wood p. 148

source, from rw *oriri*, L - to rise)'[3] and concludes: '[a]s **originality** settled into the language it lost virtually all contact with **origin**: indeed the point is that it has no **origin** but itself.'[4] 'Originality', as Williams argues, depends on a particular sense of 'original' when 'original' departed from its stem 'origin' which 'has kept this inherently retrospective sense' 'of some point in time or some force or person from which subsequent things and conditions have arisen' and 'developed additional senses' where 'there was a transfer from the retrospective sense of original (the first work and not the copy) to what was really a sense close to *new* (not like other works)'.[5] In this way, the two terms are almost diametrically opposed: at least as they necessarily engage different types of entity: as 'origin' concerns a thing in the past, and originality concerns the way in which a thing is of a present.

In spurning 'originality' for 'origin', this project aspires to accommodate the former, however, in its purchase on the latter.

High seriousness

Beyond the bounds of both 'originality' and 'origin', this project has another rationale in the status of its topics: their perceived importance. This applies to recent theory's notion of the origin of meaning, and to an artist's notion of this topic which is also regarded for the value of an artist's perspective (the value of 'an artist'), and the value of the topics that this is brought to bear upon: origin, meaning, and visual art.

a) an artist

Evaluation of *an artist's* significance supposes a notion of what an artist *is;* an answer to the question, now adapting Foucault's much adapted question: what is an artist?[6] But if definitional protocols are to be pursued more rigorously at this juncture, then the overarching logic that is structuring this discussion, the linear pursuit of 'what', 'why' and 'how' (the project's subject, rationale and

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[3] entry for 'Originality' in *Keywords* by Raymond Williams. 'fw: Immediate forerunner of a word, in the same or another language'; 'rw: ultimate traceable word, from which "root" meanings are derived.' (*Keywords* p. 29)

[4] Ibid. p. 231

[5] Ibid. p. 230

[6] See Michel Foucault's essay 'What Is an Author?' in Sean Burke (ed.) *Authorship: from Plato to the Postmodern: a Reader* which is followed by Molly Nesbit's essay 'What was an Author?'

methodology), has to be suspended. Or, hypertextually, the reader might be sent in advance to page 26 on the strict understanding that they return to this point: *make your choice*.

Few hang upon the words of an artist as a social subject in the manner that they heed the pronouncements of politicians, footballers and pop stars. Very little that the artist spits (besides and possibly including art) is regarded as significant. Beyond their professional sphere, the artist is, today, unimportant. And even here, concerning this professional issue of the origin of meaning, there is a query: why is *an artist's* notion of the origin of meaning of any consequence? As this bears upon the value of the other terms in this discussion, a response to this will have to wait.

Descending in order of grammatical importance, there is the issue now of the significance of 'origin', 'meaning' and 'visual art' as topics for investigation.

b) origin

'Origin' appears as the central conceit in a range of stories that are key narratives of Western culture and which may be referred to collectively as 'foundation myths'. Historically, when history itself is often one such myth, these start with the Greek, Roman and Judaic stories, if not before: Ovid's version of Creation in *Metamorphoses*; and the Bible's account of that in *Genesis*, and these hold sway as explanations of the origin of all things until the advent of a more secular society. It is then that accounts of 'origin' splinter into many as the multifariousness of things or 'the drunkenness of things being various'[7] becomes, itself, the point of origin for many explanations of the world as each different thing demands its own explanatory system with an individual notion of that thing's inception. (So, for instance, philosophy explains *The Origin of Human Knowledge*;[8] *The Origin of Geometry*;[9] *The Origin of Human Intelligence*;[10] *The Origin of Language*;[11] evolution, *The Origin of the Species*;[12] Marxism, *The Origin of the Family*;[13] psychoanalysis, *The Origins of Religion*;[14]

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[7] Louis MacNeice 'Snow' in *Collected Poems 1925-1948*
[8] Condillac
[9] Husserl
[10] Rousseau
[11] Rousseau
[12] Darwin
[13] Engels
[14] Freud

and aesthetics, *The Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beauty*;[15] *The Birth of Tragedy*[16] structural anthropology, *The Origin of Table Manners*;[17] and deconstruction, '*L'Origine de la géometrie par Edmund Husserl*'.[18])
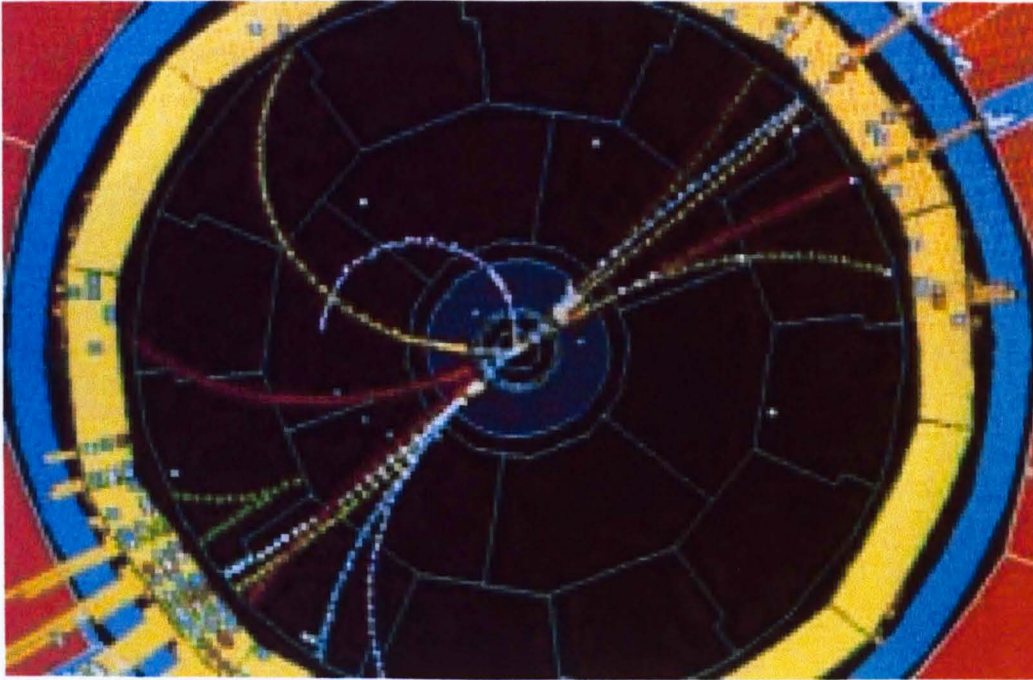
fig. 3 'A computer display of a particle collision could be the nearest we will ever get to seeing the Big Bang'[19]

Insistent in its presence, and figuring in key cultural texts, origin would thus seem to be important. But the question of why this should be so remains. Philosophically, it represents an address to the existence of a thing in the medium of time, and specifically, time past. 'Origin' is therefore an aspect of a thing's ontology. And this observation can be turned into an ethics, as a scrutiny of long gone events - of which the Big Bang is the apotheosis - is justified in terms of its illumination of the present and the future.

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[15] Burke

[16] Nietzsche

[17] Levi-Strauss

[18] Derrida (in full the title is 'Introduction a *L'Origine de la géométrie par Edmund Husserl*')

[19] David Filkin *Stephen Hawking's Universe: The Cosmos Explained* p. 219

(...the end of origin)

However, under scrutiny, 'origin' is not linked in such a simple way to the ontology of things as it can mean both the first mode of something *and* that thing's cause; an inside and an outside of a thing. Williams' gloss does little to dispel this ambiguity in failing to make these distinctions. But then a 'cause' does not always designate a place outside a thing; a thing's beginnings can inform or 'cause' its later being. Both 'origin' which may be a cause or not, and 'cause' which may be an origin or not, have a split signification.[20] And this splitting of the 'where' of origin invokes the ghost of deconstruction, which has subjected more than just that aspect of the term to the logic of the trace.[21] Asking '[w]here does writing begin?' in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues:

'[...] continuing to ask questions of origin, we must recognize its two levels. "Where" and "when" may open empirical questions: what within history and within the world, are the places and the determined moments of the first phenomena of writing?'[22]

And he responds:

'But the question of origin is at first [in the first place; immediately] confused with the question of essence. It could just as well be said that it presupposes an onto-phenomenological question in the strict sense of that term. One must know *what* writing *is* in order to ask - knowing what one is talking about and what the question is - where and when writing begins.'[23]

But this knowledge is deferred by

'the impossibility of beginning at the beginning of the straight line, as it is assigned by the logic of transcendental reflexion, [which] refers to the originarity (under erasure) of the trace [...]'[24]

And as I was reading this, I was reminded of mathematics' 'line' of integers which in its strictest sense has no beginning (and no end): the line which is notionally pivoted on 0, and which extends, in either direction, to positive and negative infinity.

By virtue of this logic, 'origin' itself, and not just the origin of something, is under erasure, deferred by space and time.

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[20] Moreover, the notion of what constitutes a cause is highly problematic: '[...] there is little philosophical agreement on what it means to say that one event is the cause of another.' *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* eds. N Bunnin & E P Tsui-James p. 308

[21] 'the trace is the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is "not one's own", etc.,' and the trace itself also subject to 'exteriority in general'. Jacques Derrida *Speech and Phenomena* p. 86

[22] *Of Grammatology* p. 74

[23] ibid. pp. 74-75

[24] ibid. p. 75

Somebody said to somebody else concerning this research 'She [i.e. me] must get rid of the notion of "origin"'. I took the first somebody to be a sort of deconstructionist.

Or maybe they had read Deleuze, who, in 1985, mourns the passing of the end-of-origin (though in retrospect this passing looks more like an intermission):

'If things aren't going well in contemporary thought, it's because there is a return under the name of "modernism" to abstractions, back to the problem of origins and so on. Any analysis in terms of movements or vectors is blocked. We are now in a very weak phase, a period of reaction. Yet, philosophy thought it was through with the problem of origins. It was no longer a question of starting or finishing. The question was rather, what happens "in between"?'[25]

As 'origin' is apparently expurgated from the philosophical vocabulary, it is instructive to look at the fate of 'authorship' which was subjected to similar threats in the wake of Barthes' polemic.[26] For in noticing (and calling for) the death of the author, Barthes has been construed as demanding the end of authorship *per se*, whereas what he is *actually* observing, and demanding, is the death of a type of 'author'; one which enshrines the 'prestige of the individual'[27] and to which the notion of that subject's expression, via an instrumental language, accrues. Along with 'authorship', 'origin' is not really dead, but transubstantiated.

Although it was already dead; dead on arrival. For Barthes' essay also proposes that the self-expressive author is a fiction; that it never lived except as a myth. It was this that first seduced me when I started doing 'theory'. And this lasted for some time. To begin with, I also signed up to the rest of the argument and the notion of language as an author especially. And I went around telling people that it was not 'I' who made my work, but forces beyond my control. Yet my friends said: 'but your work is so obviously yours' which annoyed me considerably and I accused them of romantically desiring the self-expressive subject. Then, I realised that 'I' was in my work in a complicated way. And a way that still required the death of the author in its simply self-expressive form as the author of a unified or unifiable production. For the 'I' that I saw in my work was multiple. So I traded in my real name for four pseudonyms the better to pursue self-expression. Without realising that I had also traded in most of Barthes' critique, which I only understood in working on this two-sited project, though this project takes that critique of Barthes' critique somewhere else.

Derrida's equivocal response to the 'question of origin' - 'there is no origin, that is to say, simple origin'[28] - captures the shift in understanding that Barthes'

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[25] 'Mediators' p. 281
[26] Roland Barthes 'The Death of the Author'. Here, 'authorship' is more than an arbitrary example, for the term belongs to a shifting complex of terms that includes 'origin' and 'meaning' and 'agent' or 'agency'. That 'authorship' is not a term preferred by this project has a lot to do with its inclusive signification: that it can designate the general production of something above and beyond a more particular act of semantic manufacture.
[27] ibid. p. 143
[28] *Of Grammatology* p. 74

essay advocates; the move from the 'onto-theology'[29] of '*indissoluble origin*'[30] to 'origin' 'sous rature'[31] as the death cry of metaphysics. If 'origin' is written of today, it can be taken to embody rather than exclude this latter sense.[32]

a lexicon of aspects of an (aesthetic) entity

c) meaning

content
effect
form
function
meaning
origin
truth
value

'Meaning' as a crucial topic in postmodernism is, like 'origin', often featured in its negative condition, but should be regarded as no less important because of that. As Richard Rorty writes, 'the theory of meaning [is] philosophically fundamental'.[33]

Beyond, and legislating for this socially narrow compass of significance, meaning features largely in the fabric of day-to-day existence. Largely, and multifariously, as the noun which derives from the verb 'to mean', 'meaning' has a plethora of meanings. (That 'meaning' holds its own hermeneutic key is another aspect of its richness, if also a convolution.)

And yet despite this richness and its centrality in postmodernism, the meaning of meaning is nowhere - to my knowledge - glossed.[34] So I recourse to a dictionary, which gives 'to mean' as follows:

'[...] **1a** (often foll. by *to* + infin.) have as one's purpose or intention; have in mind (*they really mean mischief; I didn't mean to break it*). **b** (foll. by *by*) have as a motive in explanation (*what do you mean by that?*). **2** (often in passive) design or destine for a purpose (*mean it to be used; mean it for a stopgap; is meant to be a gift*). **3** intend to convey or indicate or refer to (a particular thing or notion) (*I mean Richmond in Surrey*). **4** entail, involve (*it means catching the early train*). **5** (often foll. by *that* + clause) portend, signify (*this means trouble; your refusal means that we must look elsewhere*). **6** (of a word) have as its explanation in the same language or its equivalent in another language. **7** (foll. by *to*) be of some specified importance to (a person), esp. as a source of benefit or object of affection etc. (*that means a lot to me*).'

'Meaning' then appears as:

' • *n*. **1** what is meant by a word, action, idea, etc. **2** significance. **3** importance. • *adj*. expressive, significant (*a meaning glance*). [] **meaningly** *adv*.'

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[29] ibid. p. 23

[30] 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' p. 273

[31] Erasing the English translation of 'sous rature' in *Of Grammatology* p. 75

[32] Compare this to the 'always-already' of (Althusser's) structuralism which entirely voids the concept of origin.

[33] Introduction to *Objectivity, relativism, and truth* p. 3

[34] See *The Meaning of Meaning* C K Ogden & I A Richards

(So in sense **3**, the meaning of meaning is also its importance; its meaning returns a rationale for pursuing it as a topic of research.)

By way of importing a less lexical and more abstract meaning into 'meaning', by way of a provisional full-stop, it is useful to note that all these meanings of 'to mean' and 'meaning' (except in its third sense as a noun), entail a 'will to sense' or volition in the realm of signification. Moreover, as sense **1** of 'meaning' indicates, this will to meaning encompasses much more than just the human 'doer', as it pertains to a range of entities. As A R Lacey notes: '[...] not only words, sentences, and people can be subjects of the verb 'mean' but also actions, works of art, and natural events, states and processes.'[35]

Is there anything that can't mean, I wondered. Or does everything have meaning? The cat sleeping under the table, as I write this? Do *I* have meaning? And does every piece of art mean? What about Abstraction? Those works which are 'all form and no content' or in a sense, *pure presence*. Where is their meaning? In the gesture that they are? And in a sense, how can that gesture *not* mean? How can art be truly meaningless?

Freud said that 'sometimes a cigar is just a cigar'. But then he was very fond of cigars, so he would say that, wouldn't he?

d) visual art

To complete this rationale, as it concerns the terms of this investigation separately, there is, lastly, the term 'visual art'. Thieving a ruse from Heidegger, '[t]he work [of art] is the origin of the artist',[36] visual art is rationalised as a socially significant topic by virtue of the artist's rationale, tenuous though that may have been.

'The origin of meaning': the aggregate significance

As the first term in this phrase qualifies the second, and the first *and* second qualify the third, the value of this project is *less* than the sum of its uninflected nouns according to the law of accretion. But the context of the third term for the second and the second for the first might compensate for this with the interest of its permutations, offering as it does seven viable interpretations of this phrase - some as part of it. (These are: 'the origin of meaning in visual art'; 'the origin of meaning'; 'the origin in visual art'; '(the) origin'; '(of) meaning'; '(in) visual art'; '(of) meaning in visual art'). However, the question to be asked

[35] *A Dictionary of Philosophy* p. 198
[36] 'The Origin of the Work of Art' p. 143

most urgently concerns the fullest permutation, and runs: why is 'the origin of meaning in visual art' significant?

The second somebody said to me: 'The impression I get is that artists are not concerned with where meaning originates; rather they see themselves as immersed in the flow of things.' Well fine, I thought. Artists can work like that if they're prepared to accept what comes by: the detritus in the street; the rubbish at the crossroads. But what happens if they want some recondite material? Don't they need to know where it comes from? Details of the shop, the place - details of its *origin*? And what ever happened to an interest in your subject?

Over and above the heuristic value of this topic, and its obvious practical importance - *there, where meaning comes from, so it shall be sought* - there is, compellingly, the notion that it might be of interest to everyone involved with art, over and above the artist. This is the case if a theory of the origin of meaning (whoever's theory that might be) can also serve as a theory of meaning *tout court*. So the question phrased philosophically is: can an aetiology[37] function as a morphology?[38]
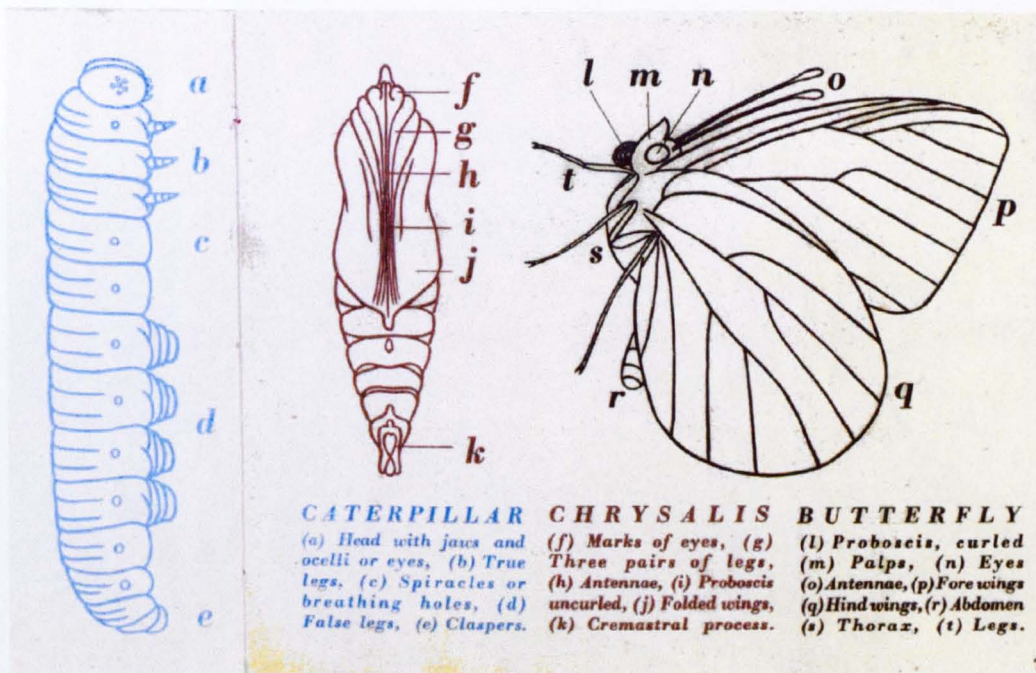
fig. 4 Diagram showing relationship between caterpillar and butterfly

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[37] 'aetiology': '[...] **1** the assignment of a cause or reason. **2** the study of causation. [...]' *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

[38] 'morphology': '[...] *n.* the study of forms of things. [...]' *ibid.*

Origins and ends

In a well-known essay, John Berger plays in the margins of this question using Van Gogh's painting *Wheatfield with Crows*. Before a black and white version of the image, he writes: '[t]his is a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it. Look at it for a moment. Then turn the page.'[39] There, the reader-viewer

fig. 5 Vincent Van Gogh *Wheatfield with Crows* July 1890

finds the image as before, but now captioned with the following information: '[t]his is the last picture Van Gogh painted before he killed himself.'[40] And Berger comments: '[i]t is hard to define exactly how the words have changed the image but undoubtedly they have. The image now illustrates the sentence.'[41]

Analysed with reference to the question of origin's relation to being, the logic of the argument runs thus: one context for *Wheatfield with Crows* is the artist's suicidal thoughts. (The knowledge of) this context is a cause (origin) for how the painting is ('*the words* [describing it] *have changed the image*'); that context, is, moreover, present in the painting '*[t]he image now illustrates the sentence*'). Berger's reasoning accommodates the concept of an aetiology providing for a morphology; a study of the origin of something suggests an understanding of its being. For Berger, this does not happen in reverse, as it does not happen either for Derrida, (for very different reasons - by virtue of the

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[39] *Ways of Seeing* p. 27
[40] ibid. p. 28
[41] ibid. p. 28

logic of the trace)[42] who also writes on Van Gogh, on 'his' shoes, in the wake of Heidegger.[43] For Heidegger, of course, it does happen: 'Van Gogh's' boots - the boots themselves if not the painting of them - eventually disclose their history; the origin of how they are:

Troubled sole Van Gogh painting goes on show

Fiachra Gibbons
Arts Correspondent

Everyone knows that Vincent van Gogh was a deeply troubled soul. There was the bloody business of his amateur ear amputation, and the amazing pictures he produced while in the St Remy madhouse.

The battered soles of the great artist are less well known, but all that is about to change. A Pair of Shoes, worth about £20m, goes on show at the National Gallery on Wednesday for a year.

It was painted soon after he arrived in Paris to live with, and scrounge off, his brother Theo in 1886.

"It's extraordinarily evocative," said the gallery's director, Neil MacGregor. "You can almost feel him from them [the boots]. Van Gogh identified hugely with the poor miners he grew up among in Holland and with the virtues of honest toil, which had been ingrained in him by his stern Calvinist background."

He bought the old pair of pedlar's boots at a flea market and broke them in by tramping through the wet streets until they became caked with mud, literally stepping into the shoes of the poor.

The work, which is on loan from the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam, will be displayed with five other Van Goghs, including Sunflowers and the Chair.

ons on freedom of information law

fig. 6 The Guardian Saturday August 7 1999

[42] Recall that 'the question of origin' 'presupposes an onto-phenomenological question' - see p. 13 of this text - whereby the painting would be opened up to its outside, not its origin as that is a question of metaphysics not deconstruction.

[43] As Derrida inquires of Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's boots '[w]hat makes him so sure that they are a *pair* of shoes?' (*The Truth in Painting* p. 259) so I might ask of Berger: what is a sign of imminent suicide?

'From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles stretches the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field.'[44]

It is left to Barthes to put the case *overtly* against Berger in this respect, and to argue that a history of a thing (and specifically a cultural thing, a work of art) is *not* a story of its being. And he does so as he sunders the connection between the (modern) author and their final texts. Again, the case is made with reference to Van Gogh (and his contemporaries) as Barthes complains:

'The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice. The explanation of the work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, the voice of a single person, the author "confiding" in us.'[45]

That this author is thus voided might actually propose that he or she cannot be called an origin, though this is just the term that Barthes uses later in the essay to describe the author.[46] It is in this way - across the fissure of critique - that 'origin' is not identified with 'being'.

Drawing a conclusion from these accounts, it might be argued that relations between origin and being (or an aetiology and a morphology) are theoretical and subject to a range of paradigms of knowledge. (Strategically, *the artist* might prefer Berger's explication as it writes them into art - 'their' art - and on the back of this, the reader of *this* text might also like to take this line, as this text then illuminates the finished work of art for them. Thus from this point of view, the significance of looking at the origin of meaning is enhanced by its value as a theory of meaning.) Either way, confronted with the recognition that 'the course of events leading to a given event is enormously complex',[47] theory explains the dense thicket of the real by doing explanation via its etymology: as an act of flattening out and making simple. No matter for the time being. What might matter as an adjunct, and provisionally the last word on this subject, is to note

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[44] 'The Origin of the Work of Art' p. 159
[45] 'The Death of the Author' p. 143
[46] Ibid. p. 148
[47] A R Lacey *A Dictionary of Philosophy* entry for 'causation'

that 'being' need not only be configured causally with 'origin' but with 'end' as well. The affect of things, their function and their purpose can also wholly, or in part, define how they are, as 'teleology' replaces 'aetiology'.

An artist's *notion of the origin of meaning: the significance*

There is a value in an artist attending to this topic as an artist offers a perspective that has seldom been regarded, either on this topic, or at large, in fact. But the greater interest in this purchase on the origin of meaning is due to an artist's possible proximity to that. However, this proximity is fragile in that it depends upon a number of conditions being met, and namely: a) that an artist is identified with the work of art's production, and b) that this production is associated with the origin of meaning (which, according to some theories, need not be the case - reader response theory for example). Assuming that these circumstances *are* in place, and this project argues that they are (if not to the exclusion of the role of the viewer in constructing meaning), then an artist has a unique understanding of the origin of meaning, supplying this project with a further rationale.

An artist as a writer

On the basis that an artist has something useful, as distinct, to say, it might be objected that they say - or rather - *write* it, and that this is perverse for an artist. Or at least, that the reason for writing as an artist needs to be explored.

In the transcript of an interview on the subject of 'studio doctorates and objective standards for studio practice as research', Christopher Frayling contends that:

'The best definition [of research] could be "an enquiry that leads to communicable knowledge" [...] and that word "communicable" is for me the key. Art is in its nature multivalent, can be read in a million ways. That's why it's great, people bring different things to it, see things in it, come away with different meanings. The range of meanings is potentially almost infinite. Whereas the punchline of research can never be that multivalent, it has to have limits and boundaries somewhere, and say "this is what I am trying to put over"'.[48]

Here writing, by default, is permitted as a medium of research. But this privileging of everything but art as univocal is fallacious, at least according to a

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[48] 'Nourishing the Academy' *Drawing Fire: Journal of Fine Art Education* Vol. 1 No. 3 Winter 1996

theory of deconstruction which this project is adopting and which will formally be announced as its theoretical method. Taking 'deconstruction' as a register of multivalence (to borrow Frayling's term), Derrida considers, in 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other', if:

'we could be sure that [literature's] deconstructive structure cannot be found in other texts that we would not dream of considering literary. I am convinced that the same structure, however paradoxical it may seem also turns up in scientific and especially in judicial utterances, and indeed can be found in the most foundational or institutive of these utterances, thus in the most inventive ones.'[49]

When reason is identified with singularity, writing's reason is erased. And this process of contamination works in reverse:

'Suppose we knew what literature is [...] we still could not be sure that it is integrally literary (it is hardly certain, for example, that [literature], as soon as it speaks of truth and expressly claims to state it, is nonphilosophical).'[50]

So Frayling's argument is doubly defeated: (philosophical) writing is literary (aesthetic) and art is philosophical.[51] Not that this defeat provides this project with a rationale for taking place in writing. In the last resort - for the time being - that is provided by the Institution in prescribing that research in Fine Art takes place, in part, in writing.

Writing art

The artist writes about art. What do they find out? Precisely, that they write. About art. "Around" art.[52] Art is mediated by the word. The word defers art. But research in art that took place in art would defer art too. This is not an argument for not writing. Rather, it is a prompt for writing about the relations *between* writing and art.

If writing seeks to represent art and art cannot be truly present in that writing (according to the Derridean theory of the sign, which will be discussed in the section on 'the treacherous sign'), then the art which 'makes use' of that representation of art is likewise subject to the process of deferral. And so on, for

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[49] 'Psyche: Inventions of the Other' p. 208
[50] ibid. p. 208
[51] The multivalence of this text according to this argument cannot be emphasised enough.
[52] See Derrida: *The Truth in Painting* : 'I write four times here, *around* painting' (p. 9). Painting is encircled; not presented. And as with painting, so with 'art'.

the writing that refers to that art - *ad infinitum*... Each time writing looks to art, 'art' is somewhere else from where it was before. And vice versa. The structure of a helix catches the topology of this process with 'writing (about art)' and 'art' as the two ends of a chord which subtend the helix thus:

writing on art

art
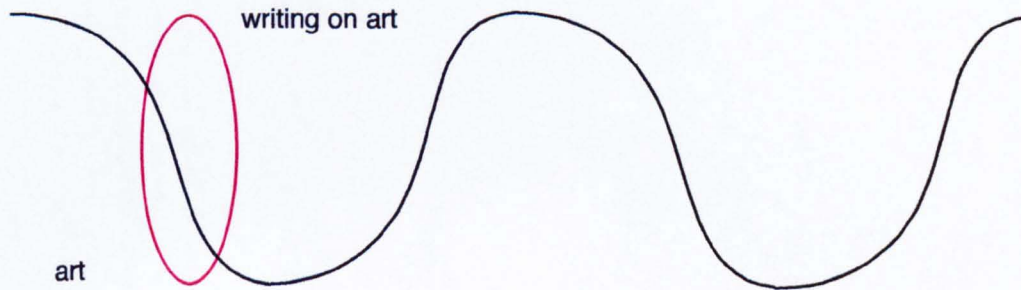
fig. 7 Diagram to show the relationship between art and writing on art adopted by this project

But framed as this project is by the discipline of Fine Art research, (however much that is undisciplined), this writing is only half the story, for the project's other half begins with art as research; not just as that for which writing is done, but that which is done (as research) for itself (and which will then inform writing). Structurally similar, this second half begins at the point opposite the point that the first part was aiming for. And if it can be likewise figured by a helix, it can also be configured with the first syncopationally, in the manner of the double helix of DNA in which the two helices are out of phase by 180°.
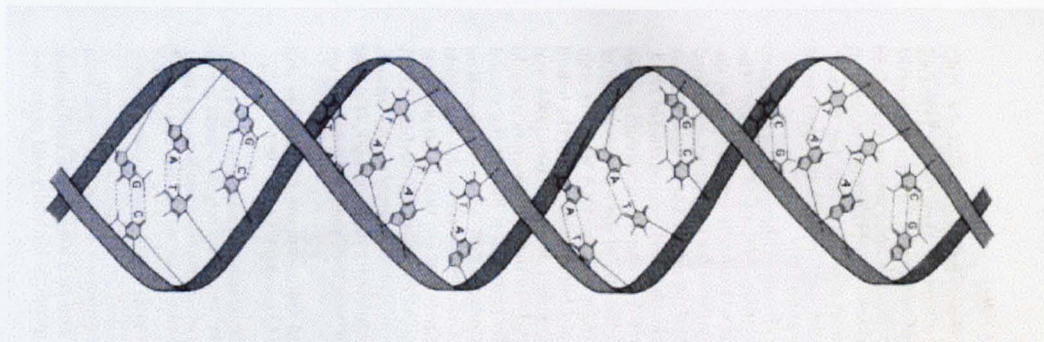
fig. 8 The Double Helix of DNA

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It is tempting to describe this structure as a double dialectic, but that is not an apt description, either in the understanding of a dialectic as an interplay of two voices (here there is a polyphony as 'writing' and 'art' are various), or in the strict, Hegelian sense of dialectics as the march towards totality. Here, the to and fro movement rather serves the production and negation of understanding in the manner of the trace. Such is how this project *starts* with reference to the writing-art relationship though this model of the double helix is another object for its scrutiny.

A friend who had read an early version of this chapter commented on this description of the writing-art relationship: 'It's the model of the perfect Conceptual Art practice'. *Conceptual Art?* I'm wondering: is that the destiny of Fine Art research?

Methodology

Methods - as the things that methodology reviews in order to construct a wisdom around them - have already started. Several as they are, they began with this chapter's first sentence, even before the question of the subject and the rationale were broached. This section merely enumerates and explicates the methods that this project adopts, and has adopted. There are four, and these are task specific.

The critical method

This is first on the list, and foremost, because an artist's desire to regard postmodernism critically, is the main compulsion for this project. All the other methods are predicated on, and serve this imperative. In asking how postmodernist textual theory looks after the interests of the artist in relation to theories of the origin of meaning, this project, first and foremost, sees these 'interests' as referring to an artist's need to have their *experience* of the origin of meaning acknowledged. So an artist's experience is brought to bear upon postmodernist theories of the origin of meaning, and thus this project's critical method can be termed 'empiricist'. In Richard Harland's term, 'empiricism' has:

'[the] goal of stripping experience back to an immediate state of particular, concrete, passively received sense-data. Under the concept of what's "natural", this state is the most sure and certain state possible. This is the primary and

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self-sufficient base upon which knowledge is to be founded.'[53]

Contrary to Harland's understanding of empiricism, however, this text does not assume that experience is not in many ways already theoretical - that it is not acculturated - within language and systems of interpretation. And by the same token, 'theory' is enmeshed with experience, however much it seeks to inhabit the realm of pure reason. But this project *does* assume a differential emphasis on 'theory' and 'experience' - one which asserts that the two are not the same, and which supposes that experience might augment and question theory.

Central as it is to this project's critical methodology, empiricism is inspected in much greater detail in Chapter 2. Formally, it yields a 'case-study' of an artist's experience of making art, and this comprises Chapter 5, which is compared and contrasted with Chapters 3 and 4, in Chapter 6.

The theoretical method

For this, procedures are deployed, to begin with, from the object of critique, 'recent theory' so that the tools for this project come from what it seeks to understand: postmodernism, as a way of enhancing that understanding. Paradoxical as that is, it is not an unfamiliar situation. *Il n'y a pas de hors* postmodernism - well perhaps there is, if an artist and an artist's experience is outside postmodernism. Certainly, in seeking the inside of postmodernism as the point from which to criticise, this project can be seen to operate - perversely - according to the *modernist* tradition of immanent critique, at least as Clement Greenberg sees it, via Kant: '[m]odernism criticizes from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticized.'[54] Specifically, tools are borrowed from Derrida's theory of deconstruction, wagering that *his* critique will probably come closest - if not so close - to this one, making it imperative to know, most of all, this version of postmodernism. And Derrida is also chosen here for the way in which his work traverses a range of textual features (signification; 'the exemplary'; issues to do with genre) one of which has already been deployed to describe the relationship between writing and art.[55] Now, urgently, there is the issue of this project's *terms*.

[53] *Superstructuralism* p. 71
[54] 'Modernist Painting' p. 5
[55] However, '[d]econstruction is not a method' as Derrida notes in 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' p. 273. And Geoff Bennington writes '[d]econstruction is not what you think. If what you think is a content, present to mind.' 'Deconstruction is not What You Think' in *The New Modernism* p. 6

Defining terminology

Along with 'meaning', 'origin' is a central concern in Derrida's writing, and 'art', if not always *visual* art, features frequently. But the terms of this project are not defined so simply; not, for instance, just as Derrida signs 'the origin of meaning in visual art' as its terms are single or in aggregate, but rather, according to his theory of the sign; at one (theoretical) remove. In this way, the project's terminology is potentially ascribed meanings that are not foreseen by Derrida and when this is the case, his theory of 'the sign' may become a Trojan Horse.[56]

The treacherous sign

In *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler recalls that for 'Structuralism and Linguistic Models':[57] '[a]ll signs consist of a *significant* and a *signifié*, which are roughly speaking, form and meaning'[58] Explaining this, he writes:

'The sign is the union of a *significant* and a *signifié* [...] The *significant* is quite easily defined as a form which has a meaning; not phonic or graphic substance itself but those relational features, functional in the system in question, by which it becomes a component of the sign. But the *signifié* is more elusive [...] The difficulty is one that arises because linguists have different ways of talking about *signifiés*. In speaking of the sign they may use formulae like Saussure's - 'the combination of a concept and an acoustic image' or 'recto and verso of a sheet of paper' - which suggest that for every *significant* there is a particular positive concept hidden behind it. [Or] they may talk of the various uses of a word, its range of potential meanings, the paraphrasable content of a sentence, its potential force as an utterance, without implying that for each phonological sequence there is a definable concept attached to it, a meaning invisibly inscribed on it.'[59]

And in this latter case, Culler specifies:

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[56] Moreover, it is not just a (sub)set of signs that is thereby defined, but all signs; not attempting to 'set aside consideration of "non-serious" language use' - or '"parasitic" speech acts', which would, as Peggy Kamuf notes, have for Derrida, 'far-reaching consequences for any theory of meaning'. Introduction to 'Signature Event Context' *A Derrida Reader* p. 80

[57] The title of the first section of *Structuralist Poetics*

[58] *Structuralist Poetics* p. 16 Moreover, elsewhere he notes that for Saussure, 'taking the linguistic sign as the norm [...] all signs are arbitrary involving a purely conventional association of conventionally delimited signifiers and signifieds [...] Peirce, on the contrary, begins with a distinction between arbitrary signs, which he calls 'symbols', and two sorts of motivated signs, indices and icons' (*The Pursuit of Signs* p. 24). Since I am concerned here precisely with the meanings - significations - of words and hence symbols and hence the arbitrary sign, these latter two can be dismissed.

[59] *Structuralist Poetics* p. 18

'[t]he sign "dog" has a signified which we may call the concept "dog", but that is less of a positive determination than we might wish: its content is difficult to specify since it has a range of applications.'[60]

Concluding this account, he observes:

'[t]here is [in this latter "way" of "talking about *signifiés*"] as Derrida would say, no full meaning but only *différance* (differences, deferment): the signified can be grasped only as the effect of an interpretative process in which interpretants are adduced to delimit it.'[61]

Noting that there is no small difference between the notion of the sign which has a 'definable concept attached to it' and one which does not, and noting that in this distinction might lie the difference between structuralism and deconstruction[62] it is also possible to note that Derrida indeed describes:

'[...] the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified be produced within the plenitude of a present and absolute presence. That is why there is no full speech, however much one might wish to restore it with or against psychoanalysis. Before thinking to reduce it or to restore the meaning of full speech which claims to truth, one must ask the question of meaning and of its origin in difference. Such is the problematic of the trace.'[63]

For Derrida, meaning originates in différance by virtue of the sign's inability to be repeated, for 'a phoneme or grapheme is necessarily always to some extent different each time it is presented in an operation or a perception.'[64] And yet, paradoxically,

'A sign is never an event, if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. A sign which would take place but "once" would not be a sign; a purely idiomatic sign would not be a sign.'[65]

In deferring the essence of the sign, language defers itself. But were identity to be possible, presence would again be deferred by 'the infinite repeatability of the same'.[66] Derrida's cleft stick is cleft again.

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[60] Ibid. p. 19

[61] Ibid. p. 20

[62] Which is the distinction proposed by Richard Harland, when deconstruction is included in 'poststructuralism', which refers to 'an unconventional mode [of sign-functioning] where the Sign works creatively and anarchically and irresponsibly' and thus is opposed to structuralism which refers to a 'mode where the Sign works rigidly and despotically and predictably.' (*Superstructuralism* p. 124)

[63] *Of Grammatology* pp. 69-70

[64] *Speech and Phenomena* p. 50

[65] *Speech and Phenomena* p. 50

[66] Ibid. p. 53

This theory of the sign locates 'the origin of meaning', among other terms, as a trace; as not this and that and this and that. The definitional task of this project is to chase its chosen terms' deferral, within the limits that have been inscribed; within the scope of recent theory and the notion of the origin of meaning that an artist's experience offers in its stead.[67]

The problem and method of reflexivity

All theories of the sign are reflexive; they bend back upon themselves because as truth claims, they implicate the gesture with which they are, themselves, made. A theory of the sign takes place in signs.
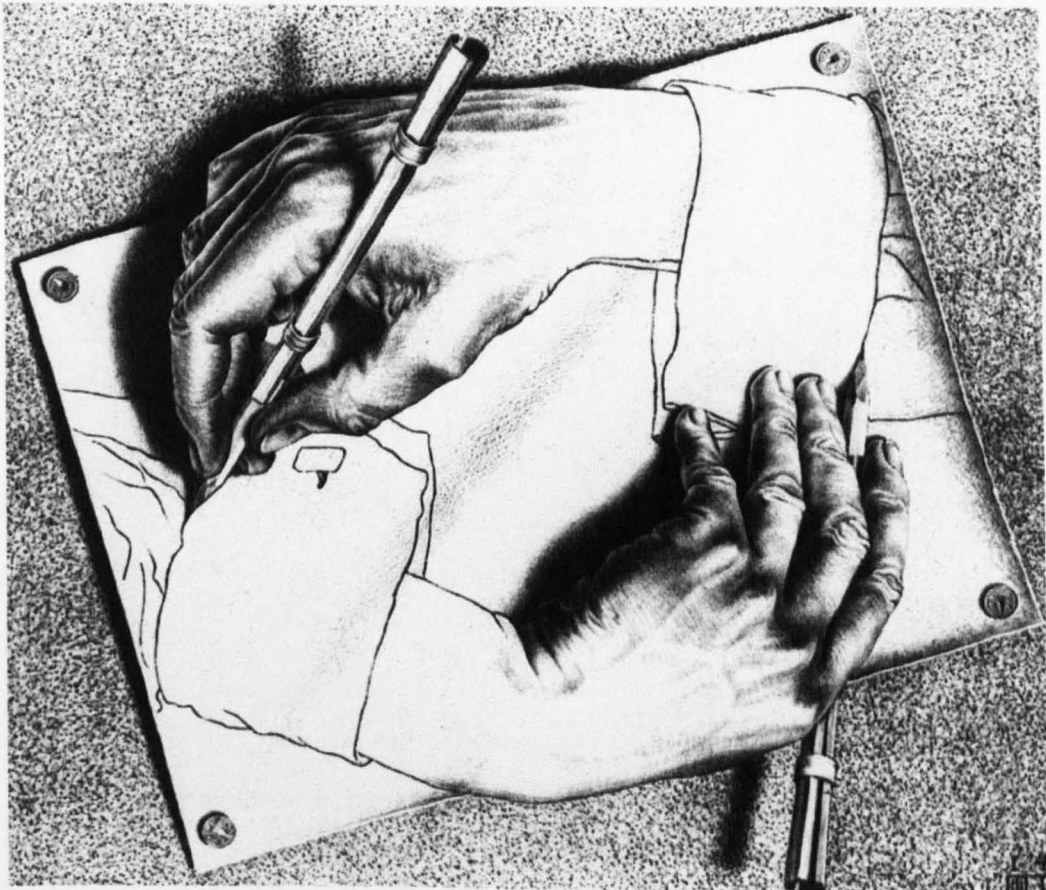

fig. 9 M C Escher *Drawing Hands* lithograph 1948

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[67] What of the cognates of the project's terms? Are they allowed? Or does this ascend into metaphysics?

