

DANIEL BUREN

FIVE TEXTS

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5Texts

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ERRATA AND ADDITIONS

1. Page 26: The date December 1969 should appear at the end of the text.
2. Page 63, Section I., number 6, should read:
 6. "Mise en Garde" Cologne, Interfunktionem 4, 1970. (In German)
Not authorized.

3. Page 63, Section I., number 7, should read:
 - 7 "Mise au Point". (Mise en Garde No. 4.) Integral text of present book.
In *Les Lettres Francaises*. Paris, June 17, 1970. (In French)
4. Page 63, Section I., number 10:

Ursala Mayer should read Ursula Mayer

5. Page 63, Section I., number 11, should read:
 - 11 "Se Upp" Grisalda, Lunde Suede, February 1974. (In Swedish)

6. Page 63: The following should appear at the end of Section I..
 12. "Opomena" In catalogue edited by Marijan Susovski, Galeria Grada Zagreba, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, April 1974. (In Yugoslav)
 13. "Achtung!". In *Über Kunst*, German-English edition, Gerd de Vries, Hrsg. Dumont International, Köln, April 1974. (In German and English)

7. Page 63, Section II., number 3, should read:
 3. "Es Malt" In *Es Malt*, Dusseldorf, Konrad Fischer, September 1973
(In German)

8. Page 63: The following should appear at the end of Section II..
 4. "It rains, it snows, it paints" In Gregory Battcock: *Idea Art*, E. P. Dutton, New York, September 1973. (In English) Not authorized.

9. Page 64, Section III., number 1, should read:
 1. "Stationen" (First Publication.) In book "Position-Proposition", along with text "Rahmen". Mönchengladbach, Städtisches Museum, 1970.
(In German)

10. Page 64: Section III., number 2, should read:
 2. "Standpoints" Published in *Studio International*. London, April 1971
(In English)

11. Page 64: The following date should appear after the title of Section IV., as:

IV. CRITICAL LIMITS (1968—1970)

12. Page 64: Section IV., number 2, should read:
 2. "Rahmen". In book "Position-Proposition" along with text "Stationen"
Mönchengladbach, Städtisches Museum, 1970. (In German)

13. Page 64: The following should appear at the end of Section V.:
 4. "Funkcija Muzeja". In catalogue edited by Marijan Susovski, Galeria Grada Zagreba, Zagreb, April 1974. (In Yugoslav)

PREFACE

WHY WRITE TEXTS or The Place From Where I Act

Translated by Patricia Railing

In the present book five texts are collected which were partially or entirely written between 1967 and 1970. Several have been published in various places between 1968 and 1973. Some have never been published in their original language or in their home country¹, and others are new in English². In this collection (which is neither exhaustive of the period considered nor which includes all the writings since 1970), the texts are reprinted *in extenso* without additions or changes, even though certain modifications would seem appropriate today. Why not present texts which differ from their original version? Because what seems to no longer satisfy me as being badly or imperfectly formulated, incomplete or even superficial, is due to the evolution in my (pictorial) experience. These texts would not gain by being rewritten or obliterated today, and they should not be. On the contrary, what is kept and read today becomes even more up to date.³

Although my painting has greatly evolved since these five texts were written (the last dates from three years ago), the writings clearly reveal that the act of painting precedes them and goes beyond them. They are not a demonstration of what the painting does not say because they themselves are dictated by a series of reflections resulting from works which preceded them. (One should admit too that within the last three years the art scene and art itself have evolved, which is to say shuffled around.) The texts presented here have nearly become "historical" since the (pictorial) experience to which they are related is appropriate to a specific point in time (the time when the texts were written). In other words, my current work is more evolved than the texts since the work itself has not solidified, while the fixity of the texts remains. The texts are valid since they perpetuate the continuity of the work which follows and which they reverberate.

Why such circumspection before approaching texts already published? The importance of the texts should not be exaggerated and the reader should be beware of the facility and illusion which they may engender.

(1) "It rains, it snows, it paints"
"Function of the Museum"

(2) "Critical Limits"

(3) The reader should not forget that the texts can contribute to the formulation of several fundamental concepts and that even if they are clumsy they are always more instructive and newer than what any critic, historian or other writer on art could perpetrate if he cared to. A situation mentioned in passing which may explain certain passionate dissension!

Facility is that which would permit one who has read the texts to feel exempt from **looking** at the painting, thinking them explicit in the texts, and forgetting that the painting explains and inspires the texts. Illusion: this second and shrewder danger results from a confusion between the writings and the painting when their very distinction confirms their existence. That there is interaction between the texts and the painting is undeniable, but it would be an absolute misinterpretation to forget which engenders the other: the process is from the work to the text. Neither is a mirror reflecting the other indefinitely.

To confine oneself to the relation text (theory), work (practice) would be to slumber in a false dialectic. It is essential to recognize that the impulse comes from the work. The confusion between texts and works possibly could be maintained if a selection of texts (and this collection is an example—or even the entire opus of texts collected in one volume and in all languages) could be juxtaposed to an equally balanced exhibition of works (if it were possible to bring together all the paintings since November 1965). But this is impossible because of the latter's dispersion and successive appearance/disappearance, which is one of its principles. Thus the relative facility of obtaining texts is juxtaposed to the extreme difficulty of seeing works, the latter being, however, indispensable to the understanding of the texts. This difference in character between the texts and the painted work could, if one is not careful, give advantage to the texts. A text is easier to seize and may tend to obstruct the work. Yet the texts provide just that possibility to grasp and discern the field in which the painted work exists. In this sense the texts will prevent those (the "critics") who are tempted to define the work "in itself" from doing so. They will also prevent those (the "critics") from seeing in the texts what is not in the painted work. For is not one of their favorite expressions, "There is more to read than to see," or even worse, "work illustrating the ideas proposed in the texts." This type of interpretation is completely false, for the texts are at best a mere echo of the works, and further it reveals that the critics have never seen the work in question and thus could not have understood the texts which relate to them. They would pretend that anything is possible in order to escape from what bothers them most: the work itself. And yet their discussions are based on the text which produced that very work. The texts cannot and would not be able to be a substitute for the work on which it was based.⁴

The texts are not theoretical. If there is theory it would appear in a painter's practice. The texts talk about what the painting cannot, since the latter is apprehended in a glance. The texts permit discussion in a certain

(4) On the other hand, one can propose the hypothesis that the texts could have been easily dismissed. However, this is not so, and it would be as stupid today to give preference to the texts over the works as to pretend that the texts do not exist. I should like to add that the works considered imply the existence of many other things which no text I've written has been able to consider yet, and perhaps never will. It would thus be frivolous to think of the texts as the unique sense of the work.

domain—that of art. (Art is confined to silence, though this silence is in fact the creator's, which seems to open the door to the chatter of exegetes and other guardians of any dominant ideology.) The texts dislodge and clearly affirm that which one is reluctant to admit: for example, the relationship between the economy, aesthetics, politics, power, ideology, criticism, and the artist and the work. That is, they propose how these relations are structured and articulated, act and determine such and such a work irremediably and often unexpectedly. If one understands how this chain functions dialectically, they decode the "mystical" aura of art. These relations are very important to specify and delineate especially since their effects are too often redhibitory.⁵

The texts must not be just an abstraction, coming out of nowhere, but rather should maintain the struggle in the artistic field against all forms of power from which both the work and the artist suffer and at the same time impose. It is at the heart of this struggle in a precise and limited field where one finds the following texts. Writing them issued from the need to recapture the discussion which certain usurpers have tried to monopolize.

The texts are based on the (pictorial) experience begun in 1965. This does not minimize them but sets them properly in their place: they are to root out all that one can say about the work and thus fulfil their didactic function. They are not to obscure their object but rather to permit seeing what they cannot say: the painting.⁶

August 1973

(5) An example: relate any artistic object, preferably one thought to be of prime importance according to current standards, and its market value. What becomes of the work, what is its significance, whose market value is such that it can belong only to him who can pay? This work disappears because it is snatched from the vision of others. In other words, the possessor/proprietor of the work in question becomes the unique guarantor of his object and in so doing juxtaposes and even replaces the rightful role of the artist who has made a work to be seen. It is now the former who decides who will have the "right" to see it. The work thus hidden from view by the simple fact that one can, in buying it, possess/annihilate it (becoming, paradoxically, newly made/unmade by a third person who has "paid" for his right). This, obviously, is the lot of every work in our present system (that is, for economic reasons a work may disappear from the view of the many to the one, even if it is—inadequately—presented to the public), and is potentially part of every work made. But this is generally proudly evaded, for to admit that every work of art is detoured from its real meaning (whatever that may be) would be to find oneself face to face with a deadly contradiction, because art lives from it. The only way to escape this situation is to radically change the sense and function of the work and the artist. But this is a long story.... I should add that the above situation is equally dictated by the pictorial work undertaken. For one of its aspects—and not the least—poses *de facto* the problem of its appropriation by another and the relation established between the owner and the work. Here again the texts discuss what is already in question in the pictorial work.

(6) It must be understood of course that I am speaking about the work I am doing. It cannot be about (the) painting as a myth (painting in general), of which the panegyric, the defence and the illustration are generously taken over by some others.

I. BEWARE

Translated by Charles Harrison and Peter Townsend

This text was written for the exhibition "Conception" at Leverkusen, (subsequently reprinted by A 379089 of Antwerp), before I had seen the works which were "exhibited" there. My skepticism in certain respects was proved justified. Given that this text is neither a profession of faith nor a bible nor a model for others, but merely a reflection upon work in progress, I have wished, for this new context, to change certain words, delete or restate certain phrases or to go more thoroughly into certain particular points with respect to the original text. Alterations or additions to the original are set in italics and placed in square brackets.

I. WARNING

A concept may be understood as being "the general mental and abstract representation of an object" (see *Le Petit Robert Dictionary*; "an abstract general notion or conception"—*Dictionary of the English Language*). Although this word is a matter for philosophical discussion, its meaning is still restricted; concept has never meant 'horse'. Now, considering the success which this word has obtained in art circles, considering what is and what will be grouped under this word, it seems necessary to begin by saying here what is meant by "concept" in para-artistic language.

We can distinguish [*four*] different meanings that we shall find in the various "conceptual" demonstrations, from which we shall proceed to draw [*four*] considerations which will serve as a warning.

(1.) Concept/Project: Certain works which until now were considered only as rough outlines or drawings for works to be executed on another scale, will henceforth be raised to the rank of "concepts". That which was only a means becomes an end through the miraculous use of one word. There is absolutely no question of just any sort of concept, but quite simply of an object which cannot be made life-size through lack of technical or financial means.

(2.) Concept/Mannerism: Under the pretext of "concept" the anecdotal is going to flourish again and with it, academic art. It will no longer of course be a question of representing to the nearest one the number of gilt buttons on a soldier's tunic, nor of picturing the rustling of the undergrowth, but of discoursing upon the number of feet in a kilometer, upon Mr. X's vacation on Popocatepetl, or the temperature read at such and

such a place. The "realistic" painters, whether it be Bouguereau, painters of socialist realism, or Pop artists, have hardly acted otherwise under the pretext of striving after reality. [*In order, no doubt, to get closer to "reality", the "conceptual" artist becomes gardener, scientist, sociologist, philosopher, storyteller, chemist, sportsman.*] It is a way—still another—for the artist to display his talents as conjurer. In a way, the vague concept of the word "concept" itself implies a return to Romanticism.

[(2a.) Concept/Verbiage: To lend support to their pseudo-cultural references and to their bluffing games, with a complacent display of questionable scholarship, certain artists attempt to explain to us what a conceptual art would be, could be, or should be—thus making a conceptual work. There is no lack of vulgarity in pretension. We are witnessing the transformation of a pictorial illusion into a verbal illusion. In place of unpretentious inquiry we are subjected to a hodgepodge of explanations and justifications which serve as obfuscation in the attempt to convince us of the existence of a thought. For these, conceptual art has become "verbiage art". They are no longer living in the twentieth century, but wish to revive the eighteenth.]

(3.) Concept/Idea/Art: Lastly, more than one person will be tempted to take any sort of an "idea", to make art of it and to call it "concept". It is this procedure which seems to us to be the most dangerous, because it is more difficult to dislodge, because it is very attractive, because it raises a problem which really does exist: how to dispose of the object? We will attempt, as we proceed, to clarify this notion of object. Let us merely observe henceforth that it seems to us that to exhibit (*exposer*¹) or set forth a concept is, at the very least, a fundamental misconception right from the start and one which can, if one doesn't take care, involve us in a succession of false arguments. To exhibit a "concept", or to use the word concept to signify art, comes to the same thing as putting the concept itself on a level with the object. This would be to suggest that we must think in terms of a "concept-object"—which would be an aberration.²

This warning appears necessary to us because if it can be admitted that [*these interpretations are not relevant for all representatives of this tendency*] we can affirm that at least nine-tenths of the works gathered together for [*the exhibition at Leverkusen*] (or its counterparts) [*relied on one of the four points*] raised above or even, for some people, [*partook subtly of all four at once*]. They rely on the traditional and "ever-green" in art or, if you like, rely on idealism or utopianism, the original

(1) Whether there is a material object or not, as soon as a thing, an idea or a "concept" is removed from its context, it is indeed a question of its exposition, in the traditional sense of this term.

(2) This approach is not only aberrant (nonsense) but typically regressive, considering that the very concepts of art, of works of art...are in the course of being dissolved.

defects which art has not yet succeeded in eradicating.³ We know from experience that at the time of a manifestation of this kind, people are only too quick to impose the image of the majority upon any work shown. In this particular case, this image will be approximately as described above, i.e. that of the new avant-garde which has become "conceptual". This is nothing more than to identify, in a more or less new form, the **prevailing ideology**. Therefore, **although concerned with confronting problems**, let us henceforth suspend judgement of the way in which they are approached or solved in the majority of cases. Moreover our present task is not to solve any enigmas, but rather to try to understand/to recognize the problems which arise. It is much more a question of a method of work than the proposal of a new intellectual gadget.

Vertically striped sheets of paper, the bands of which are 8.7 cms. wide, alternate white and colored, are stuck over internal and external surfaces: walls, fences, display windows, etc.; and/or cloth/canvas support, vertical stripes, white and colored bands each 8.7 cms., the two ends covered with dull white paint.

I record that this is my work for the last four years, without any evolution or way out. This is the past: it does not imply either that it will be the same for another ten or fifteen years or that it will change tomorrow.

