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Art and Object-X:
Things I found while digging a pond

Elise Bernatchez

A thesis
in the
Humanities Programme

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

September 1995

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ABSTRACT

Art and Object-X:
Things I found while digging a pond

Elise Bernatchez, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 1995

This is a study of the nature of art in a "postmodern" intellectual climate, drawing on texts from the sociology of art and from art theory as well as on artworks. A distinction is made between artworks and discourse, in parallel to the object\subject and nature\culture dichotomies. A theory is developed in a post-structural framework, in which art is presented as elusive by nature. This quality is related to its function in the social structure. The thesis project includes a sculptural installation that highlights and activates the border between art as practice and discourse on art. This occasions a critique of epistemic methodology and the introduction, both in theory and in the thesis itself, of alternate methods of criticism, such as "mimetology" or "translation" of works through analogy rather than interpretation.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to three remarkable women:

Joan Bernatchez

Annette Côté Savoie

Lily Maley

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I could not have done this alone. Thank you.

Particularly to

Dr. John Jackson for his creative mind and his faith in me,

and to

Gisèle, Madeleine, Paulo, Jacques, Pepe and David
for their help in making the artwork.

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INTRODUCTION

Since Hegel diagnosed the end of art, it appears that we did all we could to hasten its demise in de-defining it out of existence. And yet, art rises... in increasingly confusing states and surprising places. What is this "art" that we will not, or cannot, allow to disappear?

Many theoreticians and artists have tried to come to grips with the nature of art and its role in postmodern society. In a modernist perspective, art has often been seen as a form of resistance to the negative aspects of social reality or as a form of encouragement towards a better state. Much current thought attempts to evaluate whether or not art can continue as a mode of contestation while remaining distinct as a practice and, if so, how. While many artists are busy theorizing the reunion of art with life, many theorists are adamantly defending it as a distinct practice. There is therefore an erosion of the boundary between art theory and art practice which brings to the fore the question of the specificity of art. While, in some circles, high is fed to low, blurring the distinction between art and non-art, in others, the credibility of avant-garde "objectivity" is revived and almost touted as our only remaining mechanism for maintaining a critical distance from life as we now live it. "Art" is even considering divorce from its age old partner, "aesthetics",

trying to find a place between an anti-aesthetic and a beyond-aesthetic stance.

Since much of the postmodern critique of modernity seems to concentrate on the effect that a certain kind of scientific thinking has had on us, it appears to me that an exploration of the differences and connections between social science and art may shed some light on my questions about the nature of art, its relation to theory and the function it might have in society.

My research questions have to do with the contemporary intellectual situation of postmodernism, its critique of modernist premises and the impact this has had on current art practice. I wonder whether art has a "nature" of its own that distinguishes it both from theory and from "real" life. What can artists do after postmodernism(s)?

Although it seems almost pointless, in terms of practice, to attempt an "ex minimis" definition of art (as opposed to non-art), I have nevertheless chosen to focus on this problem in my attempt to map out the general area of aesthetics and art. Since I investigate some of the dichotomies critiqued by postmodernism, in particular, that of being and consciousness (or subject and object) which is central to scientific discourse, it seems appropriate to see whether a study of the nature of art would lead to it re-entering its own basic dichotomy of content and form in a new and productive way.

The purpose of this project is to address these questions, in an effort to contribute to current research on art, but, more particularly, to further art production in general and to extend it as a vital element into the broader context of society as a whole. In this fractured and fracturing world, this may be a lost cause but I believe it is worth the effort, as I hope to show.

There are three main components in this work which tie into my research questions since they each touch upon an aspect of the problem I raise. In the first component, I address the relation of art to theory. In the second, I develop a view of art that differentiates it from theory and from "real life". I also discuss methods of relating theory and practice. This component is a result of the initial opposition between art theory and art practice that I set up for my project. The final component is a sculptural installation, including two chapters in written form. This last part of the thesis is properly artistic as opposed to theoretical. It is not an illustration but a contribution, presenting a possible field of action for current artists.