Though habitually identified with convolution, reflexivity is not, however, necessarily a problem. It is only problematic when a truth claim rebounds upon itself to generate a paradox. The famous example of this is the Cretan, Epimenides, whose 'simple assertion', 'I lie', is, as Foucault remarks 'enough to shake the foundations of Greek truth'.[68] Truth is badly shaken as 'I lie' contests its own truth; the cleft stick appears again. What is claimed is paradoxical - *against wisdom* - when 'truth' is Greek, or wisdom is non-contradictory. Yet had the Cretan said 'I speak the truth' there would have been reflexivity without contradiction, as his claim affirmed itself.

A theory of the sign informed by deconstruction is associated with the Cretan *liar's* reflexivity; it claims that meaning is deferred, and this applies to that assertion, thus forestalling any apprehension that 'meaning is deferred'... The paradox prevents the application of this version of 'the sign' to its objects - other signs - and meaning, in the sense that this project seeks it, is suspended. Thus the project is postponed perpetually.

This refractive reflexivity occurs when the media of knowledge - language, history, science, theory and the like - are not considered to be 'transparent' but 'opaque'; precisely 'media' as 'thicknesses'. To claim that 'language is transparent' is not convoluted or impossible: and yet it is so to 'claim that language is opaque'. As Hilary Lawson notes, in a rare exposition on the subject of reflexivity:

'[o]ur "certainties" are expressed through texts, through language, through sign systems, which are no longer seen to be neutral. It appears therefore, that in principle there can be no arena of certainty.'[69]

And as she also notes, refractive or 'destructive' reflexivity (in her phrase) is thus identified with postmodernism, valorising as that does, the constitutive aspect of knowledge. Moreover,

'Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida [...] take the destructive aspects of reflexivity to their limit. In consequence, they can be seen to open up the post-modern world - a world without certainties, a world without absolutes.'[70]

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[68] *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside* p. 9

[69] *Reflexivity: The post-modern predicament* p. 10.

[70] Ibid. p. 10. While Lawson's premise is that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are crucially engaged with reflexivity, she also comments that 'the concern with reflexivity, although pervasive, is largely implicit' in their work. (p. 15) It is this which makes her own text 'rare' among not only the philosophers of reflexivity, but their commentators, too. Central to postmodernism, reflexivity is much overlooked as an *explicit* topic.

Yet not 'supposing truth to be a woman'[71] - uncertain and unabsolute - the urge to restrain refractive reflexivity is compelling and indeed, Lawson outlines various responses. The catalogue includes at least four methods for 'avoiding the paradoxical effects of reflexivity'.[72]

'On encountering paradoxes of self-reference philosophers have in general followed [a] common-sense approach, and have attempted to remove such paradoxes by excluding from the reference of such claims the claim itself. [...] So long as the statement can belong to [a] higher order, a meta-level, the self-reference can be avoided and the paradox evaporates.'[73]

'As we know, Epimenides' argument can be mastered if, discourse having been slyly folded back upon itself, a distinction is made between two propositions, the first of which is the object of the second. The grammatical configuration of the paradox cannot suppress this essential duality, try as it might to dodge it (particularly if the paradox is locked in to "I lie" in its simple form). Every proposition must be of a higher "type" than that which serves as its object. That the object-proposition recurs in the proposition that designates it; that the Cretan's sincerity is compromised the instant he speaks by the content of this assertion; that he may indeed be lying about lying - all this is less an insurmountable logical obstacle than the result of a plain and simple fact: the speaking subject is also the subject about which it speaks.'[74]

But as Lawson notes, this method 'simply bans [a] type of all embracing claim', and the other strategies are equally disingenuous. Asserting that 'only empirically verifiable statements are meaningful' the logical positivists ward off paradox by stating that their claim is not itself a statement 'only a proposal'.[75] And then there are philosophers who 'modify [their] views'[76] rather than descend into paradox. Finally, Marx seems to offer a less problematic tactic:

'[...] although [Marxism as] a description of our context is itself determined by that context, an interaction between the theory and the context allows for a development in which the theory moves forward. Theory and context are thus interwoven in a dialectical relationship which is itself described by the theory.'[77]

However, as Lawson comments 'if it is capable of such change, it is no longer clear what the theory is asserting.'[78]

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[71] Nietzsche *Beyond Good and Evil* p. 13
[72] Ibid. p. 22
[73] Ibid. p. 17
[74] Foucault *Maurice Blanchot: Thought from Outside* pp. 9-10
[75] Lawson p. 19
[76] Ibid. p. 18
[77] Ibid. p. 21
[78] Ibid. p. 22

Ironically, the strategy for contradictory reflexivity that Lawson seems to sanction is the one deployed by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida: 'reflexivity endorsed';[79] none regards it 'as requiring [a] solution'. Truth is, indeed, a woman.

The strategy that this project favours is more complex. Derrida's discussion of the sign - which prompted *this* discussion - was invoked as a tool: to signify 'the origin of meaning in visual art' as *that* might be deferred. A disingenuous deferral - of the sort that Foucault outlines - of the first reflexivity (that which pertains to the meaning of 'the sign') is brokered as a means to entertain the second: that which pertains to the origin of meaning in visual art which rebounds, in part, upon this text, as this has meaning which originates. And the project aims to entertain this reflexive feature in a truly Derridean style: by welcoming the way in which a 'theory' of 'the origin of meaning in visual art' potentially negates itself as such as soon as it encounters 'origin' in a non-neutral medium: language, history, the unconscious or whatever... It does so in the name of logical integrity, if to do so risks the project's wholeness as a cognitive endeavour.

The formal methodology

The means by which this project might endorse this reflexivity includes a formal aspect, which is the way of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, as Lawson sees it, when their 'evasive style' underscores the radical semantic equivocation of their writing.[80] (In *Tympan* and *Glas*, Derrida deploys the insistent device of a structurally divided text: two columns to a page.)

But this model of the content-form relationship (to use a well-worn distinction) is not the only one, and it is important to consider which of all of them works best.

Conventionally, in academic writing, (in the texts where reason is supposed to reside), the formal aspects of the text are hidden. Materiality is seen as mind's other. (Truth is not a woman.) Writing simply 'means', without the means of visible support as the means are precisely conventional. This method is rejected for this project on the basis that a welcomed reflexivity draws attention to a text's material dimension because the content of a text rebounds upon it.

[79] Ibid. p. 22
[80] Ibid. p. 15

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Indeed, the conventional mode of academic writing has already been rejected by one aspect of this text: as the doubling of this text's 'voice' (indicated by the different type-faces) denaturalises both voices, rendering both material.

When form is rendered visible, the content-form relationship strays into the territory of art. (Here, the fact that 'poetics', which has to do with shaping according to its etymology, and is used to describe art's shaping, has been dubbed an 'alienated rationality', is telling.[81]) Art configures this relationship in two distinct ways.

In the first place, there is what can be called the interrogative relationship in which the form is held in tension with the content. Serving as a demonstration (once again) is *Wheatfield with Crows*. When the content is given by the title - a landscape, a local one, not particularly exotic for the artist; nothing out of the ordinary - unless the birds are taken as an inauspicious omen - the form, in the instance of the gestural marks, the agitated sweeping brushstrokes, suggests the opposite: the untoward. Disturbance is connoted, but more expressly as the formal agitation disturbs a congruence of content with form and inaugurates the 'free harmony between the function of images and the function of concepts occasioned by an object of art' that is the 'sense of beauty [...] for Kant', in Lyotard's analysis.[82]

What either Kant or Lyotard would make of Van Gogh's boots is less certain, but clearly *A Pair of Shoes* proposes an assonance between its content and its form. The boots are loaded with 'the dampness and the richness of the soil'; literally, in Heidegger's account, as quoted before, it is 'on the leather' and this is in the hues and the texture of the painting too (as the painting is a surface which is not the boots). It is 'stiffly rugged'. That Heidegger's description of the painting's objects (content) functions to describe its form makes the point. In this second version of the content-form relationship, the two entities are complementary.

Inherently, and ethically perhaps, there is nothing against either version, but here,

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[81] This was the phrase used by Julian Thomas at a conference on the subject of Cultural Poetics; University of Southampton July 8, 1996.
[82] 'The sublime and the avant-garde' p. 203

for reasons of the context of this text, the second is preferred.[83] That this is the mode preferred by Derrida and others is not the only reason. Rather, their deployment of 'the oblique, unseen intervention of literature into philosophical discourse' is adopted as it has a degree of visibility, in fact, *contra* to what Kamuf contends.[84] The explanation is as follows. There is a danger that in the context of philosophical writing, which is, after all, a context for this project, the techniques of literature are overlooked; form is assumed to be neutral and this assumption erases any evidence to the contrary. If form 'only' complements content this is not a problem. If it is overlooked, no matter. But if it is seen in its partial visibility, it enhances the signification of the text. Were form to interrogate content, so that the 'meaning' of the text depended on the visibility of both and this tactic were adopted as 'philosophy' the text might be radically misread, which is not a type of negation that this project entertains.

The form of complementary form

Hypothesising that at some point this project will encounter a notion of *opaque* origin (and origin becomes 'opaque' as soon as it is more than one - and thus rendered relative to something else), and thus it will encounter a notion that reflexively rebounds upon its own articulation, the issue of exactly how this writing will embrace that content via its principle of complementary means, asks to be addressed.

At the outset, it seems that a simple maxim will suffice: do as you say: embody, for example, the notion of language as an origin, via obviously linguistic means. And repeat this as necessary. In this way, a multiplicity of textual registers - across the verbal *and the visual* - would function as an indication that the project had encountered different sites of origin. Of the visual in this respect, Kristeva writes:

'It seems important to me [...] to take into account the visual factor, the plastic aspect of the icon as signifier, which lends itself more readily to playfulness, to invention, to

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[83] '"The poetic function, in the widest sense of the word, would thus be defined by a Cratylian awareness of the sign, and the writer would be the conveyor of this secular myth which wants language to imitate the idea and which, contrary to the teachings of linguistic science, thinks of signs as motivated signs." To the extent that Cratylism assumes a convergence of the phenomenal aspects of language, as sound, with its signifying function as referent, it is an *aesthetically oriented theory* [...]'. (Emphasis added) This is Paul de Man quoting Barthes in 'Resistance to Theory' in *The Resistance to Theory* p. 9

[84] This is Peggy Kamuf writing of *Tympan* in *A Derrida Reader* p. 169

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interpretation, than verbal thought, which can have a repressive intellectual weight.[85]

And with this urge to register a multiplicity of textual registers lies the first conundrum: should the text embody origins as it encounters them (assuming that embodiment is necessary) - or rather as it commends the origin of meaning in visual art? Is embodiment descriptive of the project's course, or prescriptive of what it recommends on the basis of an artist's experience? This being the more significant modality, it is the latter that is chosen. So the textual registers embody what an artist recommends, perversely, as they happen in advance of that commendation, in part.

Another complicated aspect of this gesture of embodiment concerns the way in which the text, as a token of its origins, should not be read, symbolically, as token of the texture of *all* texts. This text is anomalous, in working formally to underscore its content, and should not be regarded as proposing that The Text in its final form bears witness to a range of registers.

The end of the beginning

On the subject of finality, it is timely to conclude this chapter, as a discussion of the project's what, why and how - the last to be developed in one specific aspect by Chapter 2 - now ends. It ends as it has done the work of initiating a quest for another end; the end as the 'conclusion' and the purpose of this project, and the pleasure of the progress there.

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[85] Julia Kristeva 'Interview with Catherine Francblin' in *Art in Theory* eds. Harrison & Wood p. 1084

Empiricism and its contexts

The Café Zola

Having promised that this chapter would be concerned with empiricism, as that underpins this text's critique (it is an artist's *experience* that is brought to bear upon recent theories of the origin of meaning), I decided that I needed to consult an expert: an epistemologist. My supervisor put me in touch with an eminent Professor and I rang him to arrange a meeting, and to flag a number of my questions. I warned him that I wanted to be able to put empiricism in the context of other 'truth regimes' as I termed them - by which I meant: 'means of accurately depicting reality'. I wanted to be able to do this, because I wanted to know if empiricism really serves the artist best. I wanted to know what an artist really wants from theory; and I could only know that if I knew what it was possible to want. (I didn't tell him that I'd phrased this last question to myself as a version of Freud's query 'what does woman want?' - a question that Freud left unanswered.[1])

We met a week later, at the Café Zola - a café where a cup of tea can last an hour and no one minds. (What follows is a transcript of our conversation, as best I could record it. Naturally, the footnotes are apocryphal, for while the Professor was most helpful in citing the titles of his textual sources, I had to find the page numbers etc. myself. And because these are extraneous to the transcript, I have put them at the end, so as not to interfere with the flow of the discussion.)

Having ordered tea and coffee (me: tea, and him: coffee), I started, nervously:

'I was wondering how you might locate empiricism as a research method - not just in terms of my discipline, but also in terms of the larger, academic field.'

'Empiricism is a truth regime - to use your phrase, and as such it is a truth regime of science par excellence.'

---

[1] 'What does [a] woman want?' (Was will das Weib?), has been sourced as a question put (rhetorically) by Freud to Marie Bonaparte, in a letter (*The Penguin Dictionary of Twentieth Century Quotations* eds. J M and M J Cohen). Ernest Jones, however puts it slightly differently: '[h]e said once to Marie Bonaparte: "The great question that has never been answered and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'."' (Ernest Jones *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* Vol. 2 p. 468

And I remembered what I'd read by way of boning up for this, in my *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*: '[t]he empiricists' paradigm is natural science, where observation and experiment are crucial to enquiry.'[2] And I wondered about the connections between the research methods of science and those of Fine Art, and the possibility of taking the former as a paradigm for the latter, given that there is this common ground of observation and experiment - an involvement with matter. But, rejecting this fallacious separation of 'matter' and 'ideas', I rejected science as a model more especially on the grounds that in Fine Art research, the supposed medium of 'experiment' - the visual or the practical - is also one of the media in which the results of observations and experiment are presented - which is not the case in science. And besides, what is science? The professor was continuing:

'But empiricism is also favoured by some social scientists, particularly those who value field work, and it features in sociological practices such as Action Research, which constructs a dialectic out of real experience and more abstract theory. And further back: well, you need to look at Bacon and Locke...

As for your question about empiricism in the context of different truth regimes - here, I recommend two essays by Richard Rorty. There's the introduction to his first volume of *Philosophical Papers*, and the first essay in that volume: "Solidarity or objectivity?" In both of these, he looks at different modes of truth regimes which have ruled in the last millennium or so, including "realism" with which one may align "empiricism" in part.'

Ignoring the complexity proposed by the emphasis he'd made with this last comment, I demanded:

'What does Rorty have to say about "truth"?'

'Ah! "What is truth?" Pontius Pilate's question and then Francis Bacon's after him...[3] Rorty suggests - in the second essay - that the history of Western philosophy, with *some* exceptions, takes "truth" to be a relation between representation and reality.[4] And in the first essay, "truth" in this configuration is named as "determinate"; settled by a relation.'[5]

'As suggestions go, that seems rather facile. *Of course* truth is a relation between reality and representation.'

'You may think so now, but let me continue. For a start, even this simple observation has its complexities. There is, as Rorty notes, a dispute concerning

which term - "reality" or "representation" - determines the other. Hence there is a dispute concerning exactly *how* truth is determinate. On one side there are philosophers who argue that reality determines representation, while on the other side, the reverse is supposed to be true - if you see what I mean. It is these latter chaps who make the term "representation" look a bit strange - at least according to its etymology. For if representation is anterior to reality, how can it be said to *re*present it?'

Clearly, this was a rhetorical question, so I let him continue.

'Rather, it must be said to represent it in the sense that the term has of calling up something in the mind by description.'

And as he spoke, I recalled Gayatri Spivak's use of the term and I made a note of this alongside my notes on the Professor's discourse.[6] He had hardly paused between ideas:

'This distinction between different modes of determination, different trajectories, indeed, between the two terms - reality and representation - constitutes a schism. This is the divide between the realists and the idealists, the theories of truth as correspondential and constitutive, and it is, perhaps, philosophy's most famous, or fundamental disagreement. These are broad positions which, in turn, are riven by internal controversy.'

And he added the entire contents of another sugar sachet to his coffee.

'And yet, before considering these internal fissures we should really consider more precisely what is at stake in the realist-idealist opposition; what it means to claim that "reality" is the cause of representation, and vice versa. And this is best done by putting both those theories into practice; by getting them to explain an instance of representation and its relation to reality. But this is a little awkward here because although we have reality in plenty - '

(here he waved his arms to indicate the café)

' - we do not have an image of it.'

At this point the Professor suddenly ducked down as if seeking a refuge of sorts under the table. I was initially alarmed - the more so as this was followed by a furious scrabbling noise - until I realised he was searching in his bag - a battered leather

satchel - for something. He emerged triumphant, brandishing a heavy tome entitled *Dürer And His Times* by William Waetzoldt.[7]

'Dürer! Dürer will come to our rescue; with one of his wonderful woodcuts: *The Draughtsman and the Lute* of 1525, engaging as it does in its content, explicitly with representation and reality. Indeed, it is a meta-text - a text about a text - before its time.'

And he opened the book to display this image:
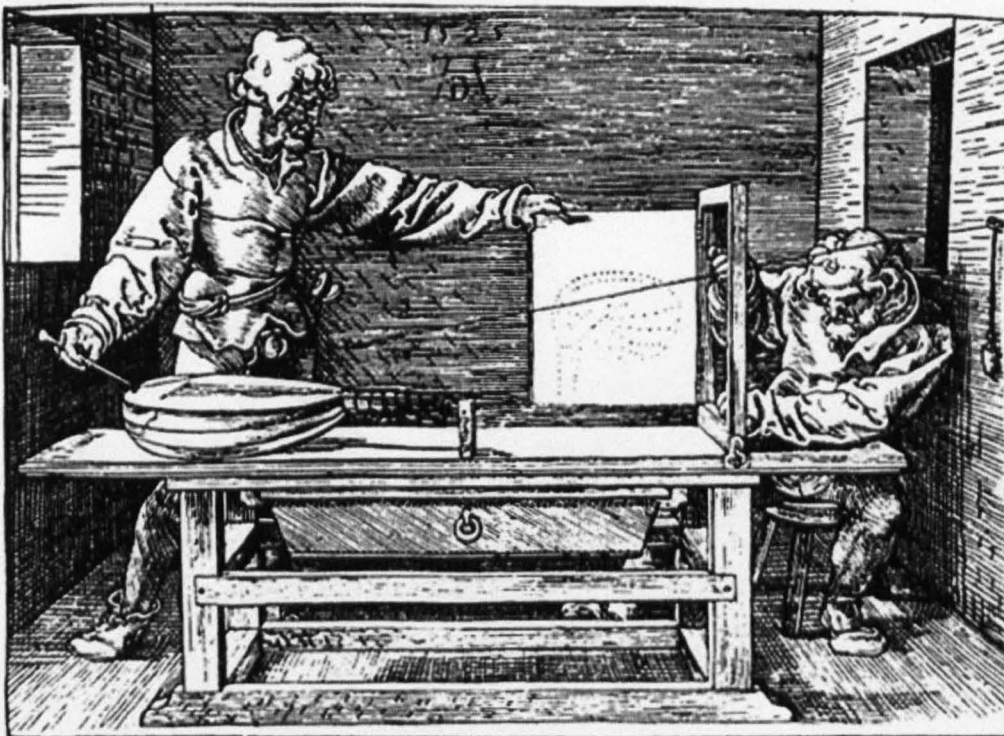
fig. 11 Albrecht Dürer *The Draughtsman and the Lute* 1525

And we both looked at it in silence. Until I exclaimed:

'But it's a visual image!'

'Well, yes... You mean that your interest is in *verbal* representation - as an artist *writing* about her experience, but you're also making art about it, I hope. At least *reality* is visual in this image (for how can it not be?). Won't that do for you?'

'Something by Magritte would have been more appropriate, perhaps... I was thinking

of his word-image paintings.'

'Yes, I agree, but I don't have Magritte with me. And as I hope to show you, if you'll let me, Dürer's image can be made to support our two contradictory truth regimes - which proposes, I suppose, that truth is, indeed, the property of one and not the other.'

He had lost me. So I changed the subject.

'Why *this* Dürer image? I know it's got to be a picture about picturing, but why not, for instance, the infamous draughtsman and the nude?'

'The "marmoreal nude", that is - to quote Martin Jay,[8] or "draughtsman drawing a reclining nude" to quote Gombrich?[9] This one, you mean?'

And he shuffled through the pages to display this:

fig. 12 Albrecht Dürer *Draughtsman Making Perspective Drawing of a Woman* 1525

'I'll leave that to the feminists... as your description of it seems to propose. Let's return to the matter in hand. It's not difficult to see *The Draughtsman and the Lute* as an instance of realism, or what Rorty refers to as "the correspondence theory of truth".[9] Indeed, there's a line which runs from the lute to the sketch.'

'But that line doesn't have a direction; it's not a vector... I mean, nothing in the image - Dürer's image - tells us that we have to read it in that way: as running from the lute to the sketch and not vice versa.'

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'No, no, you're right. A lot of the arguments for reading the sketched lute as an instance of realist truth are ones that we import into Dürer's text, not ones the text itself supplies. What I was going on to say, is that the line can be seen as running from the lute to the drawing, in accordance with the notion that reality determines the image, for two reasons. In the first place, this "realism" is the way our culture thinks: it's the common-sense position, the default setting, if you like. We are *programmed* to see things in this way (well maybe not you and I for we've read too much semiotics... certainly *I* have), but most people are. And we should also observe that a will to correspondential realism is the rationale behind the apparatus; that frame-like device on the table which also comprises the string and the fixture on the wall. This apparatus typifies the "scopic regime" - to use Martin Jay again - of this type of realism.[10] Now, here is William Waetzoldt describing the device in a passage which, I should mention, somewhat counterposes the point I am trying to make as he places an emphasis upon the line of sight, the trajectory of vision which, of course, runs against the drift of reflective realism in proposing a trajectory from the eye to the object.

"The focusing eye [of the artist] is replaced by a ring let into the wall of the atelier, while the line of vision is represented by a thread running to a point on the lute which is being drawn. To keep the thread taut, a weight is attached to the extremity which passes through the ring on the wall, and at the other end the thread is fastened to a needle, which an assistant can move from one point of the model to another. On its way from the eye (the ring) to the object (the lute), the line of vision (the thread) passes through a frame, strung with threads to form a system of co-ordinates. The point at which the thread intersects the frame - indicated by the co-ordinates - is the position which the point the artist has just focused has to occupy in the pictorial plane. One point after another is thus transferred on to the sheet of drawing paper hinged to the frame."[11]'

He paused in a contemplative sort of way so I didn't intervene. And then he continued:

'Several things must be observed beyond what Waetzoldt notices. One must note the way in which the "displaced eye" functions in this process. The doctrine of realism, in the sense unfolded here, is supported by the notion that nothing interrupts the expression "pressing out", as it is according to its etymology, of the visual object as the image on the surface of the paper. While the perspective grid spectacularly scores and screens the visual scene, that, of course, is voided in its role as "aid to drawing" in Waetzoldt's phrase.[12] The human eye is more problematic. Not in itself, but as it trails an individualised, embodied subject. Much has been written around the drive to avoid "ocular desire"[13] that is to say, the body of the eye, in the the image, in the age of Dürer which has also been referred to as the "Founding Perception" of "the Cartesian

perspectivalist tradition."[14]   Listen to this - it's Jay once more - '

and he produced a scrap of paper from the Dürer monograph:

"The abstract coldness of the perspectival gaze meant the withdrawal of the painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted in geometricalized space.   The participatory involvement of more absorptive visual modes was diminished, if not entirely suppressed, as the gap between spectator and spectacle widened.   The moment of erotic projection in vision - what St Augustine had anxiously condemned as "ocular desire" - was lost as the bodies of the painter and the viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye".[15]

Well, it always seems to me that *The Draughtsman and the Lute* renders the perspectivalist's desire for disembodied looking paradoxically substantial.   To repeat Waetzoldt, Dürer replaces the "focusing eye" by "a ring let into the wall of the atelier" - hardly a disembodiment.   On this note I think we should turn to the opposition, and consider how we might view this image via the logic of idealism.'

I looked at the Dürer print again, and tried to second-guess his analysis.
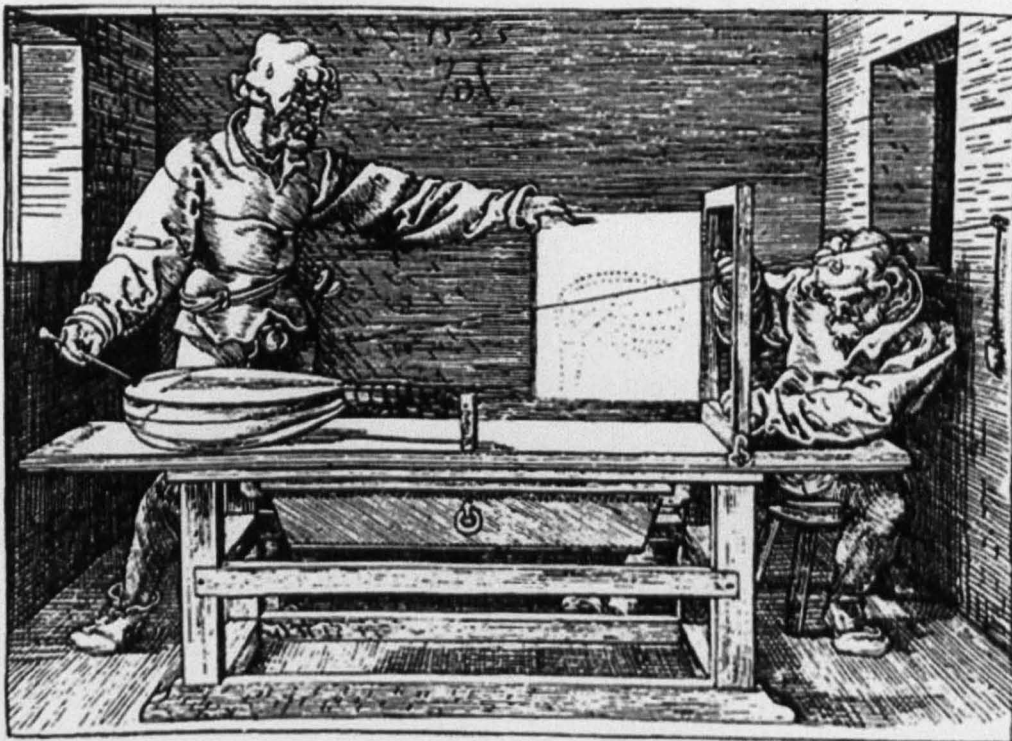
fig. 13 Albrecht Dürer *The Draughtsman and the Lute* 1525

'Recall that idealism fundamentally inverts realism. And while realists claim that reality is "intrinsically determinate",[16] idealists claim that representation produces reality. In Rorty's words:

"The picture [...] is of some mighty immaterial force called 'mind' or 'language' or 'social practice' - a force which shapes facts out of indeterminate goo [and] constructs reality out of something not yet determinate enough to count as real".[17]

This goes some way to dispersing the problem with how images produce reality, parthenogenetically, as it were. In Rorty's vision, *something* exists *before* representation, but not what we call reality. "Reality", therefore, is a mental, or linguistic or a social - in short a *cultural* - construction. So, for idealism, "truth", as the agreement between reality and representation, is "made" and not "found", in Walter Truett Anderson's useful terms.[18]

Now, here's the tricky bit. While truth is made by virtue of the fact that representation makes reality, it's not the case that *all* representations are true.'

'No of course not - for otherwise we wouldn't disagree with one another!'

'Hmm. As Rorty quotes Michael Dummett "'[t]he meanings [truth or falsity] of our sentences are given by the conditions that render them determinately true or false.'"[19] But as these conditions are "'truth-makers'" - "'non-linguistic items'",[20] idealism faces a problem, an inconsistency, for how can an item of reality reside outside culture? I'll leave this conundrum with you.

Anyway, such is idealism's notion of truth, which is also referred to as "constitutive", as I think I've already mentioned, and which is opposed to realism's notion of truth as "correspondential".

Surprisingly, it's easy to relate idealism's truth to The *Draughtsman and the Lute*. All the more surprisingly, perhaps, because unlike the realist analysis, it isn't commonsensical. But then, there are two circumstances which encourage us to see the image in this way. One is the presence of contemporary critical theory which owes its name precisely to its spirit of resistance to common sense. For instance, both the theory of deconstruction and various versions of psychoanalytic textual theory seek to go against the grain of the manifest content of any given text to reveal its repressed significations. With these in the vicinity, it can't be long before the *manifest* content of *The Draughtsman and the Lute*

(which concerned its interest in realism) cedes to its latent content as the other to that interest. But the image also seems to court that, precipitously, of its own accord. Which is to say that truth resides in Dürer's image, *contrary* to what I said before, when I led you to believe that the truth of the image is a figment of theory.'

And then I understood what had previously eluded me: that Dürer's image of the image-making process is reflexively caught up in the same discussion that it illustrates. And as the Professor had suggested before, that if Dürer's image could support two readings, so it must propose that truth is constitutive, so now he was suggesting, perversely, that the image had an essence, thereby proposing that truth must be realist. Which was rich, in the context of idealism. I bit my tongue.

'The way in which the image courts idealism is the second way in which it facilitates a reading of the print according to that truth.

Now, we should pay attention to the *failure* of correspondence in this image; or rather, precisely the ways in which the *represented* image, the sketched outline of the lute, is at odds with "the indeterminate goo" which surrounds it. The drawing does not seem to try to reproduce the scene before the draughtsman or his assistant (who are perhaps the same man) - or rather that which cuts the plane of the grid. And yet, embryonic though the drawing of the lute is, it is hard to imagine that it will be rejected, within its fictional community, as "unrealistic". Reality, in this way, is shown to be a cultural construct: an agreement as to what will pass as such - reality. The drawing edits and shapes what is otherwise "goo" to the draughtsman behind the perspective frame. And Dürer's image dramatises this gap between the scene and the seen-on-paper by turning the dotted lines through ninety degrees and presenting them to the viewer; the conditions that render the image within the image true are laid bare. It is not just a matter of the form's isolation on the white paper: there is also, for instance the issue of the dots which "transfer" "one point after another" of the lute "onto the sheet of drawing paper hinged to the frame" to use Waetzoldt's words. The lute in the outer-image does not have "points" - yet these function as the guarantee of the inner image's truth. Once more, the realism of the represented image is seen to be produced by the means of imaging rather than the putative original. Constitution replaces transferral.'

He paused to take a gulp of coffee - which was rapidly spat out, since, in the course of conversation, he had added a sachet of *salt* to his cup...

'Heavens!'

But before I had a chance to express my concern, he continued:

'The list of fissures that open up between the inner and outer image do not end here. Comments could be made about style, for instance. I have always wondered if Dürer's draughtsman will join up the dots and complete the sketch in Dürer's manner or his own. However, the final point to be made about idealism is that these fissures - that demonstrate its mechanism - can only be seen in rare moments. Ideology closes the gap so that the conditions of representation reproduce the seemingly "natural" conditions of viewing. It is not entirely ridiculous to suppose that Dürer's draughtsman "saw" through the frame what he represents. But we really should resist too fanciful a speculation...'

Acting on this cue, I decided that I had to recall him prosaically to the opening task:

'I was wondering where empiricism fits in.'

'Ah, yes. So well you might. But not before I've had some *decent* coffee.'

And he went to the counter. I was trying to digest my notes when he reappeared with more tea and coffee and a pile of serviettes.

'We'll be needing these!'

'For lots of spillages?'

I was wondering if he planned another nose-dive to his satchel.

'No. Be patient! On the theme of gaps, recall that I observed that realism and idealism are riven by internal controversy'.

'Yes.'

'Well, this is where empiricism comes in. Though not quite yet. Since we've been discussing idealism, let's attend to *its* internal fissures, while it's still fresh in your mind.'

'OK.'

'When I was discussing that, I cited Richard Rorty's description of idealism's agency as "some mighty material force called 'mind' or 'language' or 'social practise'".[21] It is these "forces" which, for idealists, construct reality. But while this inventory of his is useful, it fails to recognise the categories which split idealism. For it is taxonomically divided, by the role of the subject. On the one hand, "subjective idealism" accords the subject's ideas agency in constructing reality, and on the other hand, "objective idealism" accords everything *but those* agency. (When "mind" can refer to both these categories - think of Hegel's use of it to designate Universal or "Divine Mind"[22] - "mind" is a problematic term.) And we might map idealism's categories thus:

He drew on a serviette:

Subjective Idealism:

the subject's ideas ——→ reality

Objective Idealism:

*Ideas (language; ——→ reality (including the
Absolute Mind) the subject)*
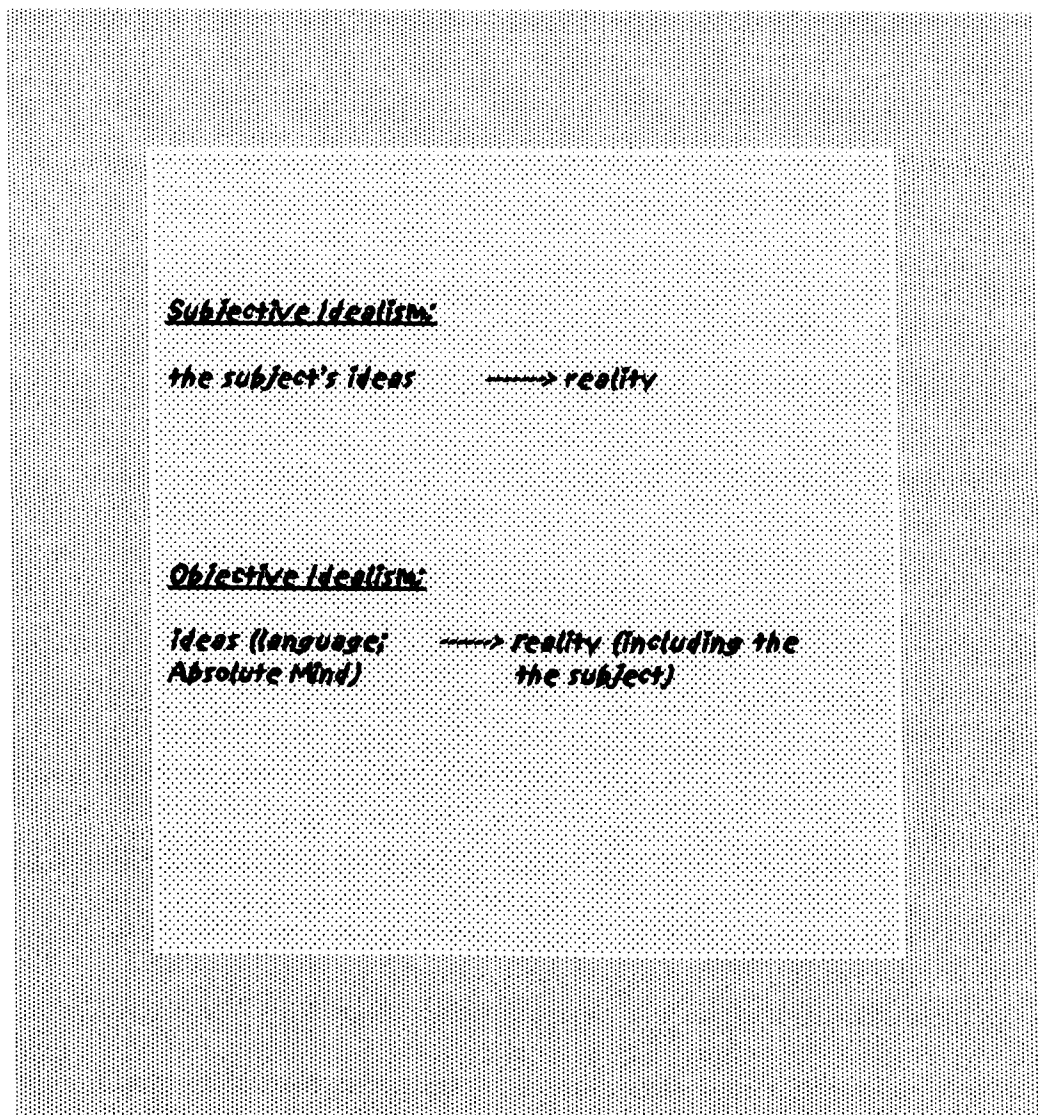
fig. 14 The relationship between Subjective Idealism and Objective Idealism

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'I hope this makes it clear that my discussion of the realist-idealist opposition was rather simplifying things - as it essentialised categories.'

'Yes, certainly.'

'Now, as idealism is divided by the question of where originary ideas reside, so realism is fragmented by different definitions or locations, indeed, of reality. Considering realism as a more sophisticated entity, I am going to show you three distinct understandings of its "reality". In the first place, when "reality" is perceived to be the realm of appearances, which, philosophically, is known as "phenomenalism" then the realism i.e. the picturing associated with this is known, usually, as "naturalism". Opposed to this, philosophically, is a notion of reality as the realm of "noumena" - things in themselves - which is Kant's phrase,[23] and which refers to things that can only be known by the mind, and not the senses. This understanding of "reality" informs another sense of "realism", which does not have its own name, but might be identified with various philosophers, such as Plato and Marx, to name but two.'

'And this realism would be instanced by Brecht's famous comment on the "realism" of photography - his remarks to the effect that "a photograph of the Krupps works tell us nothing about the conditions of production"[24] which, is of course, proposed from a Marxist-realist point of view.

This interjection surprised both of us.

'Exactly. *Thirdly* and finally, and finally, moreover, because we get - at last - to empiricism, there is reality as what you and I perceive - not jointly of course, but independently. And this reality is experience through the senses. Like the realism of noumena, this does not have its own name. And as I mapped idealism via its internal disagreements so, it is handy to do so with "realism"'.

He reached for another serviette and produced the following diagram:
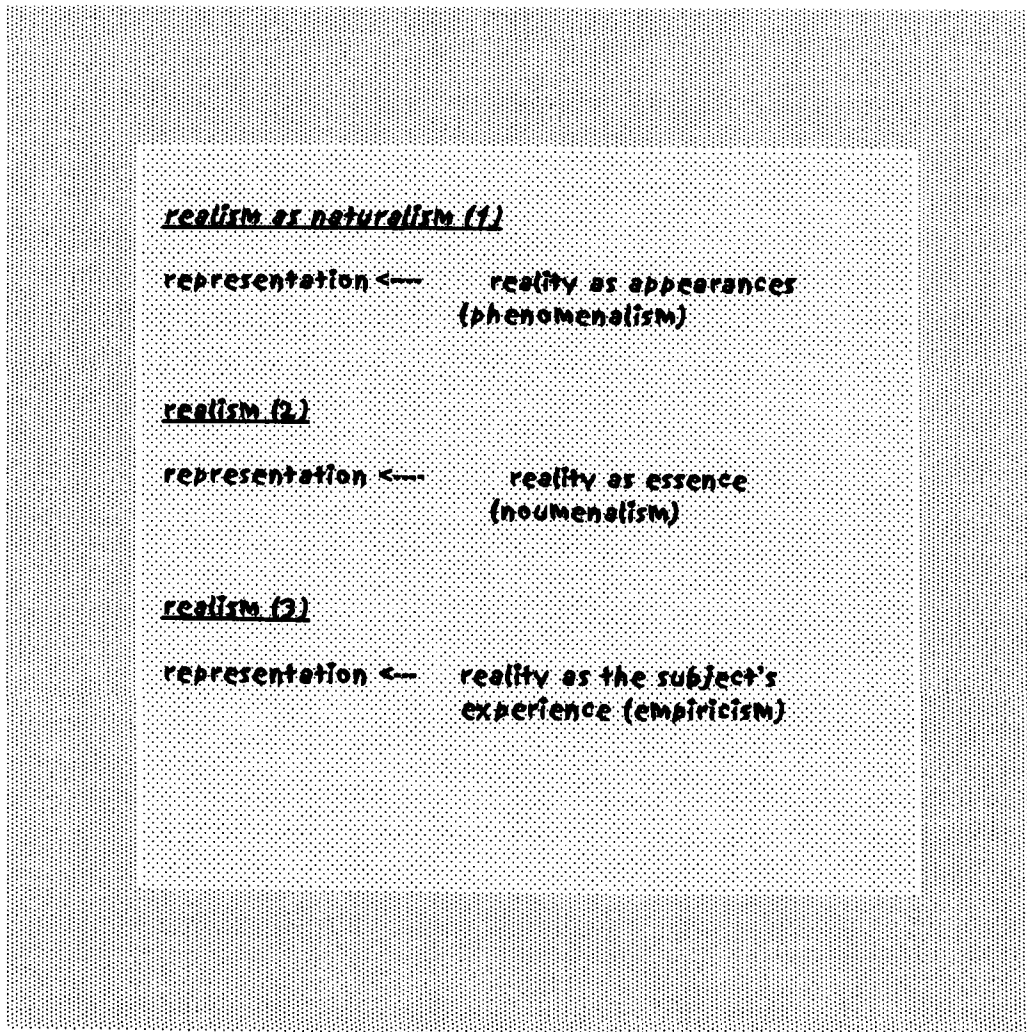
fig. 15 The role of 'reality' and 'representation' in realisms

And finally, we might also map the history of philosophy in terms of all these different truth regimes; these different relations between reality and representation.'