The perspective we are beginning to have, thanks to these past four years, allows a few considerations on the direct and indirect implications for the very conception of art. This apparent break (no research, nor any formal evolution for four years) offers a platform that we shall situate at zero level, when the observations both internal (conceptual transformation as regards the action/praxis of a similar form) and external (work/production presented by others) are numerous and rendered all the easier as they are not invested in the various surrounding movements, but are rather derived from their absence.

Every act is political and, whether one is conscious of it or not, the presentation of one's work is no exception. Any production, any work of art is social, has a political significance. We are obliged to pass over the sociological aspect of the proposition before us due to lack of space and considerations of priority among the questions to be analysed.

The points to be examined are described below and each will require examination separately and more thoroughly later. [*This is still valid nowadays.*]

(a) The Object, the Real, Illusion: Any art tends to decipher the world, to visualize an emotion, nature, the subconscious, etc.... Can we pose a question rather than replying always in terms of hallucinations? This

(3) To deny this would be to call in question all the notions sustaining the word art.

question would be: can one create something which is real, non-illusionistic and therefore not an art object? One might reply—and this is a real temptation for an artist—in a direct and basic fashion to this question and fall instantly into one of the traps mentioned [*in the first section*]; i.e. believe the problem **solved**, because it was **raised**, and [*for example*] present no object but a concept. This is responding too directly to need, it is mistaking a desire for reality, it is making like an artist. In fact, instead of questioning or acquainting oneself with the problem raised, one provides a solution, and what a solution! One avoids the issue and passes on to something else. Thus does art progress from form to form, from problems raised to problems solved, accruing successive layers of concealment. To do away with the object as an illusion—the real problem—through its replacement by a “concept” [*or an idea*]*—*utopian or ideal(istic) or imaginary solution—is to believe in a moon made of green cheese, to achieve one of those conjuring tricks so beloved of twentieth-century art. Moreover it can be affirmed, with reasonable confidence, that as soon as a concept is announced, and especially when it is “exhibited as art”, under the desire to do away with the object, **one merely replaces it** in fact. The exhibited “concept” becomes **Ideal-object**, which brings us once again to art as it is, i.e. the illusion of something and not the thing itself. In the same way that writing is less and less a matter of verbal transcription, painting should no longer be the vague vision/illusion, even mental, of a phenomenon (nature, subconsciousness, geometry...) but **VISUALITY of the painting itself**. In this way we arrive at a notion which is thus allied more to a method and not to any particular inspiration; a method which requires—in order to make a direct attack on the problems of the object properly so-called—that painting itself should create a mode, a specific system, which would no longer direct attention, but which is “produced to be looked at”.

(b) The Form: As to the internal structure of the proposition, the contradictions are removed from it; no “tragedy” occurs on the reading surface, no horizontal line for example, chances to cut through a vertical line. Only the imaginary horizontal line of delimitation of the work at the top and at the bottom “exists”, but in the same way that it “exists” only by mental reconstruction, it is mentally demolished simultaneously, as it is evident that the external size is arbitrary (a point which we shall explain later on).

The succession of vertical bands is also arranged methodically, always the same [*x,y,x,y,x,y,x,y,x,y,x, etc. ...*], thus creating no composition on the inside of the surface or area to be looked at, or, if you like, a minimum or zero or neutral composition. These notions are understood in relation to art in general and not through internal considerations. This neutral painting is not however freed from obligations; quite on the contrary, thanks to its neutrality or absence of style, it is extremely rich in information about itself (its exact position as regards other work)

and especially information about other work; thanks to the lack or absence of any formal problem its potency is all expended upon the realms of thought. One may also say that this painting no longer has any plastic character, but that it is **indicative** or **critical**; among other things, indicative/critical of its own process. This zero/neutral degree of form is "binding" in the sense that the total absence of conflict eliminates all concealment (all mythification or secrecy) and consequently brings silence. One should not take neutral painting for uncommitted painting.

Lastly, this formal neutrality would not be formal at all if the internal structure of which we have just spoken (vertical white and colored bands) was linked to the external form (size of the surface presented to view). The internal structure being immutable, if the exterior form were equally so, one would soon arrive at the creation of a quasi-religious archetype which, instead of being neutral, would become burdened with a whole weight of meanings, one of which—and not the least—would be as the idealized image of neutrality. On the other hand, the continual variation of the external form implies that it has no influence on the internal structure, which remains the same in every case. The internal structure remains uncomposed and without conflict. If, however, the external form or shape did not vary, a conflict would immediately be established between the combination or fixed relationship of the band-widths, their spacing (internal structure) and the general size of the work. This type of relationship would be inconsistent with an ambition to avoid the creation of an illusion. We would be presented with a problem all too clearly defined—here that of neutrality to zero degree—and no longer with the thing itself posing a question, in its own terms.

Finally, we believe confidently in the validity of a work or framework questioning its own existence, presented to the eye. The framework which we have just analysed clinically has in fact no importance whatsoever in terms of form or shape; it is at zero level, a minimum but **essential** level. We shall see later how we shall work to cancel out the form itself as far as possible. In other words, it is time to assert **that formal problems have ceased to interest us**. This assertion is the logical consequence of actual work produced over four years where the formal problem was forced out and disqualified as a pole of interest.

Art is the form which it takes. The form must unceasingly renew itself to ensure the development of what we call new art. A change of form has so often led us to speak of a new art that one might think that inner meaning and form were/are linked together in the mind of the majority—artists and critics. Now, if we start from the assumption that new, i.e. "other", art is in fact never more than the same thing in a new guise, the heart of the problem is exposed. To abandon the search for a new form at any price means trying to abandon the history of art as we know it:

it means passing from the **Mythical** to the **Historical**, from the **Illusion** to the **Real**.

(c) Color: In the same way that the work which we propose could not possibly be the image of some thing (except itself, of course), and for the reasons defined above could not possibly have a finalized external form, there cannot be one single and definitive color. The color, if it was fixed, would mythify the proposition and would become the zero degree of color X, just as there is navy blue, emerald green or canary yellow.

One color and one color only, repeated indefinitely or at least a great number of times, would then take on multiple and incongruous meanings.⁴ All the colors are therefore used simultaneously, without any order of preference, but systematically.

That said, we note that if the problem of form (as pole of interest) is dissolved by itself, the problem of color considered as subordinate or as self-generating at the outset of the work and by the way it is used, is seen to be of great importance. The problem is to divest it of all emotional or anecdotal import.

We shall not further develop this question here, since it has only recently become of moment and we lack the required elements and perspective for a serious analysis. At all events, we record its existence and its undeniable interest. We can merely say that every time the proposition is put to the eye, only one color (repeated on one band out of two, the other being white) is visible and that it is without relation to the internal structure or the external form which supports it and that, consequently, it is established *a priori* that: white=red=black=blue=yellow=green=violet, etc.

(d) Repetition: The consistency—i.e. the exposure to view in different places and at different times, as well as the personal work, for four years—obliges us to recognize manifest visual repetition at first glance. We say at "first glance", as we have already learned from sections **(a)** and **(b)** that there are divergencies between one work and another; however, the essential, that is to say the internal structure, remains immutable. One may therefore, with certain reservations, speak of repetition. This repetition provokes two apparently contradictory considerations: on the one hand, the reality of a certain form (described above), and on the other hand, its **cancelling-out** by successive and identical confrontations which themselves negate any originality which might be found in this form, despite the systematization of the work. We know that a single and unique "picture" as described above, although neutral, would

(4) We may here mention the false problem raised/solved by the monochrome: '...The monochrome canvas as subject-picture refers back—and refers back in the end only to that metaphysical background against which are outlined the figures of the type of painting called realist, which is really only illusionist'. Marcelin Pleynet in *Les Lettres Françaises* No. 1177.

be charged by its very uniqueness with a symbolic force which would destroy its vocation of neutrality. Likewise by repeating an identical form, or identical color, we would fall into the pitfalls mentioned in sections **(b)** and **(c)**. Moreover we would be burdened with every unwanted religious tension if we undertook to idealize such a proposition or allowed the work to take on the anecdotal interest of a test of strength in response to a stupid bet.

There remains only one possibility; the repetition of this neutral form, with the divergencies we have already mentioned. This repetition, thus conceived, has the effect of reducing to a minimum the potency, however slight, of the proposed form such as it is, of revealing that the external form (shifting) has no effect on the internal structure (alternate repetition of the bands) and of highlighting the problem raised by the color in itself. This repetition also reveals in point of fact that visually there is **no formal evolution**—even though there is a change—and that, in the same way that no “tragedy” or composition or tension is to be seen in the clearly defined scope of the work exposed to view (or presented to the eye), no tragedy nor tension is perceptible in relation to the creation itself. The tensions abolished in the very surface of the “picture” have also been abolished—up to now—in the time-category of this production. **The repetition is the ineluctable means of legibility of the proposition itself.**

This is why, if certain isolated artistic forms have raised the problem of neutrality, they have never been pursued in depth to the full extent of their proper meaning. By remaining “unique” they have lost the neutrality we believe we can discern in them. (Among others, we are thinking of certain canvases by Cezanne, Mondrian, Pollock, Newman, Stella.)

Repetition also teaches us that there is no perfectability. A work is at zero level or it is not at zero level. To approximate means nothing. In these terms, the few canvases of the artists mentioned can be considered only as empirical approaches to the problem. Because of their empiricism they have been unable to divert the course of the “history” of art, but have rather strengthened the idealistic nature of art history as a whole.

(e) Differences: With reference to the preceding section, we may consider that repetition would be the right way (or one of the right ways) to put forward our work in the internal logic of its own endeavour. Repetition, apart from what its use revealed to us, should, in fact, be envisaged as a Method and not as an end—a Method which definitively rejects, as we have seen, any repetition of the mechanical type, i.e. the geometric repetition (superimposable in every way, including colour) of a like thing (color + form/shape). To repeat in this sense would be to prove that a single example already has an energy which denies all neutrality, and that repetition could change nothing.

One rabbit repeated 10,000 times would give no notion whatever of neutrality or zero degree, but eventually the identical image, 10,000 times, of the same rabbit. The repetition which concerns us is therefore fundamentally the presentation of the same thing, but under an objectively **different** aspect. To sum up, manifestly it appears to us of no interest always to show precisely the same thing and from that to deduce that there is repetition. The repetition which interests us is that of a method and not a mannerism (or trick): it is a repetition with differences. One could even say that it is these differences which make the repetition, and that it is not a question of doing the same in order to say that it is identical to the previous—which is a tautology (redundancy)—but rather a **repetition of differences with a view to a same (thing)**.

[This repetition is an attempt to cover, little by little, all the avenues of inquiry. One might equally say that the work is an attempt to close off in order the better to disclose.]

*[(e2) Cancelling-out: We would like to return to the idea of cancelling-out, briefly touched upon in sections **(b)** and **(d)**.*

*The systematic repetition which allows the differences to become visible each time, is used as a method and not considered as an end, in conscience of the danger that, in art, a form/thing—since there is a form/thing—can become, even if it is physically, aesthetically, objectively insignificant, an object of reference and of value. Furthermore, we can affirm that objects apparently insignificant and reduced, are more greatly endangered than others of more elaborate appearance, and this is a result of (or thanks to) the fact that the object/idea/concept of the artist is only considered from a single viewpoint (a real or ideal viewpoint, cf. section **(g)**) and with a view to their consummation in the artistic milieu.*

A repetition which is ever divergent and non-mechanical, used as a method, allows a systematic closing-off and, in the same moment that things are closed off, (lest we should omit anything from our attempts at inquiry) they are cancelled out. Cancelled out through lack of importance. One cannot rest content once and for all with a form which is insignificant and impersonal in itself—we have just exposed the danger of it. We know from experience, that is to say theoretically, that the system of art can extrapolate by licensing every kind of impersonal aspect to assume the role of model. Now, we can have no model, rest assured, unless it is a model of the model itself. Knowing what is ventured by the impersonal object, we must submit it—our method—to the test of repetition. This repetition should lead to its disappearance/obliteration. Disappearance in terms of significant form as much as insignificant form.

The possibility of the disappearance of form as a pole of interest—dis-

appearance of the object as an image of something—is “visible” in the single work, but should also be visible through the total work, that is to say in our practice according to and in every situation.

What is being attempted, as we already understand, is the elimination of the imprint of form, together with the disappearance of form (of all form). This involves the disappearance of “signature”, of style, of recollection/derivation. A unique work (in the original sense), by virtue of its character, will be conserved. The imprint exists in a way which is evident/insistent at the moment when it is, like form itself, a response to a problem or the demonstration of a subject or the representation of an attitude. If, however, the “print” of the imprint presents itself as a possible means of cancelling out and not as something privileged/conserved—in fact, if the imprint, rather than being the glorious or triumphant demonstration of authorship, appears as a means of questioning its own disappearance/insignificance—one might then speak of cancelling-out indeed; or, if you like, destruction of the imprint, as a sign of any value, through differentiated repetition of itself rendering void each time anew, or each time a little more, the value which it might previously have maintained. There must be no let-up in the process of cancelling-out, in order to “blow” the form/thing, its idea, its value and its significance to the limits of possibility.

We can say (cf. section (f)) that the author/creator (we prefer the idea of “person responsible” or “producer”) can “efface himself” behind the work which he makes (or which makes him), but that this would be no more than a good intention, consequent upon the work itself (and hence a minor consideration) unless one takes into consideration the endless cancelling-out of the form itself, the ceaseless posing of the question of its presence; and thence that of its disappearance. This going and coming, once again non-mechanical, never bears upon the succeeding stage in the process. Everyday phenomena alone remain perceptible, never the extraordinary.]

[(e3) Vulgarization: The cancelling-out, through successive repetitions in different locations of a proposition, of an identity which is constant by virtue of its difference in relation to a sameness, hints at that which is generally considered typical of a minor or bad art, that is to say vulgarization considered here as a method. It is a question of drawing out from its respectable shelter of originality or rarity a work which, in essence, aims at neither respect nor honours. The cancelling-out or the disappearance of form through repetition gives rise to the appearance, at the same moment, of profuseness and ephemerality. The rarefaction of a thing produced augments its value (saleable, visual, palpable...). We consider that the “vulgarization” of the work which concerns us is a matter of necessity, due to the fact that this work is made manifest only that it shall have being, and disappears in its own multiple being.