The first component includes chapters I, II and III in which I identify and describe some of the major contemporary debates and/or positions surrounding art. These debates can be located in theories about art currently prevalent in many disciplines. I focus on the sociology of art and on

contemporary aesthetics which both appear to be interdisciplinary in themselves since they draw on history, criticism, philosophy and many other social theories, as they pertain to art.

In the first chapter, I explore the contributions of the sociology of art, and establish an initial framing of the question of the nature of art.

Since Western societies have been witnessing radical changes in the forms and content of art, social scientists have had difficulty in keeping up with art's re-definitions of itself and have no longer been able to rely on aesthetics to provide them with a definitive framework by which they can identify their data. This is problematic because if art cannot be distinguished from non-art, sociologists of art, (or, for that matter, practitioners of any field in which art is a central focus), are left without a specific object of study. As a result of this situation, much interesting debate about the nature of art has sprung from fields related to sociology.

These debates are often centred on epistemological issues making methodological considerations and questions acutely relevant. The sociology of art is a locus of the storm, because it sets up seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies in that it opposes subjectivity and objectivity, the study of content versus the study of structure, the specific and the universal. It raises the questions of how to study something that is itself form and content, that is itself a field of

"knowledge" with its own validation process, and that has its own body of analysts as separate from its practitioners. In the attempt to define art as object of study, sociology is faced with the problem of having to redefine itself, to set its own borders, to review its own epistemological assumptions, to enter into dialogue with other "experts".

I identify two main approaches to dealing with these questions: structuralism and hermeneutical phenomenology. The first relies on a formal analysis of art, seeing in the expression itself, an analogue of the formal aspects of society, while the second considers that art reflects society through its content or meaning which is accessible through interpretation. Both these approaches to the artwork deal with the epistemological issue of validity of findings, each in their own way. Both are still left with a major problem, which is the identification or definition of art as a corpus of study.

In the second chapter I contrast two current approaches to defining art, leading to a differentiation between art and discourse. I discuss Janet Wolff's view of art as discourse, a view tied in with an understanding of art as the container of meaning about society. The stumbling blocks in her theory appear when we find that defining art as discourse sheds no light on the nature of art itself and that we are left completely in the dark as to the specificity of aesthetic experience.

I then present Lyotard's view of art as other than discourse, a theory in which art is seen as more than meaning, even though meanings can be constructed about it, and from it. Lyotard's contribution allows us to explore the relationship of art to discourse in general and to discursive frameworks in particular. It also opens up possibilities for defining the specificity of art in ways that are not directly limited to an aesthetics of reception and interpretation.

Both these positions are related to postmodernism and suggest the necessity of understanding the implications of the shifting boundaries between the terms of certain key dichotomies with regard to art.

In chapter III, I present some of the positions taken in contemporary aesthetics towards art and its relation with social life. I also continue to explore the art\discourse dichotomy in my ongoing attempt to define the nature of art. This leads to an investigation of the possibility of an "avant-garde" position through a re-examination of the borders between art and non-art, in which art may be seen as an object of perception for a perceiving subject, or as the relation between object of perception and perceiving subject. This could entail a redefinition of the dichotomy between subject and object through an understanding of the relationship between perceiver and perceived, in art.

Chapter III does not yield a definition of art, but it does allow us to rethink the problem: in overlapping the first

three chapters, the impossibility of defining art becomes clear. This indicates that the nature of art may be tied into its undeniable elusive quality.

The second component of my thesis consists in the elaboration of a ^{useful} framework for understanding the nature of art, incorporating the elusive quality of its definition. This is developed in chapters IV and V.

In chapter IV, I start from the position that since art seems to be undefinable, this very characteristic may in fact relate to its function in our lives. I develop a framework that is derived from a post-structural view of structuralism, in which art is understood as function rather than content. I distinguish between art, artwork and discourse and show the applicability of this view to the problems raised in earlier chapters.