(And on yet another serviette, he drew the diagram that follows on the next page.)

When he had finished that, he said:

'I think you'll find these jottings come in rather useful in the course of your

research so I hope you can decipher my writing. Though actually, I haven't finished, in fact I have been a little disingenuous, my dear - '

My heart sank, not only because I had drained my cup of tea to the last drop, and because I was quite hungry, but also because I was worried that if I was encumbered with any more ideas, my already fragile grasp of the material so far would be loosened with disastrous consequences.

'Forget the disagreement between realists and idealists and certainly consider the disagreement amongst the two groups themselves as trivial!

fig. 16 A history of philosophy as different truth regimes

These pale by comparison with another, major truth regime, which Rorty not only describes, but himself subscribes to. And while this has its precedents in thinkers such as John Dewey, William James and parts of Wittgenstein, it is new in the sense that it has only recently been much attended to, largely as a consequence of Rorty's efforts. Certainly, it is substantially new in the context of contemporary theory - all the stuff that goes by the name of "postmodernism" and "poststructuralism". The "truth regime" I am alluding to is pragmatism.'

And he announced this triumphantly.

'Yes! Moreover, far from seeing realism and idealism as opposed, Rorty argues that the philosophers identified with both positions are united by being "representationalists". These are "philosophers who find it fruitful to think of mind or language as containing representations of reality."[25] His phrasing is careful, avoiding, as it does, specifying *one* relation of determinacy over and above another, but it *does* involve the concept. This is crucial. Pragmatism, on the other hand, is *anti*-representationalist, in insisting that, as Rorty writes: "'determinacy' is not what is in question [for]... neither does thought determine reality, nor, in the sense intended by the realist, does reality determine thought. More precisely, it is no truer that 'atoms are what they are because we use "atom" as we do' than that 'we use "atom" as we do because atoms are as they are.' Both of these claims, the anti-representationalist says, are entirely empty. Both are pseudo-explanations."[26]

So the opposition between realists and idealists becomes a sub-division in the larger distinction between representationalists and anti-representationalists, which can be mapped thus:'

And he seized a serviette again:

representationalists versus anti-representationalists
misnamed anti-realists

realists v idealists
also termed
'anti-realists'
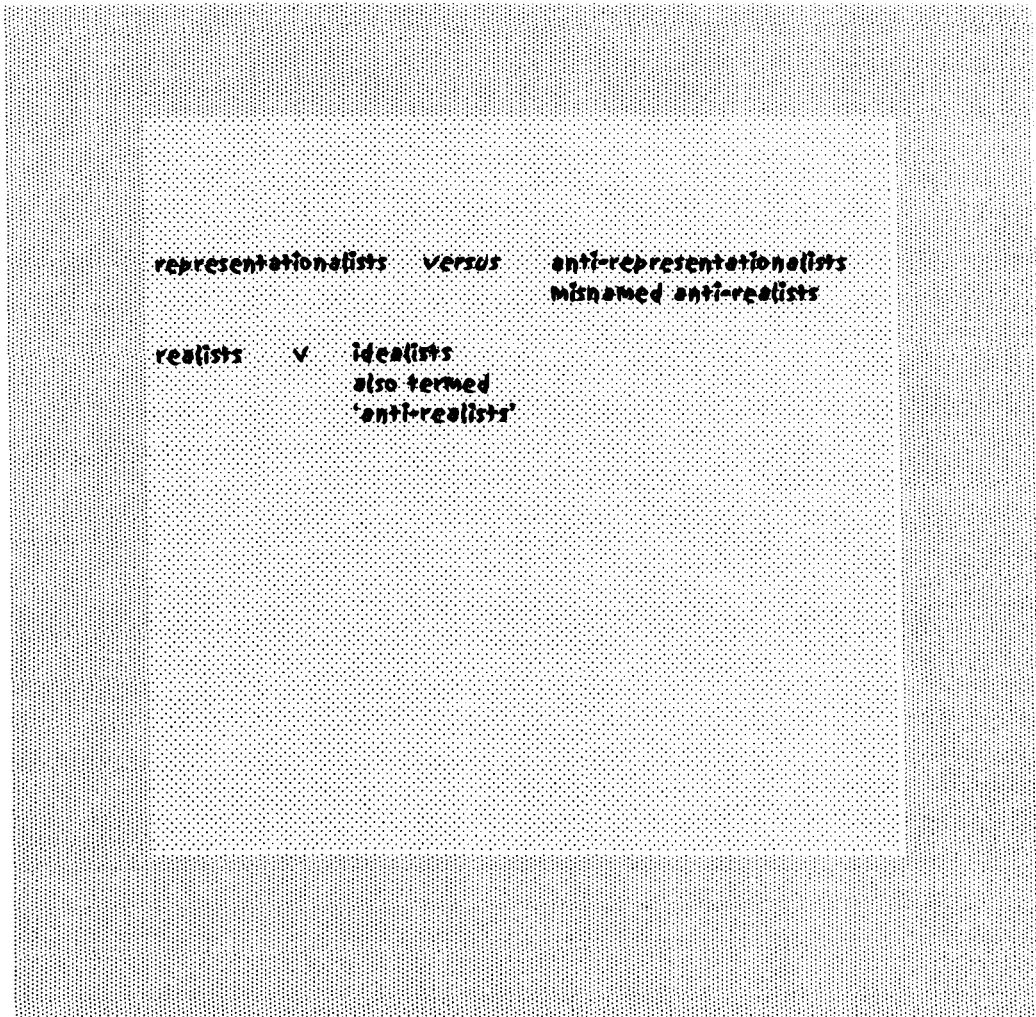
fig. 17 Representationalism as the schism between realism and idealism, versus anti-representationalism

The table was by now arrayed with white squares of serviette, variously inscribed with runic scribblings. Cautiously, I survey the other customers to see what they were making of this scene. The professor recalled my attention:

'Now, the realists and idealists offer "pseudo-explanations" because such accounts suggest "questions which we should have to climb out of our own minds to answer".[27] To quote Rorty more extensively:

"there is no independent test of the accuracy of correspondence... - semantical

notions which relate language to nonlanguage - are internal to our overall view of the world. The representationalists' attempt to explain the success of astrophysics and the failure of astrology is bound to be merely an empty compliment unless we can attain a God's-eye standpoint - one which has somehow broken out of our language and our beliefs and tested them against something known without their aid".[28]

Impressed at this indeed extensive quotation, which was, I found out later, word-perfect, I felt the need to muster some criticality:

'But as far as I can see, pragmatism only tells us what *not* to think about representation and truth: that they are not a matter of determinacy; not a matter of reality determining the image or vice versa.'

'Quite so. But in "Representation, social practise, truth" Rorty writes:

"Truth is not the name of a property, and in particular, not the name of a relational property which ties a statement to the world or to a set of semantical rules as followed by an omniscient being",[29]

and then:

"true does not name a word-world relation, but instead is to be analyzed as 'S-assertible.'"[30]

'"S-assertible"?'

'Yes. Philosophers use "S" to signify the subject. So if truth is "S-assertible" it means that truth is what the subject can assert.'

'Good heavens!'

'But it's not a mandate for subjective licence. For Rorty supports the idea in later Wittgenstein that "'meaning is to be explained in terms of what is taken as justifying an utterance'"[31] which is also known as the "'therapeutic'" conception of philosophy'"[32] in which:

"reflection on what a belief is is not 'the analysis of representation.' Rather, it is reflection on how a language-using organism interacts with what is going on in its neighbourhood".[33]

Finally: pragmatism "does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with

reality".[34] To sum up: we can see it as a *teleological* account of truth, rather than an aetiological account which is, of course, what realism and idealism are.'

'Of course.'

I couldn't help this sounding somewhat sarcastic. He hadn't noticed though for he continued:

'What do we make of *The Draughtsman and the Lute* in this context?'

'I have no idea.'
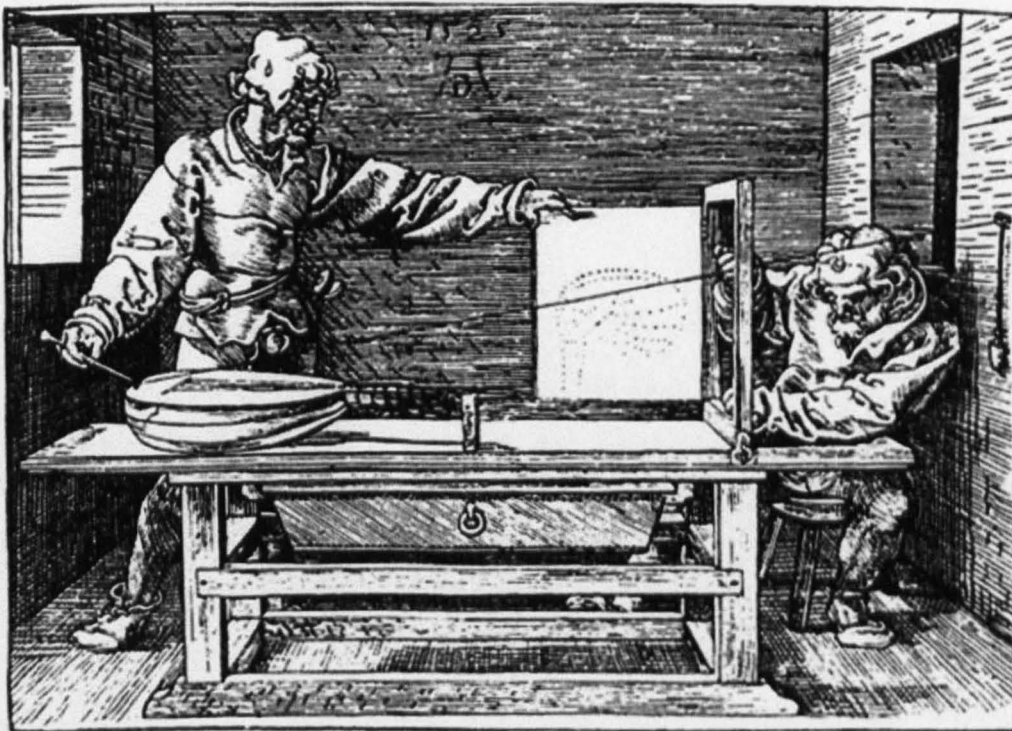
fig. 18 Albrecht Dürer *The Draughtsman and the Lute* 1525

'Well, concentrating on the drawing of the lute, we would have to ask how it helps the draughtsman to cope with his reality - and not just the lute in front of him. We would have to ask why it is useful for him to atomise the lute; to present it from *his* point of view. And we could do a lot of historical research here and argue that he was shoring up the prevailing world view in this way, aside from more individualistic concerns... This is all very cursory and I'll have to leave you to conclude this research, my dear.'

He looked at his watch.

Irritated by his persistence in referring to me as his 'dear' I tried again to flex some intellectual muscle. I seized a copy of *The Guardian*, that was lying on the next table.

fig. 19 Front page of *The Guardian* Tuesday April 8 1997

'And "pragmatism" is the flavour of the month. See here:'

And I tapped my finger under this:
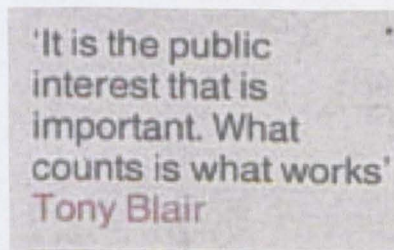
fig. 20 Detail of the front page of *The Guardian* Tuesday April 8 1997

'And just this lunchtime - on *The World at One* - why Nick Clarke was commenting on this speech and he said that "pragmatism replaces ideology". I was struck by it then, because it made me think about Bell's notion of the end of ideology, but now, in the context of what you're saying - '

'That's the media for you. Always trivialising terms. It's not at all the same thing. Blair's "third way" is not the third way that is Rorty's way. In the context of New Labour machinations "pragmatism" has been purged of all connections with the concept of "truth" - which is just what you'd expect from politicians.'

Abruptly, he stood up.

'I must leave - I must get to the Library before it closes.'

He gathered up his books.

'Goodbye. We'll meet again, I expect.'

I was left with a clutter of assorted cups, teapots, saucers, serviettes, and even more assorted thoughts. And the strange gift of pragmatism.

There was little I could do with that gift at the time. Other than to ponder the nature of 'the gift'. And I looked to Derrida for this.

So I turned my attention to the mundane task of checking out my hunch that the artist's experience (of the origin of meaning) was not represented in recent theories (of the origin of meaning). This involved two broad areas of research: research into recent theories of the origin of meaning, which is what Chapters 3 and 4 represent - and research into my experience as an artist of the origin of meaning, which is what Chapter 5 represents. Taken all together, these three chapters form the 'proof' for the assertions that I make later on in Chapter 6 (assertions which were necessarily unknown when I started this research).

But to return to the immediate enquiry into 'recent theory'. In Chapter 1, I wrote: "'recent theory" has been tacitly defined as "postmodernist textual theory", which includes artists' writing'.[34] And yet, it is not quite so simple.

Inscribed in the very term 'postmodernism' is the notion of an outside: modernism. And recalling that 'the outside' - as supplement - contains, for Derrida, 'all that most

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[34] Chapter 1 p. 8

essentially defines that to which [the inside is] presumed to be opposed',[35] it can be proposed that a scrupulous examination of the way in which modernism produces the origin of meaning is 'essential' to - the essence of - postmodernism.[36]

So for reasons of epistemology, (the form of reason), modernism's versions of the origin of meaning are reviewed by Chapter 3, before more 'recent' theory is reviewed in Chapter 4.

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[35] As Victor Burgin summarises Derrida in 'The End of Art Theory' p. 192

[36] Linda Hutcheon captures this convolution well as she writes: '[postmodernism] is usually accompanied by a grand flourish of negativized rhetoric: we hear of discontinuity, disruption, dislocation, decentering, indeterminacy and anti-totalization. What all of these words literally do (by their disavowing prefixes, dis-, de-, in, anti-) is incorporate that which they aim to contest - as does, arguably, the term postmodernism itself' ('Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism' p. 243).

Notes

2. *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* eds. N Bunnin & E P Tsui-James
   p. 39.
3. The Gospel According to St John, Chapter 18; Verse 38; then quoted by
   Francis Bacon in 'On Truth' in *Essays* p. 3
4. Rorty 'Introduction' to *Objectivity, relativism, and truth* pp. 4-5
5. Rorty ibid. pp. 4-5
6. Gayatri Spivak '[...] immense problems are buried in the differences between
   the "same" words [...] representation and re-presentation'. 'Can the
   Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* eds. C
   Nelson & L Grossberg p. 275. But in noting the difference that resides in
   this term as 'the contrast [...] between a proxy and a portrait'(ibid. p. 276)
   Spivak overlooks indeed, buries, the contrast between representation as a
   form of re-presenting, however proximate, and representation as a form of
   bringing into being: 're. presence'.
7. *Dürer And His Times* William Waetzoldt (London; Phaidon; 1950)
8. Martin Jay 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' in *Vision and Visuality* ed. H
   Foster p. 8
9. Gombrich - as the woodcut is named in the index to *Art & Illusion*
10. Martin Jay 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' *passim*
11. Waetzoldt p. 215
12. ibid p. 215
13. Jay quoting St Augustine in 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity' p. 8
14. Jay ibid. p. 7
15. Jay ibid. p. 8
16. Rorty 'Introduction' p. 7
17. Rorty ibid. p. 5
18. Walter Truett Anderson Introduction to Part Four of *the fontana post-
    modernism reader* p. 175
19. Rorty 'Introduction' p. 3
20. Rorty ibid. p. 4
21. Rorty ibid. p. 5
22. Hegel: see Richard Harland on Hegel in *Superstructuralism* pp. 70-75
23. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason* (B) 307-9
24. Brecht quoted by Walter Benjamin in 'A Short History of Photography'
    p. 8
25. Rorty 'Introduction' p. 2
26. Rorty ibid. p. 5
27. Rorty ibid. p. 7
28. Rorty ibid. p. 6
29. Rorty 'Representation, social practise, and truth' in Rorty, R *Objectivity,
    relativism, and truth* p. 154
30. Rorty ibid. p. 153
31. Rorty 'Introduction' p. 1
32. Rorty ibid. p. 3
33. Rorty ibid. p. 10
34. Rorty ibid. p. 1

PLATE CXCV.

ARCHÆOLOGY.
REMAINS OF THE STONE PERIOD.
(The relative proportion to the true size is given under each figure.)

Polished Flint Wedge
⅔

Granite Wedge or Axe
⅜

Granite Wedge or Hammer
⅔

Flint Wedge
⅔

Flint Chisels
⅔

Stone used to polish Flint Weapons
⅔

Bone Chisel
½

Elkhorn Chisel
½

Stone Axe
⅔

Stone Axe
⅔

Stone Axe
½

Axe of Whalebone
½

Stone Axe
⅔

Axe of Deer Horn
⅔

Circular edged Flint Knife
½

Saw edged Flint Knife
½

Flint flake Knife
⅔

Crescent shaped Flint Knife
⅔

Flint Arrow heads
¾

Harpoon head of Flint

Pin of Bone
¾

Pin of Bone
½

Bone Comb
⅔

Flint Arrow head set in Bone
¾

Amber Bead
½

Amber Necklace
¾

Amber Bead
¾

Stone Axe
½

Stone Axe
½

Earthern Pot
⅔

Lance or Spear heads of Flint
¾

Flint Knives
¾

Eng.d by Thos Dick.

Modernism and the origin of meaning in visual art

The meanings of 'modernism'

Recalling that, for Derrida, the sign is simultaneously an essence (it is 'never an event';[1] it is 'iterable'[2]) *and* a singularity ('different each time'[3]), it is possible to trace the meanings of 'modernism' as it is deferred.

Modernism as a temporality

There is, in the first place, the etymology of 'modernism' though this beginning in another language is not a 'simple origin'.[4] Etymology gives modern as 'just now' - a shifter or a part of speech which is formally unfixed in its reference. But with modernism - as the noun associated with and derived from this adjective - this promiscuity is curtailed, as 'the now' is restricted to a certain present. 'All historical epochs are modern to themselves, but not all live their experience in this ideological mode'; 'modernism lives its history as peculiarly, insistently present'.[5] So this sign of a relation to time (the term 'modernism') is purloined to make a sign for an epoch. 'Just now' becomes just now; or rather 'just then', since it is generally agreed that modernism is (now) over.[6]

Following Raymond Williams, it is thus possible to ask: 'When was Modernism?' As his answer notes, this is also a question concerning the history of a *word*:

'"Modernism" as a title for a whole cultural movement and moment has... been retrospective as a general term since the 1950s thereby stranding the dominant version of "modern" or even "absolute modern" between, say, 1890 and 1940.'[7]

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[1] *Speech and Phenomena* p. 50

[2] 'Signature Event Context' p. 96

[3] *Speech and Phenomena* p. 50

[4] *Of Grammatology* p. 74

[5] Terry Eagleton 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism' in *art in modern culture* eds. F Frascina & J Harris p. 95

[6] Note how Habermas contests its completion in 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project' in *Art in Theory* pp. 1000-1008

[7] Raymond Williams 'When Was Modernism?' in *Art and Theory* (p. 1116). Barry Smart maps some of these responses, along with a history of uses of the term, in his essay 'Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present' *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* ed. B S Turner pp. 18-20

In defining the epoch of modernism, Williams admittedly undoes the differential meaning of 'modernism' and 'modern'. But in doing both, he also usefully makes another definitional point: 'modernism' is a 'cultural movement' and it conventionally accrues this charge as it is *not* its cognate noun - 'modernity'.

Modernism is not modernity

'Modernity was a form of experience, an awareness of change and of adaptation to change. But it was also a form of effect on the person: a character these changes and adaptations gave one. It was, so to speak, both a social and inner experience. The condition of modernity exists in a shifting relationship with Modernism: the deliberate reflection upon and distillation of - in a word the *representation* of - that inchoate experience of the new'.[8]

As a mode of representation, 'modernism' has a two-fold relationship to visual art.

Modernism as the art and the art theory of modernity

On the one hand, in the context of visual art, 'modernism' is the *art* which is associated with modernity, and on the other hand, it is the *writing* (of the time of modernism) *about art*. In the second case this writing about art, which will be referred to as 'theory',[9] is more and less concerned with visual modernism.[10] It is 'modernism' in this latter sense, as modernist *art theory*, which is reviewed here because this thesis is exploring the way in which the origin of meaning is represented in *the writing* that is recent theory.[11]

When is modernism as art theory?

Then and now. It occurred *then*, at the time of modernism, but it is surveyed

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[8] Harrison & Wood 'The Idea of the Modern World' Introduction to Part II of *Art in Theory* p. 126
[9] On the basis that, as Victor Burgin notes, 'criticism [which 'conceals, or is blind to, its own theoretical bias' nevertheless] involves theoretical presuppositions.' 'The End of Art Theory' p. 141
[10] Greenberg applies his notion of 'modernism' to the Old Masters ('Modernist Painting' pp. 6-7)
[11] That modernism-as-art reflexively engages with its origin is not at issue here, though a topic worth pursuing, however much the 'issue' of that topic is undecided: how does Morris Louis' *Alpha-Pi* (1960) - below - bear witness to its origins? What is the sign of 'origin' in painting?

fig. 22 Alpha-Pi

now. It is not the same thing in each instance. The difference (that is only one of many) may be regarded as the difference between immanent and external perspectives. And modernism 'then' may be less available than modernism 'now' appears to be. Yet now there are several ways in which it seems to appear. There is 'modernism' which attempts to be as close as possible to what it was historically, and there is 'modernism' as it is consciously inflected by postmodernism. Here, the fiction of the former is preferred. In the first place, modernism as the supplementary logic of postmodernism is essential; and in the second place, it would be impossible to access postmodernism's modernism prior to pursuing this enquiry as a basis for an explanation of postmodernism...

Modernism's modernism

From here, modernist art-theory proposes a number of grand narratives about modernism. Of these the most insistent is that which engages the notion of the new (which Harrison and Wood attribute to the 'inchoate experience of the new'). Not just conceptually, but as a sort of rhyme, the 'new' is of the 'now'. Thus, writing on modernism, Harold Rosenberg contends '[e]xactly one hundred years have passed since Baudelaire invited fugitives from the too-small world of memory to come aboard for his voyage in search of the new'.[12]

Yet in a standard collection of modernist art-theory - Frascina and Harrison's *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* - a very different notion of what art, and modernist art especially, can be, emerges. (Note that the title shifts the meaning of 'modernism' yet again; here, it designates 'the writing of modernism', as a double genitive, in contradistinction to the art of the period, as 'modern art'.[13]) The 'standard' status of this text is claimed by the editors who write:

'What we have attempted to do is to select some vivid and typical examples of Modernist criticism at different stages of its development [...] and also of types of art theory and criticism which stand outside this principal current, either because they derive from consciously opposed points of view [...] or because they represent the interests of movements outside the modernist mainstream [...] or by virtue of their roots in other methods and disciplines'.[14]

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[12] 'The Tradition of the New' p. 11
[13] As the editors explain in their Introduction: '[i]n giving this book the title of *Modern Art and Modernism* we mean to draw attention to the relationship between the art of the modern period and the forms of criticism which have been developed to interpret and explain it.' (p. 1)
[14] *Modern Art and Modernism* p. 1

Such is the collection's typology which follows from the editors' decision to take 'modernism' as a double genitive to designate the writing *about* modern art, and modernism as simply writing as its organising principle, and which notably incorporates *post*modernist critiques of 'modern art' (which thus lie outside *this chapter's* typology of 'modernism').[15] However, it is not the *structuring* typology of *Modern Art and Modernism*, which is rather organised around a typology of modernism as three types of art theory: Art as Abstraction; Art as Expression(ism); and Art and Society.[16] And to complicate the situation further, these structuring categories, which comprise the bulk of the anthology (Sections Three to Five), are prefaced by two other sections (Sections One and Two): 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' and 'The Development of Modernism', which in turn, are preceded by two 'Introductory texts'. Serving as conceptual, lexical and evolutionary 'background', these sections nevertheless covertly propose two further types of art-theory: art as realism, and art as form, or formalism.

Given that Frascina and Harrison's anthology of modernism so clearly inscribes modernism in terms of a typology of art theory, it offers a useful opportunity to inspect the relationship between a morphology of art (what is it, however it is theorised) and the theory of its origins via the very writing inspected by this thesis, which was not the case when that relationship was introduced as an issue in Chapter 1 (and related to diverse texts on Van Gogh). For this task, it is necessary to examine, briefly, Frascina and Harrison's art-theoretical categories, in order to approve their applications to the texts of the anthology.

Art as Abstraction (or 'a small one with a stripe down the middle'[17])

Deriving from the Latin for 'to draw away, or from or off', 'abstraction' names a theory of art as the 'drawing off' refers to figurative depiction. And as it is a noun of process, 'abstraction' includes art with some figurative traits, and art

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[15] These can be identified as the two articles by T J Clark, and the one by Fred Orton & Griselda Pollock - which all adopt a quasi-Foucauldian perspective. Eunice Lipton's essay is simply not temporally modern in being written, like the rest, after 1970. The rest of the anthology of course includes some essays which are not strictly *art* theory, having 'their roots in other methods and disciplines'. They are included in this analysis by virtue of their modernism.

[16] These are the categories that Victor Burgin uses to narrate the art theory of the last two millennia ('The End of Art Theory' - see pp.144-163). They are, however, not the same in their ambition: the first two theorise types of art; the last all art. However, as Frascina & Harrison contend that '[t]here is considerable overlap between [headings]' so pointing out an aspect of any taxonomic system's tyranny; which includes the way in which it forces objects into one box, rather than another contra fuzzy logic and the insights of deconstruction.

[17] Donald Judd on Barnett Newman *Modern Art and Modernism* p. 129

which has rejected those entirely.[18]

Art as Expressionism

Jacques Aumont observes: 'Expressionism can be characterised by three basic features': *'The refusal of imitation'* ('The Expressionist refusal of representation [imitation] is not negative in nature, but a desire to go further, to let the image reach a representation of the invisible, the ineffable, the transcendent');[19] *'The exacerbation of subjectivity'*, and *'The importance attached to materials'*. ('Expressionism is the art of applied contrasts, of the broken and tilted line, of pure colour thrown onto the canvas in defiance of naturalism.')[20] What this glancing definition does not explicitly provide for is a sense that what is pressed out (as the term's etymology 'derives from pressing, forcing something out, just as one presses out the juice from an orange'),[21] is habitually, the self, or the subject.

But just as the term 'Expressionism' includes the word and notion of 'expression', so, Modern Art and Modernism includes one essay which engages rather with the theory that *all* art - not just some art - is expressive which is known as the theory of 'expression'. (This essay is 'Expression and Communication' by Gombrich, which makes Frascina and Harrison's deployment of the term 'Expression*ism*' unusual, as it signifies a theory of art beyond a type of art.)

In researching around Sheldon Cheney's article on this subject - which is however, titled 'Abstraction and Mysticism' (and is included in Modern Art and Modernism), I purchased a second-hand copy of his Primer of Modern Art in an Oxfam Bookshop. Between the title and the Contents pages, I found a few folded sheets of paper. They comprised a story of sorts, rather badly typed. There was no indication of author nor was any other sort of provenance suggested. Since the story is related to the issues of this project, and this specific section, I reproduce it here (fig. 23) - literally - for its presentation challenges the concerns of the story with a certain irony.

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[18] In *Modern Art and Modernism*, Bertolt Brecht and Hilla Rebay both invoke the term 'non-objective' painting/art to refer, respectively, to these two understandings of 'abstraction' and for Rebay, 'non-objective' art occurs in opposition to abstraction in its first sense.

[19] *The Image* p. 225

[20] Ibid. p. 226

[21] Aumont however notes that 'expression' can denote the pressing out of other things, for instance, form, the viewer, and reality. See *The Image* pp. 211-212

The Perfect Expressor

An ingenious deployment of the latest micro-chip tech-
nology means that the device has a minimal presence.
Indeed if one were to recall any particular aspect of
it, it would have to be the screen. For this is the
point at which the user encounters the Perfect Expressor.

The device was the final work of an almost unknown
inventor and has recently become the property of a multi-
national conglomerate. As such, it has been extensively
marketed and publicised. However, reports of customers'
responses are rare. At the time of writing, it is
thought that only one such account exists, and even
this is 'second-hand' in as much as it is not written by
the customer in question. Nevertheless, in the absence
of any other reports, it has a value that earns it its
presence here. The text contains not a few grammatical
errrors and errors of spelling; these are the original;
they have not been corrected because they seem to lend
the piece a certain unintended eloquence.
***

" Iam not always very good with words, so I apolgies now
if this writing is rough in places. But I had so much
rather it were like this, than otherwise. I have no
desire to improve my expression, or certainly not ifthat
involves the means that my friend pursued, and of which
I now write.

One day, I met my friend as usual in the cafe where we
drank tea, and where we talked about nothing very much
except upon those rare occasions when life seemed to
shed its mundane ekin. But it was not quite as usual
that day, for my friend arrived almost hakf an hour late,
just when I had given him up for lost. He was
perculiarly agitated and emitted phrases incoherently.
I remember this much:

' I've been phoning everywhere- most places are out
of stock - but the advert is so compelling - I have
to have one.'

He thrust a torn sheet of newspaper across to my side of
the table. Clearly, it was not the advertisement that
he desired, (although this was seductive), but an item
that went by the name of 'The Perfect Expressor'.
Now I can scarcely utter these words, but then, I recall
with grim irony, I even mis-read them: I thought my
friend was in search of a coffee machine. If only
that were the case.

The Perfect Expressor was something quite different. It or
its publicists- promised its owner the power of pure self-
expression. The posseessor of this device indulged the
enjoyment of self-reflection: they could say what they
meant without loss of intention. Thus unlike the mass
of people, they might convey themselves as they were to

1

the world without fear of distortion. Or so my friend
said and the advert certainly seemed to confirm this.

The machine was much in demand. So much so, that my
friend had only tracked one down by the time that we
met several weeks later. He entered the café bearing
a carrier bag from a well known department store,in
which, he confessed, was the rather expensive purchase.
We didn't spend long over tea that day, because my
friend was anxious to get home and try out his
acquisition. And he persuaded me to come back with him
since I was doubtful that the desire that had driven
him on this quest could be so easily fulfilled.

It did not take long to assemble the apparatus which
consisted of little more than a wooden frame, two feet
or so square, across which was stretched a curious fabric.
(To this day I have yet to discover what that material
is; with typical hype, the packaging only spoke of its
'magical properties). There was also a small electronic
component,powered by batteries, which tucked neatly
inside the frame and behind the fabric. When the
assemblage was hung on a nail(provided) on my friend's
living room wall, all that could be seen was an e
expressionless screen.

The instructions said that all one had to do to work
the device was to breathe on the canvas from six inches
away. So, standing in front of his Perfect Expressor, my
friend took a deep breath, and exhaled. The device
seemed to absorb his offering. And then little drops of
moisture appeared, which were clear to begin with and then
one by one became spiked with colour, of various hues
and tones. When this process had ended,- as soon as the
palette was ready- the watery beads of colour began to move,
sorting themselves into blocks, or mixing to make new
hues and shades. So transfixed was I xx and my friend
by this automatised work that we failed to consider how
this paint adhered to the canvas against all laws of
gravity.

After a while the flux of colours began to diminish, and
an image started to emerge. It was not at all hard to
decipher, and somehow, Iknew that I could see whatt my
friend was thinking before he confided his thoughts to
me, by way of a vindication. The image could not have
been more precise, and at that point in time, I am sure
our elation was equal. Nevertheless, he was restless
where I was merely amused, and he stood in front of the
Perfect Expressor again, this time with more concentration
and repeated the process. At this second request, the
machine seemed to shudder, a gesture I took to accompany

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the task that was now in progress; erasing the image.
As the droplets had first gained their colour, so they
now lost it, and just as the colour was leached from
the canvas, so then was the colourless medium.

We passed the best part of the evening filling and
wiping the canvas; orperhaps I should say that my
friend was the artist and I his spectator,for something
restrained me from taking his place in what then,
seemed like a slightly peculiar parlour game. Then, I
could not articulate what held me back. It is true my
friends revelations grew more and more risky and more
risque, in fact as the evening progressed, but that is
in the nature of evenings. Yet as much as I thought I
knew my friend, I wasincreasingly surprised by his
confessions; not because I felt them to be ontof
charecter, but rather because I thought it was not in
his charecter to expose so much of it.

Despite - or dare I say because of - the entrertainment,
I dozed off. Iwoke to find my friend in convulsions on
the floor, and gasping for air. I knew then that one
thing had been disturbing me, and which I couldn't put
my finger on was his increasing breathlessness which I
had taken as a sign of excitement.

I phoned for an ambulance. And then I saw the image.
I knew it was as perfect as it was terrible. Here
was a portraitx complete portrait of my friend,
which left no aspect of his life, past, present or
future, undescribed. Every detail of his being was
expressed, just as the air had been so thoroughly
drawn out of his lungs. I knew then, too, that every
attemptat self expression that my friend had made so
far with the Expressor was a travesty of this, its
real function; for little intimations of the self do
not amount to self-expression; the self that chooses
to show, the self that intimates, remains unrevealed.

My friend was dea d of course. The autopsy revealed
that he had died from a severe asthma attack, which
might not have proved fatal had I kept awake. I
wish I thought that were the case; my private post
-mortem implicates the Perfect Expressor, although
whether my friend died from the physical exertions
that the machine demanded, or the psychic distress
they effected, I cannot decide. Few share my opinions,

and many argue that I am simply favouring a resolution
which deminishes my responsibility and attendant guilt.
It is not the desire to ease my anguish that I put
this story into public circulation: little can reduce
that, for my friend is dead. It is rather in the hope
that I may save the public from the horribly imperfect
exactions of the Perfect Expressor.

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This account should not be allowed to have the last word, not simply because the writer is anonymous, which scarcely lends it to unquestionable authority, but also because ther are circumstances which bear upon aspects of the representation. Analysis has established that the 'friend' died on an evening of severe air pollution in the city where this narrative takes place. Although government statistics deny this, ths may be judged to be so on the basis of the number of people admitted to hospital with respiratory conditions on that night. Therefore, there is every reason to suppose that the death in question had nothing to do with the Perfect Expressor, which continues to enjoy record sales around the globe. It is unfortunate that the only account that we have, asy yet, should involve these extraneous circumstances. It seems certain that as the product continues to establish itself on the market, accounts of a very different tenor will be plentiful. Indeed, they may even be assisted by the machine itself."

Art and Society

Theorising art as a relation to society, all manners of relationship are accommodated here, including the express rejection of the social as found in 'art for art's sake', and Hilla Rebay's notion of non-objective art.[22] As Peter Bürger notes in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, even these rejections are socially determined, and are peculiarly expressive of the role of art in bourgeois society.[23]

Art as Realism

Conventionally, 'realism' refers to the miming of reality; what is meant by that is conventionally disputed. So as Chapter 2 proposed, realism may include: 'naturalism' as that art which engages with reality as the surface of the world (phenomenalism); art which engages with reality as the essence of things (noumenalism) and art which engages with the subject's experience of the world (empiricism).

Art as Formalism

Formalism focuses upon the forms of a work of art, over and above its content. It also signifies a preference for art which notes this emphasis thus leading it to privilege Abstraction.[24] The distinction between the two is fraught, and is the subject of extensive debate. Is Yves Klein's *I KB 79* (fig. 24) pure form or replete with content? Or even both at once?[25] On formalism, Erwin Panofsky writes:

'When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat, what I see from a *formal* point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of colour, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an *object* (gentleman), and the change of detail as an *event* (hat-removing), I have already overstepped the limits of purely *formal* perception

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[22] see 'The Beauty of Non-Objectivity' in *Modern Art and Modernism*

[23] see *Theory of the Avant-Garde* p. 48

[24] Greenberg writes: '[i]t is not in principle that Modernist painting [formalist painting] in its latest phase has abandoned the representation of recognizable objects. What it has abandoned in principle is the representation of the kind of space that recognizable, three-dimensional objects can inhabit.' 'Modernist Painting' in *Modern Art and Modernism* eds. Frascina & Harrison p. 6

[25] fig. 24

and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning.'[26]

This elaborates the distinction which was made in Chapter 1 between form and *content*.

Having now concluded this resumé of the categories of modernist art theory, the question of how the texts in *Modern Art and Modernism* attend to the origin of *meaning* remains. When meaning is only one of the concerns of art-theory it is not surprising that not all the texts discuss that. For this reason, the following examination will pursue a parallel concern with the origin of art per se, and will consider whether the latter might propose a notion of the former. So in this way, the origin of meaning might be explored as the out-of-focus content of these texts.

Amidst all this concern with typologies and categories of knowledge it has occurred to me that the organising device here should be that archetypal modernist motif - the grid - at least as it is for some accounts of modernism. And here I can hardly write another word which is not a name or does not name by inference (via conceptual and stylistic imitation): Rosalind Krauss. For as she writes: modernism seeks 'the place where one looks for the very foundations of formalization itself. It finds it in the grid's generalization of order, in its condition as infinitely extensible generatrix of formal possibility.'[27]

This statement is, of course, implicated in the grid of Krauss's own concerns which have formerly included the grid as the figure in the foreground of modernism. In 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde', the grid becomes the deconstructive emblem of modernism's unoriginality: that entity which gives onto 'a strange new perspective' with which 'we look back on the modernist origin and watch it splintering into endless repetition'.[28] In the sense that the grid signifies in two very different ways - as the sign of immanent modernism, and as a deconstructive emblem - it thus serves the double quest of this analysis which, on the one hand, seeks to offer 'modernism' in its own terms, and on the other hand, presenting multifarious accounts of it, questions those accounts' claims to sole authority, and thus pursues a deconstructive version of the topic. Indeed, it is here that this chapter is only truly deconstructive: as it watches 'modernism' splinter into endless iteration through the grid's structure of plurality,[29] which has not happened hitherto. For until now, while various significations of the term have been pursued, these have tended towards a narrowing of focus, as at

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[26] *Studies In Iconology* p. 3
[27] *The Optical Unconscious* p. 191
[28] 'The Originality of the Avant-Garde' p. 170
[29] Note, however, that for individual entries, the grid insists upon the logic of the essence, and of closure; the metaphysics of the précis.

definitional junctures all but one signification has been excluded.[30] And moreover, the surviving definition has led to yet another meaning with a narrower focus. Thus this chapter treats 'modernism' as a double type of force field; one which repulses all but a small compass of signification which then is eclectic in its attractions. As these are ordered by the grid, its rules must be elaborated.

The rules for the grid

The axes: the vertical dimension (the column headed 'modernism'): this represents the articles in *Modern Art and Modernism* that are selected here to signify 'modernism'.

The horizontal axis represents the topics for discussion.

Thus the *first column* is a basic filter - seeking every text's relation to the topic under scrutiny. *The second column* is sufficiently explained by its title. *The third column* takes the expanded field of *Modern Art and Modernism's (MA&M's)* types of modernism ('Abstraction' 'Expressionism'; 'Art and Society'; 'Realism', and 'Formalism') to 'grid' both those texts which are not typologised by *Modern Art and Modernism* and those texts which are. In the latter case, this either works to endorse Frascina and Harrison's ascription of categories, or to contest it, while choosing an alternative from the same (expanded) typology. For ease of perception, the categories have been colour coded. Where the category is not given by the editors, this is prefixed by 'proposed as'. Diagonal stripes register a category in its negative condition.

The fourth column, like the second, is sufficiently explained by its title.

The fifth column, as the third, is a visual and verbal summary of the one before and likewise has a 'colour key' for ease of perception. Categories of origin are extrapolated from the typology of modernism that the third column represents. Here there are two levels of attribution: those explicitly provided by the text's author (marked as 'given') and those provided by me, the reader (marked as 'proposed') as an attribution not acknowledged, but proposed by the text. A splitting of categories of origin is explained either as the writer attributes the origins in that way, or it marks the presence of an ethical imperative in their text, in conjunction with a recognition of how things *are* (otherwise).

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[30] Here, I have adopted a ruse from Derrida in *The Truth in Painting*. Calling a halt to the infinite signification of his title, he isolates four readings 'supposing *concesso non dato*, that the unity of each one remains unbroachable'. (p. 5)

The sixth column offers a layer of reflection on these findings which, among other things, relates the analyses to contingent enquiries pursued by this thesis, and/or puts those analyses into a critical context.