In art, Banality soon becomes Extraordinary. The instances are numerous. We consider that at this time the essential risk that must be taken—a stage in our proposition—is the vulgarization of the work itself, in order to tire out every eye that stakes all on the satisfaction of a retinal (aesthetic) shock, however slight. The visibility of this form must not attract the gaze. Once the dwindling form/imprint/gesture have been rendered impotent/invisible, the proposition has/will have some chance to become dazzling. The repetition of a neutral form, such as we are attempting to grasp and to put into practice, does not lay emphasis upon the work, but rather tends to efface it. We should stress that the effacement involved is of interest to us in so far as it makes manifest, once again, the disappearance of form (in painting) as a pole of attraction of interest, that is to say makes manifest our questioning of the concept of the painting in particular and the concept of art in general.

This questioning is absolutely alien to the habits of responding, implies thousands of fresh responses, and implies therefore the end of formalism, the end of the mania for responding (art).

Vulgarization through repetition is already calling in question the further banality of art.]

(f) Anonymity: From the [seven] preceding sections there emerges a relationship which itself leads to certain considerations; this is the relationship which may exist between the "creator" and the proposition we are attempting to define. First fact to be established: **he is no longer the owner of his work.** Furthermore, it is not **his** work, but **a** work. The neutrality of the purpose—"painting as the subject of painting"—and the absence from it of considerations of style, forces us to acknowledge a certain anonymity. This is obviously not anonymity in the person who proposes this work, which once again would be to solve a problem by presenting it in a false light—why should we be concerned to know the name of the painter of the Avignon Pieta—but of **the anonymity of the work itself as presented.** This work being considered as common property, there can be no question of claiming the authorship thereof, possessively, in the sense that there are authentic paintings by Courbet and valueless forgeries. As we have remarked, the projection of the individual is nil; we cannot see how he could claim his work as **belonging** to him. In the same way we suggest that the same proposition made by X or Y would be identical to that made by the author of this text. If you like, the study of past work forces us to admit that there is no longer, as regards the form defined above—when it is presented—any truth or falsity in terms of conventional meaning, which can be applied to both these terms relating to a work of art ⁵ [*The making of the work has no more than a relative interest, and in consequence he who makes the work has no more than a relative, quasi-anecdotal interest and cannot at any time*

(5) See 'Buren or Toroni or no matter who', demonstration, Lugano, December 1967.

make use of it to glorify "his" product.] It may also be said that the work of which we speak, because neutral/anonymous, is indeed the work of someone, but that this someone has no importance whatsoever [*since he never reveals himself*], or, if you like, the importance he may have is totally archaic. Whether he signs "his" work or not, it nevertheless remains anonymous.

(g) The Viewpoint—The Location: Lastly, one of the external consequences of our proposition is the problem raised by the location where the work is shown. In fact the work, as it is seen to be without composition and as it presents no accident to divert the eye, becomes itself the accident in relation to the place where it is presented. The indictment of any form considered **as such**, and the judgement against such forms on the facts established in the preceding paragraphs, leads us to question the finite space in which this form is seen. It is established that the proposition, in whatever location it be presented, does not "disturb" that location. The place in question appears as it is. It is seen in its actuality. This is partly due to the fact that the proposition is not distracting. Furthermore, being only its own subject-matter, its own location is the proposition itself. Which makes it possible to say, paradoxically: the proposition in question "has no real location".⁶

In a certain sense, one of the characteristics of the proposition is to reveal the "container" in which it is sheltered. One also realizes that the influence of the location upon the significance of the work is as slight as that of the work upon the location.

This consideration, in course of work, has led us to present the proposition in a number of very varied places. If it is possible to imagine a constant relationship between the container (location) and the contents (the total proposition), this relationship is always annulled or reinvoked by the next presentation. This relationship then leads to two inextricably linked although apparently contradictory problems:

- (i) revelation of the location itself as a new space to be deciphered;
- (ii) the questioning of the proposition itself, in so far as its repetition (see sections **(d)** and **(e)**) in different "contexts", visible from different viewpoints, leads us back to the central issue: What is exposed to view? What is the nature of it? The multifariousness of the locations where the proposition is visible permits us to assert the unassailable persistence which it displays in the very moment when its non-style appearance merges it with its support.

It is important to demonstrate that while remaining in a very well defined cultural field—as if one could do otherwise—it is possible to go outside

(6) See Michel Claura in *Les Lettres Françaises* No. 1277.

the cultural location in the primary sense (gallery, museum, catalogue...) without the proposition, considered as such, immediately giving way.⁷ This strengthens our conviction that the work proposed, in so far as it raises the question of viewpoint, is posing what is in effect a new question, since it has been commonly assumed that the answer follows as a matter of course.

We cannot get bogged down here in the implications of this idea: we will merely observe for the record that all the works which claim to do away with the object (conceptual or otherwise) are essentially dependent **upon the single viewpoint** from which they are "visible", *a priori* considered (or even not considered at all) as ineluctable. A considerable number of works of art (the most exclusively idealist, e.g. ready-mades of all kinds) "exist" only because the location in which they are seen is taken for granted as a matter of course.

In this way, the location assumes considerable importance by its fixity and its inevitability; becomes the "frame" (**and the security that presupposes**) at the very moment when they would have us believe that what takes place inside shatters all the existing frames (manacles) in the attaining of pure "freedom". A clear eye will recognize what is meant by freedom in art, but an eye which is a little less educated will see better what it is all about when it has adopted the following idea: that the location (outside or inside) where a work is seen is its frame (its **boundary**).

II. PREAMBLE

One might ask why so many precautions must be taken instead of merely putting one's work out in the normal fashion, leaving comment to the "critics" and other professional gossip-columnists. The answer is very simple: complete rupture with art—such as it is envisaged, such as it is known, such as it is practised—has become the only possible means of proceeding along the path of no return upon which thought must embark; and this requires a few explanations. This rupture requires as a first priority the revision of the History of Art as we know it or, if you like, its radical dissolution. Then if one rediscovers any **durable and indispensable criteria** they must be used not as a release from the need to imitate or to sublimate, but as a [reality] which should be restated. A [reality] in fact which, although already "discovered" would have to be challenged, therefore to be created. For it may be suggested that, at the present time, [all the realities] which it has been possible to point out to us or which have been recognized, are not **known**. To recognize the existence of a problem certainly does not mean the same as to know it. Indeed, if some problems have been solved empirically (or by rule-of-thumb), we cannot then say that we know them, as the very empiricism which presides over

(7) As an example and by comparison, what has become of Duchamp's urinal since it was returned to the public lavatories?

this kind of discovery obscures the solution in a maze of carefully maintained enigmas.

- B ut art works and the practice of art have served throughout, in a parallel direction, to signal the existence of certain problems. This recognition of their existence can be called practice. The exact knowledge of these problems will be called theory (not to be confused with all the aesthetic "theories" which have been bequeathed to us by the history of art). It is this **knowledge** or **theory** which is now indispensable for a perspective upon the rupture—a rupture which can then pass into the realm of fact. **The mere recognition** of the existence of pertinent problems **will not suffice for us**. It may be affirmed that all art up to the present day has been created on the one hand only **empirically** and on the other out of idealistic thinking. If it is possible to think again or to think and create theoretically/scientifically, the **rupture** will be achieved and thus the word art will have lost the meanings—numerous and divergent—which at present encumber it. We can say, on the basis of the foregoing, that the rupture, if any, can be (can only be) epistemological. This rupture is/will be the resulting logic of a theoretical work at the moment when the history of art (which is still to be made) and its application are/will be envisaged theoretically: theory and theory alone, as we well know, can
- m ake possible a revolutionary practice. Furthermore, not only is/will theory be indissociable from its own practise, but again it may/will be able to give rise to other original kinds of practice.
- Fi nally, as far as we are concerned, **it must be clearly understood that when theory is considered as producer/creator, the only theory or theoretic practice is the result presented/the painting** or, according to Althusser's definition: "Theory: a specific form of practice".

We are aware that this exposition of facts may be somewhat didactic; nevertheless we consider it indispensable to proceed in this way at this time.

July/August 1969 and January 1970

II. IT RAINS, IT POURS, IT PAINTS

Translated by Suzanne Ruta

Back there in the distance, within the realm of stupidity, the battle still rages, and it takes all the desperate efforts of the merchant class (critics, galleries, museums, organizers, *avant-garde* magazines, artists, collectors, art historians, art lovers) to keep reports of the combat on the front pages of today's paper. Panic strikes the art establishment as its members begin to realize that the very foundation on which their power is established—art itself—is about to disappear. Faithful to their arch-conservative or arch-*avant-garde* positions, they continue to champion art vs. anti-art, form vs. anti-form, creating today's news so as to have something to talk about, to analyze, to sell tomorrow. Black and/or white, hot and/or cold, pop and/or *op*, pro and/or con, object art and/or conceptual art, subjective and/or objective, maximum and/or minimum, are their stock in trade, their way of thinking, their way of dividing to conquer. But their conquests now are at an end, for the question of art, which is the only question, cannot be contained within their confusing and archaic frame of reference, their primitive dualism of pros and cons.

"Art-and-anti-art" now constitute a single unit, defining limits within which art is continually bounced back and forth. What finally happens is that the notions of art and anti-art cancel each other out, and all our cherished beliefs: art as affirmation, art as a protest, art as the expression of individuality, art as interpretation, art as aestheticism (art for art's sake) art as humanism, are stripped of all significance. The artist's task is no longer to find a new form of art or counter art with a new anti-form; either pursuit is henceforth totally pointless.

Why then, even as it is about to disappear, when its existence has lost all justification, "**does art appear** for the first time to constitute a search for something essential; what counts is no longer the artist, or his feelings, or holding a mirror up to mankind, or man's labor, or any of the values on which our world is built, or those other values of which the world beyond once held a promise. Yet art is nevertheless an inquiry, precise and rigorous, that can be carried out only within a work, **a work of which nothing can be said, except that it is.**"¹

We cannot hope to answer this question here. In any case it seems to us less remarkable as a question than as an observation of what is occurring, of an inevitable tendency.

"A work of which nothing can be said, except that it is;" there's the crux of the issue, the nucleus, the central tension around which all activity falls into place. Painting will henceforth be the pure visuality of painting; it will

(1) Maurice Blanchot, "L'Avenir et la Question de l'Art," L'ESPACE LITTÉRATURE (Ed. Gallimard, Collection Idées, p. 295). Bold type mine.

create a means, a specific system not to direct the viewer's eye, but simply to exist before the eye of the viewer.

This central tension has many implications. We will deal here with only one; which follows from what has been said, i.e. the neutrality of a work, its anonymity or better still, its **impersonality**. By that we do not mean the anonymity of the person or persons who put out or produce the work. For them to remain anonymous would be a cheap solution to a problem demanding much more: the neutrality of the statement—painting as its own subject—eliminates all style and leads to an anonymity which is neither a screen to hide behind nor a privileged retreat, but rather a **position indispensable to the questioning process**. An anonymous, or rather, **impersonal** (the word is less ambiguous) "work" offers the viewer neither answer or consolation nor certainty nor enlightenment about himself or the "work," which simply exists. One might say that the impersonal nature of the statement cuts off everything we habitually call communication between the work and the viewer. Since no information is offered, the viewer is forced to confront the fundamental truth of the questioning process itself.

The producer of an anonymous work must take full responsibility for it, but his relation to the work is totally different from the artist's to his work of art. Firstly, **he is no longer the owner of the work** in the old sense; he takes it upon himself, he puts it out, he works on common ground, he transforms raw material. He carries on his activity within a particular milieu, known as the artistic milieu, but he does so not as an artist, but as an individual. (We find it necessary to make this distinction because particularly at this time, the artist is increasingly hailed as art's greatest glory; it is time for him to step down from this role he has been cast in or too willingly played, so that the "work" itself may become visible, no longer blurred by the myth of the "creator," a man "above the run of the mill.") This impersonal effort, without style, inevitably produces a result poor in, if not totally lacking form. Such form, as ineffective as it may be, is none the less essential, for it is the work **simply being**, and not the image of something or the negation of an object. **This form is the object questioning its own disappearance as object**. It is not the result or the reply to the question. It is the question, the question endlessly being asked. Let us also make it clear that if an answer does exist, it is understood *a priori*—lest any illusions remain lest the act of questioning itself become a comfortable pose—that one possible answer to the question is that the question—as to the essence of art and its theoretical formulation—ought not to have been asked. Moreover, no solutions to enigmas are to be expected; the fundamental question does not necessarily imply an answer, whatever it may be. Form, art's quest throughout the centuries, obliged to incessantly renew itself to keep alive, becomes a matter of no interest, superfluous and anachronistic. Of course then art is bound to disappear, at least its traditional mainspring is. Creating, producing, is henceforth of only relative interest, and the creator, the producer, no longer has any reason to glorify "his" product. We might even say that the producer—"creator" is only himself, a man alone before his product; his self is no longer revealed through his product. Now that he is "responsible for" an impersonal product he learns, putting out the product, that he is no

longer a 'somebody' at all." His product, devoid of style could, by extrapolation have been put out, that is to say, made, by anyone. This possibility neither adds to nor detracts from the product itself. It is simply another implication of the impersonal nature of the product, not a way of affirming that the product is neutral/anonymous. While putting out a product is not at all the same, as we have seen, as "creating a work of art," the person responsible for the product does have a certain form of attachment to his work. His relation to his product is similar in nature to the relation between a demonstrator and the product he is demonstrating. His function in relation to the product is purely a didactic one.

The impersonal or anonymous nature of the work/product causes us to be confronted with a fact (or idea) in its raw form; we can only observe it without a reference to any metaphysical scheme, just as we observe that it is raining or snowing. Thus we can now say, for the first time, that "it is painting," as we say, "it is raining." When it snows we are in the presence of a natural phenomenon, so when "it paints" we are in the presence of an historical fact.

III. STANDPOINTS

Translated by Charles Harrison and Peter Townsend

WARNING

We have chosen for this text the theme “standpoints” (“point of view”). We would, nevertheless, not want this theme to conceal the other implications included in our proposal: form, color, repetition, difference, effacement, vulgarization, anonymity, etc. . . .

All this—and the “point of view”—forms the total proposal. If we have chosen to emphasize one theme, it is none the less true and verifiable that the same proposal could/will help us to analyze other themes, notably those set out below.