Chapter V is a discussion of the epistemological problems raised by my thesis. The first part of the chapter describes the research methods that I used for the theoretical component of the project. In this sense, it is a validation of the findings of my study, as they now stand. The rest of the chapter is a critique of that approach and demonstrates how inappropriate it would be to apply such methods to artworks themselves. This chapter becomes the "break" point or fulcrum of the entire work, because it highlights the distinction between art and discourse.

The third part of the project is a practicum. Since I am attempting to show that art has a specific contribution to make, this contribution must be integral to my thesis or the overall study would lack an important dimension. Furthermore, the inclusion of this particular component raises the most interesting methodological problem of my work. This problem is inherent in a research study that conceives of art as the opposite of discourse but that nevertheless includes it as part of the study.

The last component is divided into two written chapters and a sculptural installation (for which the photographic documentation is included as an addendum). The way I have written these two chapters reflects the fact that content and form, as well as process, make up the sculptural work. It also puts into practice the ideas that I developed in chapter V which resulted from the interaction effects between the first and third components of the thesis, standing in analogous relation to each other but also affecting each other. In this sense, the theoretical study must avoid being an explanation of my particular art practice or a critique of it. In the overall study, it must remain distinct from but parallel to the practical component. And, conversely, the practicum must not be an illustration of the theoretical aspect of the thesis, but remain its analogue, researching, within its own logic, the same questions.

Chapter VI examines the production of artists as well as critical writing, but it does so as part of the process involved in the sculptural installation. It frames the artwork in its context in terms of art, sculpture and social issues. It isolates elements of this context to integrate them into the sculptural process. It enacts the contribution of thought to the sculpture.

Chapter VII focuses on the material shaping of the sculpture. It takes the form of a sort of dialogue between the constructing, which involves materials, techniques, labour..., and the artist. This dialogue is presented to the reader as sporadic monologue or journal of the work.

Both these chapters take on the qualities of collage and montage and interact in the production of the installation. They attempt to remain faithful to their object by miming it rather than representing it.

As a final point, I wish to make it clear that in this thesis, I concentrate on contemporary art in the Western tradition. Furthermore, even though I focus on the visual, this does not mean that I exclude music, theatre, dance, or poetry and literature, from art, although I am aware that they each consist in different distinct practices. I use art almost as a generic term to mean all the cultural artifices that we create to activate the boundary between the "real" and our understanding of it.

CHAPTER I

ART and SOCIOLOGY

In the following chapter, I identify and describe some of the major contemporary debates and/or positions surrounding art, to be found in the sociology of art. This is a useful point of departure since developing a contemporary understanding of the nature of art is one of the aims of my thesis, an aim that is, understandably, shared by many sociologists of art who must identify a corpus of study and develop a methodology that is coherent with the nature of such a corpus, in order to produce valid and relevant research.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

It appears that two main frameworks for the study of art emerge in sociology, those of phenomenology and structuralism. However, in order to understand art in sociological terms, I will first situate it within the sociology of culture, with a very brief description of broad sociological perspectives on culture.

Culture or structure

Culture is thought of by many social scientists as the inner life of human beings either individually or collectively

animated by a Weberian "ethic" or "spirit" through which they share values, have a collective purpose or create intersubjective realities. This inner life may also be a set of beliefs held by people reflecting the power configurations within their society. In short, culture is anything that is not a form of observable human behaviour.

Since culture is traditionally defined as separate from social structures, it is often understood as the product or content of "cultural" institutions, which, in turn are considered different from political, economic, or scientific institutions. For a sociologist, bent on quantifiable validation of research results, culture itself, as content or meaning, is an inappropriate level of study. Therefore, in this limited view, the object of study of sociology is likely to be the cultural institution itself rather than its product.

Structure through culture

It is generally believed that formal constraints influence content and that content reflects social structures. It follows, therefore, that content, or culture, becomes a channel to understanding structure, its manifestations reflecting the society in which they appear: culture tells us something about structure. One also finds the reverse: many sociologists assume that culture can only be understood by relating it to social structure (Wuthnot 1984, 4-5); in this view, structure explains culture.