Citations from the essays are marked by quotation marks. Page numbers are not given on the basis that this would be over-cumbersome and that the essays are often very short and so quotes are easily accessed.

schematic representation of some topics in modernism for the

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Clement Greenberg 'Modernist Painting' 1965	no	In this canonical text, 'meaning' is not mentioned once. Rather, modernist art is discussed as it implements a process of 'self-criticism', which, for Greenberg, entails the identification of 'the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself'. This is 'flatness' which alone is 'unique and exclusive to [pictorial] art'. So in posing the question of what modernism is (as art) and of what art is, Greenberg produces a formalist response.	not given by *MA&M* appears in the section 'Introductory Texts' proposed as: formalism
Sir Karl Popper 'Historical Interpretation' 1957	no	This article is not about art but *history* (therefore a meta-text on *art*-history by implication). Popper rejects two related notions: 1) 'historicism' as the idea of '"periods"'; 'of the "spirit" or "style" of an age', of 'movements which captivate the minds of individuals and which surge on like a flood, driving rather than being driven, by individual men'. 2) the idea that 'history' is *not* interpretation (historicism's view of it).	not given by *MA&M* appears in the section 'Introductory Texts' proposed as: anti-formalism
Charles Baudelaire 'The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life' 1846	no	At one remove from 'meaning', Baudelaire discusses here the 'subjects' of modern painting, contending that, extending the classical tradition, there is an 'epic side of modern life': 'thousands of floating, existences - criminals and kept women'. Also, '[t]he *nude* [...] in bed [...] or in the bath, or in the anatomy theatre.' Surely, Baudelaire is writing ironically.	not given by *MA&M* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' proposed as: Art and Society
Charles Baudelaire 'The Salon of 1859: The Modern Public and Photography' 1859	no	Lambasting the 'great industrial madness' of photography, along with the 'mob's' desire for photographic realism, this article would seem to establish the irony of the previous one. Here, Baudelaire contends 'the Beautiful is *always* wonderful' (full of wonder) whereas, 'it would be absurd to suppose that what is wonderful [i.e. photography] is *always* beautiful.'	not given by *MA&M* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' proposed as: mimesis

purposes of exploring modernism's aetiologies of meaning

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
Modernist art originates (art's) self-critique. This 'grows out of but is not the same thing as the criticism of the Enlightenment', inaugurated by Kant. This, in turn, is symptomatic of the way in which 'Western civilization [...] question[s] its own foundations'. Yet, Greenberg also writes: 'The immediate aims of Modernist artists remain individual before anything else' - flagging the notion of self-expression?	given as: art's self-critique i.e. a type of formalism / proposed as: (self)-expression i.e. the origin is 'the self'	Commentary on Greenberg abounds. Here, suffice to say that the context which Greenberg fails to supply for the overall process of self-criticism is the division of labour under Capitalism.
When applied to art, Popper's criticisms (and attendant recommendations) refute a formalist analysis of art-history; and urge that the 'point of view' of art-history is enunciated. So this is a prescription for art-history's origins - even by negation.	given as: against form	The citation of this essay and location at this point in *MA&M* seems to be provocative: Greenberg's account of modernism is retrospectively regarded as formalist, urging as it does, the notion of a 'law' of (art-)history; a principle of evolution - which may extend to art itself (as that is prescribed as pure form).
Arguing against anachronistic classicism, Baudelaire proposes that 'Modern Life' and, in particular, the city, should be the source of art. However, the 'dogma of the studios' and the 'lazy' painter prevails.	given as: form as art tends to be: tradition; outworn habits / given as: should be social life	Note that T J Clark writes (in 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865') and commenting on a critic's recourse to Baudelaire in discussing Manet's painting: 'The discovery of Baudelaire does not stabilise meaning'. Baudelaire's position is shifting, in the manner of the life of the modern city as he sees it.
True art originates in Beauty and Wonder; in dreams and marvelling. Photography produces wonder by 'unworthy tricks'.	given as: should be Beauty, Truth etc. conceived as a quasi-Platonic realism / given as: the public's desire	This text inaugurates the reading of photography as modernism's constitutive other; that which High Art will react against. Greenberg's logic happily enshrines this dismissive designation of photography.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Charles Baudelaire 'The Painter of Modern Life' 1863	no	A complex essay not the least as Baudelaire sees Constantin Guys - 'the Painter of Modern Life' personified - as dealing with the essence of 'modernity', defined as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent'. As with the 1846 text, art is an issue of subject-matter, for Baudelaire, and the relative aesthetic merits of a range of different subjects.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' / proposed as: realism
Emile Zola 'Edouard Manet' 1867	no	Zola's argument is simple: Manet's work is made as a subjective response to objective Nature (the painter's visible environment). 'Every great artist who comes to the fore gives us a new and personal vision of Nature. Here "reality" is the fixed element, and it is the differences in outlook of the artists which has given to works of art their individual characteristics. For me, it is the different outlooks, the constantly changing viewpoints, that give works of art their tremendous human interest.' Thus the final, viewed subject of the work of art is identical to its origins.	not given by *MA&M*: appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' / proposed as: realism / proposed as: expressionism
Stéphane Mallarmé 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' 1876	yes	Mallarmé's analysis of Manet refers to Zola's, adopting the theoretical principle of 'Naturalism': 'the quest, not merely of that reality which impresses itself in its abstract form on all, but of that absolute and important sentiment which Nature herself impresses on those who have voluntarily abandoned convention-alism.' But Mallarmé's own account of Manet only sees this first principle of Naturalism as an issue for the artist's work. Manet is preoccupied with the 'search after truth, peculiar to modern artists, which enables them to see Nature and to reproduce her, such as she appears to just and pure eyes'. Mallarmé complicates this designation as he proclaims (as if he were Manet): 'I have taken from [Nature] only that which properly belongs to my art, an original and exact perception'. Mimesis is tinged with Greenbergian formalism.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism' / proposed as: realism re. Nature / proposed also as: formalism

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representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As if Guys had heeded Baudelaire's prescriptions in 1846, his work appears to Baudelaire to originate in the subjects of modernity.	given as: the social	If Guys *has* needed Baudelaire's prescriptions, then his work originates additionally - or firstly - in that essay, which was, perhaps, ironic.
Since Zola's essay is concerned, to a large extent, with the production of Manet's work, see preceding two columns.	given as: Nature given as: the self	Having outlined his theory of (Manet's) art, Zola sees his next task to be 'establishing the [personal] language and the characters' of Manet's work. In order to do this, he has to assume an unmediated, impersonal access to Nature - something which his emphasis upon the 'personal' character of 'vision' would seem to render problematic. Such is one of several complications that the essay overlooks to its basic thesis.
Meaning is addressed as an overt issue only intermittently. Mallarmé writes 'it was evident that the preacher [Manet] had a meaning' and he mentions too, the 'meaning' that the 'principles' of Manet's work 'inculcated'. However, any more precise engagement with the work, as imitations of nature, fails to materialise, including the intimation of an origin for Manet's meanings.	given as: Nature given as: form	In terms of the theoretical self-understanding of 'modernism', this article would seem to represent a retreat from Zola's, in its failure to pursue his engagement with subjective Nature (human and non-human Nature as subjective).

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
J K Huysmans '"L'Exposition des Indépendants" in 1880' 1883	yes	This is another text about 'the painter of modern life', and Huysmans nominates Dégas. Dégas receives this accolade for attending to 'Washerwomen in their shops, dancers at rehearsals, café-concert singers, theatres, race-horses, portraits' - modern life as so many subjects, via an 'instrument that was both fine and expansive, flexible and firm'. And yet for all his apparently mimetic achievements, Dégas inaugurates 'a totally new artistic flavour'. Huysmans is confused; the more so as he writes: 'it is difficult to convey [...] even the vaguest idea of what M. Dégas' paintings are about.'	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism'
			proposed as: realism
			also: expressionism
Maurice Denis 'From Gauguin and Van Gogh to Classicism' 1909	yes	A mapping of the complex history of avant-garde art 1890-1909, and a theory of the Classicism in the art at the time of writing. Denis notes: 'We replaced the idea of "nature seen through temperament" [see Zola on Manet] with the theory of equivalence and of the symbol'. But then, '[f]rom the objective point of view, the decorative, aesthetic and rational composition, overlooked by the Impressionists' became 'the necessary corrective to the theory of equivalents'. So art is 'the visual sensation [...] of nature' via 'plastic equivalents capable of reproducing those emotions or states of mind' which also defer to 'harmonious forms and colours'.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism'
			proposed as realism
			also: expressionism
Maurice Denis 'Cézanne' 1910	yes	Published prior to the last article, this prefigures many of the notions above as '[t]he painting of Cézanne is literally the essential art': 'At a period when the artist's sensibility was considered [...] to be the sole motive of a work of art' Cézanne '*composed* his *natures-mortes*, varying intentionally the lines and masses, disposing his draperies according to premeditated rhythms [...] all this without losing anything of the essential *motive*' [sensibility].	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'Modern Life, Modernité and Modernism'
			proposed as: formalism
			also: realism
			also: expressionism

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
This account of Dégas ends with the declaration that '[t]he whole of modern life is still to be studied'. So Huysmans describes the origin of Dégas' work in contemporary experience, and prescribes for the origin of more art via the same terrain. But as Dégas' work does exhibit a 'totally new artistic flavour' there is a sense that it originates in Dégas' uniqueness as 'a painter who derived from and resembled no other' - the unique self?	given as: the self given as: the social	An identification of the marginal as true; the city, the ephemeral etc. as 'modern'.
Alluding to objective and subjective deformation as an 'expressive synthesis,' Denis begs the question: what does it express? Certainly the artist's 'feelings or states of mind' but logically, the 'object arranged for the pleasure of the eye' as well? And if so, the pleasure of the (viewer's) eye is then originary. In all this, the agency of symbol - the plastic equivalent of feeling or sensation - is overlooked, or rendered neutral.	proposed as: form given as: nature given as: the self	This is the first of several texts to articulate a notion of the symbol (and by extension form/language) as vital to expression but magically invisible. (See also Fry on this.) So the symbol does not figure in the aetiology of art.
Describing Cézanne's work, Denis sees 'sensibility' as originary: 'the essential *motive*' over and above 'style', and this puts it very near to that art he seems to scorn. Writing more generally on art, he notes '[painting] is bound to be an art of concrete beauty'; the equivocation is dramatic. When 'expression' of sensation is at stake, 'meaning' can be read off as Cézanne's sensation in front of nature; such is the 'law' of Expression.	given as: form given as: nature given as: the self	Denis' formalism is a long way from Greenberg's. Denis sees the 'decorative', inventive, abstract aspect of the art-work as fulfilling a demand or desire for aesthetic pleasure.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Clive Bell 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis' 1914	no	Bell asks the question 'what is art?' and answers: 'significant form'; that whereby 'lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions.' This hypothesis is not so far from Denis' analysis of Post-Impressionist 'Classicism' as the expression of emotion through form, but what is striking and moreover, crucial about Bell's notion is its teleological inflection: the way in which it looks to art as an *affective* entity.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' — proposed as: expressionism
Clive Bell 'The Debt to Cézanne' 1931	no	Cézanne again functions as an instance for theory. Except that here, Bell's own theory has, however, changed in one critical respect. Form now expresses the artist's emotions; it is less certainly (just) the end of art. Moreover, Cézanne is additionally the agent of 'reality' as his work discovers 'a sublime architecture haunted by that Universal which informs every Particular.' This Platonism reappears at the end of the essay as Bell sees Cézanne concerned with 'the essential reality'. Overall, as a theory of art, this looks back to Zola's account of Manet's subjective and objective treatment of external reality.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' — proposed as: realism — proposed also as: expressionism
Roger Fry 'An Essay in Aesthetics' 1909	no	Like Bell, Fry is asking, 'what is art?' And he supplies several definitions, as an aggregate. 1) ontologically, it is a 'mirror' (imitation) and as such, art is an 'expression and a stimulus of [...] imaginative life, which is separated from' 'responsive action.' 2) In this way, it serves to aid 'greater clearness' of 'perception' of life. 3) Morally, it is justified as it leads 'to an existence more real'.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' — proposed as: form — also: expressionism — also: the social
Roger Fry 'The French Post-Impressionists' 1912	no	Post-Impressionism subordinates illusion for 'the direct expression of feeling'. This is ambiguously the artist's and/or 'the sensibilities of the modern outlook'. Expression is achieved as the artist finds a formal 'equivalent for life'.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism'

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
In a teleological account of art, cause can only be accounted for by purpose; the two are elided, or almost so. When art's function is to stir our aesthetic feelings, its cause is the desire to have those feelings stirred. Thus the cause of origin of art is seen to reside with the viewer.	given as: the self as the viewer via form	Theorised thus, art, for Bell, excludes many objects that are classed as art elsewhere - photographic-style painting such as Frith's *Paddington Station* for example, which *sets the scene* for emotional engagement, rather than provoking emotion by a use of form.
To some extent, the contradiction between art as the expression (via form) of the artist's emotions, and of the Universal, is reconciled by Bell's insistence that this is the emotion that Cézanne 'felt for what he has learnt to see'. On the other hand, Bell also argues that Cézanne's work expresses 'the significance' of form which is yet another origin for art...	given as: nature as landscape - Platonically // given as: the self - the artist via form	There is no sense in which these different points of origin which Bell's text pursues, are actually acknowledged as such. Instead, they function as unhappy synonyms for something unproductively amorphous.
Having invoked the image of the mirror, (hardly an avant-gardist proposition), Bell is tied to the idea of art as mimesis, and art, therefore as originating in 'reality' - which, depending on the literalness of his motif, is *more* or *less* the surface of the world.	given as: nature	This is also a teleological account of art as Fry emphasises art's function; its effect.
Fry argues that Post-Impressionism's 'Classic spirit' involves 'cutting off the practical responses to sensations of ordinary life' in art, which *communicates* a new and otherwise unattainable experience'. (Emphasis added.)	given as: the self via form	As Post-Impressionism communicates original experience, its meaning originates ambiguously in the (artist with the) modern outlook. But 'expressive form' is instrumental too, excluding 'ordinary life'.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Clement Greenberg '"American-Type" Painting'	no	Greenberg's approach here is resolutely aetiological: the causes of Abstract Expressionism, (as he prefers to call 'American-Type' painting) are explored both for the movement as a whole and for individual artists. Prospecting the thesis of 'Modernist Painting,' the origins of AE are understood to be art's self-criticism: its shedding of '*expendable* conventions'. Arguing that '[s]uch problems were not attacked by program [...] but rather run up against simultaneously by a number of young painters', Greenberg explores the (un)-conscious motives of AE's critique.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' proposed as: formalism
Clement Greenberg 'Collage' 1958	no	Greenberg's critical machine is turned to Cubist collage, with predictable results. Collage is construed as a dialectic of 'illusion' and 'the very real flatness of the picture plane' with particular, and approving reference to Picasso and Braque's work in the medium. Typically, what is refused in this analysis of art is something more than 'plastic meaning' (i.e. meaning as form) - semantics, for example.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' proposed as: formalism
Clement Greenberg 'Master Léger' 1954	no	This essay is a sampler for the previous one: Léger is inspected with the tools that are used on Picasso, Braque and Gris. Except that Greenberg also mentions the effect of the 'industrializing world' on Léger's work while stating, '[h]owever, Cubism was more than a response to a certain historical moment'.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' proposed as: formalism
Michael Fried 'Three American Painters' 1965	no	Ostensibly an article on Noland, Olitski and Stella, but rather about Greenberg's formalist account of modernism, which Fried largely shares in noting an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to 'painting itself', it argues that the mark of this is 'the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality'.	not given by *MA&M:* appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism' proposed as: formalism

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
In theory, 'Abstract Expressionism' *as a term* challenges the core of Greenberg's argument - as art is *not* expression for 'modernism' as self-criticism. Yet, as with 'Modernist Painting', intimations of art as self-expression creep into this essay. Pollock, for example, 'is not sure of what he wanted to say'. And curiously Greenberg has a stab at a socio-economic explanation for AE, citing the input of the 'WPA' and the way in which WW2 produced a group of emigré artists, critics, dealers and collectors in the States helping AE to take off.	given as: form - art's self-critique given as: the self - the artist given as: the social - the WPA and the art-system	What is interesting about this commentary on a key moment for Greenbergian art history, is how it does, indeed, pluralise the otherwise singular ambitions of Greenberg's formalist analysis; offering the inside of High Modernism up to not one but two outsides.
As art originates once more, reflexively, 'meaning' is addressed only fleetingly via the reference to the 'plastic meaning' that for Greenberg, is collage. However, this is 'meaning', as the meaning of the act of art; *what art is* purely in its context; not what it is as a text - when the two are at least *analytically* distinct.	given as: form - desired given as: nature - undesired	Again, a deconstructive moment is located at the heart of modernism, as it proposes another meaning for 'meaning' as it is interpreted by this project. Here, 'meaning' is not the 'content' of a work of art, but its significance as form. (See: entry for Bell's essay 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis'.)
Most of this article, which is really a review of a show, - is concerned to explore Léger's art-historical genealogy (viewed from a formalist perspective) as the explanatory context for his work.	given as: form given as: society	Compare, here with Berger's essay on Léger.
At one point in the article, Fried writes: '[o]ne of the stock objections [...] to exclusively stylistic or formal criticism of the art of the past [...] is that it fails to deal with the influence of non-artistic factors upon the art of the time, and as a result is unable to elucidate the full meaning of individual works'; 'meaning' is acknowledged as an issue for analysis of art, and moreover, formalist approaches, before it is promptly dropped.	given as: form - for art and criticism	F also tries to defend G against 2 charges Hilton Kramer makes: 1) that G prefers a formalist account of art history 2) that G uses Marxist ideas of history. While K's accusations needn't be contradictory, F's defence is: on 1) he argues that G has a humanist idea of art history, giving agency to individual artists; on 2) he says that G uses a Hegelian idea of art history - K's 1st charge.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of modernism assigned to text
Herbert Read 'What is Revolutionary Art?' 1935	no	For Read, art is a relation to the Communist Revolution of the proletariat against their oppressors. For this reason, Read contends that art should be abstract, as it is shorn of its 'temporary and accidental qualities' and 'keeps inviolate, until such time as society will once more be ready to make use of them, the universal qualities of art' which for Read is chiefly, '*pure form*'.	not given by *MA&M*: appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism'
			proposed as: realism
Donald Judd 'Barnett Newman' 1964	yes	A hagiography of Barnett Newman's work as it looks towards the 'arbitrary object' (in Greenberg's phrase). Judd rejects the concept of a picture (art as an image of reality) and seems to suggest, instead, that art should be something more akin to reality itself. At the same time, he sees Newman's work as a vehicle for the artist's 'concerns and knowledge' which implies an altogether different model of what art is, or should be (since Newman is exemplary). And in this account, art, by inference, is a form for meaning.	not given by *MA&M*: appears in the section 'The Development of Modernism'
			proposed as: realism
			proposed as: expressionism
Nikolai Tarabukin 'From the Easel to the Machine' 1923	yes	An account of the history of modernism since Manet's first canvases, which seems, at first, to champion '[t]he emancipation of painting from literariness and illusion' on its 'path towards realism' (when '[c]ontemporary aesthetic consciousness has transferred the idea of realism from the subject to the form of a work of art'), but then rounds on this as it is embodied by Constructivism - as 'an unadorned empty form' [a creation deprived of 'all meaning'] 'can never satisfy us'. Instead of Constructivism's attention to the 'professional and technical aspect of painting', Tarabukin would like to see 'objects which are socially justified in form and purpose' - thus critiquing abstraction, around notions of utility and meaning.	appears in the section 'Abstraction'
			proposed as: art and society

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As art has a double nature - 'pure form' and 'temporary and accidental qualities' - its origins are also seen as double - residing thus in art and history. Inasmuch as this essay is prescriptive - it outlines what Revolutionary Art should be - art should originate in 'pure form'.	given as: the social via abstraction	Exactly why 'pure form' serves the true Communist is not entirely clear. It is certainly opposed by Brecht (see 'On Non-Objective Painting' and Tarabukin - see below). Read provides a clue at the end of the essay when he writes: '[...] people imagine that revolutionary art is a kind of folk art, peasant pottery, madrigals and ballads.'
As art *is* a vehicle for Newman's concerns, and therefore, has meaning, the origin of this is, necessarily, the artist. Judd further complicates this model of (what) art (should be) by quoting Newman as he argues: 'we are making [art] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings' so suggesting yet another origin for (Newman's) art (and that of his contemporaries), as distinct from the artist's *thoughts*. For Newman, this origin implies the content of the work, as '[t]he image we produce is the self-evident one of [self] revelation'.	given as: the self	Judd's spare, modular syntax aggregates noun-phrases in the manner of his own 'three-dimensional work' - often making for 'dry reading' to use his own description. There is a question concerning whether it is more fitting to purloin Greenberg's notion of 'the arbitrary object' as a shorthand for what Newman's work is looking to, than Judd's own notion of 'the specific object'; the two terms seem diametrically opposed, but in actual fact, may designate similar entities.
Tarabukin writes of art '[it] has roots not only of a formal character but also of an ideological and social nature'. Thus 'meaning' - or the absence of this - which occurs, for Tarabukin, (with Rodchenko's *5 x 5 = 25*) has a complex of causes.	given as: form given as: society	This is a complicated essay, not only because Tarabukin's 'cause' is not made immediately apparent, by his serpentine argument, but also, in terms of this analysis, because he includes the topic of this exploration in its negative condition: as meaning*lessness*.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Bertold Brecht 'On Non-Objective Painting' c 1935-1939	no	As Tarabukin critiques abstraction on the basis of its non-utilitarian aspect, Brecht does so as it de-politicizes objects, in substituting for their social specificity a reification of 'color and form'. 'The poor man who lacks a kitchen chair does not lack color and form. The wealthy man who has a beautiful old chair does not regard it as something to sit on, but as form and color.' Thus art as 'non-objective painting' is perceived as a relation to the iniquitous status quo. Brecht protests this relation, if only in its specificity - for he wants to preserve the more general notion of socially motivated art - as it serves 'We Communists' rather than the bourgeoisie.	appears in the section: 'Abstraction' proposed as: art and society
Hilla Rebay 'The Beauty of Non-Objectivity' 1937	yes	Writing in the other side of the Atlantic, Rebay writes against both Tarabukin and Brecht in arguing for the value of 'Non-Objective Painting' - which for her means art as a relation to 'absolute forms like circles, squares and triangles' - and *not* abstraction which is 'still inspired by earth'. She does so on the basis that 'Non-objectivity has beauty and spirit combined' and that 'spirit begins where materialism [i.e. object-ness] ends'. In so doing, 'meaning' as an issue for art is jettisoned, as it was for Tarabukin via Rodchenko. Rebay writes: 'Non-objective pictures, being worlds of their own, have no meaning, and represent nothing.'	appears in the section: 'Abstraction'
E H Gombrich 'Illusion and Visual Deadlock' 1961	yes	More about visual language than art per se, this essay argues that the 'reading' of a 'picture' depends upon conventions and that when these are left intact, images are the 'prose' of the visual. With some types of picture (avant-garde art - Gombrich cites Cubism) these assumptions are displaced, producing the 'verse' of the visual. Ultimately, Gombrich seems to propose, that *all* visual language is cultural as opposed to natural.	appears in the section: 'Abstraction' proposed as: formalism

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As Brecht argues from a Marxist point of view, his notion of art is inevitably aetiological; as art is dialectically a superstructural 'product' of the economic base of society.	given as: the social	What is interesting about this analysis is the way in which it prefigures Peter Bürger's argument in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, wherein the autonomy of art in bourgeois society is seen as an aspect of its relations to, or with, that same society. For Bürger, as for Brecht, art's autonomy is socially contextualised, if not quite socially conditioned.
As the negative condition of the subject of this investigation, meaninglessness originates, for Rebay, in the 'creation' of non-objective art. 'Creation' is a key term in her lexicon because she signs up whole-heartedly to the notion of 'the genius' whose 'cosmic power' and 'inner need' results in non-objective painting. So ultimately, art (as meaninglessness) originates in the individual artist and Kandinsky is cited as a good example.	given as: should be abstraction / proposed as: the self	Another example of how modernism as art-theory or writing about ('modern') art gives a key term or concept a range of contradictory charges. Here, 'non-objectivity' ('Abstraction' for others) is charged in a very different way from Tarabukin's reading, yes, but also Read's too.
As much as this is an aetiology of art or the visual, it suggests that the image is a product of the visual code. When meaning is discussed (very much in passing), it is seen as a consequence of effective visual signing. Gombrich writes: 'we look across the signs on the page at the meaning behind them.' 'Meaning' emerges through signs, as if they were transparent.	given as: form	Why is this essay in this anthology?

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Wilhelm Worringer 'Abstraction and Empathy' 1908	yes	As a 'pre-assumption of aesthetic experience', 'the urge to empathy' 'finds its gratification in the beauty of the organic'; 'Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment'. The 'urge to abstraction' on the other hand, 'finds its beauty in the life-denying inorganic'. And Worringer explains: '[w]hereas the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world'; identifying empathy with 'modern man' and Abstraction with 'savage peoples'. Where Worringer prefers the latter, he clearly regards both as expressive.	appears in the section 'Abstraction' proposed as: art and society
Hermann Bahr 'Expressionism' 1916	yes	Like Worringer, Bahr grounds his theory of art (which for him should be Expressionism) on a 'history' of the primitive - which is set up as a model. However, while the sweep of their histories are similar, Bahr contends that 'primeval man' 'escapes from nature into himself'.Thus, as the Impressionist 'rule[s] out every inner response to the outer stimulus' he fails to 'truly become an artist'. The Expressionist corrects this omission and in doing so 'adopt[s] flight from a "civilisation" which is out to devour our souls'. Worringer and Bahr agree in this point only: that 'objective' art is bad.	appears in the section 'Abstraction' proposed as: expressionism
Sheldon Cheney 'Abstraction and Mysticism' 1934	yes	An exploration of 'Expressionism' as an avant garde gesture. Cheney asks 'If depiction [Naturalism and Realism] is dropped for expression, what is it that is expressed?' and answers '[f]orm is not enough if [form is] merely [...] instrumental means'.'Form is revelation [...] of a plastic organism, but through the plastic of something that might be termed universal or cosmic truth, and commonly, of human emotion.'	appears in the section 'Abstraction' proposed as: expressionism

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As art is expressive, it is so as a social act: the gesture of a people. However, as art has to do with empathy (people's objectified self-enjoyment) it both seems to have a strongly individualistic aspect, and to be something that pertains to the viewer as much as the producer. Worringer does not make a distinction. And with the notion of art as abstraction, what is very much conspicuous by its absence is the notion that the origin for this is art's inevitable logic of self-critique.	given as: society	Worringer's construction of contemporary civilised and primitive societies is highly problematic and his celebration of the primitive is merely a symptom rather than negation of his orientalising discourse.
As a meaning is imputed to art, via the self-expressive artist, the source of meaning is located with that self. 'Expressionism is the symbol of the unknown in us in which we confide, hoping that it will save us', Bahr writes. The question of the means is rather overlooked: with Impressionism man is a 'mere instrument [...] a tool' of his own work as the machine has 'his soul'. Bahr recourses to the metaphors of self-effacing tools and machines to discuss art as communication - while 'primeval man' deploys 'lines, circles, squares' to express his inner self - a detour via abstraction.	given as: self - desired / given as: society - undesired	See 'The Perfect Expressor' earlier in this chapter.
As meaning is brought 'from that realm beyond', '[f]orm in art is at once the expression of this dual power or origination [of 'the apprehension of source, spirit, cosmos, and at the same time [...] the creating, feeling self of the artist'] and expression of the potentialities of the particular medium employed'. Cheney accords form transparency (with cosmos and self) *and* rarely, for writers of Expressionism, sees it as opaque.	given as: form / given as: cosmos / given as: self	See 'The Perfect Expressor' earlier in this chapter.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
E H Gombrich 'Expression and Communication' 1962	yes	Not so much a theory of art as a reflection upon the relation between theory (as communication and expression) and art which 'we must [...] place [...] between these extremes'. Yet as he progresses, Gombrich locates art nearer to 'communication' (as 'conventional signs') rather than expression as 'natural resonance'. '[...] understanding the language of the emotions is much more like any other understanding. It presupposes a knowledge of the language and therefore a grasp of alternatives open to the artist, but it also presupposes what the Romantic would describe as natural sympathy'. For Gombrich, meaning is, largely, conventional, and moreover the product of a difference.	appears in the section: Expressionism

proposed as: formalism |
| Nelson Goodman 'Art and Inquiry' 1972 | yes | Goodman compares art and science via the issues of: function; aim; emotive and cognitive potential - as a means of 'distinguishing aesthetic from all other experience'. Contending that 'Aesthetic and scientific activity alike [...] consist to a large extent of symbol processing', he concludes: the 'difference between art and science is not that between feeling and fact [...] but rather a difference in determination of certain specific characteristics of symbols' (i.e. the means of meaning). | appears in the section: Expressionism

proposed as: formalism as art and science are seen as different types of symbolic language |
| Julius Meier-Graefe 'The Development of Modern Art' 1904 | yes | Wryly, Meier-Graefe imputes an explosion of art-production to the need 'to invent suitable occupations for unproductive energies.' Such an activity is '[c]hatter about art' fuelled by '[t]he incomprehensibility of painting and sculpture'. But art also answers the nouveau riche's needs as it fulfils 'the purpose of other marketable things: that of being purchased'. At the same time, 'the popularisation of art is rendered impossible by the extravagant prices commanded'. For Meier-Graefe, art, in its several aspects is clearly a relation to a socio-economy. | appears in the section: Art and Society |

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
Since this paper is an exploration of how meaning comes about, see previous page resumé.	given as: form given as: 'Natural Sympathy' given as: form as social practice	see 'Illusion and Visual Deadlock' as a similar enquiry.
In Goodman's comparative typology of different 'experiences' which includes art, the origin of art or the origin of art as meaning is not discussed. This is an ontology of art not an aetiology.		This article, as Frascina and Harrison acknowledge, is included 'by virtue of [its] roots in [an]other method[...]' - as an epistemologist's perspective on art - if not modernism. Indeed, its 'modernist' status is problematic, though it might have to do with its recourse to a scientific rationality.
The comments for this section in relation to Brecht apply: the meaning of art, moreover, is seen to be produced by the economic character of early 20th century society.	given as: society (as the economy)	What is interesting about this analysis is the strength with which it pursues the notion of art's function. Or to put it another way: this is a resolutely teleological analysis. Strictly excluded, therefore, is any notion of art as (self-)expression, formalism, or mimesis.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Leon Trotsky 'Literature and Revolution' 1923	yes	As art is considered in terms of the revolution, Trotsky urges the 'Lef' not to 'fuse [art] with life' too quickly, but to realise that 'bourgeois art' can be an 'important weapon' in 'building a new society' functioning as a mirror, as well as a 'hammer' (its shaping capacity). While Trotsky agrees that the Futurists' art is 'above the heads of the masses', he argues that art does not have to be symmetrical with the 'ideology of society' and that the time for an art of the masses will come.	appears in the section: Art and Society proposed as: realism proposed as: art as constitution
Walter Benjamin 'The Author as Producer' 1934	yes	Like Trotsky, Benjamin discusses what a socialist 'politically correct' art might be. Concentrating also on art as technique, he argues that a 'literary work can only be politically correct if it is also literally correct'. For Benjamin, 'literary correctness' follows Brecht's demand 'not to supply the apparatus of production without [...] changing it in accordance with socialism'. Benjamin considers the 'revolutionary strength' of Dada and 'Matter-of-fact photography', and finds, in the subjects and meanings of the latter that 'we have a flagrant example of what it means to supply a productive apparatus without changing it'. Thus he urges producers to transcend 'the specialization in the process of production' and to turn 'consumers [...] into producers [...] readers or spectators into collaborators'.	appears in the section: Art and Society
Walter Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' 1936	yes	Art is related here to (its) photographic reproduction. For Benjamin, this has historically specific significance for what art is - for what it means. Mechanical reproduction deprives art of its 'aura' on two counts: 'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space'; when this 'ceases to matter' for the reproduction, it ceases to matter for the original. Benjamin writes: 'Instead of being based in ritual, it begins to be based in another practice - politics'.	appears in the section: Art and Society

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As the meaning of art - recondite or otherwise - is not to be explained as a simple, reflective relation to society, the question of its (other) origins is raised; if art is (partly) autonomous from 'the life of society' what inaugurates change in art, and society for that matter? Trotsky gives no clues... but presumably it would be the ideas of the revolution.	given as: (existing) society / given as: revolutionary socialism / given as: reality / given as: form - bourgeois art	The answer to the question that Trotsky fails to answer is, of course, provided by later Marxist writers on this subject - see Hauser, for example, who argues for the (relative) autonomy of the superstructure (which includes art). (Thus a type of formalist analysis is proposed.)
Tautologically, perhaps, art is a product of the means of production (and its meanings are included here). Only as the means of production change/or are changed, (and the individual artist can author this), are art and its meanings substantially altered: directed to a different social end. Art here is seen as an instance of the means of production, (and this includes its meaning by implication).	perhaps proposed as: the individual artist - as a social subject? / proposed as: society - the means of production	Ironically, for his keen analysis of art in relation to the means of production, Benjamin fails to theorise the producer's agency: its trajectory, whose interests it might serve; or how the producer can operate against the means of production.
Benjamin does not explicitly pursue the implications of his theory for the issue of meaning. Granted the work of art, in losing its aura, also loses its authority - but its authority to mean, specifically? Benjamin, however, does note that the 'negative theology' of 'pure art' denies 'any categorizing [of art] by subject matter.'	given as: technology	How does Benjamin perceive the loss of art's aura? He writes: 'for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual', thus anticipating Baudrillard's idea of the hyperreal.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Paul Eluard 'Poetic Evidence' 1936	yes	Poetic evidence in name and deed, this (transcript of a) lecture lyrically extols revolutionary surrealism as the art of 'sombre truths' among other things. Meaning is only one aspect of art in the polyphony (cacophony?) of aesthetic-political concerns that Eluard invokes.	appears in the section: Art and Society proposed as: realism
Bertolt Brecht 'Popularity and Realism' 1967	yes	Of his title's terms, Brecht writes: '[i]t would be a mistake to think that these concepts are completely transparent, without history, uncompromised, or unequivocal' and much of the essay is devoted to elaborating their complexities, as the basis for a notion of art. 'Popular means: intelligible to the broad masses, adopting and enriching their forms of expression/assuming their standpoint, confirming and correcting it/representing the most progressive section of the people so that it can assume leadership, and therefore intelligible to other sections of the people as well/relating to traditions and developing them/communicating to that portion of the people which strives for leadership the achievements of the section that at present rules the nation.' 'Realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power/writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up/emphasizing the element of development/making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.' And for both, Brecht warns against the dangers of ahistoricism: 'one must compare the depiction of life in a work of art with life itself that is being depicted'.	appears in the section: Art and Society

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
Eluard writes 'In 1925 [...] Max Ernst upheld with me the watchword of fraternisation of the French Communist Party [...] If only it had been possible for us, during the war, to meet and join hands, violently and spontaneously, against our common enemy: THE INTERNATIONAL OF PROFIT.' Art, for Eluard, originates in this stark aim: 'the total emancipation of man'. This is Communism crossed with de Sadian Romanticism.	given as: the social - as a type of socialist anarchism	Including this text in their anthology, Frascina and Harrison draw attention to the absence of the theorising of Surrealism by and large in *Modern Art and Modernism*. - especially of the psychoanalytic sort. Thus the motif of repression (what modernism leaves out) is repressed.
Ethically, art should be 'of' the people - when much hangs on what Brecht allows with that possessive. And in order to facilitate this, Brecht acknowledges the role of 'realism' - a stylistic convention of art - 'but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master.' So the origins of art and its meaning are, at once, (prescriptively) the people and a mode of art.	given as: the social / given as: form	What Brecht conspicuously avoids in this essay is a sense that 'the popular' - meaning 'of the people' might be best left to them.

modernism	analytic topics		
author, title of article and date of publication	does the text discuss meaning?	way in which the text theorises art	type of 'modernism' assigned to text
Arnold Hauser 'The Sociological Approach: The Concept of Ideology in the History of Art' 1958	yes	'Meaning' is a key issue here as Hauser looks at art's relationship to 'truth' and 'ideology' (as distinct things). He argues: 'A work of art is not "correct" or "incorrect" in the way scientific theory is; it cannot properly speaking be termed either true or false [...] truth is not what is aimed at [...] Art is partisan through and through'. But in considering this tendentiousness as a relation to society, Hauser also notes that 'the so-called superstructure has a vitality of its own, that spiritual structures have both the capacity and the tendency to cast loose from their origins and go their own way' and this 'alien character is felt whenever art is treated as pure form'. As a mode of knowledge, art has a complex and historically various relation to society.	appears in the section: Art and Society proposed as: form
John Berger 'Léger' 1960	yes	Léger is seen - in this short and basic essay - as the champion of the machine as the vehicle of man's liberation - which takes place through the painter's imagery and formal means. Since this essay in no real sense suggests a theory of art discussion will be left here.	
Nicos Hadjinicolaou 'Art History and Class Struggle' 1973	yes	Focusing on questions of style ('the way in which the formal and thematic elements of a picture are combined on each specific occasion'), and renaming 'style' as 'visual ideology', Hadjinicolaou is able to illuminate the relationship between style and 'class ideology' (as parallel, superstructural entities). He argues for the independence and dependence of art as visual ideology from 'other types of ideology' - transfiguring Hauser's notion of the possible autonomy of art from history and society. But as art is seen as visual ideology, and thus as a site of class struggle, Hadjinicolaou contends that only the struggle of the same class or of the ruling classes, takes place therein as 'some classes never historically had a developed visual ideology of their own'.	appears in the section: Art and Society

representation of the origin of meaning and/or the origin of art	schematic analysis of type of origin	commentary
As a variable relation to society, art's (potential) origins include 1) 'a standpoint' ('[a]rt is partisan through and through'); 2) the autonomy of art; 3) and possibly 'society' unmediated by 'ideology' for Hauser writes 'it would be wrong to deny art all claim of achieving truth'. In this way, art *does* have the status of scientific theory.	given as: form - the form of art given as: reality - truth - rarely given as: the social	Like Read, Hauser seems to take 'pure form' - his phrase as much as Read's - as an ahistorical phenomenon.
Art - when it does originate at all - is sourced in visual ideology, which in turn is defined as 'the real relation of men to their real conditions of existence [as] invested in an imaginary relation'. Thus art, and its meanings, are ultimately derived from social life. However, in this fairly sophisticated analysis, Hadjinicolaou also accords (visual) ideology a role.	given as: the social via visual ideology given as: form - the form of art as visual ideology	As queried before of Modernist analyses of art, what determines autonomy? (Not to put too fine a point on the potential paradox.)

Riddling the grid

Gridding some of the concerns of modernism thus, the question of the origin of meaning is more readily approached. The grid, which insists on categories of knowledge and the obedience of objects to those categories, yields its data quickly and visibly: as stark co-ordinates.

The most basic question to be put to the grid - 'how much does meaning matter in modernist art theory?'- is addressed by column two. As tabulated here, twenty-two out of thirty-eight articles attend to the issue of meaning (at the level of explicit content).[22] And while 'meaning' is one of several analytically distinct entities in the lexicon of art theory's key preoccupations, this is a curious result, given the centrality of meaning to representation. Possibly, this relegation of meaning is explained by the centrality of 'form' to certain strands of 'modern art'; form as meaning's other, and form as the mode of the art of pure presence.

The reason people - The People - couldn't stand The Bricks was because they didn't answer their desire for meaning however recondite or even rebarbative the meaning of The Bricks might have been. The Bricks were simply and solely there. They were presence not representation. No matter that Rodchenko had been designing babies' feeding bottles back at the beginning of the century and had called these art... Recall Mallarmé, whom T J Clark recalls invoking 'the horrible vision of the work that is pure'.[23]

Next, the question that the grid readily supplies the answer to is the way in which the *origin* of meaning is produced by 'modernism'. This grid proposes two ways of analysing this: in terms of number and type.

The *number* of origins of meaning (as distinct from the origin of art per se), is for modernism, overall, the full complement of analytic categories cued by *Modern Art and Modernism's* expanded typology: five, plus a one-off category ('technology' via Benjamin). For individual theories, the number of origins of meaning is only once more than three (see the essay by Trotsky) and rarely three at that. The exact figures are: (for articles which do attend to meaning), six offer one origin; seven offer two, and five offer three. (These figures are produced by counting the different colours in the grid, overall, and the number of colours in each box.) And the pattern is similar for the origin of art per se. Overall, the

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[22] But what is 'explicit content'? In seeking to present 'modernism' in its own terms, however much this is also deconstructive, it is nevertheless difficult not to watch the meaning of its texts *splintering into endless repetition*, which as Derrida has argued is the end of presence via 'the infinite repeatability of the same'. (*Speech and Phenomena* p. 53)

[23] T J Clark 'On the Social History of Art' in *Modern Art and Modernism* Frascina & Harrison (eds.) p. 258

number is four (not five; Abstraction is missing); and for individual theories seven propose one origin; seven propose two, and one proposes three. The similarity of results implies that an account of *art's* production might indeed propose a notion of the origin of *meaning* in art; that the former is not so much the latter in an out-of-focus mode.

The *types* of origins of meaning (and art), are necessarily covered by the typology of modernism as unfolded earlier, with the addition of technology (for Benjamin) and anti-formalism via Popper.

But these results are highly mediated as the data has been produced by a grid of knowledge that has been designed to facilitate a certain enquiry and namely the question of the relationship between the morphology of art (and its aetiology) which was first raised in Chapter 1. The results of this enquiry suggest that, as there is a fair degree of congruence between a notion of a type or category of art, and its origin, that an aetiology might serve as a morphology, and vice versa. However, there are also some extraordinary glitches - especially with the articles by Roger Fry. This proposes yet again, recalling Chapter 1's suggestion, that the relationship between the two is finally theoretical.

For the purposes of this project, the preceding analysis is all that is required of the grid; it has yielded the origin of meaning as a matter of its number, type, and as a relation to another topic of ontology. As the subject of two comparisons - with postmodernist (art) theory, and an artist's notion of the origin of meaning - it will shortly be revisited.
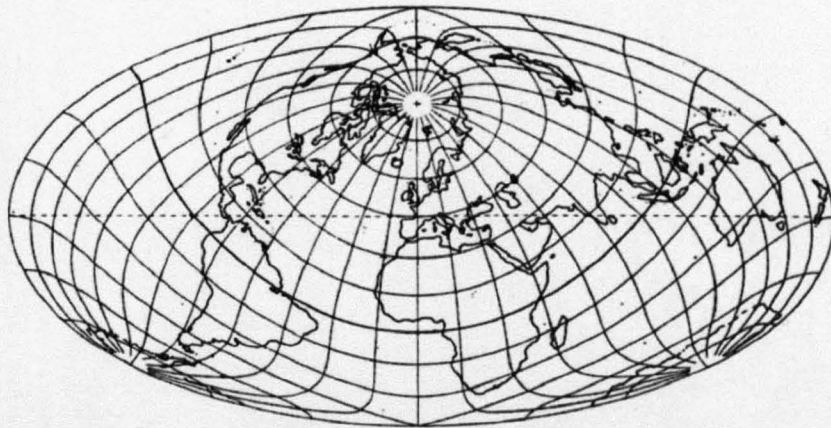
(*Above*) **The Nordic equal-area projection for distribution maps in northern latitudes**

(*Above*) **An equal-area projection, Aitoff's, of the World; and the Oblique Mollweide (*below*), also equal-area, which shows the relative areas of the British Commonwealth**

Postmodernism and the origin of meaning in visual art

Adopting the procedures used to broach the meanings of 'modernism' in the previous chapter, it is possible to broach the meanings of 'postmodernism', though that may adapt those procedures according to the logic of its singularity.