It is vital also to re-emphasize that the themes in question are gradually revealed by the proposal itself, and not the contrary. The partial theme, the object of the present text, is revealed only in so far as it is understood within an ensemble which is the question of art itself.

As for the proposal itself, essentially “visible”, it remains to be “seen” and each manifestation makes this possible. Attention is then only to be brought to a work evident and visible¹ in its own terms in the context of each presentation. This work/presentation, being systematically repetitive, is specifically different at each exposition.

PREFACE

“We will observe for the record that all the works which claim to do away with the object (conceptual or otherwise) are essentially dependent **on the single viewpoint** from which they are “visible”, *a priori*, considered (or even not considered at all) as ineluctable. A considerable number of works of art . . . “exist” only because the location in which they are seen is taken for granted as a matter of course. In this way, the location acquires considerable importance by its fixity and its inevitability; it becomes the frame **(and the security that presupposes)** at the very moment when they would have us believe that what takes place inside shatters all the existing frames (manacles) in the attaining of pure freedom. A clear eye will

(1) When we employ (and insist on) the words “to see”, “visible”, they are to be understood in a broad sense that never confines their reference to the eye as an independent organ, which would be absurd and mechanistic. **To see, to look**, are the actions which render our work perceptible and without which it would not exist, as opposed to certain works (called conceptual) which would not require this.

—The proposal “to be seen”—yes, of course, but without forgetting **there can be no vision without thinking**.

recognize what is meant by freedom in art, but an eye which is a little less educated will see better what it is all about when it has adopted the following idea: that the location (outside or inside) where a work is seen is its frame/its **boundary**.”

If we permit ourselves to use this introduction extracted from a text written in July-August 1969 (see “Beware!” in *Studio International*, March 1970, p. 104) for the “Conception” exhibition in Leverkusen, it is because we indicated at the time that each of the points raised was to be dealt with in greater depth or taken up later separately. This is what we are here attempting to do. The extract above is taken from the section “The viewpoint—the location”, for it is with these notions that the following sections are concerned.

[*In the following text, passages italicized within square brackets are editorial additions made in order to clarify the translation from the French.*]

“...A complete rupture with art—such as it is envisaged, such as it is known, such as it is practised—has become the only possible means of proceeding along the path of no return upon which thought must embark; and this requires a few explanations. This rupture requires as a first priority the revision of the history of art as we know it or, if you like, its radical dissolution [*dismantlement*]. Then if one rediscovers any durable and indispensable criteria [*strong or essential points*] they must not be used as attainments to imitate or to sublimate, but as a reality which should be restated. A reality in fact which, although already “discovered” would have to be challenged, therefore to be created. For it may be suggested that, at the present time, all the realities which it has been possible to point out to us or which have been recognized, are not **known**. To recognize the existence of a problem certainly does not mean the same as to know it. Indeed, if some problems have been solved empirically (or by rule-of-thumb), we cannot then say that we know them, as the very empiricism which presides over this kind of discovery obscures the solution in a maze of carefully maintained enigmas.

“But art works and the practice of art have served throughout, in a parallel direction, to signal the existence of certain problems. This recognition of their existence can be called practice. The exact knowledge of these problems will be called theory (not to be confused with all the aesthetic “theories” bequeathed to us by the history of art).

It is this *knowledge* or *theory* which is now indispensable for a perspective upon the rupture—a rupture which can then pass into the realm of fact. **The mere recognition** of the existence of pertinent problems **will not suffice for us**. It may be affirmed that all art up to the present day has been created on the one hand only **empirically** and on the other out of idealistic thinking. If it is possible to think again or to think and create

theoretically/scientifically, the **rupture** will be achieved and thus the word art will have lost the meanings—numerous and divergent—which at present encumber it. We can say on the basis of the foregoing, that the rupture, if any, can be (can only be) epistemological. This rupture is/will be the resulting logic of a theoretical work at the moment when the history of art (which is still to be made) and its application are/will be envisaged theoretically: theory and theory alone, as we well know, can make possible a revolutionary practice. Furthermore, not only is/will theory be indissociable from its own practice, but again it may/will be able to give rise to other original kinds of practice.”

[From the last chapter of “Beware!” (*Studio International*, March 1970) entitled: “Preamble”.]

I. QUESTIONS RAISED

One can say that the strong or essential points [*key issues*] that mark what by agreement is called “art history” from the beginning of the century until today were in their majority emphasized, revealed, three-quarters of a century ago by Cezanne. One can also say as of now that they have all—with more or less brilliance and diverse talents—been resolved tens of times; i.e. in real terms, distorted, or, better, censured [*discredited*].

In order to clarify our exposé, we will not deal here with the historic, the how and why reasons for the emergence of questions we call **strong or essential points** [*key issues*]. We will limit ourselves to the recognition of their existence and to the examination of the outcome. In effect, Cezanne did not, miraculously, all alone, coincidentally, raise these problems, not even the first of them, but let us say he posed them best and most clearly, and in such a decisive way that even if we cannot consider his work as representing a “rupture”, it certainly set in motion an irreversible process. These “strong or essential points” [*key issues*], these realities, are as we said recognized by everyone and about everyone. Of these “realities” two are essential, since they derive to a greater or less degree from all the others. Although they are commonplaces—perhaps because they **are** such—we won’t hesitate to recall them.

A) TO QUESTION² THE SUBJECT, that is the appearance of painting to the detriment of what is being painted.

B) TO QUESTION PERSPECTIVE, that is the appearance of and the regard to the support on which the “message” is inscribed, i.e. a flat surface.

(2) To question: this expression which recurs and will recur often does not mean a problem must be resolved or rejected, but that a problem is posed and that it must be examined, even, and above all, if that problem is comparable to a form of usage having the force of law. To question is to examine the problems that are posed; sometimes to clarify them or uncover them, always to confront them.

In order to pinpoint ideas, we can define several strong points deriving from A and B:

A

- a) Progressive disappearance of any representation, even an illusive one.
- b) Attempt to neutralize the painted 'touch' mechanization directed towards the end of appearance for its own sake.
- c) Questioning the tools of painting (brushes...) and their consequence; disappearance of the transmission (and the gesture it required) between the body and the canvas.

B

- a) Emphasis on the surface in its totality, i.e. no areas of greater or less priority.
- b) Questioning of composition.
- c) Questioning of the "tableau" i.e. of the support itself as an object to be respected.

One will note that these problems, already raised by Cezanne—disavowed, camouflaged—on the one hand reappeared as of constant necessity at the strong moments of artistic production since the beginning of the century, and on the other hand are now posed to us with remarkable acuteness, even freshness. As we see it there is one fundamental reason for this; a political reason. If it is true, and we believe it to be so, that every act is a political act, that every gesture is dictated by (or linked to) a precise social, historical situation, then art is *a fortiori* ruled by these "truths".³

So the problem is posed quite differently and if not more clearly then at least in a more instructive and interesting fashion. This is not, for us, a hypothesis, but a statement of the obvious: what we call "strong or essential points", i.e. the problems examined are only attempts at discrediting or unmasking the existing system, i.e. the dominant ideology, i.e. the bourgeoisie. It is for this reason that we consider these "questions" not only as taken for granted but also as issues to be restated or **redefined**. Hence, of course, their freshness and appositeness. It is not surprising, then, to see these commonplaces constantly reappearing, then being muzzled, extinguished until their next appearance, and so on in this way, because these "commonplaces" are in effect very dangerous questions, in the final count, for the established order.

If social revolts against the established order are generally repressed by violence—by the police or by wars—it is not so in art. The repression is much subtler and therefore even more efficient because it is harder to expose.

(3) There is not an art which is political and an art which is not. All art is political and as a whole art is reactionary.

Generally the method is this (we'll be diagrammatic so that the differences in the methods and their variations will emerge of their own accord): to the posing of a question one gives a formal, seductive response, with the least possible delay, so that the solution/distortion may hold the stage at the expense of the question itself which is thereby prevented from gaining prominence. At the same moment as one thus camouflages the embarrassing question/questions, one pays homage to that work which raised them—overwhelms it with praise—**In order to naturalize them**, so that the work is choked to death; and so that it can no longer deliver its message, its real meaning, it is in turn hidden behind the image of its creator who becomes a 'genius', with all that that implies in terms of the irrational and inexpressible: a myth whose essential role is to disarm, to turn the "CATALYST QUESTIONS" into "ETERNAL TRUTHS"; the inspired creator thus comes to overshadow his own product.

This is so with Cezanne, real universal monument difficult to rediscover, covered as he is by successive layers of all kinds of alluvia. Nevertheless although it is necessary to "dismantle" what has been made of Cezanne's work, in order to rediscover it, to clarify the questions raised—we hope this text will leave a trail—**we do not believe more in Cezanne than in Watteau, Pollock or Buffet**. If we use Cezanne, it is only as a reference point and to try to distill from his work the essential points it raised and which were carefully deflected, stifled, truncated or annulled.

We consider the questions raised by Cezanne—his work—to be essential, yet if they were so easily camouflaged, it is because at the same time they carried within them the partiality that made it possible to ignore them. This criticism of the theoretical weakness of work which raises only empirically, and in a partial way, questions which are essential yet does so in ignorance of the whole, holds good in our view in general up to the present day for the work of any artist whatsoever, including of course even those who asked the fundamental questions which enable us today to suggest that a theoretization of art has become possible—has become the only possible path.

The task of recovery and examination of the "essential points" raised by Cezanne's work was carried out for the first time by the cubist movement as a whole.

We have described diagrammatically, that is we have exposed in clinical fashion, the process of camouflage and the motives, which we believe to be in essence political. Let us examine now how this happened practically/formally with Cubism.

II. SOLUTIONS GIVEN

Cezanne's question no. 1: Is it possible to manifest painting without

making manifest that which is painted?

Cubism's answer: Yes. And as regards the disappearance of the subject, we witness a simulacrum of disappearance. The subject is literally, that is formally, mechanically "broken up", dissolved. Apparently, it has disappeared; but with a little "culture" you can see it. It is only hiding. In fact everyone can find here a violin, here a portrait, there a fruit dish, here again a guitar, etc. In plain language this means (A) one cannot dispense with "nature", the reference point (that Cezanne required), but (B) one gives it an appearance at first sight incomprehensible, abstract, in order to appear to provide an answer to the problem posed by Cezanne (see A) and to resolve it, without in fact having touched upon it. This masquerade finally reassures the bourgeois in his appetite for the "new", a new which makes no change at the fundamental level; the fundamentals are "preserved". The answer to question no. 1 is "revolutionary" and reassuring. Revolutionary because the form appears to be new and abstract, unrecognizable, reassuring because the subject is nevertheless there in its place and represented. With Cezanne, the questions were posed despite and through "the apples"—pretty cumbersome, it is true—but at least without cheating. They were there, impossible to conjure away. Thus their presence was clearly set up as precarious and as if destined for disappearance. With Cubism the opposite occurs. Beneath the will to make "the apples" disappear—which is visibly unattainable—the question is puffed up/distorted for the sake of a false semblance of answer. Although hidden, diluted beneath the effects of paint, "the apples" are always present. Henceforth we can say, taking advantage of this image, that the famous "apples" will reappear under different forms throughout twentieth-century art and that continual attempts are made to eliminate rather than explain them.

Cezanne's question no. 2: Can one abolish perspective, really remove the illusion of depth and make manifest the characteristic of the support on which one paints; i.e. a flat surface?

Cubism's answer: Yes. Let us see how, yet again, contortions were necessary in order to reach this conclusion: (A) we work at the abolition of perspective, answer the Cubists, in such a way that if we choose to represent an object, we are not going to show it from one angle only, but from several at a time and on the same surface. Once more, it's a literal response.

The multiplication of perspectives is not their abolition. One can even say that *visually* cubist canvases do not create the illusion of depth as do the single-vanishing-point canvases; rather they create the illusion of a surface pitted with holes, hammer-wrought—which is still an illusion of the third dimension and not the revelation of a flat surface.

(B) If the reality of the surface must be made "perceptible", the answer is: glued paper, plaster, string, oilcloth, etc. We are then to believe that the

decisive step has been taken, the solution found. Look! A "real" oilcloth, therefore a "true" canvas; a natural, real canvas. In the way of reality, what have we? The replacement of certain pictorial media (drawing, color, form) by others (drawing of newspaper or graphics, colored oilcloth stains, a form drawn by the piece of cut-out cardboard). In fact, an illusion backwards. What talent; one has the impression it's painted! They would give us a real object, a flat surface respected in all its palpability and even emphasized as such, and what have we in the end? A *trompe l'oeil*. We will proceed no further than this with the demonstration. Let us only add that Cubism, by replying "yes" to the questions perceived through Cezanne's work, blocked these questions for a time by hiding through a totalitarian response questions which, although partial, were nevertheless apparent for an instant. Cubism thus gave the impression that the problems were solved and that one could/should proceed to other business. To sum up: according importance to Cezanne, the encumbering "father":

1) by verbal eulogy.

2) by formal similarity to or rather caricature of the "master" work itself, while avoiding confrontation with the real difficulties and by confining oneself to fictitious answers; for example: the "apples" have disappeared. In fact, they are only masked, deformed.

Result: elimination of the questions by solutions which, under revolutionary guise, in fact impose repressive limits.⁴

One begins to understand better why the "strong points" are always the order of the day. They have never been developed to their limit and to their consequences. They are constantly blocked by the will to regulate them, that is to say the will to confine them to their accidental appearance which could otherwise have entailed the stripping bare of artistic ideology. Nevertheless one must emphasize that this deflection is largely facilitated even by those rare individuals who pose the questions.

We said at the beginning that although Cezanne revealed important and fundamental questions regarding the evolution of art towards an intrinsic thought, he did not in any way break with what preceded him. If one prefers, Cezanne's work provokes in art history (that of forms) a **split**. This evidence was quickly felt and attempts were made to widen the split to the point of **rupture**. Let us indicate immediately that this rupture has not yet in our view been produced. Nevertheless it was tempting to give it shape, that is, to give (it) a solution, and it is what will be done/attempted in the first place with the undertaking of Duchamp.

We think of a logic in art history; it is perhaps the one that is imposed on

(4) It's the first important step towards the mythification of Cezanne's work wherein the painted result/style becomes a model to copy or sublimate to the exclusion of its meaning, of the reason why it "is painted" in a particular way.

us. Nevertheless, it is imposed on us as it is made, because when we write that it is necessary to “dismantle” art history, because it is imposed on us falsely or arbitrarily, we do not exempt those who create art history such as we condemn, i.e. the artists. This art history is the making of historians, or critics, but also, and we think particularly, the making of “creators” who themselves permit an apparently logical (too logical) linkage of things and also a censure of the essential questions—censured because they imply a tearing [*rending*], a fundamental questioning of artistic preoccupations—as we have just seen with Cubism.