In a more dynamic perspective, some social scientists define culture as a system of meanings, functioning either to hold a social system in place or to destabilize it. In this framework, culture is seen as a constant succession of social practices that act as catalysts for change. In Fiske's understanding of it, cultural activity can clearly be considered a political act in itself (1989a, 1-25).

Many of these various points of view stem from either an idealist sense of culture as an "informing spirit" that is manifested in language and art, for instance, or from a materialist perception of culture in which art and intellectual work are considered to be the product of an order constituted by other social activities. Each of these positions implies a method either of illustration and classification of the "informing spirit" or of exploration and connection of the known social order to the specific forms of its cultural manifestations. Each of the positions also maintains a distinction or separation between "culture" and "structure".

Structure as culture, culture as structure

In contemporary work there is a kind of convergence which considers cultural practice as constitutive of the social order as well as derived from it. Culture is seen as a signifying system through which a social order is communicated, reproduced and experienced (Williams 1982, 16).

This is an alternative approach that rejects the dichotomy between the social as observable (action or fact without meaning) and the cultural as invisible mental creations (meaning attached to fact). In this emerging framework, culture is seen as a behavioral phenomenon: an analytic aspect of behaviour. It is a daily experience in which we feel both free and entrapped, in which we may produce our own future and yet be confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal constraints.

Margaret Archer attempts to build a theory in which this dichotomy is made dynamic in a view in which culture is both system and agency, structure and people, in interaction. Her distinction between the cultural system and agency, however, is an analytic one, not to be found in real life since in fact she considers them to be inseparable (1988).

In another approach emphasizing interaction, James Carey defines culture as communication. Communication is understood here not as transmission of information but as the means of producing reality: the construction and apprehension of symbolic forms. In this, he connects with the symbolic interactionists who consider culture to be the symbolic, expressive aspect of human behaviour. For Carey, reality is not given and does not exist independently of language. "Through communication, reality is a product of collective work and associated action" (1988, 25). He goes on to say that "It is formed and sustained, repaired and transformed,

worshipped and celebrated in the ordinary business of living" (1988, 87).

It appears to me that, in these two last perspectives, the "object" of study is so vast and all-encompassing that it can become unmanageable, since what is being studied is, in fact, an interactive process, a system in flux.

From the sociology of culture to the sociology of art

According to Raymond Williams, although all social systems (economic, political or other) have intrinsic signifying systems, only some activities, relations and institutions, embedded in the social organisation of culture as a realized signifying system, are manifestly "cultural"; there also exists a signifying practice that is distinguishable as a system in itself (1982, 207).

THE SOCIOLOGY OF ART

Art can then be seen as one of these manifestly cultural signifying practices, and one finds that theoretical positions in the sociology of art parallel those of the sociology of culture, as do the resulting debates.

Defining the field

A cursory reading immediately makes it evident that the sociology of art draws on many other areas of study in order

to establish and back up the various lines of argument that are taken in defining its field.

In the sociology of culture, it calls upon the sociology of taste with contributions from Herbert Gans and Pierre Bourdieu, for example. Cultural analysts like Janet Wolff appeal particularly to the sociology of knowledge. In aesthetics, many sociologists refer to theoretical frameworks in art history, in art criticism and in the philosophy of art (traditional aesthetics) in order to establish their own counterdistinctive position. "Philosophical" frameworks, principally those of phenomenology, structuralism and post-structuralism or postmodernism are currently embedded in the discussion either by implication or explicitly.¹ There are complex interrelations between all of these aspects, and the sociology of art attempts to establish a point of view that is refracted and constantly bounced from one of these areas of study to another.

Sociology and the fields of art

In overviews of the sociology of art, its problems are sometimes defined in terms of an antagonistic relation between humanists and social scientists. Humanists are said to have an implicit or explicit evaluative posture which sociologists, who are expected to strive for objectivity, try to avoid.

Humanists,² Vera Zolberg generalizes in saying, regard each great work as a unique, original meaningful expression,

endowed with a special aura that is constructed on the basis of quasi-sacral meanings, intellectual or philosophical ideas conveying value such as beauty, perfection or sincerity (1990).