Postmodernism as a temporality

If modernism was 'just now' then postmodernism is, by definition, post 'just now'. Postmodernism is the future of the present that is past, given it is generally agreed that modernism is over. And this periphrasis bears no substitution. Postmodernism is not 'now'. Indeed, it is an after-life; a negative ontology which it marks on numerous fronts. Foucault notes the death of man, and Barthes, the author's death. Fukyama marks the end of history, Bell the end of ideology and Douglas Crimp, the end of painting.[1] And as the 'not now', postmodernism also signifies as something that is over; it is not *now*. Which is to say, it is an epoch, too.[2]

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[1] The death of man: *The Order of Things* (1966); the myth of the self-expressive author: 'The Death of the Author' (1968); history: *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992); ideology: *The End of Ideology* (1960); painting: *The End of Painting* (1981). Yet this is not to argue that postmodernism must be nostalgic. Rather the metaphor of death signifies in various ways; as an end, yes, and therefore 'a necessary turn toward "tradition"', ('the postmodernism of reaction'), but also as a new beginning, permitting an alignment with 'the postmodernism of resistance', to borrow Hal Foster's phrasings and schema, constructing as they do, postmodernism as a politics. (See his editorial preface to *Postmodern Culture*.)

[2] However, arguing against the latter notion, Umberto Eco writes: '[a]ctually, I believe that postmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but, rather, an ideal category - or, better still, a *Kunstwollen*,* a way of operating. We could say that every period has its own postmodernism, just as every period would have its own mannerism (and, in fact, I wonder if postmodernism is not the modern name for mannerism as metahistorical category).' ("I Love you Madly," He Said Self-consciously': *the fontana post-modernism reader* pp. 31-32 ed. Walter Truett Anderson.) Convoluting the above notion of postmodernism's temporality, Eco yet ironically returns a notion of postmodernism as an entity defined chronologically - against his belief. Postmodernism is a term - a 'moment' within *every* period and as such is defined as a multiple occurrence within chronology. So the question 'is postmodernism over?' must be turned as the question 'is the most recent postmodernism over?'

* 'Kuntswollen' - a term identified primarily with Alois Riegl, and as such defined as 'the artistic or aesthetic urge' (Eric Fernie commenting on Riegl). Fernie also notes of 'kunstwollen': '[t]his concept has been understood in a variety of different ways. While literally it means that which wills art [the will to art], it has also been translated as an aesthetic urge by [Otto] Pächt, will-to-form by Gombrich and artistic intent by [Margaret] Iversen, and has been paraphrased as an active creative process in which new forms arise from the artist's will to solve specific artistic problems by [Meyer] Schapiro.' (See Eric Fernie ed. *art history and its methods: a critical anthology* - p. 117 for references.) Eco is, it seems deploying the term in yet another way again: to designate a will to a certain form of art - thus conflating two of the above definitions.

I was sitting in the bar at the ICA with my friend David. We had just been to see the Lari Pittman show. Our postmortem of the exhibition turned to the issue of its postmodernism. David was proposing that as an up-front expression of a sexuality, Pittman's work was very 80s - very postmodern - and that things were different now.

I agreed that things, in this respect, had changed, but said that I was not so sure that this marked the end of postmodernism, though I would accept that the work we now readily identify as 'postmodernist' looks out of date.

(I know this when I teach postmodernism, and the students want to talk about contemporary work - Tracey Emin's, for example, and I wonder how that really continues the tradition of postmodern feminism that is clearly identified with Mary Kelly and Cindy Sherman.)

Then I said to David: 'If postmodernism's over, what can we call what's happening now?' And he suggested 'neo-Modernism' and we looked around us at the bar full of younger things in their Gap uniforms - boring blues and buffs, all very minimal in a casual sort of way. And I said that neo anything would not do because neo this and that have been synonyms for postmodernism (particularly in painting).[3] We were at a loss for terms ...

Returning to the question of *what* postmodernism is beyond a temporality and an epoch,[4] - how it might be signified - it is possible to look at it alongside its cognate terms, and especially, 'postmodernity'.

My neighbour said that he could find out what postmodernism is on the Internet - as if, even there, in that network which comprises many nodes or sites which are not subject to a centre or hierarchical arrangement, meaning would be simple; unitary.

Postmodernism is not postmodernity; postmodernism is the art and the (art) theory of postmodernity

Like 'modernism', 'postmodernism' can be defined in contradistinction to postmodern*ity*. And likewise, '*post*modernism' can be used to designate an epoch in representation and 'postmodernity' an era in social life. And as with 'modernism', 'postmodernism' is the art which is associated with

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[3] See, for instance, *The New Modernism: Deconstructionist Tendencies in Art. Art & Design* Vol 4 No 3/4 1988.

[4] An essay by Charles Jencks: 'What is Post-Modernism?' *the fontana post-modernism reader* and one by Jean-François Lyotard (in *Art in Theory* eds. Harrison & Wood).

postmodernity and its writing (about art).[5] As before, the latter - writing - is the focus of this enquiry.

When is postmodernism as art theory?

Here, however, the dilemma that arose in connection with the question of a historical purchase on modernism has been rendered void in the absence, as yet, of a conventionalised outside to postmodernism, anything preceding notwithstanding. Postmodernism has to be reviewed in its own terms, though as Harrison and Wood contend, those terms are informed by the terms of modernism:

'[t]here can be no theory of the *postmodern* - no sensible identification of some art as postmodern art - which does not assume a certain means of identifying the modern. To claim the status of 'postmodern' for some form of art is to reveal the nature of one's beliefs and attitudes concerning the modern. Similarly, to talk of Postmodern*ism* is to assume a certain meaning and value for Modernism.'[6]

So the question to ask of postmodernism as art theory has to do with how it might present itself, in a way that collects its diversity and does justice to its range.

In relation to visual art, a truly comprehensive selection of texts is offered by the final, eighth part, and its preceding subsection, of Harrison and Wood's *Art in*

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[5] In the latter case, it includes 'poststructuralism' as a very particular body of theory (concerning relations between language and 'the subject') which is synchronous with 'postmodernism' and which is often drawn upon in writing about (postmodernist) art and postmodernity, and even, sometimes, recoursed to by that art itself. Of course, in the sense that poststructuralism is another 'after-thought' another 'post', it can, and perhaps should, be defined against 'structuralism'. And that observation begs another - of a slightly different order - a question: as poststructuralism is to postmodernism so, then is structuralism to modernism? Here, 'poststructuralism' is defined in accordance with Richard Harland's notion of it as an understanding of signification 'where the Sign works creatively and anarchically and irresponsibly'. (*Superstructuralism* p. 124)

[6] *Art in Theory* p. 988. But while it can be argued that modernism establishes a way for understanding postmodernism, this is not the same as arguing (as was argued at the end of Chapter 2) that modernism, as postmodernism's outside, might define postmodernism (as its essence). Rather, it is to propose that postmodernism might be defined *against* modernism.

Theory 1900 - 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas.[7] The final part is titled 'Ideas of the Postmodern' and is prefaced by a section called 'Critical Revisions' which comprises excerpts from many of the key texts of poststructuralism.[8]

Yet, despite the promise of its title, *Art in Theory* often slips its subject, 'art', as the object of theoretical investigation, especially with the poststucturalist texts. But this slippage is not unexpected, given that poststructuralism presupposes that the verbal can function as a paradigm for all modes of textuality, and often offers, more or less ambiguously in this vein, essays on the verbal.[9] Such is 'the exorbitation of language' that Harrison and Wood note Perry Anderson remarking;[10] the legacy of Barthes which 'helped fuel a tendency to perceive the mute objects and practices of the social world as encoding meaning, after the manner of a text'.[11]

And yet, despite this legacy, the issue of meaning is not always prominent in the texts that this chapter reviews. Still less so, the origin of meaning. When this is the case, they have to be read 'against the grain' of their intentions; the origin of meaning is pursued *as the out-of-focus content of those texts*. Or else not at all; some are omitted from this chapter's survey.

And the structure which best orders the results of this survey is not, here, the grid, in its fullest Mondrianesque form. That was appropriate for plotting modernism's many signifieds (as so many articles on 'modernism') against a spread of topics, inaugurated by the fact that in Frascina and Harrison's anthology, 'modernism' was typologised with some conviction; according to a system. Now, with Harrison and Wood's presentation of postmodernism, the typology is more impressionistic, for while they do indeed propose categories of

[7] But the basis on which this judgment of comprehensiveness is made needs to be examined; in particular, I am interested in the empirical conditions of any choice (of text); the way in which that choice is contingent upon rather mundane circumstances: what books one owns; what books are in the libraries; which libraries one is allowed to use; who one knows and what they know, which is in turn dependent on what books they own, and so on... Prevailingly, our attitude to the scope of what is known is so idealised. Philosophically, this is the territory of 'the example', which Chapter 5 attends to.

[8] Note that 'postmodernism' is the designation used by Harrison & Wood, and 'poststructuralism' is a term that I deploy to mark a difference in analytic emphasis - in the latter case, privileging the notion of the text, and the linguistic.

[9] In *Downcast Eyes* Martin Jay identifies (a consequence of) this with 'the denigration of vision in twentieth century French thought' (this is the subtitle to Jay's book): 'a great deal of recent French thought in a wide variety of fields is in one way or another imbued with a profound suspicion of vision and its hegemonic role in the modern era.' (p. 14)

[10] *Art in Theory* p. 801

[11] ibid. p. 801

the postmodern ('The Condition of History'; 'The Critique of Originality'; 'Figures of Difference'), it is not clear that these are subsumed by one system, other than a notion of types of art as different contents. For this reason, a conceptually much looser 'grid' is suggested and, moreover, one which is much more conceptual, figuring only in the mind and not on the page. This is the figure of the Encyclopaedia which plots the 'articles' of postmodernism against their various productions of origin which are arranged alphabetically. (That the cartographic or mathematical device takes a linguistic turn is perhaps, appropriate given the ascendancy of language with postmodernism.[12]) But this structure should not be regarded as coming any closer to its objects than the grid, which was more simply more conspicuous and more ornate. This taxonomic system constructs its objects via its categories of knowledge as much as any other.

With little more ado, except to say that '>' refers the reader to related categories of origin, 'A' is for:

The **A**bsence of presence

This is Victor Burgin's phrase which he uses to describe the exceptional condition of Conceptual Art (see entry for 'Fetish'). I deploy it here to approach Jean-François Lyotard's address to the question 'What is Postmodernism?' which his answer is so titled. Seeing his response as an issue of postmodernism's patrimony, Lyotard proposes:

'[...] modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its unrecognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure.

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them, but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable.'[13]

So postmodernism is a double absence: the absence of the presence of an absence. In the presence of these voids, the possibility of meaning is nigh impossible. If it can be found at all, it is only, as with presence, vertiginously

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[12] And is atavistically associated with the French Encylopédistes: Diderot and D'Almbert et al.
[13] 'What is Postmodernism?' in Harrison & Wood p. 1014

much removed: as the final signified of so many absences. Thus the *absence* of meaning is what originates.

A rtist

> Viewer

B eyond the Artist

Gerard Richter writes (24.10.90):

'The much despised 'artistic scene of today' is quite harmless and friendly when we do not compare it with false claims: it has nothing to do with traditional values that we uphold (or which elevate us), it has virtually nothing at all to do with art. [...] *Art happens despite this, rarely and always unexpectedly, never because we make it happen.*'[14] (Italics added.)

Art, if not its meaning, is produced by two negatives: *not* the system; *not* the artist. **> Death** and **The Exhibition System.**

the B ody

'Signifiance' as *revolutionary* meaning, is, for Kristeva, the: 'unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists - the subject and his institutions.'[15]

Using a psychoanalytic metaphor (the notion of repression) to describe 'the generating of significance',[16] Kristeva, necessarily, countenances, too, the 'sleeping body - a body in repose, withdrawn from its socio-historical imbrication, removed from direct experience'.[17] Such is the origin of non-revolutionary meaning.

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[14] Harrison & Wood p. 1048

[15] '"Prolegomenon" to *Revolution in Poetic Language*' in Harrison & Wood p. 963

[16] Ibid. p. 960

[17] Ibid. p. 960

Community

Borrowing the notion of 'tradition-bound periods punctuated by non-cumulative breaks' from fields such as 'literature', 'music' and 'the arts', to look at the structure of scientific knowledge, Thomas Kuhn provides, at one remove, a discussion of the entity he is deploying: the structure of 'the [visual] arts'. As such, he argues that meaning is community-specific (not inherent in the object of knowledge, nor perception, nor language as the means of expressing that but is rather to be found in the relation that a community constructs between all three terms). While much of the excerpt here is concerned with the problem of translation - the question of how different language communities recognise each other - it begins with a rejection of the notion that meaning is authorially expressive and therefore resides with the author: '[t]o understand why science develops as it does, one need not unravel the details of biography and personality that lead each individual to a particular choice [...]'[18] Kuhn's notion of community-dependent meaning is clearly related to Foucault's understanding of 'discourse' > **Order of Discourse**.

Death

Much preoccupied with death as it is, postmodernism, as already noted, often views it as a point of production, a chance for the new to succeed. Here is Sherrie Levine's formulation of the theme:

'[w]e know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. [...] we can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. Succeeding the painter, the plagiarist no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense encyclopedia from which he draws. The viewer is the tablet on which all the quotations that make up a painting are inscribed without any of them being lost. A painting's meaning lies not in its origin, but in its destination. *The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter.*'[19] (Italics added.)

The painter dies, conceptually, of course: as the myth of the self-expressive author, for Levine is borrowing from Barthes' 'The Death of the Author', in an act of witty reflexivity.[20] But the viewer thus born, is no more a self-expressive

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[18] excerpt from 'Postscript - 1969' to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in Harrison & Wood p. 936

[19] 'Statement' in Harrison & Wood p. 1067

[20] Refer to the discussion of 'The Death of the Author' in Chapter 1 p. 14

subject than the author was. Proleptically elaborating on Levine, Barthes writes:

'[...] the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted [...]'[21]

The viewer/reader is a 'paper-I',[22] and meanings that they give the text are therefore not willed.

Wilfully, this is how my students take the 'birth of the viewer' - thus grossly out of context - eager as they are to resurrect the fiction of their own intentionality. This is how they read 'The Theory'.[23] *And I sort of sympathise.* > **Multifarious.**

Wryly, in this context, the artist's *literal* death is demanded for the origin of meaning by Anselm Kiefer. He contends: 'Before an artist has died, one can't completely tell what he meant with his work in its entire spectrum.'[24] > **The Order of Discourse**, and Foucault's notion of the author as a 'field of conceptual or theoretical coherence'.[25]

Depthlessness

For Fredric Jameson in 'The Deconstruction of Expression' from 'Post-Modernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' this is '[t]he first and most evident' feature of 'the postmodernist moment'; that is to say: 'the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness [...]'[26] Other distinctive features of postmodernism include: the 'the role of photography' (as an image of the simulacrum) and 'the waning of affect': the inability of images to have an impact on the viewer.

Such conditions are exemplified for Jameson by Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* which functions as an icon of postmodernism in the way that Van Gogh's boots do for modernism. But it is Jameson's analysis of another

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[21] 'The Death of the Author' *Image Music Text* p. 148

[22] Roland Barthes 'From Work to Text' in Harrison & Wood p. 1067

[23] 'The Theory' is Gilbert Adair's mocking designation of 'The Death of the Author' in his novel of that name.

[24] from 'The Cultural-Historical Tragedy of the European Continent' in Harrison & Wood p. 1035

[25] 'What is an author?' in Harrison & Wood p. 926

[26] 'The Deconstruction of Expression' in Harrison & Wood p. 1077

modernist icon - Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, that provides an explanation of the origin of depthlessness, and it is this part of the essay which answers most clearly to its title.

While Jameson reads *The Scream* on the one hand as 'a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude and social fragmentation and isolation',[27] he also sees it as:

'[...] a virtual deconstruction of the very aesthetic of expression itself, which seems to have dominated much of what we call high modernism, but to have vanished away - for both practical and theoretical reasons - in the world of postmodernism.'[28]

This is because:

'Its gestural content already underscores its own failure, since the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, are incompatible with its medium (something underscored within the work by the homunculus' lack of ears).'[29]

It is as such - as an image of the solipsism of the modernist individual - that *The Scream* explains - as it is the precondition of - the depthlessness of postmodernism. The effect of meaningless must follow.[30]

the Exhibition System

This is addressed in the last part of an essay by Mary Kelly entitled 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism'. She writes:

'[...] a reconsideration of critical methods is required if one takes account of the specific conditions which determine the organization of artistic texts and their readings at the present time; that is, *the temporary exhibition and its associated field of publications - the catalogue, the art book, and the magazine.* From this point of view, "art" is never given in the form of individual works but is constructed as a category in relation to a complex configuration of texts.'[31]

And then, expanding this *contextual* analysis and moving outwards from the art world to the world more largely, Kelly adds: '[...] the exhibition system marks a

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[27] Ibid. p. 1078
[28] Ibid. p. 1078
[29] Ibid. p. 1079
[30] Though this is 'read in' from Jameson's context; his contemporaries. > **Hyperreal**
[31] 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism' in Harrison & Wood pp. 1092-1093

crucial intersection of discourses, practices and sites which define the institutions of art within a definite social formation.'[32] > **Multifarious** and the notion of meaning precisely as located at an intersection.

As a consequence of this: '[a]n exhibition is a system of meanings - a discourse - which, taken as a complex unit or enunciative field, can be said to constitute a group of statements'.[33]

In referring to 'meaning' in these terms, Kelly is, directly referring to Foucault's analyses of meaning in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 'The Order of Discourse' and indeed, 'What is an Author?' In doing so, she does two things. She emphasises that an art-work, as a 'statement', (in Foucault's phrase):

'[...] always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always part of a network of statements, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play.'[34]

That is to say: the origin of meaning is *discursive*; in discourse > **the Order of discourse**. And secondly, she translates Foucault's general understanding of discourse for *art's* discourse. As such, this is one of the few (post-)structuralist analyses[35] which addresses art's specificity.

Fetish

> Addendum

Hyper-realism

Such is Baudrillard's neologism for the absence of (the absence) of presence that is seen not just in art, but in the postmodern world more generally. He writes:

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[32] ibid. p. 1093
[33] ibid. p. 1093
[34] *The Archaeology of Knowledge* p. 99
[35] There is a question mark lowering over its *poststructural* status. When *poststructuralism* is associated with 'undecidability', Foucault's discourse analysis seem rather to belong to the field of structuralism.

'Reality itself founders in hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another, reproductive medium, such as photography. From medium to medium, the real is volatilized, becoming an allegory of death.'[36]

And when '[a] possible definition of the real is: *that for which it is possible to provide an equivalent representation*'[37] the loss of the real would appear to extinguish the possibility of representation and hence meaning. Indeed, as Baudrillard observes of the 'neonovel' (postmodernist meta-fiction): '[b]oth syntax and semantics have disappeared.'[38] Expanding on this argument in a later text, *The Evil Demon of Images*, he writes:

'[...] events no longer have any meaning: not because they are insignificant in themselves, but because they have been preceded by models with which their own process can only coincide.'[39]

This constitutes:

'an immoral logic without depth, beyond good and evil, beyond truth and falsity; a logic of the extermination of its own referent, a logic of the implosion of meaning'.[40]

> **the Absence of presence; Depthlessness; Rationalisation**

Ideology or Ideological State Apparatuses

For Althusser, the ISAs (religion, education, the family, law, politics, trade unions, communications, and culture) mediate the ideology of 'the ruling class' when ideology 'represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.'[41] Thus meaning - the medium of ideology - is seen as an effect of (ruling) power by way of 'the imaginary' which is experienced, however, as *the truth*.

Infinite signification

Meaning, for Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, is not originated by a 'signified

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[36] 'The Hyper-realism of Simulation' in Harrison & Wood p. 1049
[37] Ibid p. 1050
[38] Ibid p. 1050
[39] *The Evil Demon of Images* p. 22
[40] Ibid p. 23
[41] Thesis I 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in Harrison & Wood p. 932

outside the text whose content could take place'.[42] Famously: *'There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*].'[43]

'[...] there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity.'[44]

Meaning as a closure is not originated. Meaning as an infinity is not originated in the text's outside 'whose content could take place'.

Multifarious

Borrowing from Barthes the notion of the writer as one who 'stands at the crossroads of all other discourses'[45] to describe the artist, Hal Foster sees art's meaning as subject to the vagaries of whomsoever - whatever - comes by. However, while for Barthes meaning is an unspecified encounter, for Foster it is quite particular:

'The most provocative American art of the present is situated at [...] a crossing - of institutions of art and political economy, of representations of sexual identity and social life.'[46]

This notion of art's plural, semantic origin is very different from the one that I am often forced to contemplate.

Year after year - as long as I've been teaching - students say to me: 'but everyone sees things differently'. And the 'but' is there to signal an objection to something I've just said: something to do with a theory of interpretation that cannot countenance a role for the viewer as originary subject; the font of all meaning. (The chief culprits for such theories are, of course, the 'five famous' French post-structuralists:[47] Barthes mid-career, Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lyotard.)[48]

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[42] 'The Exorbitant: Question of Method' from *Of Grammatology* in Harrison & Wood p. 919

[43] Ibid. p. 919

[44] Ibid. p. 919

[45] The reference is to Barthes' 'Inaugural Lecture' in *a roland barthes reader* (ed. Susan Sontag), in which he observes, also that the term 'prostitute' derives from 'trivilias' meaning one 'who waits at the intersection of three roads' (p. 467). Thus art is a whore; a connotation that Hal Foster's use of the concept of intersection obliquely refers to.

[46] 'Subversive Signs' in Harrison & Wood; p. 1065

[47] See Susan Kandel 'the non-site of theory' *frieze* issue 22 May 1995

[48] Perhaps. Kandel is quoting Robert C Morgan, who does not specify the 'five'. In nominating these, I am nominating thinkers who appear in this Encyclopaedia.

I sometimes offer my students ripostes: real life examples of how this is not so; how the masses think alike - take the death of the Princess of Wales... And my repertoire of instances is, for sure, getting greater - as is my weariness when faced with this remark. Of course, the best retort would be to say to one of them (a sacrificial member of this collective): 'And you're the nth person who has said that...' But I bite my tongue and, psychotherapeutically, (cued by Art & Language) turn from passing judgment to searching for an explanation which I start to find in that cliché of the 80s: the cult of (absolute) subjectivism - 'there is no such thing as society'; 'you can make of yourself what you want (and preferably a small business, or a self-made man of a Prime Minister).

Then I recollect that Lyotard has theorised the erosion of the social:

'Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy *and of the university institution* which in the past relied on it. [Italics added.] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements - narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the *intersection* of many of these. [Italics added; refer to Foster, above.] However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.'[49]

In yet a different explanation of multifarious origin, the notion of intersection occurs again, but here, *contra* Barthes and Foster, it is crucially, unstable and the nature of the intersection varies from person to person. It is multifarious multifariously.

the Order of discourse

In his essay 'What is an author?', Foucault looks at one aspect of the order of discourse, and namely, 'the author-function'. Reasoning teleologically - looking at the author, precisely, as a function - Foucault contends that the author serves various needs of discourse: 'assuring a classificatory function'; characterizing 'a certain mode of being of discourse' among other things.[50]

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[49] 'Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*' Harrison & Wood p. 999
[50] 'What Is an Author?' in Harrison & Wood p. 924

Thus meaning is produced not by the author as a self-expressive subject, but as the author is a means of producing discourse, according to a certain order. (The fact that 'the modern author' provides 'the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions and diverse modifications'[51] does not negate this point; self-expression in this instance, merely serves this culturally specific need of discourse.)   >
Exhibition system

with the art of the Past

Art & Language argue that the art of the past informs the art of the present - though 'informs' is, possibly, too neutral a term for the complex filiations that they explore.[52]

In the 'Letter to a Canadian Curator' they describe contemporary art (c1982) as 'Mannerist'.[53] Mannerism is the reign of means over matter; the retreat into style. Reading between their lines, contemporary art's stylistic excess is produced by the repetition of *the art of the recent past*, resulting in 'New Wave "Americans", young "Italians" and Born Again "German" Neo-expressionists'.[54] (Repetition tends towards Mannerism in the way that a photograph when copied and continuously recopied tends towards a caricature of its original.) Since Art & Language describe this Mannerism as 'hysterical' it carries a negative charge.

Elsewhere, they see the past and the art of the past as the necessary circumstance - rather than the prototype of (their own) art production.

the art of Pastiche and Parody

This is something Barbara Kruger writes about in '"Taking" Pictures'. Here

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[51] Ibid. p. 926
[52] For example: '[t]he line of development through the fifties and sixties is branching and incoherent, and there are a plethora of dead ends and little failures. There are no clear lines of succession. For example, Johns does not initiate Minimal Art. Rather Johns, Stella, Judd and Morris each articulate in different ways - often unconsciously - an intuition of the historical and cultural conditions which determined the production of art from the mid-fifties until the 1970s.' 'Art & Language Paints a Picture' in Harrison & Wood p. 1026
[53] Recall Eco's use of the same term.
[54] 'Letter to a Canadian Curator' in Harrison & Wood p. 1068

the past is not deep history but the ready-made of 'fashion and journalistic photography, advertising, film, television, and even other artworks (photos, painting and sculpture)'.[55] It is this reservoir that 'a number of artists working today' (c1982) plunder. As parodists, however, they nibble at the edges of their legacy, making 'alterations [which] might consist of cropping, reposing, captioning, and redoing'[56] and working so, as Kruger notes, 'proceed to question ideas of competence, originality, authorship and property'[57] - although she fails to say how - other than to add that: '[o]n a parodic level, this work can pose a deviation from the repetition of stereotype, contradicting the surety of our initial readings'.[58] Thus she implies that this gesture of quasi-repetition reveals its 'original' as a (hollow) repetition.

Rationalisation

This is a term that Habermas employs to describe a process which occurs with 'cultural modernity' (and since he regards that as an 'incomplete project', moreover, one that is occurring today). He writes that '[s]ince the eighteenth century':

'[e]ach domain of culture could be made to correspond to cultural professions in which problems could be dealt with as the concern of special experts. This professionalized treatment of the cultural tradition brings to the fore the intrinsic structure of each of the three dimensions of culture. There appear the structures of cognitive-instrumental [with art this would be art-theory], of moral-practical [art-criticism] and of aesthetic-expressive rationality [art itself], each of these under the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are. As a result, the distance grows between the culture of the experts and that of the larger public.'[59]

And later he asserts that '[t]his splitting off is the problem that has given rise to efforts to "negate" the culture of expertise'.[60] According to Habermas, such efforts, or 'The False Programs of the Negation of Culture'[61] include Surrealism. They fail because:

'In everyday communication, cognitive meanings, moral expectations, subjective

[55] '"Taking" Pictures' in Harrison & Wood p. 1070
[56] Ibid. p. 1070
[57] Ibid. p. 1070
[58] Ibid. p. 1070
[59] 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project' in Harrison & Wood p. 1004
[60] Ibid. p. 1004
[61] Ibid. p. 1005

expressions and evaluations must relate to one another. Communication processes need a cultural tradition covering all spheres - cognitive, moral-practical and expressive. A rationalized everyday life, therefore, could hardly be saved from cultural impoverishment through breaking open a single cultural sphere - art - and so providing access to just one of the specialized knowledge complexes.'[62]

Thus the meanings of art remain inaccessible to the non-specialist. This is an account of localised, viewer-specific meaninglessness. **> Multifariousness; the Absence of presence; Depthlessness; Hyper-realism**

R hetoric

Here 'rhetoric' refers to Craig Owen's understanding of 'allegory' (and its significance for postmodernism).

Central to Owen's understanding of allegory is the idea that it is, potentially, a mode of expression that undoes itself as expression. This is implicit (though often overlooked) in the etymology of the term, which, as Owens notes is '(*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak)': a speaking otherwise.[63]

This speech of the other is the work (as the property) of metaphor, of which the best example here would be precisely 'figure of speech'.

'In rhetoric,' Owens writes, 'allegory is traditionally defined as a single metaphor introduced in continuous series.'[64] So allegory - as an *extended* metaphor - is a speech which 'encodes two contents within one form'.[65] But in so doing, it lets in the possibility that:

'[...] the allegorical supplement [the metaphor] is not only an addition, but also a replacement [that] takes the place of an earlier meaning, which is thereby either effaced or obscured. Because allegory usurps its object it comports within itself a danger, the possibility of perversion: that what is "merely appended" to the work of art be mistaken for its "essence"'.[66]

As the site of an origin of meaning, then, allegory effects a double distancing

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[62] Ibid. pp. 1005-1006
[63] from 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' in Harrison & Wood p. 1053
[64] 'The Allegorical Impulse' Harrison & Wood p. 1055
[65] Ibid p. 1059
[66] Ibid p. 1059

from (the fiction of) 'immediate expression'. First, it is conventional: a rhetorical device. Then, it offers a potential for the substitution to replace that *which was originally intended.*

As a marker, for Owens, of postmodernism, allegory is, however, unequivocal. He says:

'In modern aesthetics, allegory is regularly subordinated to the symbol, which represents the supposedly indissoluble unity of form and substance which characterises the work of art as pure presence.'[67]

Allegory is modernism's abject other. With postmodernism, it rises to the surface (once again):

'[...] with the appropriation of images that occurs in the works of Troy Brauntuch, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and others - artists who generate images through the reproduction of other images [...]'[68]

and with '[...] the allegorical cult of the ruin [...] in site-specificity' for there, Owens argues, can be found a 'tendency to engage in a *reading* of the site...';[69] the work is at once the site and *about* the site in the way that, say, a pastiche by Sherrie Levine is at once a painting, and about a painting. **> Site**

S^{ite}

Thus the site can be construed as another origin of meaning. The origin of site-specific work is spoken of by Richard Serra in his Yale Lecture. On the one hand, he asserts:

'[t]he specificity of site-oriented works means that they are conceived for, dependent on and inseparable from their location. Scale, size and placement of sculptural elements result from an analysis of the particular environmental components of a given context. The preliminary analysis of a given site takes into consideration not only formal but social and political characteristics of the site.'[70]

(As the site-specific art work takes place at an *intersection* **> Multifarious**)

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[67] ibid p. 1057
[68] ibid pp. 1053-1054
[69] ibid p. 1054
[70] 'The Yale Lecture' p. 1125

The repetition of the word 'given' here is eloquent and may be seen to link the genesis of site-specific work back to the ready-made as another given which likewise attempts to void 'the persona of the author' as Serra says his own work does. On the other hand, he also argues that: '[site-specific] works become part of the site and restructure both conceptually and perceptually the organization of the site'[71] - which appears to ascribe an originary power to the work. Finally, however, these two trajectories - the given and the giving - are seen as interdependent:

'Site-specific works primarily engender a dialogue with their surroundings. Site-specific works emphasize the comparison between two separate languages (their own language and the language of their surroundings).'[72]

And crucially in this respect, Serra argues that such pieces are '[u]nlike Modernist works that give the illusion of being autonomous from their surroundings, and which function critically only in relation to the language of their own medium [...]'[73]

In hanging one understanding of 'postmodernism' (or an aspect of its three-dimensional work) on this dialogic structure, Serra echoes Flint Schier's notion of the relationship between the artist and the viewer. **> Viewer.**

the Text

For Barthes, 'the Text' is the locus of non-stable, anarchic meaning as it 'practises the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory'.[74] With this assertion, Barthes marks a key shift from the structuralist contentions of 'The Death of the Author' (where meaning resides with a coherent, if ideal, reader) to a post-structuralist agenda. Moreover, Barthes locates the notion of the text as a whole (which exceeds this definition), at an intersection (like the writer was before, for Barthes too) - this time at a meeting of 'propositions'. The text's deferred meaning is the work of a 'playing; the generation of the perpetual signifier [...] in the field of the text'.[75] **> Infinite signification**

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[71] Ibid. p. 1125
[72] p. 1126
[73] p. 1126
[74] 'From Work to Text' in Harrison & Wood p. 943
[75] Ibid. p. 943

the Viewer

> **Death** and **Multifariousness** which address the viewer as a subject within language and a (self-expressive) individual. Between these two extremes, there is little other space in postmodern theory for the viewer. One notable exception, is offered by Flint Schier, in his essay 'Painting after Art?: Comments on Wollheim'.

Taking Richard Wollheim's notion that 'the painter doesn't merely paint *with* the eyes, he paints *for* the eyes',[76] Schier proceeds to offer a model of the origin of meaning which puts the artist (as painter) into an empathetic relation with the viewer. Schier argues that when Wollheim proposes that the artist paints for the eyes of the viewer he (Wollheim) 'has in mind' that:

'[...] the artist wants to know whether her product would evoke a valuable experience in anyone else. And to find out whether this is so, the artist, as she works, must detach herself from her own viewpoint and assume the role of the sort of person she hopes will come before her work. Having occupied this new point of view, she proceeds to look at her work from this fresh perspective, and to ask whether it continues to hold her interest now that she is "centrally imagining" her work from the perspective of the sort of person she hopes to reach.'[77]

In proposing that this is what Wollheim 'has in mind', Schier is, in a way, modelling the act of empathy that he recommends the artist performs. And in recommending that the artist adopts the viewpoint of her chosen viewer, Schier's gloss of Wollheim logically implies that this is where the origin of meaning must be found: with the viewer.

But his model does not stop at this. For Schier then suggests that:

'[j]ust as the artist must assume the role of his spectator, so the spectator is obliged to envisage the viewpoint of the artist, in order to ask what the work means from this point of view.'[78]

So the meaning that seems, at first, to originate with the artist's empathetic consideration of the viewer also has a point of origin with the viewer's empathetic consideration of the artist[79] - which is not, however, exhausted by 'its

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[76] 'Painting after Art?: Comments on Wollheim' in Harrison & Wood p. 1112
[77] ibid. p. 1112
[78] ibid. p. 1113
[79] See entry for 'Artist'

attempt to imagine the artist's meaning'[80] - the dialectic which Schier recommends (via Wollheim or Wollheim recommends via Schier) is not completely reciprocal and thus not tautological.

Addendum

Cued by Victor Burgin's article, 'The Absence of Presence', this discussion of the fetish (as the origin of meaning) has been relegated to the end of this chapter because the concept of 'the fetish' will be useful in Chapter 6, dealing as it does with the notion of the scope of representation in relation to its objects. Gratuitously, this relegation makes a fetish of this entry, for reasons that the following discussion of the term will elucidate (structurally over-valorising it, and separating it from the main body of the chapter).

Recoursing to the notion of the fetish in its psychoanalytic form,[81] Burgin writes:

'[f]undamental to Freud's account of fetishism is what he calls "disavowal" - the splitting between knowledge and belief which takes the characteristic form, "I know very well, but nevertheless...". Disavowal is the *form* of fetishism - that which operates to protect a sense of narcissistic self-integrity by effacing difference, otherness, the *outside.*'[82]

The disavowal which 'The Absence of Presence' so clearly pussyfoots around is, in 'Fetishism', presented as the boy's refusal 'to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not have a penis.'[83] (And Freud insists that the woman, in the first place, is the mother.) This refusal is propelled by the boy's reasoning that '[...] if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there [rises] a portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ.'[84] (Perhaps Freud rather easily accepts the absence of a penis as the token of castration.) As Freud, and Burgin after him, are both at pains to point out, an act of disavowal is not simply *not* knowing, but, crucially, an act of *un*knowing - knowing, but denying that one knows. And as Freud argues, this denial, or perversion of knowledge into a (false) belief (to borrow some of Burgin's terms), is effected by the 'creation of a substitute' for the missing female member.

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[80] Ibid. p. 1113
[81] There are also Marxist and anthropological forms (which will be discussed later on).
[82] 'The Absence of Presence' p. 1100
[83] 'Fetishism' p. 352
[84] Ibid. p. 352

'It seems [...] that when the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. As in this latter case, the subject's interest comes to halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny and traumatic one is retained as a fetish. Thus the foot or shoe owes its preference as a fetish - or part of it - to the circumstance that the inquisitive boy peered at the woman's genitals from below, from her legs up; fur and velvet - as has long been suspected - are a fixation of the sight of the pubic hair, which should have been followed by the longed-for sight of the female member; pieces of underclothing, which are so often chosen as a fetish, crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.'[85]

Freud also observes that less obvious objects (such as a 'shine on the nose'[86]) can be taken as fetishes. The nature of the fetish object is of interest only in as much as it proposes its own aetiology (which it did for Freud prior to 'Fetishism'[87]) and as it fits the psychic task in hand; the psychic economy of the particular fetishist. Vitally, the psychic *function* of the fetish 'makes [women] tolerable as sexual beings'[88] - though this is somewhat confounded by Freud's assertion that the fetishist can 'readily obtain the sexual satisfaction attached to [the fetish]. What other men have to woo and make exertions for can be had by the fetishist with no trouble at all.'[89] Thus 'toleration' is effected by means of a synecdoche; the fetishist relates to a part of (a) woman, not the whole. And since this part functions 'as' the woman, it is over-valorised in its prosaic aspect.

So the 'narcissistic self-integrity' [wholeness to one's self] that disavowal *as* fetishism (fetishism as the substitution of an object for the woman's missing penis) 'operates to protect' is the *boy's* (and later, man's) self-love. And the difference, otherness and *outside* that is effaced by this disavowal, is, of course, that of *sexual* difference; sexual otherness: the outside that is woman's (other) anatomy.

Burgin himself deploys the reassuring sight of Freudian psychoanalysis, and specifically, this notion of the fetish, to explain the absence of a (missing) member from the corpus of art history - namely Conceptual Art, as a prelude to restoring it. Burgin contends that '[...] conceptual art opened onto [an] *other* history, a history which opens onto history [...]'[90] and he seems, eventually, to

[85] Ibid. pp. 354-355
[86] Ibid p. 351
[87] See the Penguin editor's notes p. 348
[88] 'Fetishism' p. 354 I wonder whether Freud considers the fetish as it functions for the female child/voyeur.
[89] Ibid p. 354
[90] 'The Absence of Presence' p. 1098

gloss this history of history as one which involves:

'[...] *taking account* of difference, *division* (rather than effectively *denying* difference by valorizing one term of an opposition in order to suppress the other)'[91]

- nothing other than a history which accommodates the notion of lack (which difference as a shorthand for *sexual* difference must countenance). This, so his rather evasive argument suggests, is one of the literal or metaphorical subjects of Conceptual Art. And he concludes (this line of reasoning, if not quite the essay) by asserting:

'I have remarked that the history and pre-history of modern art in our patriarchal, phallocentric culture is stamped by the presence of fetishism, the fetishism of presence. [...] Today, what has become in effect the "official" posture of the art establishment is a disavowal in respect of history'.[92]

When 'history' is Conceptual Art's attention to absence, the 'fetishism of presence' disavows (the presence of) the absence of presence.

There are several comments to be made about this state of affairs. One concerns the metaphorical recourse to art as a human, and of course, sexual body (art is female) and the lookers-on (the 'art establishment') are therefore male. What is interesting about this rather complex trope (that Freud himself would warn against),[93] is that the metaphor yields the fetish object as literally, presence, - or the art of this. Art lacks not a penis, but the plenitude of presence; therefore it is presence (since one does not have to beat about the bush to find a substitute) which so neatly plugs the hole. A more far-reaching point concerns the way in which Conceptual Art engages with the notion of absence: as its representing or its represented matter? It is crucial, for the purposes of Chapter 6, to address this question.

Burgin is none too clear as far as this equivocation goes, but however it is played, there are clear and important implications for an understanding of the metaphoric application (to art) of the psychoanalytic version of the concept of

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[91] ibid p. 1099

[92] ibid p. 1100

[93] Towards the end of his life Freud wrote (in *Civilization and Its Discontents*): 'I would not say that an attempt [...] to carry psychoanalysis over to the cultural community was absurd or doomed to be fruitless. But we should have to be very cautious and not forget that, after all, we are only dealing with analogies and that it is dangerous, not only with men but also with concepts, to tear them from the sphere in which they have originated and been evolved.' (p. 338)

the fetish.

If Conceptual Art engages absence as its *representing* matter - which is to say, absence is *embodied*, (as happened with John Cage's *4'33"*, perhaps) - then Burgin is indeed correct in taking the establishment's disavowal of Conceptual Art (in favour of the art of presence) as a fetishistic gesture. (Though how one would recognise the work of absence as an art-work - or indeed, as anything, remains a problem. It could be argued that the absence that Cage dramatises is announced by its staging (a concert hall; full orchestra; the conductor with his baton poised...), and it is thus *framed* and hence an *image* of an absence and not a presence.) Yet when the absence of Conceptual Art concerns its *represented* matter (Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* is a good case in point, narrating as it does, a woman's lack), it is less obvious that the art establishment, as it refuses to accept this type of work, and Burgin, as he comments on that disavowal, are in fact engaging with the mechanism of the fetish.