So in the logic of art history as it is imposed on us, the “answers” provided by Cubism still necessitated getting rid of the “apple”. The fundamental questions having been eliminated for the sake of hasty and fictitious answers which would be felt sufficient, the censure was going to be aggravated with Duchamp. Because to provide as he did, an “image” of the rupture is more reactionary than to provide, as did Cubism, a way of escape.

III. QUESTIONS IGNORED

Duchamp proceeded from a very simple comment. It was none the less judicious, because if what he did was criticizable, the value of the comment itself remains the same. This comment is that all works of art are basically nothing but skilfulness, the talent to take a thing—the word “thing” used here in the widest sense—out of its original context. That is to expose it.

If all art rests on taking a thing out of its context (to paint a flower, a landscape, a portrait, a battle) there must be a possibility of dismantling this mechanism and at the same time abolishing those cumbersome “apples” which reappear always by suppressing, purely and simply, painting itself. In fact, exposing the object directly instead of painting it: to show it as it is. Thus the first ready-made appeared.

Judging superficially, all the painters, all art before this act, Cezanne and the Cubists included, were or are imbeciles, or, to be more charitable, are “realities” of the past; art before this act is now considered as having no *raison d’être*. This remark would be justifiable if the rupture occasioned was real and not the illusion of it—as we will see, an “idea” of rupture. But it is too soon to see that we are dealing with an illusion of rupture, of its image and not a real rupture. Everything thus allows one to think there is a rupture and the still lively influence of Duchamp allows one to see how “long-lived” this illusion is. But the years go by and for those who know how to look, two phenomena reveal themselves:

1) Persistence here and there of questions already posed by Cezanne’s work—c.f. Mondrian or Pollock, among others. Could it be that on the one hand the solutions found to these questions are not satisfying (Cubism) and on the other that the “rupture” effected by Duchamp, and

whoever had to break with what preceded him, might not be as radical as all that?

2) If one leaves the Duchamp myth—what he said and what his exegetes said of him—what do we perceive? A work as valid as that of any traditional artist. Valid—used here without value judgment—but in relation to what usually gives cause for speaking of a work when dealing with artistic production, i.e. a style, a production, a sensibility, talent, etc. In fact, despite the legend according to which Duchamp chose the objects that he ex-poses [*exhibits*] accidentally, or else made sure they were the least characteristic possible, the most common, chosen without taste—neither good nor bad—we have, finally, a series of objects that have a factory “style”, a formal relation to each other. In other words, there is the same aesthetic relation between a bicycle wheel on a stool and a bottle-rack as between Renoir’s *Moulin de la galette* and his *Balancoire*.

Additionally, acting in this way, Duchamp thought to avoid the sensibility occasioned by all artisan or manual “craft” in presenting industrial objects, generally produced by machines and in great quantity, therefore *a priori* cold, neutral, having only a utilitarian value. We find ourselves today confronted by objects of another age, simply privileged and committed to the role of witnesses of an era by the magic of art, the talent of the artist. The artist in his role of preserver is certainly not an innovation. The “rupture” effected by Duchamp appears only as an empty or symbolic gesture and, instead of a radical rupture, what is offered us is a work whose characteristic would be its obsolescence. This obsolete work is a little like our grandmother’s attic exposed, with the exception that the objects represented are not unfamiliar. It is in any case a failure in relation to the aim—or rather in relation to what one would have us believe or accept. It is traditional art and not a rupture with this art. It is an imaginary questioning. But the influence of this minor work still endures. The one who wanted to kill the art object in fact perpetuates it, and in the most obsessive and conservative manner possible. The Pop artists among others have understood this so well that they have seen Duchamp as no more than the forerunner of “painting-with-no-matter-what”, of “everything is art”, “nothing is art”. Duchamp would in this way, and uniquely, have renewed the technical media of pictorial expression. Is that all?!

But—and this is the crux of the problem—why can we say that a bottle-stand which is exhibited is art and not rupture with art? Duchamp made traditional art, adding a new form (without great consistency) to the multiples which make an art history possible. Why could and can this evidence pass almost unperceived and influence a number of artistic attempts, thus making them instantly sterile and regressive?

We said that one of the questions posed by Cezanne’s work was: is it possible to eliminate the subject in painting and to manifest only paint-

ing as painted—or paint itself—that is, to show a painting without a history other than its own, without illusion, without representation of the beyond, without perspective, without a framework other than the one on which this “painting” is inscribed—its support?

Duchamp, catching a glimpse of the difficulty of the question and of the failure of the Cubist venture, replies “No”; this Cezannian ambition is impossible. What is shown on a canvas will always be an illusion. The only way is to show the object itself. Thus thinks Duchamp. There is no more representation and one approaches the complete, global solution and its consequences: rupture. Because then the object presented will be only “that which it is”.

Now, here the reasoning becomes specious, not to say false (if it is the case that it was true before!). The object in question is not in fact the object shown to us. We will not enlarge upon this phenomenon of transformation or become enraptured by it, because there have been lengthy and frequent descriptions of the miraculous and fantastic power of man to indicate, to touch (like God) something and by this sole action to transform it into something else called here work of art. We won't contradict this thesis, except that instead of rejoicing we are rather sad to see that belief in miracles is still so widespread. Now this “miracle” is simple to explain. Here the fundamental contradiction of Duchamp's venture appears. In reality, if one can say that Duchamp's urinal is different from another one seen in public *pissotieres* and not as he wished—as one would have us believe—a urinal and nothing more, it is because this urinal is taken out of context—which is what Duchamp remarked was the commonplace of every work of art, whatever it was. He was going to make the same mistake at a higher level. Let us follow his experience: A) let us take any urinal or one identical to that chosen by Duchamp, let us put it in the museum; it becomes a work of art and even, by extension, a Duchamp (but this is only an anecdotal detail; what is important is that it becomes charged with another meaning); B) Let us take the urinal exhibited by Duchamp and let us replace it in the public *pissotieres*. It is no longer anything but a urinal with neither more nor less aesthetic or saleable value than the 25 others that surround it. Now, during the transport of a urinal from a *pissotiere* to a museum, it is not the urinal as object, materially, which has changed. It is certainly “the same one” that one sees. But it is taken out of its context—and the loop is looped—in the same way as Cezanne's “apple” was, and it is no more “real”, despite appearances, than the painted “apple”.

The reason for this is that the place where this urinal has just been put (the museum, the gallery, or any other defined artistic place) has the same function as the support or tableau for the “apple”. The “apple” is received inside the canvas, the urinal inside the museum. The framework of the representation has become enlarged. What has changed is the framework in which the object is seen, the container. This verifica-

tion, through not having been clearly seen or analysed until now, is one of the essential causes of censures, that have been operating since Cézanne's Questions, of the possibility of making anything which is presented inside a Museum/Gallery say anything—and this is what the dominant ideology wants: that what is contained should provide, very subtly, a screen for the container. Maybe the museum, the gallery are indispensable (inseparable) from a work, whatever it may be, but then they should be clearly perceived as such, that is, implied, in the presented work itself. The museum is ignored for the benefit of the work, while the latter exists only through the museum. So Duchamp's undertaking is revealed: we have already seen that the objects chosen had a unique style; in addition, they will now appear **composed**, automatically, in the room where they will be presented, exhibited, and will become one of the decorative elements (representation) of this new big tableau which is the gallery, the museum.

If we insist on this example, it is because it appears to us easy enough to follow, the first of its kind, and symbolized as if drawn by Duchamp himself. It would not be so with numerous artistic examples which are nevertheless identical, but less apparent. Nevertheless, **and in all cases**, we are convinced that—thanks to Duchamp, let us acknowledge it—the Museum/Gallery plays the same powerful role, heavy with consequences, that operates in the case of the urinal, with all that which is presented within it. The Museum/Gallery, for lack of being taken into consideration, is the framework, the habit, the spider's web where until today all the "speeches" [messages] become entangled—speeches attempted while forgetting that the Museum/Gallery is the inescapable "support" on which art history is "painted". Wishing to eliminate the tableau/support, on the pretext that what is painted can only be illusion, Duchamp introduces into a new framework/tableau a real object which at the same time, becomes artificial, motiveless, i.e. artistic. An apple is made to be munched, and represented on a canvas it loses at least that function. In the same way the urinal, not utilizable, loses its function when represented in a Museum/Gallery/tableau. Pushing this image, **let us take away the Museum/Gallery: there is no more art**. This simplistic and seductive solution would not of course, resolve anything, but it shows intentionally the real importance of the Gallery/Museum where art is seen or thanks to which art is shown.

"A real object which, at the same time, becomes artificial", we wrote above. Motiveless? Not entirely, because the museum is going to show its double role here:

a) aesthetic, by becoming the real and inseparable support of the work inscribed therein. Support of forms moving from one place to another, certainly, but where the work is inevitably absorbed.

b) economic, by giving this work/object a saleable value by according it privilege, conserving it.

Like the chiaroscuro that privileged a certain part of the picture to the detriment of another, or like composition and perspective until Manet or Cezanne, a composition and perspective which privileged, inside the picture, a certain object in relation to another or a certain person (powerful-hero-prince-king-lord) to the detriment of the others (servants-slaves-conquered-poor), or vice-versa, the museum accords importance to that which stands out in relation to that which does not and among the works that do, emphasizes (publicity-value-catalogue) a particular work rather than another. Duchamp's undertaking is not only a censure of the work accomplished by Cezanne, but also a reversal, with rediscovery of formal problems posed since the Renaissance! The "rupture" effected would then be just a regression in relation to Cezanne.

The museum is thus an excellent weapon in the hands of the bourgeoisie because its role, at first sight, is not tyrannical. It is indeterminate and self-evident. It preserves. Also, access to privilege of the Museum/Gallery is often submission to vigilance over what the system considers dangerous. One sees clearly here the political interest which there is for the established order to privilege that which it fears might escape it. The museum can assess in its own time what is presented, including that which has no *a priori* value (of an aesthetic-saleable kind), and will succeed all the more easily as everyone lends himself to this process, and no one notices this phenomenon or else considers it as inevitable and self-evident. This is what Duchamp understood marvelously well, by remaining silent (pretending to) rarifying himself the "valueless" objects he placed inside the tableau/museum, going even as far as stopping production, thus accentuating the valorizing process of the museum. In fact, Duchamp's "silence", valued morally so much, was only aesthetic and finally an excellent commercial affair.

IV. NECESSARY QUESTION(S)

To sum up, as an artist, Duchamp does not answer (either closely or badly) the questions posed by Cezanne's work; he ignores them and "paints" directly what we will call "Chardin-type still lifes". Simultaneously, and without having wanted it, but irrevocably, he shows that the place where a work is put (any work) is the framework, the limit and for the first time the **Insane [senseless] link** that exists between the Museum/Gallery and that which is shown, exposed. All the pseudo-revolutionary myth, and what it continues to influence, was/is possible only because one's attention has been fixed only on the object shown, its meaning, without looking at or discussing even once the place where it is shown. Now, only the place where the object is exhibited permits discussion of the latter. Outside this place art does not exist, in any case not as we know it up until now. Conversely, this link is so strong that one can say that everything shown in a museum or gallery is a work of art and that one paints/produces for the museum as one painted/produced the representation of something, its illustration, without posing this problem, before Cezanne.

Thus contemporary art history would oscillate constantly between two poles symbolized by Cezanne and Duchamp. The first represents the positive/open pole and the second the negative/regressive pole.

The open positive pole sets in motion the questions announcing possibility of rupture; the negative/regressive pole prevents, by burning the steps and trying to accomplish a forced rupture without analysing the indispensable conditions, any possibility of real and permanent rupture. One sees that this censure—which is bourgeois—had/has the most profound repercussions on art until today.

History of art thus finds itself (1) on the one hand, really fissured by the impetus given by Cezanne, a fissure enlarged here and there (c.f. Mondrian, Pollock, Matisse, Newman, Stella) and replastered by **censure-blockage** undertakings (c.f. the same as above⁵ plus all their followers, schools, etc.; the geometric abstracts for Mondrian, the abstract expressionists for Pollock...see above for the process followed by Cubism *vis-à-vis* Cezanne's work, the same process here on a smaller scale); (2) on the other hand, in a "succession-of-simulated-ruptures" thanks to radical (petit-bourgeois) solutions given by Duchamp's descendants, who by a **regressive censure**, annul the questions and answer under brutal-radical appearances, thus carrying back [*retarding the development of*] art generally well ahead where they find it. (They are evidently more numerous than those of the first type, the venture being much more spectacular on the one hand, and on the other, corresponding much better to what the bourgeoisie expects of art, that is, noise, "novelty", *brio* and talent. Let us cite in particular the Surrealists, all Pop Art and the New Realism in general, a part of Minimal Art, all the lumino-stereo-neon-kinetic ventures, Conceptual Art...). What characterizes art attracted by the second pole, which we call regressive, is that it is ideologically, in its foundations and its results, traditional and conservative, petit-bourgeois.

It is nevertheless more and more difficult now—not to say impossible—to distinguish between artists of the first group and those of the second, because the incessant games of anti and pro, hot and cold, etc., have finally amalgamated in the same battle and the same perspective those one would have believed were irrevocably opposed. It is what some call "the crisis of art" and what forces us to say, since 1967, that art, all art, was reactionary. We now think, on our own part that one of the reasons for this state of affairs—doubtless the most important one—is that everything is said, every battle occurs in the same unique area without the area being questioned. Now, this area is not a neutral battleground, it is integrally part of what is shown and subjects all and everyone to its emollient power. It is an enormous piece of machinery that crushes the more easily, those who risk themselves as this subjection is considered as self-evident. In fact, it is not taken into consideration: work is done with the object of being

(5) This means Mondrian painting Mondrians, Pollock painting Pollocks, Stella painting Stellas.

subjected to the Museum/Gallery. It is time, it seems to us, to envisage stripping this process bare.