Although not so uniform nor so simplistic as Zolberg describes, this may have been generally true in traditional aesthetics which was geared to the establishment of "laws" that could distinguish art from non-art and good art from bad art. This may have been a viable project in historical terms; but since the turn of the century when the practice of art has largely been involved in a process of defying such laws, traditional aesthetics has not been able to keep up with evaluation of contemporary art. Aesthetics has given way to art theory and aestheticians have been replaced by artists and critics (Kostelanetz 1978).

The cross-disciplinary conflict that exists between social scientists who earn resentment from specialists in the arts, and those specialists who are seen as hopelessly idealist, can be ascribed to many standard professional turf skirmishes. What most often causes this conflict is the threat to the "autonomy" of the field of art, and especially to the specificity of art itself as a social practice, and as a parallel search for "truth".

Art and sociological truth

Cesar Grana considers the distrust of sociology in the humanistic outlook as somewhat ironic. He points out that the question of whether art can be trusted to make truth available to the mind is ancient and recurring. Plato viewed art as an imitation of appearances and therefore as untrustworthy. Ruskin, on the other hand, considered art to be the measure by which one could judge society itself. He saw a country's art as the exact exponent of its political and social virtues: it was, in fact, making visible the invisible truth (1989, 17-25). Picasso is often quoted as having said: "Art is the lie that tells the truth".

If art is the perceptible manifestation of imperceptible reality, the vehicle of social meaning, then we assume that there is a link between the general spirit of a society and the individual creations of the artist, between the particularity of the artist and the imagined universality of art. It follows that sociological studies relating to art attempt to deal with the problems arising from this positioning of art as a mediation between individual and collective world views.

Debates in the sociology of art

In attempting to define an object of study, the debates in the sociology of art appear to be mostly epistemological and related to methodological issues of value-freedom.

Furthermore, the discussions and the various positions adopted centre around the need for social scientists to determine how the art object itself is to be dealt with.³ This is problematic, in part, because of the social scientist's reluctance to enter into a discussion of value, which is seen as almost unavoidable if the object of study of the sociology of art is art itself.

THE INSTITUTION OF ART

Many of the studies that one finds in the sociology of art concentrate on the art object's existence, on its means of production, on its function, in short on all its material aspects. This attitude has the advantage of avoiding issues of "value-freedom", while still taking for granted the "importance" and "universality" of art. In these studies, which I outline briefly in the following pages, art is understood as belonging to an institutional system or as a social factor.

Art: an institutional system

Milton Albrecht in his introduction to a large reader in the sociology of art (1970), discusses art in traditional sociological terms as an institution. He states that social institutions are defined by social scientists as the principal structures through which human activities are organized and

established to serve basic human needs. They can be studied according to specific characteristics.⁴

He goes on to say that institutions are generally classified in two ways: one mostly functionalist approach emphasizes the institution's degree of development and relative importance for the maintenance of society and considers art of secondary importance. The second approach classifies institutions as carriers of cultural values; art is given primary importance in such a view (1970, 3-6).

Albrecht considers neither of these approaches to be wholly appropriate and suggests that art needs to be recognized as a peculiarly "mixed" system. In studying art as an institutional structure, we must take account of the art product both as object or as process of aesthetic experience, and as an essential link in an extensive network of social and cultural relations (1970, 7).

What he means by aesthetic experience is not defined, but he introduces with this notion the dual nature of the art object. He also connects the aesthetic with the notion of universality, in the context of human needs being served.

He concludes the book with a section on history and theory defining the sociology of art as a field study encompassing a variety of viewpoints rather than a clearly defined subject matter or general theory. He considers that its focus has been the "objet d'art", the cultural artefact itself, an interest manifested in three points of view:

(1) historical, with concentration on the description of growth achievements and changes over time in the arts; (2) genetic, focusing on how different forms of art come into being with their various qualities and styles; and (3) indexical, in which art is considered a key to the nature of society and culture (1970, 616).

If indeed the focus of all this study has been the art object, it is with an already received understanding of its nature which remains unquestioned. There seems to be no attempt to define it, either through its form or through its content. It is essentially approached only as the product of an institution.