As the *represented* matter of a work of art, absence becomes a presence (precisely as the work's subject matter). Hence, strictly speaking, this version of Conceptual Art cannot be fetishised by the art establishment (rather, the offending lack, which resides at the level of the content of the work, could be 'treated' by the artist - though this would be a dereliction of the duty of the movement). If a fetish is to be performed upon this aspect of Conceptual Art, then it has to be with deference to a looser, non-psychoanalytic understanding of the term. Such is the usage preferred by Marx and Marxists after him, who refer to money, property and commodities as fetishes for Capitalist society.[94] Here, (in a usage which predates Freud's), there is nothing of the latter's understanding of the fetish as a restitution of a lack. But what is preserved (proleptically) is the idea of an unduly worshipped part of some larger whole, with the consequence of repressing other aspects of that body/whole. (Fetishism's mechanism minus the involvement of lack is perhaps properly referred to as 'repression'.)

However, it is useful, for the purposes of Chapter 6, to hold onto the term 'fetishism' (rather than recoursing to 'repression' to make up for what the former may lack), reassured, indeed, that it operates in several ways - which Burgin himself may have seen, in avoiding to clarify the lack at stake, the flimsy references to Freud (not)withstanding.

[94] See Hal Foster, Introduction to *Fetish* 'Marx, Adorno, Benjamin, and Baudrillard have all used the term "fetish" in reference to the commodity culture resulting from a capitalist economy and society.' (p. 5) See also anthropological definitions of the fetish which include this sense of over-valorising something, without the presence of an absence.

By way of bringing this discussion to an end, the long and short of all this for a notion of the origin of meaning is that Burgin's essay argues that meaning originates, for postmodernism, in the fetish that the art establishment creates for postmodernist art history and art theory, in preferring the art of presence (instanced with postmodernism as 'a wholesale "return to painting"'[95]) over and above the art of absence.

As such, this is less a theory of the origin of meaning per se and more a theory of a history which actively excludes certain works of art which therefore never have the chance of meaning in the first place. As Burgin recourses to the fetish to describe what types of artworks "official" notions of postmodernism might acknowledge, Burgin's borrowing (from Freud) is borrowed here to describe how *the origins of meaning* are represented in the theory and the history of postmodernism (seen through the lens of Harrison and Wood's selection).

Certainly, postmodernism pluralises modernism's understanding of the origin of meaning (in number and type), as 'abstraction', 'the self', 'society', 'reality', and 'form' are replaced by a plethora of sites. There are no less than twenty-one entries in this Encyclopaedia, and doubtless, were more postmodernist texts to be reviewed, this number would increase. However, at the same time, referring to the notion (proposed by the conclusion to Chapter 2) that modernism as postmodernism's supplement (its outside), might define the essence of the latter, it can also be suggested that those twenty-one origins are nothing other than elaborations of those five categories of origin proposed by modernism. Thus, noting a certain arguability of placing, 'the Artist', 'the Body', aspects of 'Death', and 'the Viewer' could be seen as origins to do with 'the self' (or the subject, as 'the self' in its non-reflexive state); 'Community', 'Rationalisation' and 'Site', pertain to a notion of the social; 'the Absence of presence'; 'Beyond the artist', 'Depthlessness', 'The Exhibition system', 'Hyper-realism', 'Ideology', 'Infinite signification', 'The Order of discourse', 'the art of the Past', 'Pastiche and Parody', 'Rhetoric', 'the Text', and 'Fetish' are all aspects of 'form', leaving only 'Multifariousness' as a residue.

That this *is* a residue - that it may be a supplement to something else - an-other to both modernism *and* postmodernism - makes another point. As individual theories within modernism propose a singularity of origin for meaning (and six do so outright, and three, in addition, do so just authorially), modernism also represents the essence of postmodernism which, by and large, elevates this

[95] 'The Absence of Presence' p. 1098

presence of singularity to a key position; as 'singularity' defines postmodernism's understanding of the origin of meaning via individual theories.

As it does, (and as it also partially defines modernism) so the fetish (in the looser understanding of the term) is invoked as an emblem here. Or it should be invoked: as postmodernist theories in their individuality restrict the compass of the notion of origin as it is more collectively defined - also as it is defined more widely with modernism's individual theories. And if too, an artist's experience of the origin of meaning proposes something more heterogeneous, so it should be invoked again. Burgin proposes that this might be the case. Writing of 'narrative' and 'allegory' (relatives of theory and history), he contends: '[a] response to the radical heterogeneity of the possible has always been the homogeneity of the permissible.'[96] To see if this describes an artist's experience, in relation to the origin of meaning in recent theory, it is necessary to review that experience, which is the task of Chapter 5.

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[96] 'The Absence of Presence' p. 1101

An artist's experience of the origin of meaning in visual art: a case-study

In researching (for) art through practice - *empirically* - or rather, here, researching (for) art through *writing about* practice, it is not surprising that the motif of the case-study should appear. In principle, this motif signifies in two ways. It can signify the record of a close attention to an individual thing, or the attempt to derive a general law from that attention. This thesis deploys the motif in its second sense, while questioning the move from the particular to the general.

In the writing about art there are many cases of the case-study in its sense as a close attention to a thing: it is, of course the premise of art criticism. There are fewer examples of the case-study in its second sense - as art is taken as an instance of a general law (of art). Writing which *does* do this includes T J Clark's impressive study of 'Olympia' which may function as a more general law (of meaning).[1] However, because this is a rare exception in the writing about art, I am urged to look elsewhere for a paradigm; a method for proceeding.

Among the obvious disciplines to borrow from, are sociology, psychology, the many 'natural' sciences, and anthropology.[2] In choosing to recourse to Freud (psychoanalysis) - I am thinking of the way in which his comments on his case-studies can be 'lifted' almost to the letter for *this* case - which is to say, Freud makes the paradigm explicit.[3] A reading of 'A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case History ("Dora")' proposes three basic aspects of a case-study: a discussion of methodology; 'the case history'; and an analysis or conclusion, though Freud's example here is not entirely adequate for reasons that will be discussed. (But a recourse to Freud - again - offers a consistency of supplement across the chapters of this thesis: there was the question of the artist's desire in Chapter 2, and Chapter 4 concluded with the notion of the fetish.) What follows is informed by the *structure* of 'A Fragment of an Analysis of a Case History ("Dora")' and the comments on the paradigm are taken from the same text.

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[1] 'Preliminaries to a Possible Treatment of *Olympia* in 1865'.

[2] 'Science' may, indeed, function as a paradigm for the *written* aspect of this project, if not, as Chapter 2 contended, for the project overall. (See Chapter 2, p. 37)

[3] Note, however, that the Penguin Freud Library titles Freud's texts on instances of psychoanalysis as 'Case *Histories*' (italics added). It is true that a history of Freud's cases is included in these texts, but they are not reducible to chronological accounts of a subject's psychopathology as the Penguin titles so imply. Even in Freud's deployment of the term (which refers to the 'treatment' of a psychopathology - and thus includes its narration and analysis) 'Case History' falls short of describing what these texts are, for they *also* include Freud's reflection upon that 'history' so defined. This is why I refer to them as 'case-studies'.

Prefatory remarks[4]

'In now proposing [...to give] a detailed report of the history of a case [...], I cannot avoid making a few introductory remarks, for the purpose of partly justifying from various standpoints the step I am taking, and partly of diminishing the expectations to which it will give rise.'[5]

Methodology

In turning the question of the origin of meaning over to an artist - this artist, me, whoever I may be - four procedural issues need to be addressed. To begin with, there is an issue of what the noun 'artist' designates. Then there is the question of *an* artist's typicality. Next, there is the question of where, in the life of 'the artwork', an artist locates the meaning of the work of art. And here, 'the' is meant as 'an' - a single work of art - given this is what is, empirically, at stake, though an artist, like all empirical researchers, may want to move from 'an' to 'the' as a universal category. This is to argue that 'an artwork' has a history (of deferral) which has to be considered before an aetiology of meaning (the study of originarity, under erasure) is addressed. Fourthly, there is the problem of typicality, as it pertains to whether just one instance of an artist's work can represent the whole.

Defining the noun 'artist'

'What is an artist?' This question was acknowledged, and its answer was avoided, in Chapter 1, in which it was acknowledged, too, as a version of Foucault's much adapted question 'What is an author?' Here it is approached in a form which doubly adapts Foucault's query. 'An author' has becomes 'an artist' (who may well be a type of author, and vice versa); and importantly, the indefinite article here signifies a singularity, rather than a category (which it signified for Foucault). And since I have already claimed that 'I' am an artist, the question may be glossed, in this context, as a question about what this artist - I - is or am.

Clearly, as I also noted in Chapter 1, I am a writer who writes about my being (as) an artist. So as an artist, I am, or 'I' is deferred. (And as a writer, too). Writing goes about 'I'; I author-ise 'I' as an artist and de-authorise both 'I's as an artist and a writer. An artist appears. An artist is an apparition. Of what?

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[4] Title to the opening section of 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")'.
[5] ibid. p. 35

Does it matter what an artist is, even as an apparition?

Unless an empty formalism rules that I define myself for its own sake, it is only material if certain claims are made concerning this artist's - 'my' - typicality. And scholarship traditionally demands that such general claims *are* made: such is the ethics of research which forbids a singular (particular) attention to the singular. Thus my interest as an artist - a particular - is only meaningful if I am also typical of other artists - a hypothesis which pertains to the second procedural issue:

An artist's typicality

Philosophy has realised the relationship between the particular and the general in a number of ways: via Realism (Plato and Aristotle); via philosophical Conceptualism (British empiricists); and via Nominalism (William of Ockham).[6] And lastly, and latterly, via deconstruction. Since this project has adopted a deconstructive methodology for its theoretical procedures, it is this realisation which is chosen, and related to the case in hand.
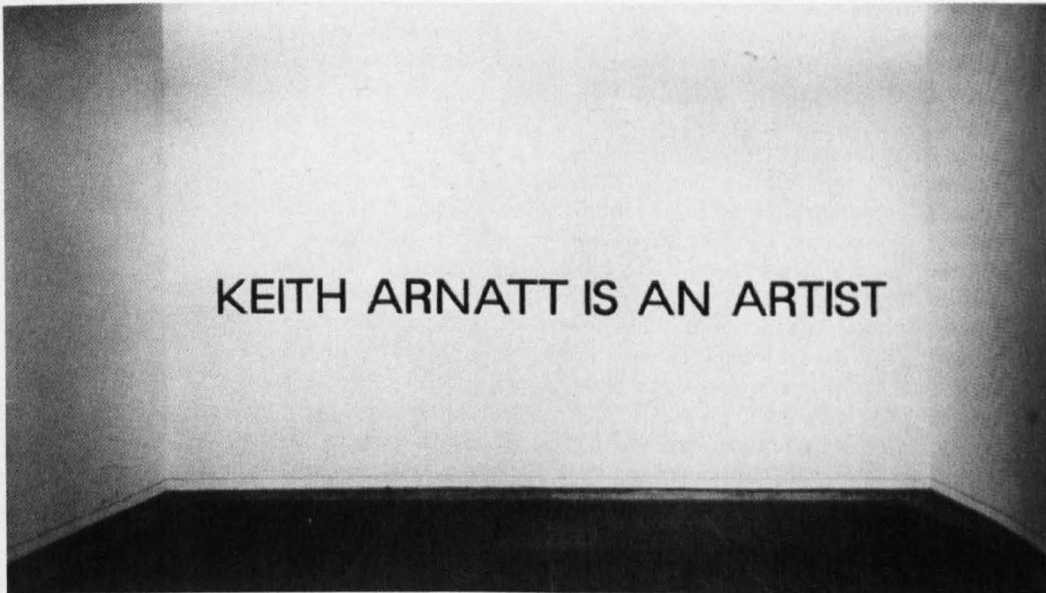
fig. 27 Keith Arnatt *Keith Arnatt is an Artist* Wall inscription exhibited at the Tate Gallery 1972

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[6] Note how these three methods correspond to the categories of realism, empiricism and idealism, respectively - categories which this thesis plies in a number of directions.

Deconstruction and the issue of exemplification: taking the particular as Universal

'It is clear that Derrida is fully aware of the problem of exemplarity as a metaphysical problem - perhaps even as the metaphysical problem par excellence' writes Irene E Harvey in 'Doubling the Space of Existence: Exemplarity in Derrida - the Case of Rousseau'.[7] However, it is less clear that Harvey herself is aware of the distinction to be made between the 'problem of exemplarity' as it relates to the separate problems of the 'mere example' and the 'good example' (the latter nevertheless including the idea of the 'mere example' as one of its components). Instead, she takes 'the problem of exemplarity' to designate the issue of the exemplary per se - which is addressed in some rudimentary remarks made by Derrida in Of Grammatology.[8] It is not he who makes the slip from 'the exemplary' to 'exemplarity'. Rather it is Harvey. But in so doing, she provides some useful clues on how the contingent issue of the (mere) example may be as problematic as she finds the exemplary to be.

The structure of 'exemplarity' is, according to Harvey's account of Derrida, one of 'duplicity'. This is because

'[...] the good example is just another instance, a repetition, a confirmation, a revindication, and here situated inside the tradition, yet on the other hand, [a] good example is outside that same tradition. [...] a good example [...] does something new [...] unique and unprecedented.'[9]

Later on, Harvey further glosses this (differential) structure of the exemplary as the difference between the 'mere example... a superfluous addition' and 'a particularly good example [...] an essential addition'; having noted that what is at stake in this argument is, indeed, the Derridean notion of différance which may in turn be glossed as 'deferring + differing'.[10]

It is not clear that this structure of exemplarity (as the structure of the exemplary) does not also describe the structure of the mere example. The latter too, is (d)riven by the play of différance. In the first (and privileged case) of the exemplary, this différance engages the issue of value; the good example is, precisely, mere and good. In the

[7] The article appears in Deconstruction and Philosophy: Texts of Jacques Derrida ed. John Sallis.

[8] 'In his "Introduction to the 'Age of Rousseau'" in Of Grammatology Derrida asks the following questions: 'Why accord an "exemplary value" " to the "age of Rousseau"? What privileged place does Jean-Jacques Rousseau occupy in the history of logocentrism? What is meant by that proper name?' His answer to these questions is by his own admission only "the beginning of an answer" and "perhaps only the beginning of an elaboration, limited to the preliminary organization of the question."' (Harvey p. 60)

[9] Harvey p. 61 The argument is specified, exemplified with reference to Rousseau.

[10] see 'Différance' in A Derrida Reader ed. P Kamuf.

second (and demoted case) of the mere example, this différance relates to the question of ontology; the nature of the example as a relation to its category as a play of abstract sameness and concrete difference. By virtue of the fact that the example (re)turns the structure of the exemplary, it would indeed appear then, that the exemplary is no less than an example (an exemplary example) of both aspects of exemplarity (the mere example and the good example). Harvey's oversight becomes far-sighted at the reflexive level of her text.

fig. 28 Examples of cakes

Thus in staking a claim to be a mere example of the artist, I am staking out an uncertain or rather, a divided field. I am inside and outside that category; this is the condition of all examples in relation to their 'ruling' categories. And the field is not just divided thus: there would be, too, the problem of my status as a 'good' 'mere example' which would further (sub)divide the territory; such is the supplementary logic of deconstruction.

The life of the artwork and the origin of meaning

The sign of 'an artwork' - the sign *for* an artwork *and* the sign that *is* an artwork - has a history, when 'history' is 'a weave of differences'. An artwork is a history - its history is the signifying chain. An artwork is a concept; a process; an investigation; an act of refinement; a mistake; a product; a text; a display; an icon; a scandal... and so on. The following account of an artwork traces something of that history, fated as that will be to partiality. This partiality is fated by the subject - me - and specifically, the subject's or, my, fatality. I cannot guarantee an artwork's slippages for all time. So meaning is brought to a subjective halt, though it goes on deferring. As 'I' am an artist (or the sign of an artist), this history begins with my interest in the work and it ends with the end of my interest. An artist's experience of an artwork is no substitute for that of other types of viewers.

The typicality of an artist's one work in relation to an oeuvre

The way in which one work of art exemplifies the whole of an artist's oeuvre can simply be referred back to the discussion of the status of the artist as an example; in that way it is governed by the same deconstructive logic, with the same evasive outcome. The example that I have chosen as a 'case-study' for the question of the origin of meaning is chosen not for its exemplarity in relation to my work as a whole, but rather for the reason that it was an extensive project which was also as a rare occurrence, seen through from beginning to the point of exhibition. Though with Freud, 'I have not yet succeeded in solving the problem of how to record for publication the history of a treatment of long duration',[11] I am able to provide, via surviving documents, much of the circumstantial information; more than usual in such cases, mainly owing to the project's more formal footing. These documents act as prompts for my memory, making up for its lacunae.

Doubtless, 'the record is not absolutely - phonograpically - exact' (the phonographic is, indeed, not exact, in partaking of the character of writing) and writing defers speech),[12] 'but it can claim to possess a high degree of trustworthiness'[13] deconstruction notwithstanding. And yet, standing with deconstruction, there are 'kinds of incompleteness' which Freud acknowledges. Like him, in the following account I only reproduce *the results* of my interpretative process - not the process itself; I naturalise the theory therein. So to:

The making of a work of art: the case history: 'the material on which my conclusions [are] based'[14]

'The presentation of my case histories remains a problem which is hard for me to solve.'[15]

I could say that it started as I rounded the corner of my street, approaching the house in which I live and saw a small dump of objects stacked against the front garden wall. Or that it began before then; before I turned the corner. It began when someone decided to clear out the cellar. And then it had another beginning in the habit that we cultivate around here, of leaving our unwanted goods on the street because there is always someone who wants something. The most unlikely objects disappear. This is

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[11] 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' p. 38
[12] see Derrida on the supplementary nature of 'writing' over speech *Of Grammatology* p. 144
[13] 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' p. 38
[14] ibid. p. 35
[15] ibid. p. 35

the socioeconomic factor in the story which does, of course, have a part to play elsewhere. But perhaps the account begins even further back; indeed, long ago. But where, then? And when? Beginnings are, of course, fictitious as Laurence Sterne so wonderfully conveys in figuring Tristram Shandy *as a shaggy dog story with its tail in its mouth, so to speak. Speaking so: because,* Tristram Shandy *puts its tale in its mouth meta-fictionally, in the telling of its story is its story. And its tail is in its mouth also, as its end (purpose, function) as the quest for its beginning, which is subject to a process of deferral or a pushing back. As Tristram, the narrator, remarks: '- Endless is the Search of Truth.'[16] And this is the fiction of origin which Derrida remarks upon when he notes 'the impossibility of beginning at the beginning' because this 'presupposes an onto-phenomenological question'[17] ('what - or who - is Tristram Shandy?') Which returns to the essential questions of metaphysics. So beginnings are fictitious (to begin again) - fictitious as they render their subjects 'essential' no matter if the stories (sorties) that they start are of the 'factual' kind or otherwise.*

So let's say that it began as I approached this pile of rubbish, and with a gaze that I had long-since perfected - my gleaner's eye - scanned and sifted it, quickly deciding what was not worth bothering with and what was rich for picking. (This has something to do with the economics of my situation and a desire to translate base matter into gold.) I teased at a broken structure that suggested some sort of toy building - which indeed, it was, or part of such; the carcass of a doll's house. Its open-plan design was extended in its after-life by the absence of a roof. I dug around some more and found two panels covered on one side with red paper tiles. And then I found a flight of plastic stairs, and some bannisters.

Inside my (real) house I put the doll's house parts together, and found that it was missing nothing. Save, I guessed, its former sheen, since it was now uniformly covered in a layer of dirt and its walls were mildewed. Leaves in the rooms' recesses harboured spiders which had spun their webs across empty door frames.

It was only after it had been in my studio as an object of curiosity and slight revulsion for a few months that I thought about photographing it - if only so that it could be dispensed with.

I can rationalise several impetuses for this.[18] With very few exceptions, my photographic work over the preceding year or so had been done with a macro lens;

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[16] *Tristram Shandy* p. 110
[17] *Of Grammatology* pp. 74-74
[18] The emphasis here is to acknowledge that other factors may have been at work as well - but rather ones that I can't so easily discern; unconscious ones, for instance.

the close-up had become a kind of automatic view. And then I was thinking, too, about models. I had in mind to make a model of a public convenience (on a scale of 1:12) which was precisely that: a loo in a cubicle with see-through walls. (It would be instructive, too, to look at the origins of this piece.) The fact that I was making close-up photographs and also had ideas for models at the same time seems, with hindsight, hardly a coincidence. As contributory factors in my decision to photograph the doll's house, they themselves may stand in a relation of cause and effect to one another - though I could not, now, say how. (This account, I realise as I write it, is fictitious in another way as well, never mind the question of its true beginning. For hindsight distorts and omits: I have forgotten when and how things really happened. But then, if I were to write of something more immediate, something I am doing now, this, too, would be vulnerable to distortion: the refracting lens of self-consciousness.)

So it was that I began, using slide film, to record this fragile structure.

This narrative of cause and effect may be represented in a manner which more clearly attends to that anatomy - the structure of causality - and this is by a visual diagram *(fig. 29)*. This presents the elaborate distribution of events in time far more forcibly than prose alone can do. However, in adopting this strategy, this case-study departs from the Freudian paradigm - not just 'Dora' but the case histories by and large - which only make occasional use of the visual; as illustration.

Methodology: the diagram

Recall:

'[...] the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified be produced within the plenitude of a present and absolute presence. That is why there is no full speech, however much one might wish to restore it with or against psychoanalysis [and here, 'against', for recall too that 'the record is not [...] exact'.[19]] Before thinking to reduce it or to restore the meaning of full speech which claims to truth, one must ask the question of meaning and of its origin in difference.'[20]

This too, is why there is no full image: 'why always say of painting [for example, though of painting, irreducibly] that it renders, that it restitutes?'[21] But as the diagram refigures the verbal account, it could be said that it is *this* which is deferred, and not (the fiction of) a presence which the verbal itself defers. Or rather, in deferring the verbal, the diagram defers the fiction of reality at two removes.

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[19] 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria "Dora"' p. 38
[20] *Of Grammatology* pp. 69-70
[21] *The Truth in Painting* p. 259

Either way, certain aspects of it need to be explained.

The horizontal and vertical axes: reading from left to right, the *horizontal* axis symbolises time in its diachronic aspect. Note that the series of rectangular boxes at the bottom of the diagram does not, however, mark an even flow of time. Rather, the horizontal axis stretches and compresses time in order to focus on the periods of activity. A consequence of this is that the spaces *in between* the time-event boxes do not function as a spatial analogue of time; roughly simultaneous events are forced into a tightly vertical alignment. Such is the medium of the grid. Reading from top to bottom, the *vertical dimension* signifies synchronic time - as a function of the horizontal axis. In its own right, it represents a clustering of events according to their 'type' - arranged thus to ease the flow of the diagram. There is no symbolic value attached to this literal hierarchy.

The squares: these catch the connotations of a box, with its notions of packaging, of parcelling up, of neatening, and making safe; they tend towards the précis' metaphysics, that was remarked upon in Chapter 3.[22] In the sense that the 'events' of the case-study are treated as discrete units - sundered graphically - the diagram implies a particular philosophy of causation. The cause of an event is seen to be external to that event even though the cause is also an event - which, as Chapter 1 proposed, is one understanding of what 'origin' may signify.

The arrowed lines: these denote causality: the relation between cause and effect. Doubtless the diagram should be a much denser wreath of arrowed lines: I am certain that the diagram's containment on the paper is a fiction; that an army of arrows should assail all the squares from unseen (because unknown) causes off the page. And I am certain also, that for any visible connections there are many more unseen, suppressed as the 'background' layer to this structure. The limits of my understanding are the limits of this diagram.

The broken arrowed line: is used to denote an instance when two events appeared to be simultaneous and yet it is possible that both stood in a relation of cause and effect to one another. This raises the (theoretical) conundrum that something can be caused by that which it effects.

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[22] See footnote 29 in Chapter 3.

diagram to show the origins of *The House in the Lumber Room*
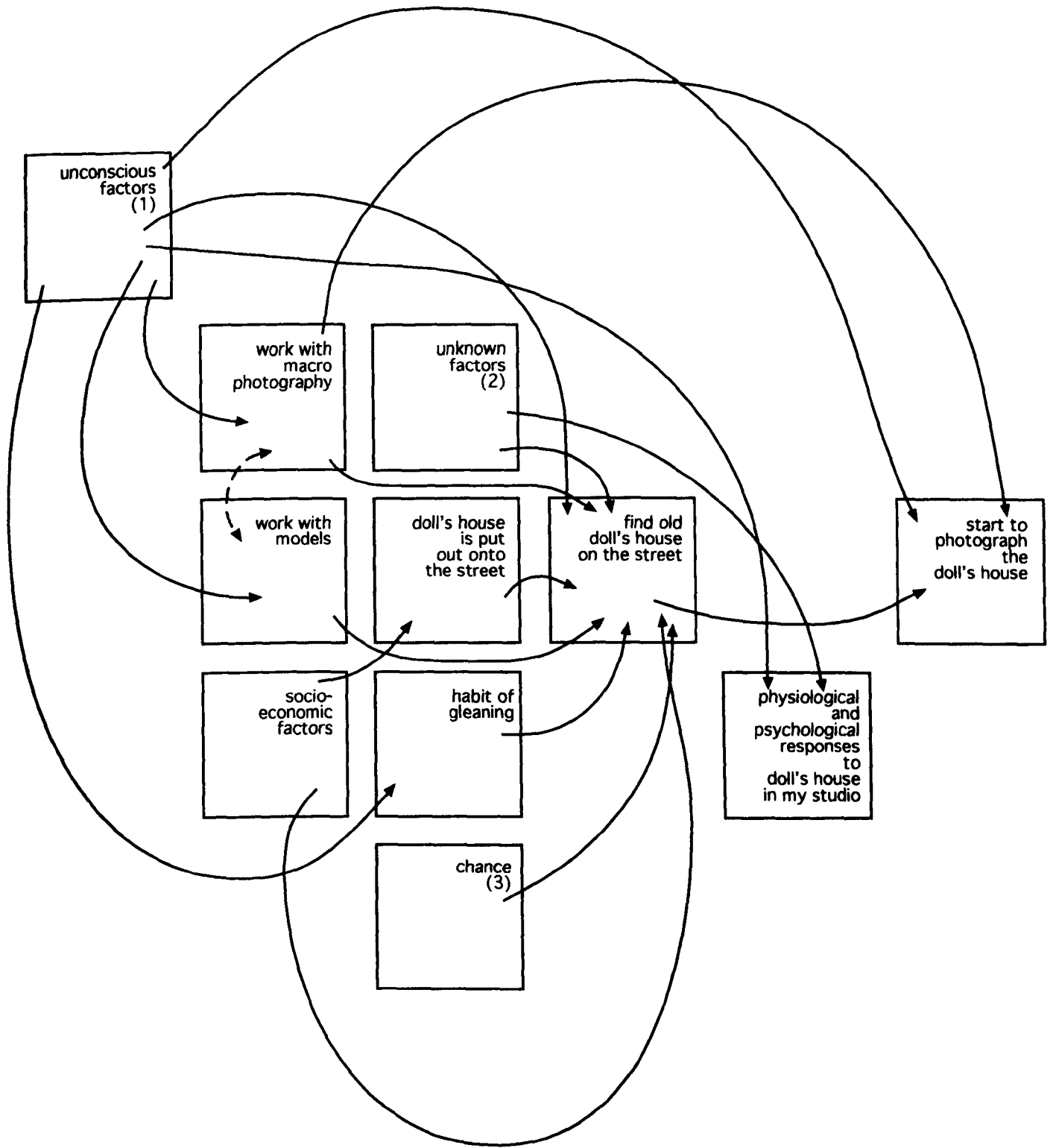
unconscious
factors
(1)

work with
macro
photography

unknown
factors
(2)

work with
models

doll's house
is put
out onto
the street

find old
doll's house
on the street

start to
photograph
the
doll's house

socio-
economic
factors

habit of
gleaning

physiological
and
psychological
responses
to
doll's house
in my studio

chance
(3)

1965 onwards	Spring 1996 - Summer 1996	November 1996	11 November 1996	evening of 11 November 1996	11 November - December 1996

The account continues

Already, even in its early stages (for there is much more to come), this account has taken in a number of very different sources for the work of art in question. And as this account has such a rambling and extensive history (for the work took a year and a half to bring to exhibition point and it went through several transformations so that, proportionally, the last few pages only represent a fragment of the whole narrative), it is *expedient* to represent this (whole) history as a (further) diagram *(fig. 30)*. This wagers on the visual's economy in this respect.

And on this subject there is one further note to add to the notes that previously prefaced the diagram. This concerns, indeed, the need for notes, for efficient though this visual schema is, there are places where it calls for greater (verbal) elaboration. Such annotations are indicated by *the numbers* and the paragraphs they designate can be found following the diagram.

CONTAINS

PULLOUTS

Boxes (flowchart nodes):

- discussion with someone about the photographic rhetoric for taking models (5)
- retake photographs with extended depth of field
- consider if this work is just about the deceptions of photography & not also about the spaces as if they are real (6)
- think about photographic devices for embodying these e.g. lighting; composition (9)
- the ICA's 'Belladonna' show becomes an important reference point for the framing of ours (10)
- technical considerations i.e. the degree to which a 35mm tranny can be enlarged determine size
- my images are realised as 30x40" R types mounted on aluminium (12)
- work on the presented scale of the work: think about realising it as slide-projections
- decide that the piece will be presented as a slide projection
- take more photographs which attempt to deal with issues of memory, child-hood and scale
- financial support for publicity from Brunel University
- choice of final images
- show first set of images to a few people
- think about the visual structure of memory and the nature of visual memory
- a few deductions about the structure of visual memory (8)
- show is mounted/ installed (13)
- show opens
- general viewers' response to the work (14)
- artists' reflections and analysis (16)
- artists' work is shown elsewhere afterwards
- people read the empty house and the small house as the house of childhood
- discussions with people about their memories of childhood homes
- produce a piece of writing about one of my childhood homes (7)
- reassess the project in the context of the exigencies of the allotted space (and time)
- I decide to show my images as photographs rather than slides due to the lighting needs of ML's work
- publicity organised/sent out;includes: invitation, press release and ad in 'Art Monthly' (11)
- agree to work on a proposal for a joint (two person) show with a contemporary - Mary Lou Pavlovic
- send a joint proposal for a show off to three galleries having made preliminary enquiries
- one acceptance (from Gasworks Gallery)
- refocus/review project via a consideration of the similarities and differences in our work
- emphasis is placed upon the adult's memory and perceptions of childhood; a retrospective gaze
- response to press release from BANK fax-back service
- person in the Gasworks office (Rebecca Fortnum) faxes Gasworks' response back to BANK
- gallerists' response to show (15)
- two rejections (from Camerawork and City Racing)
- artists' names and the concerns of the show suggest its title
- my work becomes more melancholic; Mary Lou's work becomes more humorous
- friends confuse artists' names; calling each by the other's name
- nursery rhyme
- decide on a title for the show: 'mary, mary quite contrary'

Timeline boxes (bottom):

| before Christmas and early 1997 | early 1997 | January - March 1997 | March 1997 | | June 1997 | | June 1997 | August 1997 | September 1997 | December 1997 | February 1998 | April 1998 | | May 1998 | 10 May - 14 May 1998 | 14 May 1998 | 14 May - 7 June 1998 | 14 May 1998 onwards | 7 June 1998 onwards |

Annotations to the diagram

1. *Unconscious factors;* 2. *Unknown factors;* 3. *Socio-economic factors;*
4. *Chance*

I note these factors - in the series of events that the diagram narrates - in order to recognise that something comes before the first 'concrete' stages of the narrative, at least as I experience it (and it is, after all, supposed to be the narrative of my experience). But beyond my experience, things are necessarily more hazy and this for me, here, takes on the hue of abstraction; concepts untethered to the real.

5. Discussion with someone about the photographic rhetoric for taking models

I showed the first set of slides to someone who happened to be knowledgeable about the photography of models. He told me how architectural photographers deployed certain conventions in order to make a model simulate a life-size building. One such convention involved the use of a small depth of field *in addition* to using a macro-lens (which I'd been using). And from what he said, I realised that by using a small depth of field - say f 3.5 or less - it's possible to isolate one focal plane - one layer of the scene before the camera - which can be chosen, and homed in upon, for its relative verisimilitude; that aspect which is most cunning in its detail. The rest of the image will be uniformly out of focus - and yet it can corroborate the chosen detail by supplying an impressionistic version of the scene - leaving the viewer of the photograph none the wiser as to the 'original'. Fabricating in this way a false synecdoche, it is possible to cover-up the tell-tale traces that most models carry of their fictional, scaled-down status.

But as my adviser suggested, this 'trick' has a limited life. He suggested that it was now so well-worn that I had to call the viewer's bluff by adopting the opposite tactic: by having everything in focus, as if I were depicting a life-size architecture. Such is the convoluted 'life' of rhetoric. Here, the sign of 'realism' is, at one moment, based upon a trick and then, in the next instance, functions by the absence of that trick.

Of course, the implications of the trick's exhaustion were disturbing. There was the thought that my model wouldn't withstand the unforgiving gaze of f 22 plus a slow, fine-grained film and a camera on a tripod - this shifting of the burden of veracity from photograph to model, when the model is, after all, just another image.

My adviser then told me about something wonderful: a very tiny camera - an optic fibre camera, I think - which could be inserted into the interior of a model, and so could be

used to simulate how it would seem if you were standing inside. This, it seemed to me, captured a central fantasy associated with the doll's house: as it optically embodied the child's imaginative possession of the doll's house's inaccessible spaces. (If the adult has lost this magical facility, the camera then functions, in several ways, as a prosthetic.)

So I made some enquiries with architectural practices in London, and eventually, located just such a camera. Except that - so they said - it didn't actually take photographs but was just for looking through.

6. Consider if this work is just about the deceptions of photography & not also about the spaces as if they are real

Seduced by the issues involved in the conjunction of my object and photography, which was effected by the power of photography to turn its objects into (an image of) life-sized reality by force of association, I was overlooking issues to do with what these mechanisms were more specifically brought to bear upon: the question of what the architecture signified beyond its status as a model of a real thing. By dramatic analogy: an image that conspicuously depicts a model prison is different from an image that (conspicuously) depicts a 'real' prison. But then: an image that (conspicuously) depicts a model prison differs from an image that (conspicuously) depicts a model farm.

7. Produce a piece of writing about one of my childhood homes

She sometimes walks past the house where she used to live when she was young. It is only an ordinary house; a pre-war suburban semi in a tree-lined avenue but she often finds the thought of seeing it unbearable.

So she chooses a day when the sun is out, in Spring, when the ornamental cherry trees in the road's green verges are in blossom, perhaps because there was such a tree in the back garden (with a swing) and she remembers vividly the clash of white against a sharp blue sky. In this way, she can pretend that not a week has gone by since she was five.

Searching for familiar features, and overlooking the cruel changes that successive occupants have made to her old house, she toys with the idea of asking the present owners to let her look inside the place that she regards as hers. She argues to herself that memory gives one shares of a sort in a

property. And yet while she knows that the sight of the light falling through the front door, the pattern of the bannisters and countless other architectural details would assist her wish to restore the house of her memory, she also knows that much would destroy her fragile attempt to restore that edifice. Desisting, she consoles herself with the thought that her former home is best left as a thing of the mind.

What she forgets, however, is that the memory, too, is layered with the dust of time.

8. A few deductions about the structure of visual memory

One thing that I came to understand in writing this was the way in which my visual memory was acutely selective; optically, the visual field took on the character of a moth-eaten cloth in reverse or a scene seen through holey cheese. Nothing could be further from the uniform attention of the photograph. But photography, I thought, would have to suffice; would have to attend to my memory's visual structure through its own devices.

9. Think about photographic devices for embodying the structure of visual memory

So I focused on the way in which the uniform attention of a photograph could be evaded - without recoursing to the all-too-tempting tactic of the small depth of field that was now prohibited. This 'thinking' was done as much in inward speech[23] as in the camera. These were my rudimentary conclusions: that the *scope* of the image could convey something of the range of attention of my childhood gaze. Homing in upon those 'architectural details', the camera could subject them to a fetishising stare; the stare which excluded, in the manner of the fetish, what I had forgotten, (wanted to forget) or what my former self had overlooked (wanted to avoid); the site of a lack. (Now, as I use this notion of the fetish, I think it would have been more interesting to focus on those sites of absence, in the manner of the more 'radical' conceptual art as Victor Burgin understands it.) But then, I did not see this. Instead, I also thought about the way in which the angle of view might suggest a child's gaze (closer to the floor; straining up) and about the way in which my chosen details - the fetishes of architectural elements (a standard lamp; a dusty floor; a row of bannisters; a grate; a ceiling light; a flight of stairs) could be enhanced as such; isolated further via photography. And I tried to set them in a sea of darkness, borrowing from painting the notion of chiaroscuro. Here the large depth of field was ironically supportive as it

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[*] Derrida on Husserl in *Speech and Phenomena* pp. 41-44

strained at a landscape which resolutely refused to render all but a patch visible, and further, functioned, I hoped, to suggest the unknown that lurks at a child's all-too near peripheries.

10. *The ICA's* Belladonna *show becomes an important reference point*

Because: it seemed to parallel the work that we were doing. The guide to *Belladonna* framed the show's work as follows:

'This exhibition, like its namesake, presents a spectrum of experience and effect: at different moments it is dreamy, anxious, weird, enigmatic, demented, intoxicating, disturbing, melancholic and playful. Moving between lofty romanticism and lowly gothic, between extreme beauty and disquieting ugliness, between wry humour and wistful sadness, *Belladonna* is a rich brew with many diverse ingredients.'[24]

Because: it seemed to speak a 'fin-de siècle' spirit albeit in a vastly clichéd way - but this was only to its credit (for how else can you speak of that?) And we wondered to what extent we were working with or against the spirit of that show.

11. *Publicity (invitation, press release; ad in* Art Monthly) *(figs. 31-33)*
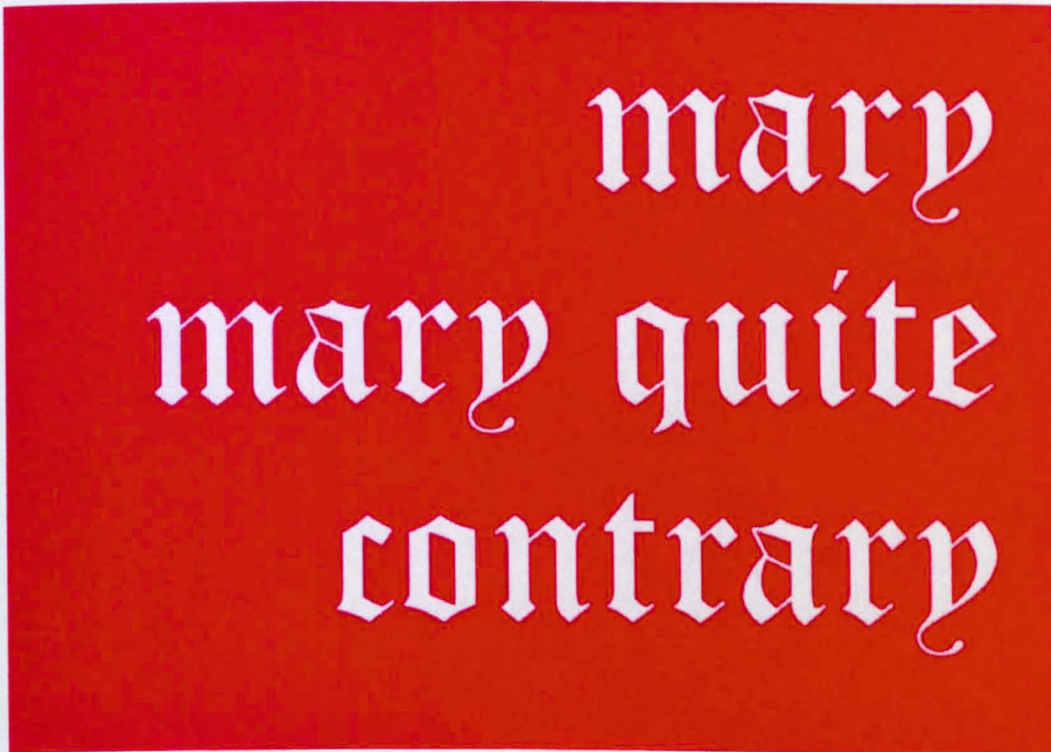
fig. 31 The invitation

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[24] *Belladonna* exhibition guide; ICA London 24 January - 12 April 1997

g a s w o r k s

mary, mary quite contrary
15 may - 7 june 1998

photographs by mary anne francis
and
videos by mary lou pavlovic

mary, mary quite contrary is sparky and brooding, funny, foolish, ethereal and derelict, thunderous, grandiose, murderous and melancholic, naive and cunning. These gothic qualities emerge through the artists' shared interest in the theme of childhood.

Mary Anne's series of large photographs *The House in the Lumber Room* portray a child's house. The images often reject the architecture of an adult's perception: one shows a flight of stairs towering overhead and leading to a darkened landing; another sees a row of bannisters like ranked toy soldiers, and another, yet again, looks with child-like concentration at the surface of a wooden floor.

But this house has been abandoned: the grate is empty and the furniture has gone - except for a standard lamp which is, curiously, aglow. Furthermore, the building's mildewed walls and thickly dusty surfaces suggest it was forsaken an age ago; consigned to a lumber room, along with other memories of childish things.

Mary Lou's work originated in the disturbing experience of a recurring dream concerning the death of her brother which she has had from early childhood to the present day. Recently, wondering if somewhere in her murky unconscious she may indeed *occasionally* desire him dead, she started to make darkly fanciful videos (*Throw Brother from the Train, The Haunting* and *No Weddings and a Funeral*) in which she attempts to murder him, or failing that, to sabotage his daily life. The work inhabits a nether world of turbulent passions ranging from adulation to jealousy, hinting at strange tensions bubbling beneath the surface of sibling relationships. An excellent remedy for anyone who has ever had to suffer the indignity of being overshadowed by a close relation.