We were saying that contemporary art oscillates between two poles. It's true of the "interior", but we discover that these two poles are themselves attracted towards a third which engulfs and annihilates them: the museum, the gallery. **The unique point of view from which a work is seen.** We should say the place for which a work is made, to the exclusion of any other consideration. It is here that the role of the Museum/Gallery should essentially be questioned, because the supposedly anonymous/neutral place has become through habit or carelessness the only point of view, the place where, inevitably, a work is made and, finding itself or not, exists or does not exist.

Cezanne shook, fissured that which habit forced on to a canvas, posed clearly the existence of the picture as illusory ground to question/analyze. It is high time to question the existence and the exact role played by the Museum/Gallery as the support, and the habit of showing work there.⁶ But only the question of art appearing in its necessity can permit an understanding of this partial question.

[This text appeared in German on the occasion of an exhibition at the Monchengladbach Museum in January of this year, under the title "Positions/Proposals". It will be published in French under the title 'Repères' in the *VHIOI*.]

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(6) It goes without saying that it seems insufficient and unnecessary to exhibit in the street or the countryside, outside museums or galleries. This neither solves nor even poses the problem.

IV. CRITICAL LIMITS

Translated by Laurent Sauerwein

The following text results from a specific practice or work which is meant TO BE SEEN¹. This text is only the demonstration, presentation of this work and not its theory. It could be considered as an illustration of the work in question. It is dictated by the work itself and is not an abstract and purified image of some future project. It can be considered didactic.

In the explanations of the diagrams which will follow, we won't refrain from using terms such as "stretcher", "canvas", "paint", although these materials are no longer in current use, having been eliminated by successive generations of avant-garde since the beginning of the century.

These means having been abandoned without due regard either to the necessities that brought them into use in the first place, or to the implications of such necessities in the resulting product (the work), one can not ignore them today as they continue to exist paradoxically in those works which sought precisely to eliminate them without really questioning their basis. It is precisely the pathological ignorance of the artist which leads him to keep on saying/doing the same things — in other words regressing — while giving the impression of creating change and novelty.

We will therefore use this terminology in spite of its anachronistic resonance. The material disappearance of these means having in no way corresponded to an understanding of their meaning, we must realize that their traces are still in evidence today.

The material absence of these means (stretcher, canvas, paint) makes it even more acutely obvious that the meanings they previously had are still present in their ersatz forms of today.

The above considerations serve only as a warning concerning the terminology used in this text. We will however attempt a comparison.

(1) When we use (and insist on) words such as "view", "to see", "visible", they are to be understood in a wide sense, never referring exclusively to sight or the eye as an independent organ, which would be mechanistic and absurd. SEEING and LOOKING are actions which make it possible to apprehend our work. Without them it could not exist — as opposed to other works (so-called Conceptual) which claim no need for visibility. A proposal can be "to be seen", of course, but without forgetting that **there can be no sight without thought.**

In the classical meaning of these terms we have a canvas stretched on a stretcher which it covers and hides, thus already producing a **front** (recto) and a **back** (verso). But the work is not completed since the blank surface of the canvas remains to be covered (concealed) by paint. At this point we have a stretcher concealed by a canvas — a first step toward ignoring the verso — and a canvas masked by paint. This painting remains to be defined: it “tells” both a story and the history of painting. It is the mask of painting.

All painting, all art, is based on the unconditional acceptance of the above fundamental facts.

The emotional power produced by any stretched canvas (Christ on the Cross) is so strong that one will find the same (religious) process in thousands of works (icons) produced since the beginning of the century, which however very seldom resort to the use of canvas, stretcher or paint. Let's consider Minimal Art: we notice a desire to use raw material which a priori has no front or back (a steel plate, a wooden plank...). This material is transformed into a box, cube or simple volume—thus immediately creating a recto and a verso, a visible side (the body) and a hidden one (the soul). The visible side is itself sometimes covered (masked) in favor of a color, a varnish, a metallisation. The resulting object can be defined as typically idealistic, since one pretends to ignore what is really at work—the above-mentioned fundamental conditions—revealing through its contradictions its failure to raise the question of art, a question which is totally ignored.

We will see, with the help of diagrams, that this object itself exists, can be seen, only in relation to the Museum/Gallery which contains it, a Museum/Gallery in view of which it was produced in the first place and to which no particular attention is given.

The stretcher, the canvas and the paint are abandoned, but in fact their exact replicas are produced, an image seen only in relation to the single viewpoint from which it is visible/made, this viewpoint being in turn ignored as a matter of course.

And yet, outside this context, supposedly neutral since one does not think about it, the work, considered timeless, beyond limits, pure and neutral, simply falls apart. We will attempt to briefly indicate the various processes of artistic camouflage in relation to the works themselves as much as to their outsides (their contexts).

Only the knowledge of the successive frames/limits involved and their relative importance can enable our own work/product to place itself in relation to these limits and subsequently to unmask and reveal them (See Section III, CRITICAL WORK).

ON READING THE DIAGRAMS

I. CANCELLING DISCOURSES

(Art as it is perceived)

Here, the painted object, or any object (ready-made) captures all the interest and relegates to a minimal importance, or even completely masks, its very condition for being perceived as an art object or work of art. It operates like the tree hiding the forest. The work of art appears in all its vigor. It is supreme.

The work of art is certainly the exception to the rule which, in seemingly by-passing all difficulties, attains full freedom, thus in fact nourishing the prevailing ideology. It functions as a security valve for the system, an image of freedom in the midst of general alienation and finally as a bourgeois concept supposedly beyond all criticism, natural, above and beyond all ideology.

Art as it presents itself to us, refuses to reveal all its underlying "supports", "frames" or "limits" concealed under the many forms of the "pure masterpiece".

The simple ignorance of these limits or the wish to mask them has an equally simple but essential consequence: as soon as one reveals these limits (see diagrams 1.2, 2.2, 3.2) the whole discourse on art as it has flourished in the past is cancelled out.

Diagram 1.1: Any painting (what one paints) first cancels out, masks its support (the canvas, paper, wood . . .) which itself permanently conceals one of its sides, its verso (and consequently its stretcher). When we speak of illusion in painting we refer on the one hand to what is effectively being shown (an artist's style, his ability to "transform" the reality of the world in a partial view, etc.) but we also refer to the illusion created by the process of hiding the reality of the painting itself — how is it made? how is it painted? why? for whom? on what? and with what? etc. This painting, in cancelling out its own process obviously cancels out its viewpoint (the Museum/Gallery) as well, making the latter pass for a vague neutral frame, not affecting the content/work. The importance of the Museum/Gallery or even its interest is reduced to a minimum so that the idealist discourse can develop without a flaw. Diagram 1.1 shows that in relation to the various elements involved, the Museum/Gallery plays a very small part. As for the cultural limits (LC), they hardly show up since art presents itself as the message of the eternal, especially if it comes in the latest style.

Diagram 2.1: In the case of a ready-made or "neutral" or "pure" object (cf. Minimal Art, certain Pop Art works; Conceptual Art, New Realism, etc.) the support, the stretcher, the paint (colored pigments) have generally disappeared. But here again the whole discourse is based on what is

being exhibited and that only, as if the place where it is visible were of no importance. One will notice in this diagram that the Museum/Gallery and the cultural limits, because certain elements have disappeared, can be considered as something close to "art" itself and become more difficult to hide. (We will see further on — diagram 2.2 — that M and LC are rivaled by the "mysterious" disappearance of S and C.)

Nevertheless the Museum/Gallery and cultural limits continue unnoticed and are still considered indifferent. It is true that the basic preoccupations in this case lie elsewhere and that the aim is to "solve" the problem of painting by unveiling its own reality (as if the problem could be "solved"), by merely **replacing art by its opposite**. It is the birth of the ready-made, in other words, the radical (i.e. "petit-bourgeois") negation of art in favor of the object ("reality") as it is (c.f. Standpoints in Studio International). The failure stems from the ignorance of the two other elements involved, namely Museum/Gallery and cultural limits. The failure is complete, as the unexpected apparition of these two frameworks will suddenly disclose all the other elements one thought had vanished through some conjuring trick.

Diagram 3.1: Here it is the Museum/Gallery and the cultural limits that one will attempt to conjure away. Their presence has indeed become cumbersome. The artist simply dismisses them in the first stage: he does his thing, liberated at last, outside! But he is actually recreating with other means (earth, stones, water, words, branches, or museum "paintings" transported into vacant lots) the worn-out forms of traditional painting and giving a pretense of re-animation to what has long been dead. And so we see the unashamed return of the ego, the anecdote, naturalism, pompiery, romanticism and all such similar nineteenth-century notions which the twentieth century keeps on regurgitating. In this instance, the Museum/Gallery is masked in a different manner than in diagrams 1.1 and 2.1, one radicalizes (see "petit-bourgeois" above), one simply takes it off the map just as the ready-made cancelled painting out. We will see further how in a second stage (see diagram 3.2) everything falls nicely back into line and reintegrates the museum to the great joy of gaping visitors still delighted at having been once again taken for a ride. The bourgeois values of freedom and escape are thus preserved thanks to the joint efforts of art and its so-called revolutionary avant-garde.

II. WHAT REALLY GOES ON

(Art where it takes place)

The Museum/Gallery is not the neutral place one would like us to believe but certainly the single viewpoint where a work is seen and in the final analysis the single viewpoint from which the work is produced. In order not to be taken into consideration or to be considered as natural/matter of course, the Museum/Gallery becomes the mythical framework, distorting everything that goes into it.

Diagram 1.2: We see the various frames as they cover each other in reality. What really goes on is not what one wanted us to believe (see diagram 1.1, 2.1, 3.1). The Museum/Gallery has become the general frame, container of all art as it exists. It is at once the center and the backdrop of art, at once its figure and its ground. **The Museum/Gallery becomes the common revelator to all forms of art** and art appears as the product of two limits that did not seem to concern it: the Museum/Gallery and the cultural limits. Art depends on those limits precisely because it avoided situating itself in relation to them, and those very limits consequently become the pivot of creation. Being ignored and yet always coming forth, these limits are both the point of departure and the point of arrival of art. The frames M and LC contain and subordinate P which itself, as in diagram 1.1, cancels S and C.

Diagram 2.2: Here the painting or object or ready-made, inasmuch as the problem of the "support" (stretcher-canvas) is solved, are only legible because they are inscribed within the framework of the Museum/Gallery which totally encloses them. "Painting-object-ready-made" (P, O, RM) simply do not exist outside the Museum/Gallery. The Museum/Gallery container is by-passed only in the case of diagram 3.1 and we will see on the one hand in what way and on the other, what ultimately takes place.

Diagram 3.2: In diagram 1.2 the Museum/Gallery container encloses all art in the classical complexity of its terms (LC, P, S, C). The same container M appears even more as the usual comfortable haven in diagram 2.2. One sees it receiving a discourse (O, RM, P) whose magic (the extravagant disappearance of traditional pictorial components) only depends on the necessary acceptance of the place of discourse, i.e. the Museum/Gallery. Diagram 3.2 shows what goes on in reality when those who (see diagram 3.1), having perceived the limits imposed by the Museum/Gallery, attempt to escape it. They quite naturally choose the "radical" solution, that which dispenses them from thinking and therefore manages to give the Museum/Gallery the alibi which it needed to justify its claim for openness.

The same thinking by which one imagined the ready-made could break away from P (art) can be found underlying Land Art, Conceptual Art, etc. (LA, CA, etc.) in its attempt to break away from M. The by-passing of the limit M is presented as a sublimation (and a "solution") whereas, in reality, this solution could simply be called an **escape**. The attempt is doubly reactionary: this individual search for greater freedom is based on a return to nature which itself rests on a double illusion concerning the disappearance of the object and the disappearance of the Museum/Gallery.

However objects certainly continue to exist and as appropriated objects, even if they are no longer objects to be "taken home". The work, the product, remains nevertheless and in a more totalitarian way than ever as ap-

propriated objects, **appropriations of an idea or of nature in the purest colonialist style**. As for the Museum/Gallery, its usual comforting function is reaffirmed since it imposes itself as the only possible exhibitor of the work (LA, CA, etc.) which had attempted an escape. Besides, the cultural limits in their general meaning ("society") and in their particular meaning (media) have reached a decisive acuteness: to ignore them as limits is necessary to the survival of art, at least in its most advanced avant-garde.

One must realize that parallel to the escape from Museums/Galleries whose vicious presence we have otherwise observed, there exists a more general escape from the urban environment. There is no doubt that the limits imposed by the culture, as represented by the city and urban society, have been perceived. And quite obviously, as ever, as soon as frames, limits, are perceived as such, in art, one rushes for ways to by-pass them. In order to do this, one takes off for the country, maybe even for the desert, to set up one's easel. But it is no longer a matter of applying paint to canvas as if it were extracted from the landscape. The conquest is now made directly on nature itself. One flees the city to propagate one's disease across the countryside. This remark is not intended to defend nature but to denounce the cowardly vanity of the country esthete. However, in relation to art and its limits, the fleeing artist we are talking about cheats no more nor less than his past colleagues. In doubt, we will simply say that it has not been proven that anybody should be held responsible for his own stupidity.

Detail of Diagram 1.1: diagram 1.3: In this diagram, a detail of diagram 1.1, P refers to anything painted, whatever the motif, the idea, the style or the justifications. In all cases, the "support" (canvas or other) on which this painting is made is covered up and cancelled out. P therefore masks S, which in turn masks C. This results in the creation of a recto and a verso. **The history of art (of forms) is the history of "rectos"**. The history of "versos" (reality), the same plus the same plus the same . . . , remains to be made. This problem of the "non-reversibility" of art is one of the many raised by **art as question**. To insist on that problem of non-reversibility alone is to give art a new form without questioning it.

Detail of Diagram 2.1: This diagram, which should be diagram 2.3, cannot be represented, as the work (RM or O) exists only as directly linked (esthetically and culturally speaking) to the Museum/Gallery/support. In diagrams 2.1 and 2.2, detail and whole are indissociable.

Detail of Diagram 3.1: This detail can be anything as its only criteria is exoticism. All symbols, even the most outworn are used by Land Art and Conceptual Art. Diagram 3.3 is not represented.