Art: a social factor

In another recent overview,⁵ Arnold Foster and Judith Blau introduce their book (1989) with a similar assumption of universality as to the essential nature of art. Invoking the importance of art to humankind, they believe that sociology should study art. They focus, as does Vera Zolberg (1990), on the reasons why traditional sociology neglected the study of art. They state that most studies in sociology deal with the non-aesthetic aspects of art, identifying four major perspectives: a view of art as commodity, a production of culture approach (focus is on production rather than on meaning of cultural objects), an understanding of art as instrumental in which art is treated as a passive link in a

chain, and finally art as social indicator.

Foster and Blau do not explicitly define sociological institutions but generally use very similar characteristics as Albrecht to differentiate between approaches which are described as stemming from various kinds of need.

In a discussion of these approaches, they describe several clusters of theories. One of these is based on individual biological and psychological needs for aesthetic experience. Foster and Blau consider these theories unsatisfactory because they say that aesthetic needs can be satisfied without creating art (appreciation of a beautiful sunset). In this, they demonstrate a very unclear definition of the aesthetic. They also remain firmly entrenched in a sociological perspective, favouring the collective rather than the individual.⁶

In another of the clusters identified by Foster and Blau, art is seen as supplying what is missing from social institutions. This perspective is based on society's needs as a whole. In other words, art is the producer of meaning and serves specific political or moral functions. Art is more than a commodity; it is a factor contributing to stability.

There is yet another grouping of theories that view art as existing outside a system of needs either individual or social. Art is discussed as the "spirit of an age", or as simply the name for the collective values of people in the art world (Becker 1982). Art is seen as mirroring society or as

presaging social developments. As such it can be the basis for understanding other non-artistic aspects of society. It is also viewed as affecting society by shaping patterns of belief or meaning (Foster and Blau 1989).

Art and social information

The first layer of debate which I have just described, appears to me to be brought to the fore by the kind of information that sociologists of art want to get from their study of art. Many of them see art and its object as a fact or an event which is part of a system of social networks of production and consumption, involving many other social institutions. It is observable and can be analyzed empirically. There is no need for subjective interpretation. Art has no hidden mysterious meaning. The artwork as an object of study, in itself, can be left aside.

ART AS NODAL POINT IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ART

This extremely reductionist approach is contested by some social scientists who consider the study of art as absolutely necessary to the understanding of society. Art is seen as reflecting or embodying something larger than its individual manifestations, not a metaphysical truth, but a social one. A branching off or a second level of debate ensues from this perspective.

Art: a reflection of society

If the sociologist of art has a subject, Cesar Grana says, "it must be because he regards both science and art as standing before the same human reality as they struggle to extract from it their own measure of truth" (1989, 46). In the end, the task of the sociology of art is to establish a bridge between the specificity of artistic knowledge and the cautious need of social science to rely on facts and systems.

Art is a reflector of past, present (or future) social structures, implying "the existence of a link between the 'general' spirit of society and the 'particular' gifts of the artist, between personal artistic revelation and the presumed universality of art" (1989, 21).

Artist\Collective: Artist-art, art-society

If large truths can become known because they can be made "visible" then the artist is the necessary agent in making this truth perceivable.

Numerous texts have been written concerning this picture of artist as "seer". The first position views the artist\creator as main or only agent in the making of artwork. Such a person is described in individualistic terms as having received a particular talent or as driven by psychological particularities. The separation between the artist and the work is ambiguous. Even though the artist's work is separate from the person, the boundary between them is crossed since

art and life are fused in one creator (Zolberg 1990).

A somewhat middle view presents the artist as a mere participant in a collective process (Becker 1974). Some theorists redefine the process of creation as one in which the "receivers" become active participants; there is no single artist, any more than there is a single completed work, in the crystallized sense of a final product. I consider this a middle view because it still focuses on the idea of a creator of art. Whether it is the viewer or the artist, or each in turn, who creates a work of art, the problem of individual attribution of meaning remains the same.