Both artists met as postgraduate Fine Art students at Goldsmiths in 1996.

Mary Anne recently exhibited with Eric Franck Fine Art in *Art '98*, London. She is a lecturer in Art at Brunel University, has taught at Goldsmiths College on the Fine Art MA, and is currently writing for *Untitled*.

Mary Lou presented a video installation in last year's Internationale Photoszcene in Cologne. She will be showing there again this year, as well as putting on a solo exhibition at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne, Australia. She teaches as a visiting lecturer on the Fine Art Courses at the University of Wales, Cardiff.

artists' studios & gallery, 155 vauxhall street, the oval, london SE1 1 5RH telephone 0171 735 3445 fax 0171 582 0159

fig. 32 The press release

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g    a    s    w    o    r    k    s
mary anne francis & mary lou pavlovic
mary, mary quite contrary
15 may-7 june  fri-sun 12-6  155 vauxhall street london se11
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fig. 33 Advertisement for show

12. *Images (fig. 34)*

13. *The show is installed (fig. 35)*

14. *General viewer's response to the work*

Few viewers read 'across' our work; few saw, or took the show as a joint statement with a curatorial 'text' or an accretive meaning. Most attended to the work as if it were two one-person shows (which might have had a lot to do with the way it was installed) - though also it had to do, I suspect, with the viewer's need to find an artist rather than a text. When they did take it as a doubly authored text, it was rather to make comparisons and contrasts between the two artists' work. For instance, a recurring reading was that two different 'takes' on childhood were being proposed: feminist and psychoanalytic (Mary Lou) and formalist-romantic (me). Thus it's possible to say that in this context that my work came to mean, in part, in relation to Mary Lou's, and vice versa. But by and large, it was treated in a more isolated fashion. Because this is a case-study of that work (and not the show in its entirety), I will focus now on the reading that The House in the Lumber Room acquired (when regarded as a discrete entity). There were five types of reading (among the people who I spoke with):

i) The images were read as pictures of a model/doll's house.

ii) The images were read as pictures of a doll's house which was then taken as a metaphor for childhood, the past, the inaccessible, lost homes, the pleasures and the terrors of the child - in short, a complex of concepts which I had more or less anticipated.

iii) The images were read as pictures of a doll's house which were attempting to look like a life-size (human) house. Thus the work was presumed to be about the magic of photography or its mendacity.

iv) Its mendacity was not spotted and the photographs were read as pictures of a life-size house. One friend (who must remain anonymous) had been looking at the work very carefully, then turned to me and said, 'So where's this then?' I was chatting to

fig. 34 The House in the Lumber Room - five digital prints from photographs
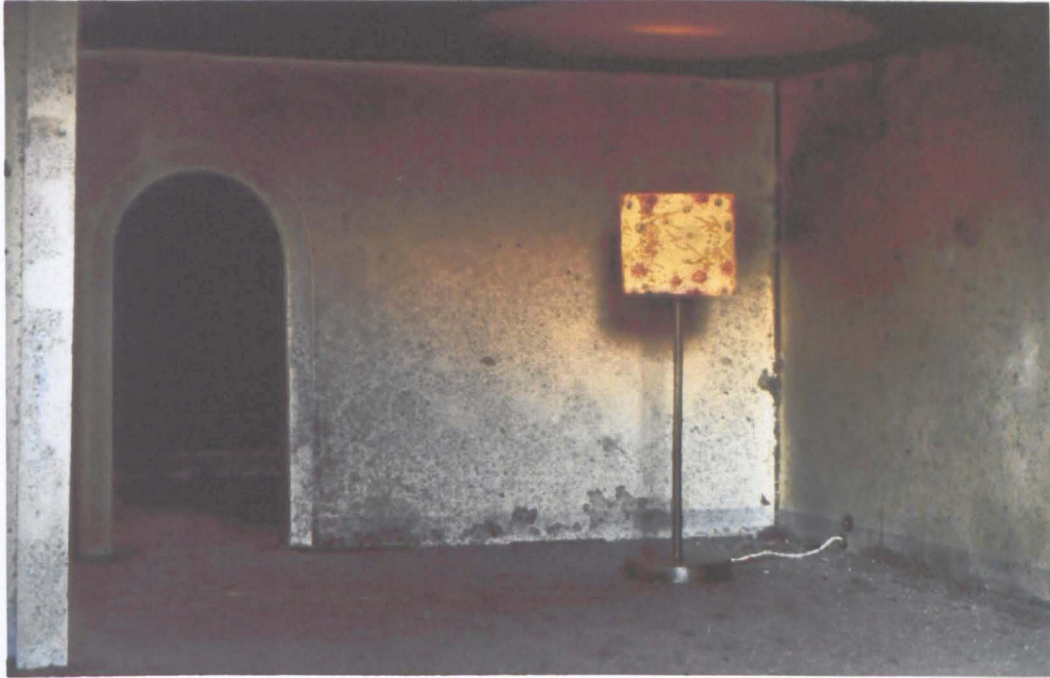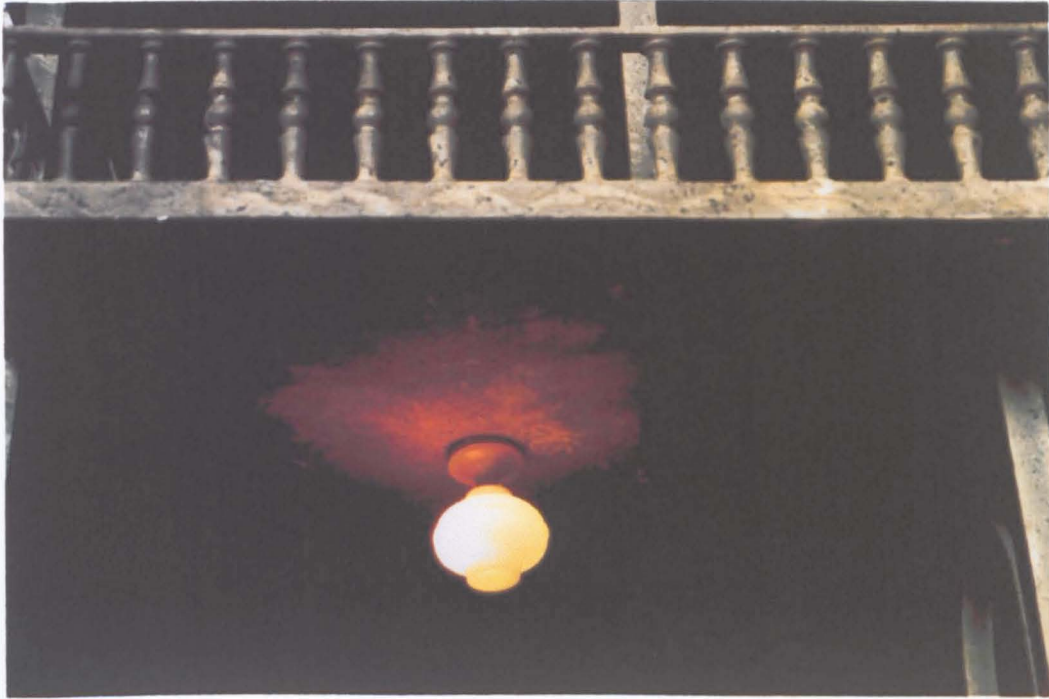
fig. 35 The show is installed

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another person at the private view (we were actually outside the gallery) and she told me that the house reminded her of somewhere she knew in the States. It was clear she thought my photographs were of a 'real' building. I had to disillusion her. She said: 'You're kidding' with much astonishment and rushed back inside to take another look.

v) The images were read in a more sophisticated way as a combination of interpretations ii) and iii). The viewer so reading them was my ideal viewer, though of course, as far as the show as a whole was concerned, the ideal viewer also worked upon this reading in relation to a reading of Mary Lou's work, and our joint text (which makes for the sixth interpretation - see the opening remarks to this note).

vi) There were doubtless other readings too, and I wonder about them. I wonder what they could have been, and how I would have rated them: what would have counted as a legitimate interpretation of the work. Readings i) - v) were all, to varying degrees, acceptable to me and v) positively welcomed. And as it so happened, they were also readings that I tried to build into the work in the course of its production, keeping Flint Schier's model of the artist and her viewer somewhere in the back of my mind.[26]

But just because a viewer (reader) could have read against the grain of readings i) - v), would not necessarily mean that their response was invalid (as something I had not imagined or consciously built into the work). And yet I wondered, in this scenario, what would be the new criteria for an acceptable interpretation? That the text could sustain a given, if (on my part) unseen reading? And what, in the wake of de Man and Derrida, is a reading sustained by the text? And if indeed, my text can sustain anything, who am I to speak of what it can sustain, when, in the wake of Barthes, a text's meaning has been sundered from an artist's intention, and thus I have no privileged access to the meanings of the things that I have made (though even this becomes less certain)?

15. *Gallerists' response to the show*

These were various - but always attended to it at the level of the individual artist's work and moreover, were, as far as my work went, concerned with making evaluations, not meaning.

16. *Artists' reflections and analysis*

These went on for many months afterwards, and indeed, are still continuing. Chiefly, they turned upon the relation between our intentions (joint and individual) for the

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[26] See entry for 'Viewer' in Chapter 4.

work and the way in which the work had been received. We operated with the (unspoken) premise that the work was successful if it had embodied our intentions for the viewer. However, other readings intrigued us: 'could we have meant that?'; 'should we follow that up (even though we'd not thought of it before)?' We've been talking of taking our collaboration further: of another show (part 2).

However, what strikes me now - when writing this, with over a year's hindsight, is how, for me, the work's meaning has moved on. I now wish it had been done very differently. I wonder why I fell into so many clichés and how I managed not so see the far richer alternatives. So the work exists for me (and thus its meaning) as the pre-text of the work that is to be; is yet to come about as a really good work of art. *In its end is its beginning.*

'It is [...] obvious that a single case history, even if it were complete and open to no doubt, cannot provide an answer to all the questions'.[26]

So Freud writes, and this observation pertains, too, to this case-study of an artist's experience of the origin of meaning. Articulating, *avant la lettre*, the Derridean problem with metaphysics, Freud's comment suggests that my case-study problematically provides the basis for a general theory *(the* artist's theory of the origin of meaning in visual art). This attention to its singularity reflects not just upon the typicality - or not - of an artist's experience, but also upon the typicality of an artist's narration, and more immediately - as Chapter 6 begins with this - upon the mandate or otherwise for taking specific origins as instances of more general categories, as the basis for comparing them to the abstracted origins proposed by Chapters 3 and 4. However, while Derrida rejects metaphysics (with its notion of essences and universal laws), he does so, as the earlier discussion of the example/the exemplary proposed, via a paradox; the singular is typical and not. In this I find a tentative authority for staking out some general observations which can be extrapolated from this case-study, or at least, for attending to the issue of what it might involve.[27]

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[26] Freud 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ("Dora")' p. 42
[27] As Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* 'I do not profess to bring to these questions anything more than the beginning of an answer, perhaps only the beginning of an elaboration, limited to the preliminary organization of the question.' (p. 97)

The critique and the new theory

An artist's experience of the origin of meaning versus the origin of meaning in recent theory

As modernism and postmodernism were compared and contrasted for the way in which they produced the origin of meaning, so postmodernism and modernism are now contrasted with the way in which Chapter 5's case-study has produced the origin of meaning.

Submitting its results to a measure of abstraction, the case-study's work of art can be seen to have these origins (which are listed in an order which approximates their not strictly linear occurrence):

- an artist's unconscious
- an artist's previous work
- the socio-economic
- the unknown
- research and development
- chance
- an event
- an artist's physiology
- an artist's psychology
- art production
- another artist's idea
- the search for a means of distribution and institutional support
- a means of distribution and institutional support is offered
- a means of distribution and institutional support is refused
- an autobiographical event
- (recent) art history
- an autobiographical event conjoining with the nature of the art in production
- cultural history
- financial support
- affect of another artist's (collaborator's) work
- affect of each artist's work upon the other's
- an act of naming
- technical considerations
- publicity

- professional feedback
- distribution of art
- 'lay' feedback
- artists' self-analysis
- further distribution

(In order to see how these entities derive from the events of the case-study, find the tracing paper map *(fig. 36)* at the end of this volume and lay in over Chapter 5's large diagram.)

As I ply this list, I notice that the notion of intention and its execution - which together may be referred to as 'instrumentalism' and particularly with representation, 'self-expression' - are, at first glance, conspicuous by their absence when they seemed to be a significant factor in the process of producing the work. Yet if they do not have their own boxes, they are present in the verbs of execution associated with the subjects of the diagram (the artists) that were seen in Chapter 5's diagram, for example: 'decide that the piece will be presented as a slide projection'. And the self-expressive subject is also indicated in the way in which intention is conveyed at one point and is realised at another; in the gap between two boxes. For instance 'decide that the piece will be presented as a slide projection' becomes 'my images are realised as 30x40" R types mounted on aluminium'.

The method for reviewing the data

As before, the versions of the origin of meaning to be compared and contrasted are analysed with reference to their number and type, as a measure of their multifariousness.

But there is a caveat, as there should have been perhaps, in Chapter 4, when the first comparison was made. This concerns the mediated nature of these accounts. For while mediation in itself is unavoidable, according to deconstruction, and moreover, after Heisenberg,[1] each chapter here adopts a different principle with which to look at - mediate - the origin of meaning. In Chapter 3, categories of origin were generated by a standard typology of modernist art theory; in Chapter 4, there was a looser system which still assumed

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[1] 'The absolute, irrevocable loss of ontological grounding'. Hans Bertens 'The Postmodern *Weltanschauung* and its Relation to Modernism: An Introductory Survey' p. 46 in *The Postmodern Reader* eds. J Natoli & L Hutcheon

abstractions, and in Chapter 5, these ceded to the grid of concrete experience, albeit if, in turn, they were forced to yield more general understandings of origin.

The warning that appends to this is that the notion of what 'origin' can be mutates, though attempts have been made to harmonise these differences. Not that such an incommensurability should really matter, product as it is of the deconstructive methodology - the contract to review 'the origin of meaning' from the sites of different signifying practices.

The number of origins

If the number of origins of meaning in modernism = x and the number of origins of meaning in postmodernism = y, and the number of origins of meaning in an artist's account = z, then:

$$\text{as } y > x \text{ } quod \text{ } erat \text{ } demonstrandum, \text{ so } z > y \text{ or } z < y \text{ or } z = y?$$

And if $z < y$ then is $z > x$?

And is $z > x + y$ or $z < x + y$ or $z = x + y$?

$$A: z > y \text{ and } z > x + y$$

To supplement the algebra: for postmodernism, overall, there are more origins of meaning (overall) than there are for modernism (overall). Likewise for an artist's account in relation to postmodernism. Furthermore, in counting amongst its origins 'unknown causes', an artist provides for *an infinity* of origins. This surpassing of postmodernism happens as a Derridean notion of the sign pursues 'the origin of meaning' (in visual art) across a few of its many contexts, and proposes understandings of that phrase which exceed both postmodernism's and Derrida's (included as that is in 'postmodernism' when that includes 'poststructuralism'). In this way, the latter's theory of the sign, deployed to advance this project, does indeed, become a Trojan Horse, (as was predicted in Chapter 1), in opening postmodernism up to an outside, via its inside.

Moreover, adding modernism's count of the origin of meaning to postmodernism's yields a total that is *less* than the number of items that is on this artist's list. To generalise: the trend towards plurality continues in this matrix of modernism, postmodernism and an artist's experience. And so the last offers a critique of modernism *and* postmodernism, when the notion of a plurality of origin is valorised.

And yet: '[a]nother set of details from the same crash could produce something completely different';[2] (the crash that is modernism-postmodernism and an artist's experience.) Consider, for example, the comparison between the origin of meaning as given by an *individual* theory of postmodernism and an *individual* theory of modernism. Here the pluralising trend is less certain. Greenberg, for instance, implies that the origin of meaning, over and above form, includes the social and the self,[3] whereas his more recent counterpart, Barthes, elaborates a formalism (in 'The Death of the Author' and 'From Work to Text') that conceives of language alone as the origin of meaning. That an artist's account of origin (as a single theory) expands on Greenberg in terms of a plurality of origin only complicates this analytical trajectory, in terms of its general law, in performing something of a U turn.

The types of origin

Multifariousness of origin follows from origin's sheer number here, though 'multifariousness' need not imply the radical diversity that is proposed by an artist's experience. What is remarkable, however, is the way in which this list includes an oppositional pair of origins which does not appear in postmodern notions of the origin of meaning (with the notable exception of Derrida).

This is the opposition of an artist as a self-expressive subject to its others. It is the opposition of an artist as the author and the authored (in their common senses); will and willed. Conceived thus, an artist is an agent as the term has a double, contradictory, meaning. As an agent, an artist is at once the source of action, when the 'action' of art is material and semantic production, and the servant - 'actor' - of another's will.[4] In this sense, an artist is a double agent as the agent is semantically double, though not a double agent in the manner of a spy who serves say, the KGB and CIA simultaneously.[5] An artist is a subject *and* a predicate; the structure of a sentence. Or, to put it in the terms of divinity: an artist is both God and God's angel, recalling that the word 'angel' derives

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[2] Peter Greenaway *A Zed & Two Noughts* p. 65
[3] See the analysis of '"American-Type" Painting' in Chapter 3, for instance.
[4] Note though how sociology gives 'actor' the sense of 'agent' as the source of action.
[5] This doubleness of 'agent' - as the source and the conduit of action - means that 'double agent' signifies *in theory* in many ways. There is, yes, the sense that a double agent is a source and a conduit; that they are this twice over; that they are a source twice; a conduit twice; that they are a source, and a conduit twice; that they are a source, twice and a conduit. This doubleness of 'agent' affects the multifarious agent, which potentially describes a subject who is: multifariously a source; multifariously a conduit; a multifarious source, and a conduit; a source and a multifarious conduit. It is this last understanding that this project takes.

from *angelus* - a messenger, and that God has been seen as the archetypal artist, or the arch-originator.

The others to self-expression in postmodernism

While the opposition of the self-expressive subject to its others does not feature in postmodernism (as reviewed by Chapter 4), this is not the case for one of its constituent terms: 'the others to self-expression' (when 'the others' comprehends almost all the terms on the opening list - excepting 'an artist's psychology' and 'artists' self-analysis' plus all the terms in Chapter 4).

Angels appear. Agents with a little 'a' abound. These angels announce the Death of God, - the Agent with the big 'a' - who is also, by virtue of being absent, the petit a. *And this* petit a *with a big 'a' is the apotheosis of the intentional subject.*

> OBJET PETIT a. The '*a*' in question stands for '*autre*' (other), the concept having been developed out of the Freudian 'object' and Lacan's own exploitation of 'otherness'. The '*petit a*' (small 'a') differentiates the object from (while relating it to) the '*Autre*' or '*grand Autre*' (the capitalized 'Other'). However, Lacan refuses to comment on either term here, leaving the reader to develop an appreciation of the concepts in the course of their use. Furthermore, Lacan insists that '*objet petit a*' should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign.

fig. 37 Jacques Lacan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*; Translator's Note p. 282. In the course of its use, I have developed a sense of *objet petit a* as the lost object; the object of desire

The instrumental/self-expressive subject: a short history

The opposition of the self-expressive subject to its others does not feature in postmodernism because 'the self-expressive subject' does not feature there. It is this which is new in the data that an artist supplies, and which makes this opposition new.

This instrumental subject - the subject who is gifted with the will to power, or, as

the self-expressive subject, with the will to power through meaning, is addressed in this particular form especially by Husserl:

'[...] one sees at once that all expressions in *communicative* speech function as *indications*. They serve the hearer as signs of the "thoughts" of the speaker, i.e. of his sense-giving inner experiences, as well as of the other inner experiences which are part of his communicative intention. This function of verbal expressions we shall call their *intimating function*. The content of such intimation consists in the inner experiences intimated.'[6]

And as Derrida observes of this:

'The [signifier] becomes an exteriorization (*Aüsserung*) of the expression (*Ausdruck*) of the [signified]. Language is determined as expression - the expulsion of the intimacy of an inside [...]'[7]

What is crucial in this formulation is that language is implicitly regarded as transparent, as it renders the inside, that is consciousness, as pure presence. If language is a medium - a messenger - of consciousness, then this medium is without body; insubstantial.

fig. 38 A substantial angel

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[6] Edmund Husserl *Logical Investigations Volume 1* p. 277

[7] This is Derrida 'presenting' Husserl's position on expression in *Positions* p. 32

'Language is determined as expression - the expulsion of the intimacy of an inside, as we return to all the difficulties and presuppositions we were just speaking of [...]'[8]

Husserl's notions mediated by the words of Derrida, trail Derrida's concern with the intentional subject (as a close relation of the self-expressive subject) in their wake, which will concern this text a little later on.

Turning away from Husserl in the opposite direction, backwards in time, it is possible to see that this subject derives from Descartes and Kant and the history of Subjective Idealism - which was contextualised in Chapter 2. For Descartes via the cogito, and Kant via the transcendental ego, mind, as the subject's consciousness, wills the world. Both have a notion of

'[...] individual subjects, who create the world outwardly from the centre of their individual selves. [Descartes and Kant] advance subjective ideas into first place ahead of objective things.'[9]

Put like this, Descartes, Kant *and* Husserl can all be seen to contemplate a subject that puts itself into the world when the governing gesture here is *exteriorization* - of the subject *as* the world; of the subject *in* the world.[10] And the links between the three (who are linked by Richard Harland as the '"I" philosophers'[11]), are made clearer still when it is seen that they all *refuse* the same thing:

'Descartes, Kant and Husserl [...] argue against empiricism. They [...] insist that we never *know* uninterrupted sense-data; by the time we can become acquainted with our own experience, it has always already been filtered through a system of innate ideas, or of *a priori* categories, or of projective horizons.'[12]

So, just as deconstruction lets something other to itself appear in the form of an experience which critiques it, so this project's recourse to empiricism generates a subject that is against that: the subject of Subjective Idealism. But both empiricism's subject and Subjective Idealism's are counterposed, by this project, to that of Objective Idealism, which is the subject of the self-expressive subject's others.

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[8] Ibid. p. 32

[9] *Superstructuralism* p. 71

[10] Refer to Derrida on Husserl: *Positions* p. 32

[11] *Superstructuralism* p. 70

[12] Ibid. p. 70

The self-expressive subject in recent theory

In making a critique of postmodernism around the self-expressive subject, it could, however, be suggested that this entity is not entirely alien to 'recent theory' as demarcated by this project. For this subject is the subject of expression and Expressionism; a subject known to Modernism, as Chapter 3 has demonstrated.

So the knowledge from an artist suggests an entity that has been repressed by *post*modernism. To phrase it in this way refers to Rosalind Krauss' psychoanalytical account of modernism, in which the narrative of opticality represses (the art of) the unconscious. To apply this motif to *post*modernism, in order to inscribe its absences, produces something of an irony, for what is repressed here is the conscious, or the subject's rationality.

Exceptionally, Derrida refuses this repression though this is not the Derrida reviewed in Chapter 4 - but rather his exception. The Derrida that countenances some notion of intentionality is the Derrida of *Signature Event Context* (a supplement to postmodernism as it is configured by this project).

There, contrary to popular belief and contrary to postmodernism's other subjects - subjects which indeed are 'others' to the self-of-intention - the subject, for Derrida, is divided - between the subject as intentional and intended; a division which is caught by the double genitive 'the subject of intention':

'[...] one must less oppose citation or iteration to the non-iteration of an event, than construct a differential typology of forms of iteration, supposing that this is a tenable project that can give rise to an exhaustive program, a question I am holding off on here. In this typology, the category of intention will not disappear; it will have its place, but from this place it will no longer be able to govern the entire scene and the entire system of utterances. Above all, one then would be concerned with different types of marks or chains of iterable marks, and not with an opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statement-events on the other. The first consequence of this would be the following: given this structure of iteration, the intention that animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content.'[13]

Others have remarked on the presence (under erasure) of intention for Derrida as well, though they are few and far between. Aside from Kamuf, in her role as Derrida's editor and commentator, there is Séan Burke, who uncommonly attends extensively to Derrida's attention to the theme. With considerable perception, he observes:

[13] Derrida 'Signature Event Context' pp. 104-105

'[...] even at the stage of the most preliminary acquaintance with Derrida's work, it is clear that intention is not opposed in the classic New Critical manner of asserting that it is irrelevant and unknowable. Quite the reverse: if authorial intentions are to be deconstructed it must be accepted that they are cardinally relevant and recognisable.'[14]

And he, too, notes the way in which the presence of intention has been overlooked in Derrida, especially in the latter's spat with John Searle, who 'claimed that from Derrida's text ['Signature Event Context'] we must infer that intentionality is "entirely absent from written communication".'[15] (That this should happen only serves to 'illustrate [t]his point, Derrida's delimitation of intention' as Kamuf remarks.[16])

Burke himself supplies a *minor* exception to postmodernism's prohibition of the self-expressive subject. In his introductory essay to *Authorship*, he stakes out a position that is *structurally* similar to Derrida's, if not identical in content. As positions go, this is by no means fully fledged, and Burke seems not to recognise its full import. Dissecting the 'deconstructive dismantling of the stable subject of romantic irony', he notes that there is a move therein 'from impersonal detachment to personal engagement within a textual scene whose undecidability admits neither of authorial mastery nor of authorial disappearance.'[17] And he deduces that '[a] view of subjectivity thus arises which is neither a limit nor a limiting concept but one which enables reading to pass beyond the constraining play of transcendence and disappearance.'[18] More than a flicker of approval moves within this last observation and Burke thus condones the stance that he had identified in his previous book, *The Death and Return of the Author*. Furthermore, he does so in the face of postmodernism (reviewed by Chapter 4) - in the manner that an artist's experience offers a critique of postmodernism in relation to this question of the 'type' of origins:

'The need to (re)situate subjectivity is prime among the many callings facing political theories as well as those facing the cluster of discourses we refer to as postmodern.'[19]

This was, in part, the hunch about postmodernism which impelled this project - that it didn't cater for the interests of an artist as an intentional subject.

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[14] *The Death and Return of the Author* p. 141
[15] Ibid. p. 140
[16] *A Derrida Reader* ed. P Kaumuf; introductory comments to 'Signature Event Context' p. 81
[17] *Authorship* p. xxvii
[18] Ibid. p. xxvii; 'subjectivity' is glossed here as 'intentional subjectivity'.
[19] Ibid. p. xxviii

And finally,

'[...] the great crises of postmodernism are crises of authorship [of agency] even if they still disdain to announce themselves as such.'[20]

Quite so. But neither Derrida, nor Burke after him, attend to this question of authorship - of meaning and its origins - quite in the way that an artist's experience recommends (when 'truth' to experience is a commendation).

Derrida's provision for the multifariousness of origin

Returning to the issue of the *number* of origins with which this comparison and contrast began, it is vital to observe that in (re)introducing a notion of intentionality to the origin of meaning, (as an artist's experience proposes), both Derrida and Burke (the latter as the former's disciple) otherwise preserve the underlying form that it had with postmodernism - at least for the former, to begin with, and for the latter, in the final case: the 'other' to intention is resolutely single, contrary to an artist's experience.

Acknowledging the 'various declensions of "otherness" developed within [contemporary] theory',[21] Burke finally pulls back from proposing all of these alongside the subject of 'authorial mastery'[22] rather favouring a subject which is 'situated',[23] as its companion. A subject within the tribulations of the undifferentiated real is opposed to its intentional other.

The other to intention for Derrida can be seen in many places, but usefully, here, in part of the paragraph from 'Signature Event Context' which was cited in relation to the question of type. Constructing 'a differential typology of forms of iteration':

'[...] one then would be concerned with different types of marks or chains of iterable marks, and not with an opposition between citational statements on the one hand, and singular and original statement-events on the other. The first consequence of this would be the following: given this structure of iteration, the intention that animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content.'

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[20] ibid. p. xxix
[21] ibid. p. xvii
[22] ibid. p.xxvii
[23] 'Situating the subject' is the subtitle of the last section in Burke's Introduction to *Authorship*.

The 'other' to intention here is *nothing other* than an aspect of language: *one* aspect. Derrida does not write: 'given *every property of language which defers presence*, the intention that animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content.' Nor does he say: 'given every property of language which defers presence, *and the multitude of other factors such as the unconscious, history etc.*, the intention that animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content.' It is only iteration that defers intention.

And while it could be argued that iteration is, by definition (as it has to do with repetition), internally divided, that misses the force of the passage above. Iteration is not a multiplicity because it does not exist apart from 'the statement-event' of intention. It is an 'other' only in the sense that the term has in deconstruction as a 'supplement' (the eccentric essence of 'the same'). Thus concerning oneself with the text and its meaning, and the origins of that, one would be concerned with iteration *with* intention, (ideality *with* singularity) - that is to say, with 'différance'. And if the origin of meaning appears, in this way, to reside with the oneness of a name, a single signifier, Derrida would not disagree:

'For us, *différance* remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical.'[24]

But then, he also writes:

'[...] *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.'[25]

Which is to say: différance becomes what it denotes: an essence and an absence of an essence. Thus, for Derrida, the origin of meaning is a paradox, or two, for différance paradoxically prohibits the description of itself as a paradox.

So an artist's understanding of the origin of meaning cannot be compared to Derrida's in terms of this debate about the multifariousness of origin; the *quantity* of different origins. Derrida proposes something staunchly other: a paradox which cannot stand to be counted. But an artist proposes something other to this otherness of paradox by refusing the form of the multifariousness of origin that appears in Derrida as part of the paradox. The deferral that is part

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[24] 'Différance' in *A Derrida Reader* ed. Peggy Kamuf p. 75
[25] ibid. p. 74

of différance as it is not this and that, and this and that, and so on, *ad infinitum*, is countered by an artist's notion of the multifariousness of origin as a 'positive infinity', which is the term that Marian Hobson uses to describe an other to the 'negative infinity' of deconstruction.[26] And this notion of a positive infinity may be understood to describe a multifariousness of beings over and against being as it is with negative infinity, as multifariously deferred by the trace.

So an artist proposes something that is raised but repressed by Séan Burke, and raised in a very different form in Derrida. And this is in addition to the evocation of the self-expressive subject, that Derrida and Burke in different ways both entertain as well. In exceeding Burke's overall inscription of the origin of meaning and in offering something different to Derrida's (when excess cannot be at stake), an artist proposes something truly other to postmodernism's notion of the origin of meaning (and also, as it happens, of modernism's, too, in part). In the context of being truly other it is also original. Moreover, an artist's account, which is also a critique of recent theory (as it is original in relation to that) has occurred in the terms supplied by postmodernism (or a few of them) and in so occurring has exposed postmodernism to an outside: an artist's experience.

I make less certain claims on the subject of modernism. For modernism's origins for meaning include intentionality and a multifariousness (that looks more like my positive infinity than Derrida's deferral); well at least, doubleness beyond intentionality, so coming close to my critique. I did not expect to find this bit about plurality. What does this imply about modernism and postmodernism? Has postmodernism failed?

And another thing: I see that my 'position' - which in its specificity cannot be mapped, unless it could be mapped as Borges describes the perfect map (co-extensive with the Universe)[27] - is more akin than anything I have found so far, to the 'Medieval tradition' which acknowledges the overdetermination of a textual scene which encompasses alterities *and* the participant role of the author' in Burke's words,[28] though I would not describe that scene as 'overdetermined'; supplied with more causes than are necessary.

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[26] Marian Hobson *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* p. 44: 'Positive infinity has traditionally been defined as that infinity which is always absolutely more, unrelatably other; it is self-sufficient in some sense given as a completed whole, though evidently not conceptualizable, since it is infinite. Negative or potential infinity is an infinity of process, in the sense that it never stops - as in the infinite set of natural numbers, given any determinate number, however large, there is always another, the set is never closed.'

[27] Jorge Luis Borges *A Universal History of Infamy*

[28] *Authorship.* p. xxvii

fig. 39 Late medievalism: William Marshall *Charles 1* 1648

Coeli Specto: I bear in mind heaven; *Beatam et Aeternam*: blessedness and eternity; *Clarior e tenebris*: more light out of darkness; *IMMOTA TRIUMPHANS*: triumphing steadfastness; *CRESCIT SUB PONDERE VIRTUS*: excellence thrives under pressure; *asperam ut Levem*: rough but mild; *Gratia*: grace; *IN TUO VERBO SPES MEA*: in your words my hope; *Christi Tracto*: I write for Christ; *Splendidam at Gravem*: brilliant but weighty; *Vanitas:* emptiness; *Mundi Calco*: I tread the world; *Guil: Marshall Scuppsit*: engraved by William Marshall (*Charles I*; 1648)

One more note: it is necessary to observe that the deconstructive notion of the sign which instituted this whole survey, is erased by the notion of the origin of meaning as a positive infinity. (Such is the effect of a subject which is, to a great extent, reflexive upon the means of its production.) Indeed, the deconstructive notion of the sign is logically, by virtue of this reflexivity, replaced by a version which proposes the sign as a positivity if subject to perpetual signification: a positive infinity.

Derrida's theory of the sign prospects (post)modernist notions of the origin of meaning and then an artist's notion of the origin of meaning - which produces this text's theory of the sign.

How postmodernism failed itself

Why did I look to postmodernism to begin with - to cater for the interests of the artist? Because, whatever it might be, 'postmodernism' seemed to promise a concern with a radical diversity - what I might now call a 'positive infinity' - and the interests of the subject. But the closer I approached, so my hunch that this was not the case became proportionally stronger. It is timely to review postmodernism's promises, and claims about itself, which precipitated this whole project.

On the multifariousness of things these claims were made:

'Postmodern knowledge [le savoir postmoderne] is not simply an instrument of power. It refines our sensitivity to differences and increases our tolerance of incommensurability.'[29]

'After the coveting of an absolute and pure language that speaks of the world comes the deceptive discovery of the plurality of tongues entangled in the world.'[30]

'Simplifying to extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives.'[31]

'[...] difference and pluralism in this [postmodern] view do not mean reducing democracy to the equivalency of diverse interests; on the contrary, what is being argued for is: a language in which different voices and traditions exist and flourish to the degree that they listen to the voice of Others'.[32]

and:

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[29] Jean-François Lyotard *La condition postmoderne* used as an epigraph by Craig Owens to 'The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism' in *Postmodern Culture* ed. Hal Foster
[30] Jean-François Lyotard, Foreword to Joseph Kosuth *Art After Philosophy and After*
[31] Jean-François Lyotard 'Introduction to *The Postmodern Condition*' in *Art In Theory* eds. Harrison & Wood p. 999
[32] Henry Giroux 'Postmodernism as Border Pedagogy: Redefining the Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity' p. 448

'[...] the postmodern politics of cultural difference [...] represents a drive "to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing".[33]

On empowering the oppressed subject this was said:

'At the level of an individual, this theory [of 'feminist poststructuralism'] is able to offer an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change. It offers a way of understanding the importance of subjective motivation and the illusion of full subjectivity necessary for individuals to act in the world.'[34]

These promises were broken in a number of ways. Multifariousness was seldom offered (see Chapter 4 *passim* for this, apart from the entry for the term), and (feminist) poststructuralism, for example, seldom taught me how to understand 'the importance of subjective motivation and the illusion of full subjectivity'. Rather, it frequently, if variously, reminded me of my linguistic, patriarchal, social, classed, gendered, sexed, and raced construction, as a prelude to un-motivation and devaluation of my full-subjectivity (in the service of the other as it mainly must be), however much it might be an illusion.[35] Not a single poststructuralist that I review in Chapter 4 - including the only woman, Julia Kristeva - writes against this grain.

With the notable exception of Derrida, and another in his wake.

Moreover, these promises were broken sometimes by the very writers who made them. Here, Lyotard is typical. Claiming, for postmodernism, in the quotes above, 'incommensurability', 'the plurality of tongues', 'incredulity towards metanarratives', he makes a grand-narrative out of this, with his notion of the

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[33] Linda Hutcheon quoting Cornel West in *A Postmodern Reader* eds. Natoli & Hutcheon p. 444

[34] Chris Weedon *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory* p. 41

[35] Sean Burke, quoting Nancy K Miller, notes the way in which poststructuralism's critique of the Cartesian subject cuts against the female subject (that Cartesian other): 'Because women have not had the same historical relation of identity, to origin, institution, production that men have had, they have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* self, ego, cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentred, disoriginated, deinstitutionalized, etc. her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position.' *Authorship* p. xxviii

'petit reçit',[36] thereby essentialising difference, as his single phrase undoes the character of difference as such.

And this sad trajectory of promise and disillusion is recorded by John McGowan, who writes:

'[...] postmodernism's implicit or explicit political commitment to changing the existing order of capitalist society also makes a search for resistant entities necessary. Thus postmodern theory has a built-in tendency to celebrate the resistant' -

'while at the same time holding to a relational view of how entities are constituted that fails to explain how the resistant can even exist. In addition, postmodernism's hostility to self (which it associates with bourgeois humanism) means that it must locate resistance somewhere other than in individuals.'[37]

This is not the place for explanations of the failure of postmodernism to deliver on its promises, though McGowan's explanation must be followed by another. Writing on an aboriginal visual arts project, *Indigena*, Lee Ann Martin argues:

'"Postmodernism" is a strategy by which those in certain privileged positions of power can "discover" and thus appropriate the stories of the "Other". This model of neo-colonialism encourages cultural difference, while, paradoxically, claiming authority over the language, philosophies and issues of the colonized within the dominant framework.'[38]

Postmodernism's treachery is hereby explained, as the flimsy discourse of diversity is seen to license raids upon the other, while simultaneously depriving the other of the means of self-enunciation, and thereby the means of resistance.

Such is the immanent critique of postmodernism - immanent because it fails on its own (avowed) terms. Combining, as it does, with its failure to serve the interests of the artist, it urges me to look for something else...

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[36] see the Preface to 'Entanglements and Complicities' in *The Postmodern Reader* eds. Natoli & Hutcheon p. 306

[37] John McGowan *Postmodernism and Its Critics* excerpted in *A Postmodern Reader* eds. Natoli & Hutcheon p. 208

[38] Lee Ann Martin 'The Burden of Authorship: Narratives of First Nation Artists in the Context of *Indigena*'p. 94

Towards an artist's theory of the origin of meaning

In the same way as it is not sufficient, before beginning to rebuild the house in which one lives, only to pull it down and to provide material and architects, or oneself to try one's hand at architecture, and moreover, to have drawn the plan carefully, but one must also provide oneself with some other accommodation in which to be lodged conveniently while the work is going on, so, also, in order that I might not remain irresolute in my actions during the time that my reason would oblige me to be so in my judgements, and so that I would not cease to live from that time forward as happily as I could, I formed a provisional moral code which consisted of only three or four maxims, which I am willing to disclose.

fig. 40 Descartes *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*

Constructing this analogy - rather in the manner of an epic simile - Descartes illuminates another feature of critique: that it can demolish and rebuild. Such is the ambition of this project and it looks to the latter aspect now, though for now in this incarnation, it is constrained to providing just interim accommodation.

And yet, to pursue further that analogy as it is helpful to advance this discussion, there are some bricks; the artist's experience of the origin of meaning is the raw material and this proposes that the origin of meaning resides in multifariousness if not omnifariousness. But whether with the building blocks of this experience, even a provisional outline for a new theory can be built is another matter. For if these bricks suggest an architecture (in the manner of a child's basic set), then that is to assume that theory is simply the singular writ large; that the singular which is the artist's experience of the origin of meaning is taken as a blueprint for all other instances. And as such, it implies that theory should expand upon the real as that is presented within (post)modernism, necessarily rejecting the notion of theory as a fetish of reality.

18 November 1998: somebody said to me: 'Mark Wallinger is a polymath.' I asked her: 'how?' meaning 'in what way?' because I agreed with her representation of his activities (think of the range of his productions from *Capital* to *Angel*). I meant: 'how does this come about, this many sidedness?' She said: 'his work originates in life, in his passions, horse-racing, London, football, Tommy Cooper...'

In the context of discussing an artist's experience of the origin of meaning as a 'positive infinity', it was noted that because the origin of meaning is reflexive, a new theory of the origin of meaning (as a positive infinity) produced a new theory of the sign for the project as a whole. Likewise, an artist's apprehension of the origin of meaning proposes a review of the Derridean notion of exemplification; relations between the singular and general; a notion of the way in which the singular becomes a theory (or not), assuming that a theory aspires to generality. This is to pursue the critique of negative infinity to one of its logical conclusions.

An artist's notion of the origin of meaning produces this text's theory of the sign and its theory of exemplification.

fig. 41 Examples of cakes

The revision is simple, taking the form of an inversion. A deconstructive notion of exemplification proposed that 'the example' at once pertained to the ideal (the general) and the singular; iterability and non-iterability. Exemplification, via Derrida, is paradoxical. If iterability as sameness is '1' and non-iterability as différance is $0o - 1$, then, with a positive infinity, exemplification is $1 + 0o$; sameness + difference. On the surface nothing has changed: an artist is an example of the general, *and* not; (only the manner of an artist's specificity is - in theory - different).

So the theory that an artist's experience proposes (that the origins of meaning are multifarious if not omnifarious), is governed by a paradox; rendered simultaneously (il)legitimate.

Here the project might conclude with this highly orthodox contortion; a contradictory truth.

But as you can guess from the thickness of the pages that are left, it continues for a little longer.

Theory and its objects

Now, I seek to situate this thesis' prescription for theory's compass of its objects in the context of the recent writing on the ethics of the scope of theory, and then, in the context of the literature which looks at the relationship of theory to its objects rather as a question of causality: whether theory's objects produce the nature of their theory or vice versa.

Theory is

a mode of knowledge
a means of conferring status
a way of conferring meaning
a politics
something to replace life
drawing

Defining terminology

Both with regard to compass and causality, 'theory' and 'its objects' have a double signification as two pairs of binaries are at stake in the following discussion. 'Theory' designates 'art theory' as well as something looser ('theory' at large), and 'its objects' designates the field of reality that is not theory, including the more specific (un)reality of art.