The work is focusless, scattered, **making it impossible for it to be apprehended as a whole at one glance**, when its existence depends exclusively

on its being seen. The multiplicity of different viewpoints dissolves the notion of property. They do not make up an oriented course. In any case, the limit of the course, if there is a course, is that **it can be made in any direction. The exhibition/presentation of the work is thus decentered and reversible just as “painting” (see diagram A) is both recto and verso.**

The work confined, limited, always the same and yet not identical, appears different at each moment because it reveals its limits. An “exhibition” in different locations (viewpoints) at least presents an all-encompassing (possessive) apprehension of the whole. This whole allows itself to be seen only bit by bit, the whole is fragmented but each fragment is unique. One must also remember that if the “frame” where the work is shown is different (and revealed) each time, the work itself visibly changes each time: **the outside form is never the same, the effect of the color is always different.** These constantly changing “differences” in the viewing of one entity are what we call “repetitions.”

Finally in diagram C1, the strictest and, until now, most camouflaged limit clearly appears—it is the cultural limit. This is the most encompassing frame; it contains all forms, every action runs up against it. It is the limit of **knowledge.**

In diagrams 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, LC is reduced to a strict minimum. Art (particular) would like to include its own culture whereas it is art (general) which makes up part of the culture.

In diagrams 1.2, 2.2, LC appears as the silent frame, reinforcing the formal frame M, and becomes more preoccupying in the process described in diagram 3.2.

In diagrams A, B, C, LC takes its real place as the container enclosing the entire question of art. The work which is then carried out inside LC in diagram A, B, C, has no proper place, i.e. revealing each time both its limits and itself (location). Priority can therefore be given successively to one or the other aspects (limits) according to the particular analysis desired.

The cultural limit must be questioned just like the others; it is the inevitable and extending enclosure of all discourse. **This container limits the very discourse we are attempting to set up to its just norms.** The limit is confining, **but it exists**, and to reject it (not to take it into account) or pretend to ignore it is to idealize.

Its enveloping power is particularly perceptible in diagram C.1: we are definitely outside the screen/barrier, without hope of returning, formed by the Museum/Gallery itself, as a defined cultural area. In so doing, the cultural limit which allows this discourse, for instance, to take place clearly appears as the background of the work itself (and of all works) in the same way as in diagram A.1 and especially B.1 the Museum/Gallery

appears clearly, is revealed as being the "canvas" or "outline" on which is inscribed/painted/drawn whatever is shown there.

III. CRITICAL WORK

(The limits of our work — the points of view — what is attempted)

Diagram A.2: In this diagram, detail of diagram A.1, P is shown concealing only a part of S, S is transformed by P, P and S are both linked and different. As for C, it is visible since the verso of P is accepted as possible and an integral part of the whole. C can be used or not as long as its presence or its absence is made obvious. By the same token, the verso can be used as recto (P covering S in part) or left unused. Either way, the verso will appear either as a verso (usable as recto) or appear as a recto, or as a verso according to the particular and indifferent use.

The painting thus presented reveals in itself its own processes and limits, i.e. its contradictions. It must subsequently be placed in its context (whatever it may be) to appear as it is, i.e. in relation to "the rest": within a frame, a boundary, the limits of a situation (see diagram A.1).

Its context is not necessarily the museum or the gallery in as much as it appears as something painted no matter where it is located. In this light and in order to question this "painted thing", it is necessary to analyze its behavior in all places. Indeed, even if the painting in question reveals its own processes by itself, **it can never be seen or be visible alone.**

The place where it is perceived thus determines the painting's very existence (see diagram A.1).

Diagram B.1: In this diagram, PC (pasted paper) plays the role of "painting" or P previously described (see diagram A.2). The support/canvas of diagrams A.1 and A.2 become the very walls of the Museum/Gallery. In this case the work and its support, the support and the work reveal themselves in the first degree.

Here, what we call the work (PC) cannot be seen (exist) and in fact exists only together with its support (whatever it may be): NS, while at the same time, the support exists with or without the work. PC therefore defines its own immediate limits and reveals them. In the case of diagram B, the work (PC) reveals the role of M, exposes its function as a frame/limit for the work and whatever (without exception) is included in it (see diagram B.2). This is also true of our work (paint applied to pre-stripped canvases) as shown in diagram A.1.

Diagram C: Here P or PC is shown outside the usual places of exhibition and therefore outside of M. This can be the walls of the city, of a subway, a highway, any urban place or any place where some kind of social life exists (which excludes the oceans, the deserts, the Himalayas, the Great

Salt Lake, virgin forests, and other exotic places—all invitations for artistic safaris). Where the work shows itself, it shatters (or masters) the limits of M, i.e. the single viewpoint from which a work is generally seen, and reveals the new limits of its location. (Considering the nature of the work and its very existence, it makes no difference to the work to “reproduce” it in the Museum/Gallery. When the latter is used, it does not matter what is done on the outside, since the same proposal is indifferently used outside or inside, in places that are artistically defined or not.)

It is for this reason that the work in question, when it is placed outside the Museum/Gallery, **breaks the limits inherent in these places**. The work being identical (and yet always different) inside or outside, **it is no longer essential** to one or the other. It is the dialectic engendered by this practice which shows, in this particular case, that the limits of the Museum/Gallery as a unique framework for a work of art are shattered.

The new and different contexts in which the work is placed each time little by little reveal the work itself. This practice shows, among other things, that the framework which is each time revealed (the street wall, the Museum/Gallery wall, the billboard, the subways) frames nothing.

It is obvious that **to reduce the discourse of art to one single element of it—P in relation to S, S in relation to C, or S in relation to M etc.—is to perpetuate art within its old habits**, with some tackling the problem of materials, others that of form, others that of color, still others that of representation, etc. It is once again considering the work in itself as if it included everything to be said or done. It is to consider the work as a self-sufficient entity protected from all exterior circumstances. Those who consider the work itself, what is inscribed in it or what is hidden in it, as the only important question, forgetting the place where it is shown for instance, confine themselves to partial questions, the latter always leading to acceptable solutions (i.e. art history).

Any discourse of this kind can only be considered regressive.

All the points brought up by our proposal condition one another.

To ignore a single one is to ignore all of them.

It is not a matter of solving such and such specific problems. It is a matter of showing clearly the problems which are raised and to try, insofar as is possible, not to give undue importance to any single one. **Only practice/theory can bring these problems to light**. In this sense, we consider our work as being **essentially critical**.

The work is critical of its own processes, revealing its own contradictions, a process which also indicates the position of each of the elements taken into consideration and this each time the work is presented in a non-

preestablished order.

After diagrams A.1, B.1, C.1, we can say that painting can only appear with the revelation of its own processes, of its support(s), of its different point(s) of view, etc. This without emphasizing any given element in relation to another, but always considering the particular in its most accurate possible relationship to the whole.

Returned to their true place, painting and its discourse, as a partial problem of the entire question of art can, by the same token, truly appear and for the first time. **It is when it does not affect the eye that the painting becomes visible.** The sections I, II, and III show to what extent art is contained within precise and definite limits, limits which are generally not perceived or hidden or simply ignored.

Diagrams in section I show the idealist discourse as it is practiced. Section II reveals what section I would like to hide, and section III indicates the practice of our own work and what that practice reveals about the work. Within section III, diagram B.1 reveals what might pass unnoticed in diagram A.1 to a careless eye.

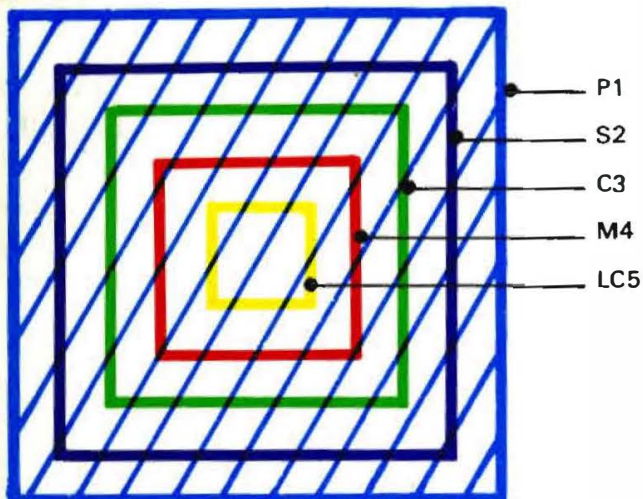
To pretend to escape from these limits is to reinforce the prevailing ideology which expects diversion from the artist. Art is not free, the artist does not express himself freely (he cannot). Art is not the prophecy of a free society. Freedom in art is the luxury/privilege of a repressive society.

Art whatever it may be is exclusively political. What is called for is the **analysis of formal and cultural limits** (and not one or the other) within which art exists and struggles.

These limits are many and of different intensities. Although the prevailing ideology and the associated artists try in every way to camouflage them, and although it is too early—the conditions are not met—to blow them up, the time has come to unveil them.

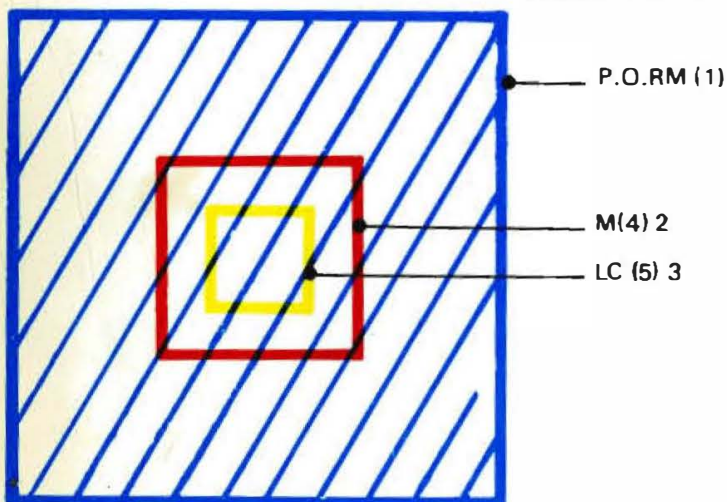
October 1970

I. CANCELLING DISCOURSES (Art as it is perceived)



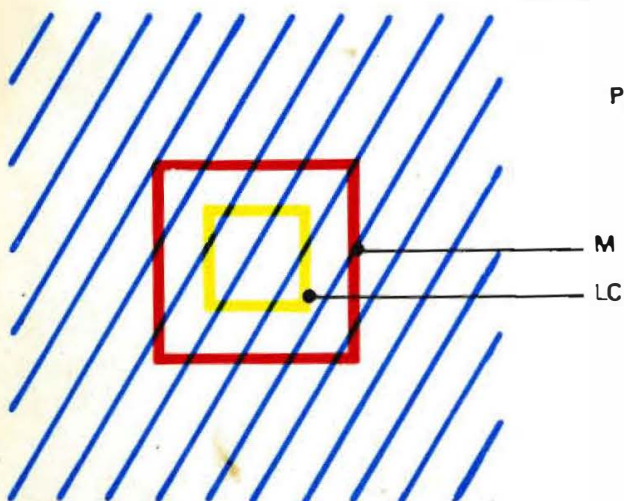
Diag. 1.1

The numbers after the letters (S2) indicate the places, in order of importance, of the different limits or frames.



Diag. 2.1

The quotation M(4) 2 indicates the previous plan in parentheses (see diagram 1) and the new one.



Diag. 3.1

The color of the hatching (blue) corresponds to the frame/limit which cancels out the others.

LEGEND

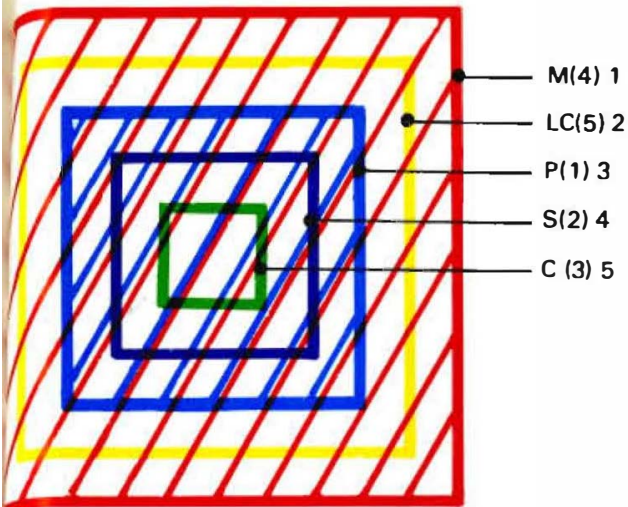
- C : Stretcher, verso (back)...
- S : Support: canvas/wall/store windows...
- M : Museum/Gallery/any defined artistic place.
- LC : Cultural Limits/Knowledge. In general (the period) and in particular (media such as TV, newspapers...)
- O : Object - Sculpture - Environment - Arte Povera - Technological Art...
- RM : Ready-Made.
- LA : Land Art - Happening.
- CA : Concept Art.
- P : Painting (in the sense of what one paints, i.e. on canvas/stretcher or directly on walls, stones, trees...)

ag. 1

ag.

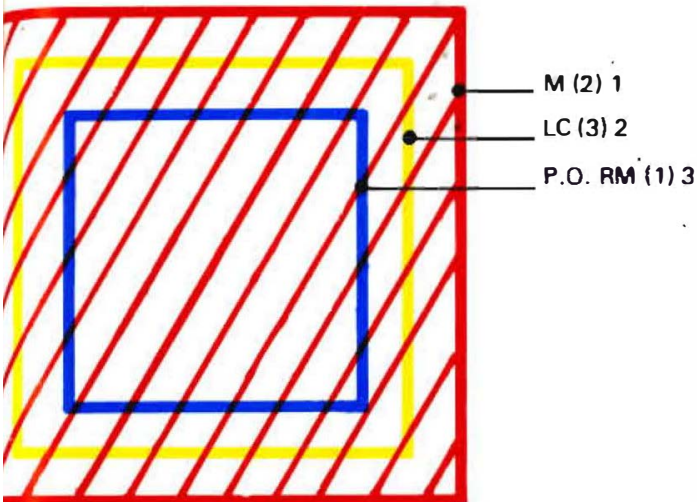
ag.

II. WHAT REALLY GOES ON (Art where it takes place)



g. 1.2

The number in parentheses indicates the place occupied in diagram 1.