At the opposite pole, agency is considered non-existent and we are left with a "dead" author\artist. Becker transforms the individual artist into a team player who is filling a subject position or playing a social role. Though the artist may be involved in constructing that position, like most social actors, his degree of autonomy is nevertheless severely limited (1974).

Artwork: form and\or content

Many of the studies referred to above, take society as a collective for granted and concentrate on defining the producer of artwork, or they ignore the producer and privilege the social structure itself. However, more interesting approaches attempt to focus on the point of interaction between collective consciousness and its individual expression

in works of art. These theories are rooted in two main opposing "philosophical" frameworks; both propose an understanding of the artwork as a source of information on society.

ARTWORK: FORMAL EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES

One of the two main attitudes towards the artwork stems from the assumptions of structuralism.

Artwork as crossroads

Jean Duvignaud starts with the idea that the uniqueness of artistic creation is unique because it is a practice enacted in the complex network of human relationships, at the level of the many "dramas" of daily experience (1972, 36). The problem lies in discovering where uniqueness intersects with social structure.

One approach described by Duvignaud is that of Georg Lukacs, who thinks that it is possible to find some correlation between social experience as a whole and the expression of his own particular age offered by an individual through an imagined representation. The artist gives concrete form to the imagination in a work of art which can be compared to other structures that appear very different but that reveal the same logic and involve comparable attitudes to life, death and the "beyond". The most important work of art of a

particular era acts as a filter for common experience, because it embodies, within a coherent system and style, the possible problems which contemporaries may encounter and sometimes resolve in practical life. By uniting disparate artistic expressions in a common artistic inspiration, a vision of the world becomes a model of life and existence (qtd. in Duvignaud 1972, 36-42).

Duvignaud criticizes this theory, considering it debatable whether an individual can deal with an entire era since there are many aspects of life that cannot be perceived by a single individual whatever his social status. But he believes that Lukacs's main weakness is that he regards the work of art as having in its own right an awareness of the world and of man. The whole process assumes that the work of art interprets and reconstructs in an imagined whole, themes which had emerged in the past. This is a major flaw for Duvignaud because his own point of view is that art does not simply reflect society as it is or was but that it actually presents a "new deal which, while undoubtedly making use of essential elements from the human landscape inhabited by the artist suggests a new arrangement and a redistribution of the established system" (1972, 42).

Another approach to the problem of the relationship between the artwork and the collective is that of Erwin Panofsky and Pierre Francastel who attempt an "archaeology" of the fundamental structures of imaginative experience, through

the examination of a work of art in the early stages of its creation. They see creative expression as a collective and individual activity, influencing human experience itself and giving us an opportunity to reach a definition of ourselves in a world which we gradually come to dominate. The origin and growth of creative activity are the same as those of social life, and social life rediscovers in the creative individual the principles and driving force through which it is transformed.

Duvignaud considers that this approach is limited in that it can be applied to all creativity and therefore subsumes the category of art as a specific practice. Furthermore, by concentrating on the formative stages of structures and on the elements which compose experience, Panofsky and Francastel only examine one moment in the creative process leaving aside the element of communication and overt meaning (qtd. in Duvignaud 1972, 42-47).

Artistic experience\social experience

Duvignaud asserts that a sociology of art needs to understand the totality of artistic experience within the totality of social experience and he proceeds to construct a framework within which this can be done. He bases this framework on four hypotheses: drama, the polemic sign, the conjunction of natural and social systems of classification and, lastly, anomy and atypicality.

The first is "drama" which he defines as a combination of behaviour, emotions, attitudes, ideologies, actions and creations which for the creative individual crystallizes the whole of society and places the genesis of a work of art within the complex of those contradictory forms which make up collective life. (1972, 47)

In this context, form becomes a particular attempt of the imagination to discover the common origin of certain elements to which everyone can respond emotionally and content becomes the immediate meanings inscribed in the work to which the audience must respond spontaneously. In a dramatic framework, it is appropriate to speak of the work of art as an attempt to overcome an obstacle. This obstacle consists of everything that prevents the total communication which the artist cannot choose but try to realize.