This play is entertained for a variety of reasons. In the first place, it is expedient to do so: the literature on the relationship between art theory and art is small. Besides, substituting 'theory' for 'art theory' is not unproductive. Such is the case when the theory so regarded is a theory of culture, and when culture (and its theory) are construed 'like a language',[39] following its 'exorbitation', which was remarked upon in Chapter 4 as a defining feature of postmodernism.[40] When this is not the case, the substitution is, admittedly, more strained, but not impossible, for the relationship between art theory and art is, like the one that governs theory's relations with its objects, one of representation in which the first term regards the second.

An ethics for the scope of theory

This is notably addressed by Wlad Godzich as he inspects the term's derivation. In the foreword to de Man's *The Resistance to Theory*, Godzich notes that:

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[39] The verbal sign standing as the paradoxical exemplar of the universal Sign.
[40] Recall Harrison & Wood quoting Perry Anderson (*Art in Theory* p. 801). See Victor Burgin's essay 'The Absence of Presence' for an account of this exorbitation - the fact that it is art that is so regarded notwithstanding: '[a]rt practice was no longer defined as an artisanal activity, a process of crafting fine objects in a given medium, it was rather to be seen as a set of operations performed in a *field* of signifying practices, perhaps centred on a medium but not bounded by it.' ('The Absence of Presence' pp. 1098-1099) Note also, that in using the concept of the fetish to designate art theory's relationship to art, I am straying into the realm of substitutional theory.

'Etymologically, the term [theory] comes from the Greek verb *theorin*, to look at, to contemplate, to survey. And in Greek, it does not enter into an opposition with praxis - an opposition constructed in Idealist philosophy and eventually used to combat the latter - but rather with *aesthesis*, something that Ruskin recalls in his *Modern Painters*:

The impressions of beauty... are neither sensual nor intellectual but moral, and for the faculty receiving them... no term can be more accurate... than that employed by the Greeks, "theoretic" which I pray permission to use and to call the operation of the faculty itself "Theoria." [...] The mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness I call Aesthesis, but the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it I call Theoria.

[...] the act of looking at, of surveying, designated by *theorin* does not designate a private act carried out by a cogitating philosopher but a very public one with important social consequences. The Greeks designated certain individuals, chosen on the basis of their probity and their general standing in the polity, to act as legates on certain formal occasions in other city states or in matters of considerable political importance. These individuals bore the title of *theoros*, and collectively constituted a *theoria*. (It may be useful to bear in mind that the word is always a plural collective.) They were summoned on special occasions to attest the occurrence of some event, to witness its happenstance, and to then verbally certify its having taken place. [...] In other words, their function was one of see-and-tell. [...] The *theoria* provided [...] a bedrock of certainty: what it certified as having seen could become the object of public discourse. The individual citizen, indeed even women, slaves, and children, were capable of aesthesis, that is perception, but these perceptions had no social standing.'[41]

Here, what 'theory' may encompass is restricted, as an economy takes place *around the seeing subject*, as what the expert witness sees is privileged above all others.

Today, the prescription that the theorist should be an expert still applies, but this restriction of what theory may command is accompanied by another, as the theorist must also be a specialist: constrained to *a certain field* of knowledge. Informed by Max Weber's analysis of 'cultural modernity',[42] Habermas refers to this apportioning of knowledge as 'differentiation'.[43]

Thus the refusal of a 'specialized culture' that postmodernism and poststructuralism stage - exemplified in the appropriation of 'language' as a paradigm of textuality - is referred to as the 'de-differentiation' of cultural life - of cultural life within itself, and with its others.[44]

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[41] Godzich pp. xiii-xv

[42] Jürgen Habermas 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project' in *Art in Theory* p. 1004

[43] ibid. p. 1004

[44] See Bryan S Turner for example: 'If modernization is differentiation, then postmodernism is cultural de-differentiation'. 'Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern' p. 3

In turn, it is precisely the contamination of one specialism by another that provokes Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's moral panic: *Intellectual Impostures* - a 'Devastating Critique of some of France's Best-Known Thinkers'.[45] Here, various (post-)structuralists and postmodernists are attacked for their habit of misappropriating ideas from disciplines beyond their own, and 'namely the repeated abuse of concepts and terminology coming from mathematics and physics'[46] in the pursuit of their 'alleged philosophical and social implications'.[47] Admittedly, Sokal and Bricmont's quarrel is with the *mis*appropriation of alien ideas and not with the *premise* of crossdisciplinary endeavours, but in refusing to acknowledge the positive examples of transgressions into science (Christopher Norris' review of the book cites Evelyn Fox Gardiner as a notable omission on this score 'who knows enough science to avoid this sort of error'[48]) they suggest that they believe that the 'carry over' from science to the humanities and social sciences is 'doomed to be fruitless'.[49]

Differentiation is the order of the day.[50]

The issue of the global scope of any one theory aside, there is still the issue of how much of its *allotted* portion of reality it should then review - which is the heart of this enquiry. This is the philosophy and politics of metaphysics. Taking up this issue in *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend offers a sustained critique of *scientific* theory's tendency to fall short of its objects. (Feyerabend uses 'method' and 'theory' interchangeably.[51]) Misquoting Lenin, Feyerabend contends:

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[45] Review extract quoted on the front cover of the English Edition

[46] Sokal & Bricmont *Intellectual Impostures* p. 4

[47] ibid. p. 3

[48] *Independent Saturday Magazine* (no date)

[49] Appropriating Freud's phrasing; see footnote 94 to Chapter 4.

[50] Moreover, this sundering of areas of theory might be thematized as diss(ass)ociation; such is the term that Freud uses to describe the splitting that can occur in mental life (*Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* p. 33); that T S Eliot employs to describe the rift of thought and feeling in English literature after the metaphysical poets ('[i]n the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered.' ('The Metaphysical Poets' in *Selected Prose* p. 117) And such is the notion that C P Snow invokes to describe the very division that Sokal & Bricmont want to keep, between the arts and the sciences, and which has recently been revivified by Melvyn Bragg ('The Two Cultures Debate'; Radio 4, 8.00pm; 13 March 1999); this thematic seems peculiarly specific to the 20th century. It is interesting to note, by comparison, that the very act of grafting a concept from one thing to another is something that was common (and commended) practice in the 'Hermeticism of the Renaissance' which Umberto Eco refers to in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* p. 50. This involved 'looking for "signatures", that is, visible clues revealing occult relationships.' (ibid. p. 50)

[51] For the purposes of (thinking through this project), I deploy the two terms to designate different entities: 'method' as a system for doing something; 'theory' as a system of ideas. Of course the two come together as soon as theory is deployed - is 'done'.

'"History generally, and the history of revolution in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and more subtle than even" the best historian and the best methodologist can imagine.'[52]

The quote is adapted because as Feyerabend notes 'Lenin is addressing parties and revolutionary vanguards rather than scientists and methodologists'[53] and he concludes: 'the lesson, however, is the same'.[54]

As a consequence of this, 'scientific education' (as an instance or inflection of scientific theory) '"maims by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot [sic], every part of human nature which stands out prominently"'.[55]

(This allusion to the foot, and moreover, the *Chinese* lady's foot appears to suggest that Feyerabend conceives of theory's incompleteness as a fetish. Discussing 'the divided attitude of fetishists to the question of the castration of women' in 'Fetishism', Freud cites the example 'in social psychology' of 'the Chinese custom of mutilating the female foot and then revering it like a fetish after it has been mutilated'.[56] Appearances are stressed as Feyerabend is quoting John Stuart Mill, who was writing prior to Freud, though restoring some originary agency to Feyerabend, it could be argued that, as with Duchamp and the urinal, 'He CHOSE it'.[57])

Concluding this preamble, Feyerabend asserts:

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[52] *Against Method* p. 9
[53] ibid. p. 9
[54] ibid. footnote 1 p. 9
[55] ibid. p. 12 The passage continues in a way that seems, however, to reject the idea of 'scientific education' as a fetish per se. Add on: 'and tends to make a person markedly different in outline *from the ideals of rationality that happen to be fashionable in science, or in the philosophy of science*' (my italics), and the fetish, it appears, is wrought from these two other fetishes... a reading that the *rest* of the passage then counteracts. Amidst all this appendaged confusion, and a foot being at the heart of it, I cannot help but notice that a *foot*note is a metaphoric (Freudian) fetish too (in function), as it makes a reparation for an absence in the main body of the text (as this one does). And the foot as a fetish converges with the footnote for Freud (which may have prompted my insight), as the editor of 'Fetishism' recounts: '[t]he explanation of the choice of the foot as a fetish [...] was published in a further addition to [a] footnote of the *Three Essays* in its third edition of 1915'. (p. 348)
fig. 42 A foot-note

[56] 'Fetishism' p. 357
[57] Marcel Duchamp 'The Richard Mutt Case' in *Art in Theory* Harrison & Wood p. 248

fig. 43 Theory as the tip of the iceberg

'It is clear, then, that the idea of a fixed method, or of a fixed theory of rationality rests on too naive a view of man and his social surroundings. To those who look at the rich material provided by history, and who are not intent on impoverishing it in order to please their lower instincts, their craving for intellectual security in the form of clarity, precision "objectivity", "truth", it will become clear that there is only one principle that can be defined under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: *anything goes.*'[58]

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[58] *Against Method* pp. 18-19

Moralising also over theory's comings short, Paul de Man insists: '[...] a method that cannot be made to suit the "truth" of its object can only teach delusion.'[59] (For de Man, as well, 'method' and 'theory' are commutable.) And the object that de Man is trying to be true to, in the name of theory, is 'literariness'.[60] In 'Resistance to Theory' de Man suggests that 'literariness' concerns the 'rhetorical dimension of discourse',[61] as that concerns the 'undecidability'[62] of (literary) texts. When reading regards this undecidability - 'the tropological dimension of language'[63] - reading resists theory, as 'the stable cognitive field that extends from grammar to logic to a general science of man and of the phenomenal world'.[64]

But as de Man also notes: '[t]his undoing of theory [...] can in its turn be made into a theoretical project of rhetorical analysis that will reveal the inadequacy of grammatical models of non-reading.'[65] The resistance of 'literariness' to theory, can be theorised. (So, in a second reading of the essay's title, 'the resistance to theory is a resistance to the rhetorical'[66] - as 'the rhetorical dimension of discourse' is an object *for* theory rather than an object *against* theory.)

In this account of theory and its objects, theory is regarded as *necessarily* a fetish. Moreover, rhetoric needs theory - to resist (it), when resistance 'is a property of the referent [...] which allows this referent to become the object of knowledge.'[67]

In entertaining the necessity of theory as a fetish, its proscription may be preserved in a residual form: as a plea for the fetish to be as little so as possible. This is to introduce the idea of a limit for the limit that is theory, and thereby an oscillating movement which keeps the act of theorising productively suspended

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[59] 'Resistance to Theory' p. 4 The context suggests that the 'suiting' is an issue of method's capaciousness.

[60] ibid. p. 9

[61] ibid. p. 14

[62] ibid. p. 16 This 'undecidability' as an effect of 'rhetoric', is, it seems, the work of the figural. 'Since grammar as well as figuration is an integral part of reading, [in the more usual sense as 'interpretation'] it follows that reading will be a negative process in which the grammatical cognition is undone, at all times, by its rhetorical displacement.' ('Resistance to Theory' p. 17)

[63] ibid. p. 17

[64] ibid. p. 17 Note how Terry Eagleton contends that '[o]ne reason that we have theories is in order to stabilize our signs. In this sense all theories, even revolutionary ones, have something conservative about them.' ('The Significance of Theory' in Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* p. 25)

[65] ibid. p. 17

[66] ibid. p. 17

[67] *The Resistance to Theory* p. xiii

between two poles.

'Not that theory itself is a problem - the difficulties seem to arise from a fascination with a certain understanding of theory. That understanding [...] is merely the newest configuration of the very Cartesian ideals - of epistemological adequacy, of unimpeachable method, of foundations - that poststructuralism [...] [has] rightly called into question.'[68]

As the fetish is regarded as an inescapable condition, Freud's understanding of it is rejected - in very different terms from how it was regarded in Chapter 4. He writes: 'there is no doubt a fetish is recognized by its adherents as an abnormality'; the fetish proper is not inevitable. But the terms of Chapter 4's review are also present in this survey of the literature of theory and its objects, as Freud's notion of the fetish has been steadily refuted throughout in favour of a much looser one that owes more to Marxism and anthropology. The (Freudian) psychoanalytic version of the term is (additionally) misleading here because it suggests there is a 'lack' in the realm of theory's objects. Clearly, for Feyerabend (despite his Freudian allusion) and de Man there is not. Rather: the realm of theory's objects is (potentially) plentitudinous. But as this discussion rejects the explanatory properties of Freud's concept of the fetish, it is also a critique of the fetish so configured. For Feyerabend and de Man, the fetish is a part of the whole which restores an absent absence. Which is to say (as a critique of Freud): women do not lack (a penis).

Theory and its objects - causality

To invoke this topic is to resurrect concerns that were looked at in Chapter 2, as it has to do with philosophies of representation. In asking whether theory should restrict attention to its (designated) objects, a certain premise was accepted: that theory can reflect or represent its object. This is a premise informed by realism.

Theory and its objects: idealism

A number of theorists of theory and its objects invoke this other premise, and among them Thomas Kuhn, whose notion of community-specific meaning is attached to his better known, idealist, notion of the 'paradigm' as that is used to

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[68] Susan Bordo & Mario Moussa 'Rehabilitating the "I"' in *Questioning Foundations* ed. H Silverman

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designate distinct modes of knowledge which, moreover, constitute their objects.[69] He writes:

'Examining the record of past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before.'[70]

There is something of this notion in Terry Eagleton's assertion that '[a]ll social life is theoretical'[71] if, for him, this seemingly idealist moment is part of the larger, materialist dialectic in which social life reciprocally constructs theory, in an ongoing revolution.[72]

For Godzich, the construction of reality by theory (as language), has a more linear trajectory, as witnessed in 'deixis':

'[...] the linguistic mechanism that permits the articulation of all of these distinctions between the here and the there, the now and then, the we and the you [which] establishes the existence of an "out there" that is not an "over here," [which thus] is fundamental to the theoretical enterprise',[73]

as

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[69] See entry for 'Community' in Chapter 4.

[70] 'Scientists and Their Worldviews' p. 185

[71] 'The Significance of Theory' in Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* p. 24. Regarding art in this way, Terry Atkinson insists: 'No matter how much theory is disguised or repressed, there is no practice without theory. The theory that practice has nothing to do with theory is a theory, a disingenuous and naive one, but none the less a theory.' (These are the opening lines to 'Phantoms of the [Art School] Studio' (Interestingly enough, Susan Kandel uses the figure of the phantom to argue for the haunting of the art of the 80s by (poststructuralist and postmodernist) 'theory' ('Theory as Phantom Text: Plundering Smithsons [sic] Non-Sites' *(de-, dis, ex-, cavating Modernism)*. For Kandel, the phantom is no bad thing; for Atkinson, on the other hand, the phantom is that of theory which masquerades as its other - 'nature' - epitomised for him by the pernicious ideology of 'expressive realism' - 'self-expression' in my parlance - which is still rather more than a ghost in most art schools. Someone who was at art-school in the 60s told me that when 'lessons' ended at 5.00pm, students started on 'their own work'. Today, my students likewise protest the projects I set them, in favour of 'their own thing'. And fully fledged artists refer to site-specific work and public art as alien to theory 'own practice'.) In addition to the deconstruction of the primacy and 'innocence' of practice via the concept of its always-already theoretical character, there is another deconstructive point to be made which is likewise useful: often practice is a habit, so in some sense conventional: 'piano practice' has this connotation, which would be useful to introduce to *art* practice, as a behaviourist critique of its supposed naturalness.

[72] Maybe it is stretching a point to say that this moment is 'idealist', for in the Marxist dialectic, the superstructure (i.e. theory) acts upon the base (social life) as a pre-existing entity. Thus theory affects, rather than effects its objects, though idealism might include that inflection.

[73] Foreword to *The Resistance to Theory* p. xv

'[...] it turns out that deictics do not refer to anything tangible, to anything that has any resistance, as is clear from the very instability of the terms themselves (I becomes you when you address me, and here turns into there, etc.).'[74]

Or if they do, they do so in a way that anticipates de Man's capturing of undecidability by theory:

'[...] they refer to the fact that language has taken place and that it is something that takes place [...] deictics are the means by which language makes itself into *something that takes place and something that can be referred to*, and it is from this inaugural act of reference that all other forms of reference will flow'.[75]

Does Godzich mean that when I write 'I write' the second 'I' refers - to someone that you know, alluding, as it does, to the subject who has written that they write?

Equivocating likewise about the referential properties of theory, Michel Serres decides that different *types* of theory are divided on this score. (For Godzich, the equivocation was identified with theory's twofold relation to the rhetorical as theory resisted it and was resisted by it.) In 'Panoptic Theory', Serres retells the myth of Zeus, Io, Argus and Hermes, making Argus, as 'a man who could see everything',[76] the focus of his interest. And Serres bestows on him the 'nickname of Panoptes'[77] (the all-seer). Thus, Argus has become a theorist, for as Serres heeds, after Godzich, '[i]n its Greek meaning, the verb "to see" incarnates theoretical man'.[78]

Making a distinction between theory as 'the surveillance of relations' (the 'human sciences'[79]) and 'the examination of objects' (the 'exact'[80]) *natural* sciences, Serres condemns the former and commends the latter on the basis that the former is non-objective, as its double genitive proposes a concern with the way in which one thing affects another, and scrutiny itself is inflected; relational. Serres declares, 'I shall call that poor which has no object'.[81] (That '[m]yth has no object[82] makes Serres the victim of his own critique in 'Panoptic Theory', as

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[74] ibid. p. xvi

[75] ibid. p. xvi-xvii

[76] 'Panoptic Theory' p. 25

[77] ibid. p. 26 'Panoptes' takes the fable into the realm of epistemology, for Panoptes unlike 'Argus' conjures up the vista of Jeremy Bentham and Foucault, and the whole panoply of writers on looking and surveillance.

[78] ibid. p. 27

[79] ibid. p. 27

[80] ibid. p. 27

[81] ibid. p. 27

[82] ibid. p. 27

the signifying form of his text confounds its signified content.)

Panoptes certainly personifies the theory of surveillance of relations (literally, as Zeus's wife conscripts him to spy on Io), but uncertainly the theory of exact science, so that when he dies, it is not clear what theory, allegorically, remains: the theory of reflection, or none at all?

Along with Serres, Sokal and Bricmont bemoan constitutive notions of theory - that is:

'epistemic relativism, namely the idea - which, at least when expressed explicitly, is much more widespread in the English-speaking world than in France - that modern science is nothing more than a "myth", a "narration' or a "social construction" among others.'[83]

And indeed, it is this which returns for Serres, as the horrible effect of Panoptes' murder by Hermes, 'the god of information and communication[84] whose ascendancy thus ushers in today's age in which '[t]he message becomes the object itself' and '[r]elations return, bringing with them the heavy and regressive burden of stakes and *fetishes* [...]'[85] (italics added). What is salient about this observation is that the fetish is identified with idealist representation. Thus the earlier objection to it acquires a philosophical authority, inscribing it, as it does, as an anomaly within a realist mode of representation.

The reappearance of the fetish brings this survey full circle, suggesting it is now time to review the survey's findings.

The survey surveyed

Considering how theory can engage with 'the real' (as 'a concatenation of chance and circumstance, of the aleatory and the unpredictable'[86]), this survey has staked out various conflicting positions: theory as desirably and undesirably a fetish; theory as reflection, and constitution, including the fetish in both cases. But it has not been a proper survey for one prominent position has been left out. and in being admitted only now, it executes a revenge by laying the others to waste.

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[83] *Intellectual Impostures* p. x
[84] 'Panoptic Theory' p. 31
[85] Ibid. p. 46
[86] Thomas M Kavanagh Introduction to *The Limits of Theory* p. 16

A LONG time ago there were a King and Queen who said every day: "Ah, if only we had a child!" but they never had one. But it happened that once when the Queen was bathing, a frog crept out of the water on to the land, and said to her: "Your wish shall be fulfilled; before a year has gone by, you shall have a daughter."

What the frog had said came true, and the Queen had a little girl who was so pretty that the King could not contain himself for joy, and ordered a great feast. He invited not only his kindred, friends and acquaintances, but also the Wise Women, in order that they might be kind and well-disposed towards the child. There were thirteen of them in his kingdom, but, as he had only twelve golden plates for them to eat out of, one of them had to be left at home.

The feast was held with all manner of splendor, and when it came to an end the Wise Women bestowed their magic gifts upon the baby: one gave virtue, another beauty, a third riches, and so on with everything in the world that one can wish for.

When eleven of them had made their promises, suddenly the thirteenth came in. She wished to avenge herself for not having been invited, and without greeting, or even looking at anyone, she cried with a loud voice: "The King's daughter shall in her fifteenth year prick herself with a spindle, and fall down dead." And, without saying a word more, she turned round and left the room.

fig. 44 From 'Little Briar Rose'[87]

For to counterpose idealism to realism is disingenuous - if a commonplace manoeuvre - when Chapter 2 proposed that these are closely related concepts as the two forms of representationalism, which is to be opposed to anti-representationalism, which is pragmatism. And to recollect: 'pragmatism "does not view knowledge as getting reality right"' (as do realism *and* idealism), '"but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality"'.[88]

My colleague and I had introduced the first years to the deep waters of postmodernism via Terry Atkinson's assault on (self) 'expressive realism' in 'The Phantom of the Studio'. And we got them to dip their toes in the shark-infested straits of The Death of the Author.

Later, while discussing studio work, one of them said to me: 'You've got to believe in

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[87] In *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales* p. 237
[88] Richard Rorty 'Introduction' to *Representation, social practise, and truth* p. 1

self-expression otherwise you might as well give up.' Quite. I couldn't have put it better myself. Especially as she gave it a pragmatic turn. A thing is true by virtue of what it achieves.

Pragmatism and an artist's theory of the origin of meaning

If 'truth' is a matter of a thing's effect, then an artist must be asked: 'what do you want to come about?' (This is a prelude to the question 'what is it useful to believe in?')

And if, as Heidegger proposes, '[t]he work [of art] is the origin of the artist',[89] then the artist wants the work of art to come about. And because too, '[t]he artist is the origin of the work',[90] the artist must desire their instrumentality. They must desire their self-expression in the work of art as the expression of that self's desire for the work of art to come about.

So pragmatically, an artist is impelled to theorise the origin of meaning as the artist's self. This is nothing other than the student's argument - just more explicitly theorised. And as she also indicated, it is not useful to accept the contrary: that the origin of meaning - as an aspect of the work of art - is the self's others; *not* the self. So, as postmodernism (which includes post-structuralism) voids the subject's originary agency, it is not helpful to believe in it; in Rorty's terms it is not true.

The consequence of this, is that an artist's notion that the origin of meaning as in the self, has a double rationale, as it answers to the realist logic of empiricism *and* the truth of pragmatism.

Things could be left here. But it is tempting to consider if - reasoning preposterously[91] - there are any circumstances under which pragmatism would also propose that an artist theorised the origin of meaning as multifariously other - overriding the above argument against this. And that which comes to mind, is the context of a critical aesthetic of diversity, of heterogeneousness, of multifariousness. (It is critical because, as it applies to individual artists, it still works against the grain of most aspects of the art institution, and pointedly, the

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[89] Heidegger 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Basic Writings* p. 143
[90] Ibid. p. 143
[91] 'Preposterously' etymologically means 'before coming after'. The reasoning is back to front because rather than asking 'what does pragmatism commend?', I am asking 'what might commend this pragmatic argument?'

market with its need for an artist's *identity* - when that means 'name as unique sameness'.) When an artist is required to seek out multifariousness, (or, as that is outside themselves, to let that seek them out), they will find it *useful* to conceptualise the origin of meaning as multifariously other (assuming that origins affect the end).

(This critical aesthetic is close to my heart. Perhaps because it indexes the multifariousness of origin - which is a realist reason for supporting it; perhaps because it challenges the institution which is rather a pragmatic reason for supporting it.)

Pragmatism's commendation of multifarious origin (as a theory by and for the artist) might militate against its commendation of the artist as the origin of meaning - but it should be combined with it, as it is useful to acknowledge both, sacrificing the hegemony of one for the presence of the other.

So an artist's theory of the origin of meaning as the self and its others has a double rationale as it answers to the realist logic of empiricism *and* the truth of pragmatism. In the second case, this rationale has been secured by somewhat convoluted means - by recoursing to my critical-aesthetic preferences. Thus it might be objected that this rationale is subjective. But then I might propose that I exemplify *the* artist as it is useful for me to do so, thus enlarging the provision of my theory as it caters for *the* artist rather than *an* artist. As I do so, I avoid the various problems that my realist theory encountered around its typicality. But this should not suggest that the two meta-theories here can be used to cover for the weaknesses in one another. Rather, they should be hailed in the spirit of precisely that they bring about: as different, incommensurate points of origin for an artist's theory of the origin of meaning as the self and all its others... Only two points of difference perhaps, (a minimum of difference indeed) but then this project only provides 'interim accommodation'; nothing more than the outline of another dwelling which might be built upon a far more multifarious meta-theory. But for now it keeps the artist warm - until another builder comes along: *il miglior fabro.*[92]

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[92] This is the epigraph to *The Waste Land*, and the better workman is taken as a reference to Ezra Pound.
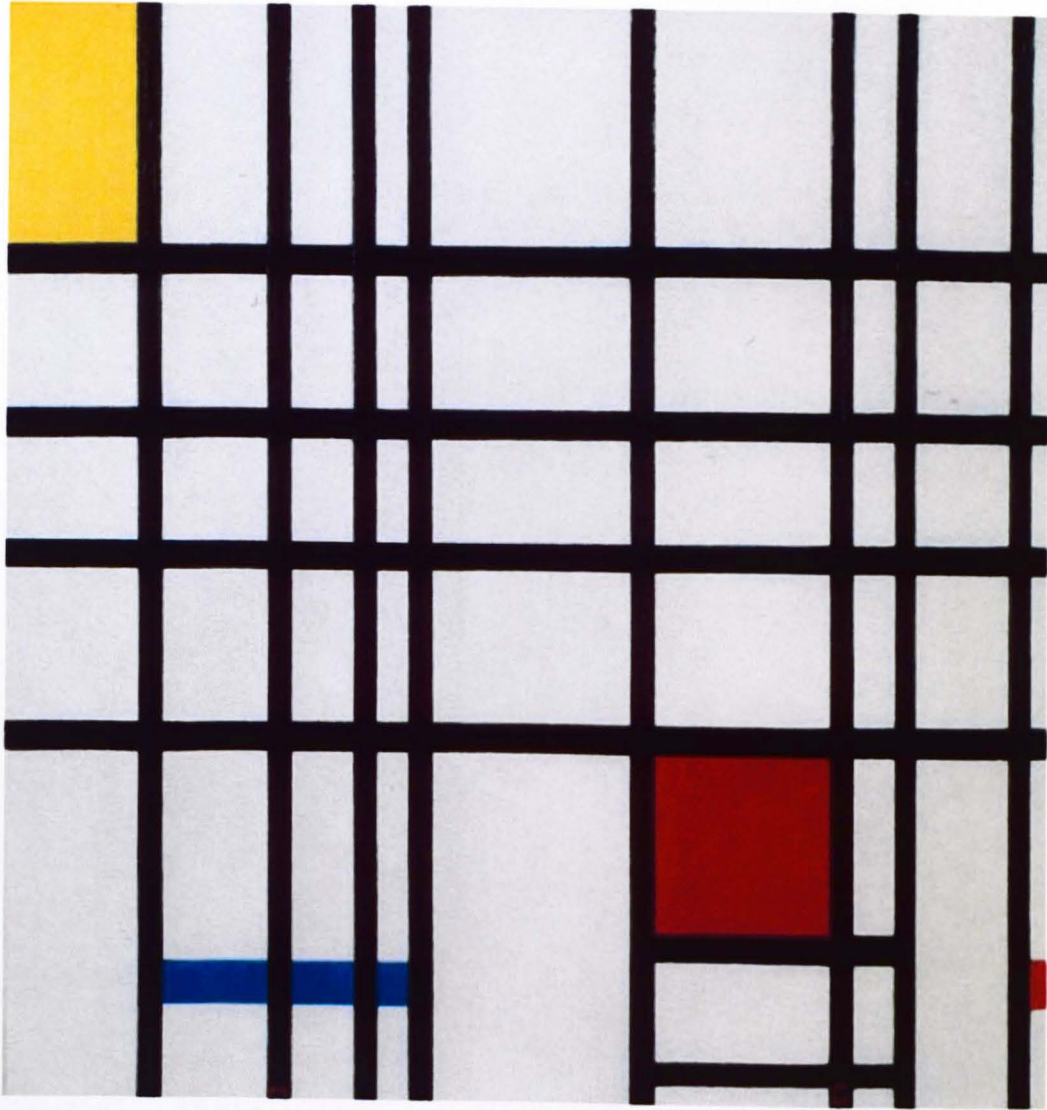
fig. 45 Piet Mondrian *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue, c.* 1937-42

In conclusion

Proposing, from two theoretical perspectives - empiricism *and* pragmatism - that an artist's notion of the origin of meaning offers a critique of recent theory (and especially postmodernism) as that fails to accommodate an artist's notion of their own agency and their multifarious others as a positive infinity, this thesis can be seen to make a number of innovations.[1]

A critique of postmodernism

Most obviously, as it *does* offer a critique of postmodernism, it makes a claim to innovation, though this is a very modest one for critiques of postmodernism per se are hardly new. As this text has itself noted, there is Sokal and Bricmont's polemic, Séan Burke's comments on the role of agency in postmodernism, Nancy K Miller's attack on 'The Death of the Author' (quoted and anthologised by Burke), and there is Lee Ann Martin's critique of postmodernism's notion of difference. Beyond the scope of references within this project, notable attacks on postmodernism include: Christopher Norris' assault on Baudrillard and Lyotard in *Uncritical Theory*, and Richard Rorty's critique of Umberto Eco in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*.

A unique critique

However, the critique of postmodernism that is offered by an artist's notion of the origin of meaning is, to all intents and purposes, unique, approached in the *content* of its observation, only by Séan Burke and Derrida, at certain points. And then it is only half its contents which is so approached - that which has to do with the expressive subject. And as an artist's notion of the origin of meaning insists upon the need to 'resituate' the self-expressive subject in theories of agency, and especially, a theory of the artist's agency, it suggests a focus for a new theory of the origin of meaning, as that is constructed around the figure of the artist as the subject of 'the origin of meaning'. Likewise, this text's critique of postmodernism's notion of multifariousness, (in which this text has a greater claim to innovation), suggests a focus for more theory: that it should represent that multifariousness more thoroughly, and in distinction to Derrida's.

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[1] Recalling that this is its rationale *as research*.

A hybrid critique

Yet the real innovation that this project makes in terms of the content of its critique of postmodernism, is to put two points concerning agency together (Derrida, in part, notwithstanding), in the postmodern spirit of the hybrid, no matter that one term in that hybrid of 'the self and all its others' - precisely the second term - itself contains a plethora of other terms, themselves potential hybrids. But as it does, it leaves a number of questions unanswered, tethered as it is by the limitations of this project to proposing just an outline for a theory.[2] There are questions to do with the theory's application to each and every work of art, with the application of all multifarious origins to all works of art, that have still to be addressed, and questions to do with the weighting of multifarious origins.

The double critical method

As the critique of postmodernism's version of agency and multifariousness is more original in its content than the bare fact of its existence, so it is still more original *indeed* in being made from two theoretical perspectives: (empiricism and pragmatism).[3] Further still, as postmodernism was additionally impaled on its own terms this proposes yet another critical perspective, differentiated from the two preceding theories in belonging to another paradigm; the fact that it came from *inside* the object of critique, when empiricism *and* pragmatism were extrinsic approaches to that object.

And as this critique from an artist is indeed proposed from two theoretical perspectives and in terms of two approaches to the gesture of critique, it is possibly unique in another way. Here too, it proposes directions for further work as that might concern itself with plural methodologies - though this is, of course, not only commended by this project as it offers an example of pluralistic methodology, but is commended elsewhere, for *science*, by Paul Feyerabend, whose elaboration of 'against method' leads him to propose that:

'[a] scientist who wishes to maximize the empirical content of the views he holds and who wants to understand them as clearly as he possibly can must therefore introduce other views; that is, he must adopt a *pluralistic methodology*. He must compare ideas with other ideas rather than "experience" and he must try to

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[2] As I noted in Chapter 5, Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology* 'I do not profess to bring to these questions anything more than the beginning of an answer, perhaps only the beginning of an elaboration, limited to the preliminary organization of the question.' (p. 97)

[3] This project has attempted to contextualise empiricism critically - by way of idealism and pragmatism. That cannot be said for pragmatism which enjoys an uncritical acceptance here. Future work might look to the socio-political context for its most recent form in Richard Rorty.

improve rather than discard the views that have failed in the competition.'[4]

As this project works through a notion of the ineluctable modality of the real, it is precisely this pluralistic methodology which is so appropriate to its process as it seeks, at the level of its form, to avoid essentialising multifariousness. And yet, it can also be suggested that this pluralistic methodology has something to do with the subject of its theory: an artist, and the fact that this subject is not only the subject as that means 'the object' - that which is looked at - but also the subject as that signifies the viewer of that object.

*fig. 46* Piet Mondrian - painting (newspaper reproduction)

[4] *Against Method* p. 21

As an artist writes for an artist as the object, an artist is inclined to favour a theory that accounts for an artist's experience. But as an artist writes for the artist as subject - as theorist - other interests take over: the concerns of more idealist theory.


fig. 47 André Kertész *Chez Mondrian*, Paris, 1926

A new way to do theory: for an artist (by an artist)

In pursuing the issue of what *an artist's* response to 'recent theory' might be, and then the issue of what *an artist's theory* of the origin of meaning looks like, this projects makes a less modest claim to innovation. Indeed, the innovation here cannot be stressed enough - as it looks to an artist as an artist. For an artist writing qua an artist can be lost in the forest of those texts which are doubtless authored by artists, but by artists who are writing at a certain remove from their practice; subjects whose name signifies an artist, as they write in name only.

Towards a definition of the discipline (of Fine Art)

Is this - this writing as an artist - the innovation forced upon me by this new discipline: research into Fine Art? For as the discipline - the rule of the institution - demands that art is the subject (object) of writing, I am forced to ask myself: how is this writing distinct from that done in other disciplinary contexts? How does it find its identity in not being 'Art History' or 'Art Theory' as conventionally practised? For sure, it is not through the object of knowledge, which is similar, if not identical in each case. So it must be through the purchase on that object: in this way 'Art History' is not 'Art Theory', though they find their objects changed by their purchase at the same time. In this way, too, Fine Art Research is not Art History or Art Theory: it is done by a (Fine) Artist. This was the argument I put to a conference staged by my (more advanced) research-student peers on the subject of Fine Art Research: 'Redefining Art'.[5] There, I argued that research into Fine Art redefines research (into art) - not vice versa as the organisers claimed: that research into Fine Art redefines that field. Art redefines research, I claimed, so that 'redefining' functions adjectivally. And I was on the way, even then, to realising this redefinition around the subject of an artist as researcher as a theorist for herself.

But even then I wondered: does it really take an institutional innovation - the creation of a new discipline - the recognition of a practice by an (academic institution) - to produce a new subject for epistemology? Knowing that this should be the case, I was still incredulous. Artists have written copiously, I mused, and there must be a precursor for *my* version of the writing-artist, a precursor so proposing that the creation of a discipline was cued by them, not to bring them into being...

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[5] 22 February 1997, Goldsmiths College

So I went to the Library in search of this, with a list of likely candidates, in part prompted by the list of contributors to *Modern Art and Modernism* and *Art in Theory;* tomes which number many artists among them including texts by authors that this project has itself cited as key figures in the writing that is modernism and postmodernism.

And I quizzed them for the way in which they theorised *by* an artist and then, *for* an artist. As I read for the former - the notion of a writing that is clearly *by* an artist - I realised that the notion of what comprised an index of the artist's hand, so to speak, had itself, to be quizzed. Buren's work is 'by' the artist as it looks at the role of the studio;[6] Victor Burgin's writing suggests an artist's authorship as it argues for Conceptual Art (extra-textually connected to him by an autobiographical thread);[7] Peter Halley theorises his practice;[8] Donald Judd pronounces from the point of the artist as a position of imputed cultural authority.[9] And Sol Le Witt,[10] and Richard Serra[11] write about their own work.[12]

An artist writes as an artist in a number of ways... and as they write as an artist, they write for the artist, assuming that another artist shares their interest. However, in all of the above instances, the issue of the 'for' as the 'by' is implicit rather than explicit. Future research could well concern itself with articulating this relationship beyond the progress made by this project on this matter. And it should, as a prelude to this, consider more methodically than this study has been able to do, what might constitute the indices of an artist's authorship (in writing).

The subject of epistemology: towards a (different) ethics

At the back of this interrogation is the issue of the ethics of who speaks for whom; an issue which concerns any writer (representor) and which may be given an original charge here. In proposing that an issue which concerns an artist (the origin of meaning), is addressed by an artist writing from experience, this project is proposing, by its own example, that knowledge is addressed by those who

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[6] 'The Function of the Studio' in *OCTOBER The First Decade, 1976-1986* eds. A Michelson, R Krauss, D Crimp, and J Copjec

[7] 'The Absence of Presence' in *Art in Theory* pp. 1097-1101

[8] 'Nature and Culture' in *Art in Theory* pp. 1071-1074

[9] from "...not about master-pieces but why there are so few of them" in *Art in Theory* pp. 1028-1032

[10] 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' in *Art in Theory* pp. 834-837; and 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' in *Art in Theory* pp. 837-839

[11] from "The Yale Lecture" *Art in Theory* pp. 1124-1127

[12] None of the artists I looked at engages with the issue of the origin of meaning.

have, empirically, a stake in it. And as a corollary, it is suggesting that those who have a stake in knowledge (need to use it; are its subjects) should be its authors. Moreover, by example again, this thesis also indicates that knowledge of a category, 'the artist and their notion of the origin of meaning', should be generated from within that category; via one of its constituents, the problem with their typicality aside. There are many implications in these commendations - and not least, the issue of their politics - which future work could look to, too.

An artist's writing and poetics

Quizzing my list of artists' writing for the mark of an artist's interest, and the mark of writing for the artist, I was also wondering how these texts *embodied* this concern; how the formal means advanced this topic.

Here, I was disappointed. For skimming through a compilation such as *Modern Art and Modernism* or *Art in Theory*, I could not have *seen* which articles were by artists and which were not. And the more extended artist's writing made the same point. Only occasionally, did a text's visual aspect obtrude from the mass of more academic writing with its solid chunk of margin to margin prose unpunctuated by the visual, or the non-verbal. (Look at William Tucker and Tim Scott's 'Reflections on Sculpture';[13] Art & Language's 'Art & Language Paints a Picture',[14] and Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni's 'Statement'.[15]) Not that the visual is, of course, the only index of formal difference (innovation) but, for an artist, it might be an important one.

Certainly it is important to this project which has sought to make a contribution to the field in its formal-material innovations, in asking how an artist can insert themselves into the interstices of an institutional notion of what 'a thesis' is, though these have also been proposed by way of embodying the text's argument so that its pursuit of self-expression and its many others is rendered in the voice (and the look) of the text. As this constitutes an exploration of 'poetics' and poetics as way of responding to the problem of a reflexive topic (which the origin of meaning is) as Chapter 1 proposed, it adds another layer of textual innovations to this project - not one which is so novel, given that it is approached by poststructuralism - but one which adds to this text's multifariousness of layering.

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[13] In *Art In Theory* pp. 784-787
[14] Ibid pp. 1018-1028
[15] Ibid. p. 850

Whether or not, in this complexity, the project has another claim to innovation - as it sets a record, had best, perhaps be left unanswered. Suffice to say that it announces the end of complexity: the (relative) simplicity of an ending, though the notion of an ending reminds me that I thought of a companion volume to this thesis: some notes for future work: 'The end of meaning' or a speculation on the question: 'when does an artwork die?' But never mind the work of art - here this thesis ends - in conclusively concluding.

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Jorge Luis Borges, *A Universal History of Infamy*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

Melvyn Bragg, 'The Two Cultures' Debate (Radio 4, 13 March 1999, 8.00 pm).

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CONTAINS

PULLOUTS

an artist's unconscious

an artist's previous work

the unknown

an artist's previous work

the socio-economic

an event

art production

the socio-economic

the socio-economic research & development

an artist's physiology and psychology

chance

research & development

research & development (technical and conceptual)

art production

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

research & development

art production

(recent) art history

technical considerations

art production

financial support

research & development

another artist's idea

the search for a means of distribution and institutional support

a means of distribution and institutional support is offered

research & development

affect of another artist's (collaborator's) work

publicity

research & development

distribution of art

distribution of art

'lay' feedback

artists' self-analysis

further distribution

a means of distribution and institutional support is refused

an auto-biographical event conjoining with the nature of the art in production

affect of each artist's work upon the other's

professional feedback

professional feedback

professional feedback

an autobiographical event

cultural history

an act of naming

1965 onwards	Spring 1996 - Summer 1996	November 1996	11 November 1996	evening of 11 November 1996	11 November - December 1996

before Christmas and early 1997	early 1997	January - March 1997	March 1997		June 1997

June 1997	August 1997	September 1997	December 1997	February 1998	April 1998

May 1998	10 May - 14 May 1998	14 May 1998	14 May - 7 June 1998	14 May 1998 onwards	7 June 1998 onwards