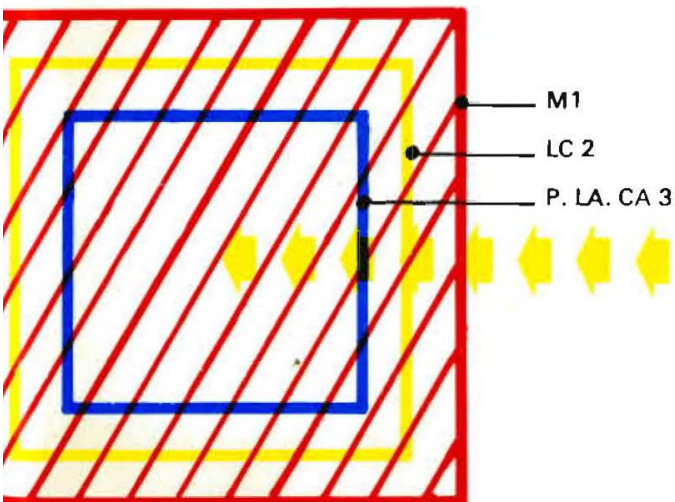


g. 2.2

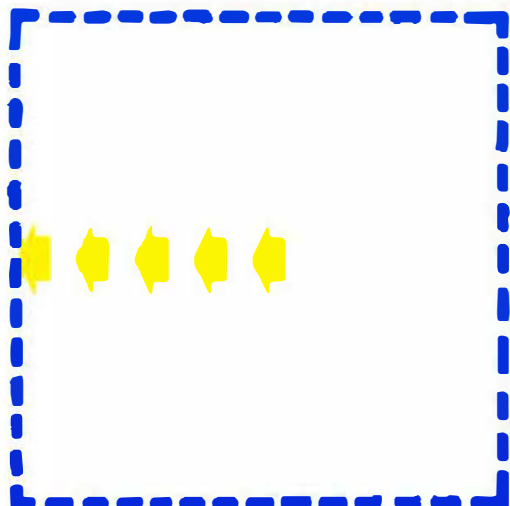
The numbers in parenthesis indicate the places occupied in diagram 2.1.

LEGEND

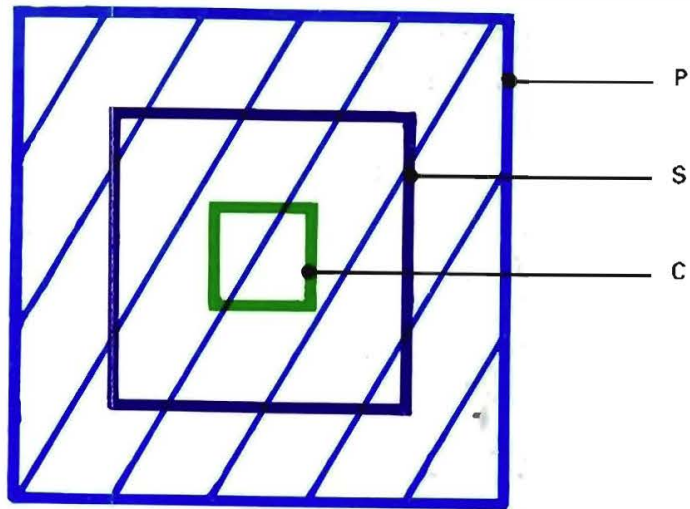
The red hatching indicates that M is the real limit (single viewpoint) of everything that takes place within it. However, P always cancels out C and S. The blue hatching therefore remains.



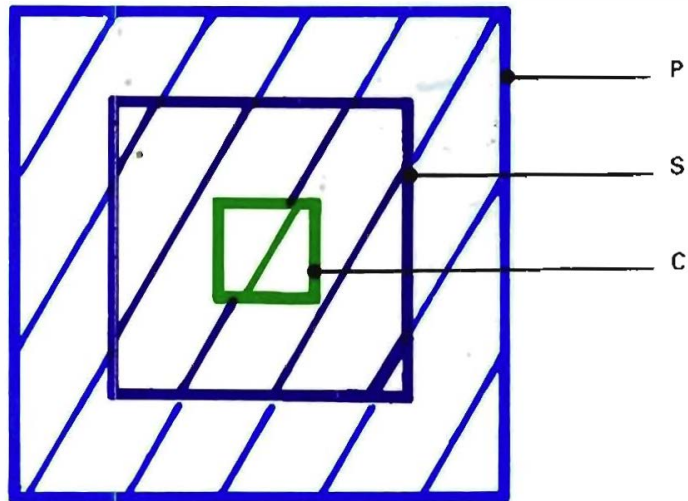
g. 3.2



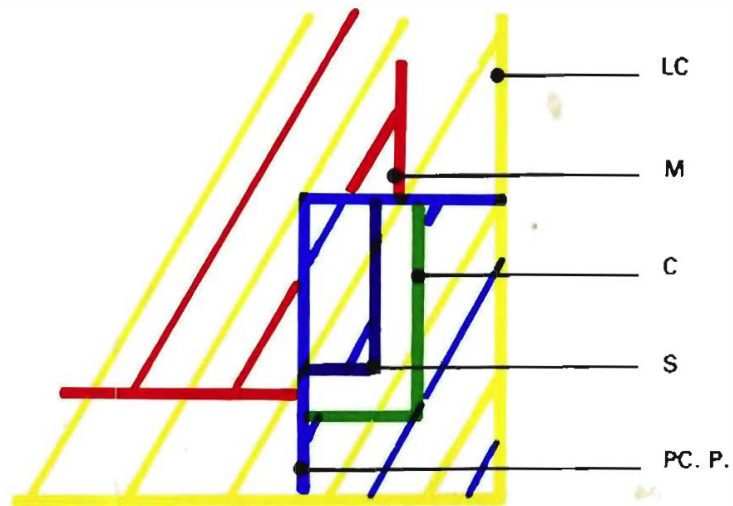
DETAILS FROM SOME DIAGRAMS



Diag. 1.3

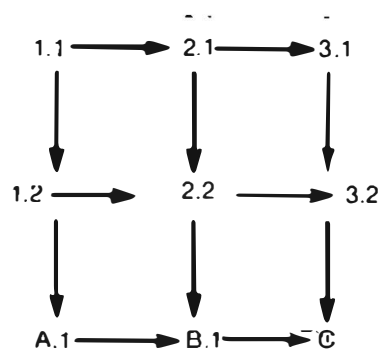


Diag. A.2



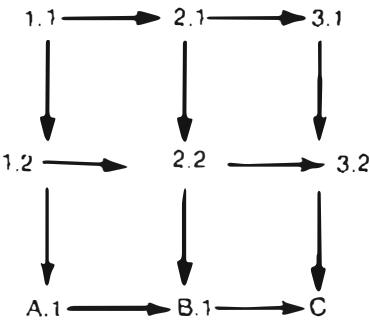
Diag. B.2

The diagrams can be read in these ways:



N.B. — The different diagrams are only here to help our demonstration. It is obvious that they are by nature approximate and incomplete. To consider them as "formal/rigid truths" would be pure fantasy on the part of the reader.

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V. FUNCTION OF THE MUSEUM

Translated by Laurent Sauerwein

The following is an extract from a text written in October 1970. It was to be the third part—"Le Donne"—of the text "Position—Proposition" published by the Museum of Munchen Gladbach in January 1971. The first two parts of this text were respectively "Standpoints" and "Critical Limits." This is one of the reasons we ended the text published on that occasion with the words "to be continued".

FUNCTION OF THE MUSEUM¹

Privileged place with a triple role:

1. **Aesthetic.** The Museum is the frame and effective support upon which the work is inscribed/composed. It is at once the center in which the action takes place and the single (topographical and cultural) viewpoint for the work.
2. **Economic.** The Museum gives a sales value to what it exhibits, has privileged/selected. By preserving or extracting it from the commonplace, the Museum promotes the work socially, thereby assuring its exposure and consumption.
3. **Mystical.** The Museum/Gallery instantly promotes to "Art" status whatever it exhibits with conviction, i.e. habit, thus diverting in advance any attempt to question the foundations of art without taking into consideration the place from which the question is put. The Museum (the Gallery) constitutes the mystical body of Art.

It is clear that the above three points are only there to give a general idea of the Museum's role. It must be understood that these roles differ in intensity depending on the Museums (Galleries) considered, for socio-political reasons (relating to art or more generally to the system).

I. PRESERVATION

One of the initial (technical) functions of the Museum (or Gallery) is preservation. (Here a distinction can be made between the Museum and the Gallery although the distinction seems to be becoming less clear-cut:

(1) It must be quite clear that when we speak of "the Museum" we are also referring to all types of "galleries" in existence and all other places which claim to be cultural centers. A certain distinction between "museum" and "gallery" will be made below. However the impossibility of escaping the concept of cultural location must also be stressed.

the former generally buys, preserves, collects, in order to exhibit; the latter does the same in view of resale.) This function of preservation perpetrates the idealistic nature of all art since it claims that art is (could be) eternal. This idea, among others, dominated the 19th century, when public museums were created approximately as they are still known today.

Painted things are generally attitudes, gestures, memories, copies, imitations, transpositions, dreams, symbols set/fixed on the canvas arbitrarily for an indefinite period of time. To emphasize this illusion of eternity or timelessness, one has to preserve the work itself (physically fragile: canvas, stretcher, pigments etc.) from wear. The Museum was designed to assume this task, and by appropriate artificial means to preserve the work, as much as possible, from the effects of time—work which would otherwise perish far more rapidly. It was/is a way—another—of obviating the temporality/fragility of a work of art by artificially keeping it “alive”, thereby granting it an appearance of immortality which serves remarkably well the discourse which the prevalent bourgeois ideology attaches to it. This takes place, it should be added, with the author’s i.e. the artist’s delighted approval.

Moreover, this conservatory function of the Museum, which reached its highest point during the 19th century and with Romanticism, is still generally accepted today, adding yet another paralysing factor. In fact nothing is more readily preserved than a work of art. And this is why 20th century art is still so dependent on 19th century art since it has accepted, without a break, its system, its mechanisms and its function (including Cezanne and Duchamp) without revealing one of its main alibis, and furthermore accepting the exhibition framework as self-evident. We can once again declare that the Museum makes its “mark”, imposes its “frame” (physical and moral) on everything that is exhibited in it, in a deep and indelible way. It does this all the more easily since **everything that the Museum shows is only considered and produced in view of being set in it.**

Every work of art already bears, implicitly or not, the trace of a gesture, an image, a portrait, a period, a history, an idea and is subsequently preserved (as a souvenir) by the Museum.

II. COLLECTION

The Museum not only preserves and therefore perpetrates, but also collects. The aesthetic role of the Museum is thus enhanced since it becomes the single viewpoint (cultural and visual) from which works can be considered, an enclosure where art is born and buried, crushed by the very frame which presents and constitutes it. Indeed, collecting makes simplifications possible and guarantees historical and psychological weight which reinforce the predominance of the support (Museum/Gallery) inasmuch as the latter is ignored. In fact, the Museum/Gallery has a his-

tory, a volume, a physical presence, a cultural weight quite as important as the support on which one paints, draws. (By extension, this naturally applies to any sculpted material, transported object or discourse inscribed in the Museum.) On another level, let us say social, collecting services to display different works together, often very unlike, from different artists. This results in creating or opposing different "schools"/"movements" thereby cancelling certain interesting questions lost in an exaggerated mass of answers. The collection can also be used to show a single artist's work, thus producing a "flattening" effect to which the work aspired anyway, having been exclusively conceived—willingly or not—in view of the final collection.

In summary, the collection in a Museum operates in two different but parallel ways, depending on whether one considers a group or a one-man show.²

A) In the case of a confrontation of works by different artists the Museum imposes an amalgam of unrelated things among which chosen works are emphasized. These chosen works are given an impact which is only due to their context—collection. Let it be clear that the collection we are speaking of and the selection it leads to are obviously economically motivated. The Museum collects the better to isolate. But this distinction is false as the collection forces into comparison things that are often incomparable, consequently producing a discourse which is warped from the start, and to which no one pays attention (cf. "Beware!" Introduction).

B) In collecting and presenting the work of a single artist (one-man show) the Museum stresses differences within a single body of work and insists (economically) on (presumed) successful works and (presumed) failures. As a result, such shows set off the "miraculous" aspect of "successful" works. And the latter therefore also give a better sales value to juxtaposed weaker works. This is the "flattening" effect we mentioned above, the aim of which is both cultural and commercial.

III. REFUGE

The above considerations quite naturally lead to the idea, close to the truth, that the Museum acts as a refuge. And that without this refuge, no work can "exist". The Museum is an asylum. The work set in it is sheltered from the weather and all sorts of dangers, and most of all protected from any kind of questioning. The Museum selects, collects and protects. All works of art are made in order to be selected, collected and protected (among other things from other works which are, for whatever reasons, excluded from the Museum). If the work takes shelter in the Museum-refuge, it is because it finds there its comfort and its frame; a frame which one considers as natural, while it is merely historical. That is to say, a

(2) We are here referring more particularly to contemporary art and its profusion of exhibitions.

frame necessary to the works set in it (necessary to their very existence). This frame does not seem to worry artists who exhibit continually without ever considering the problem of the place in which they exhibit.

Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whether the work itself is directly—consciously or not—produced for the Museum, any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism. This idealism (which could be compared to Art for Art's sake) shelters and prevents any kind of break³

.... In fact every work of art inevitably possesses one or several extremely precise frames. The work is always limited in time as well as in space. By forgetting (purposefully) these essential facts one can pretend that there exists an immortal art, an eternal work And one can see how this concept and the mechanisms used to produce it—among other things the function of the Museum as we have very rapidly examined it—place the work of art once and for all above all classes and ideologies. The same idealism also points to the eternal and apolitical Man which the prevalent bourgeois ideology would like us to believe in and preserve.

The non-visibility or (deliberate) non-indication/revelation of the various supports of any work (the work's stretcher, the work's location, the work's frame, the work's stand, the work's price, the work's verso or back etc. ...) are therefore neither fortuitous nor accidental as one would like us to think.

What we have here is a careful camouflage undertaken by the prevalent bourgeois ideology, assisted by the artists themselves. A camouflage which has until now made it possible to transform "the reality of the world into an image of the world, and History into Nature".

New York 1970 (to be continued)

(3) A detailed demonstration of the various limits and frames which generally constitute a work of art—painting, sculpture, object, ready-made, concept ...—has been removed for technical reasons from the original text. However this subject matter can be found in other texts already published, such as: "Critiques Limites" (a), "Around and about" (b), "Beware!" (c), "Standpoints" (d), "Exposition d'une exposition" (e).

(a) Edited by Yvon Lambert Paris October 1970 (text in French)

(b) in *Studio International* London June 1971

(c) in *Studio International* London March 1970

(d) in *Studio International* London April 1971

(e) in catalogue Documenta V (text in German and French)

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