In this framework, the "sign becomes polemic"; this is Duvignaud's second hypothesis: every significant imagined action is a communication from a distance which is never reconciled to this distance. If people did not have to reach out to each other over space and time, through social barriers, they would not need to rely on signs any more than on the imaginary.

Duvignaud's third hypothesis is of the "conjunction of the natural and the social systems of classification". He believes, following Durkheim, that it is society which has

supplied the basis for logical thought. Classifications are an attempt on the part of society to structure the natural world resulting in a double effort: to integrate the natural world into society and to understand the natural world in terms of the social categories which have been formed. Encounters between two different kinds of well-ordered signs create the possibility of putting forward an order and a new arrangement which offers a different image of man.

The fourth hypothesis comes into play at this point: the artistic sign is "a group of meanings" all the more unsettling because it is always created by an atypical individual, someone who frees himself or is kept out of immediate reality by "anomy and atypicality".

It is clear that Duvignaud's sociology of art connects artistic creation with social creation.

We cannot separate the imagination from the general influences active at the time when the work was created because it is impossible to detach the imagination from social reality . . . the fact that art is rooted in collective experience is not simply an established fact, a secondary characteristic, it is an essential part of the very life of a work of art . . . it is necessary, in order to measure the depth to which imagined creation is rooted in society, to define these factors both in relation to artistic attitudes and

in relation to the function exercised by art in a particular type of society. At the point of intersection between the creative attitudes and the functions of art in different structures, is the starting point for a sociology of artistic creation. (1972, 65)

Duvignaud isolates several aesthetic attitudes which he considers as coexisting in industrial societies. He also defines several functions of art according to different social structures or types. These types are not to be confused with "world view"; rather it is a matrix of possibilities, both subjective and objective, actual and potential, virtual and determined.

Artwork: new possibility

Were this the whole of Duvignaud's theory, he would be himself doing what he reproached Lukacs: using art as the key to understanding past, or possibly present, social structures. But for Duvignaud, art is more than mere reflection, it contains within its own structure a new, unfelt, unexperienced society. This is possible because of the power of the imagination. To a large extent, it anticipates what is possible experience by drawing on actual experience. Art is a wager on the capacity of human beings to invent new relationships and to experience hitherto unknown emotions. This is not falling back on the notion of the artist as "seer"

for, in the social situation within which artworks are created, lie embedded the seeds for its own possible futures. What the artist expresses is one of those possible futures.

In my view, Duvignaud explains the artist's capability to express the whole of society by his ability to see society as an "artistic" creation itself, as a work of art and to respond to it, in a dialogue, with another work that actually, through the imagination, presents the viewer with an alternate or future "world". And sometimes, society develops according to that "future" giving us the impression that the artist was a kind of prophet. The artist is able to distance himself from his environment and see it from outside as a kind of formal creation because he is in some way an "outsider" himself (anomy and atypicality). What Duvignaud advocates is an "authentic sociology of the imagination" (1972, 19) rather than a sociology of art, for art is the product of the imagination of an individual whose creativity and dynamism is paralleled by the creativity and dynamism of society itself. The work of art is a new form or structure drawn from the existing structures in society, both actual and virtual.

Art: timeless\of its time

Another structuralist approach is that of Hanna Deinhard. Hers is a historical perspective with a more precise methodological focus in which she tries to find a solution to the problem of evaluation and quality. She considers that

"both those who assert the absolute autonomy of art and those who maintain that art is completely determined historically find themselves in a position which can lead only to more and more pointless hairsplitting" (1970, 2).

She starts her analysis with two contradictory statements: "Every great work of art is timeless" (the autonomy of art with its own quality as an expression of the collective spirit) and "Every work of art is an expression of its time" (the specificity of contextually determined meaning).

According to Deinhard, the task of the sociology of art is at precisely the point designated by the opposition between the two statements, questioning how it can be so that they are both true. She considers that the best way to approach this problem is to look at a work of art and to establish a definition of the terms "meaning" and "expression" (1970).

Art as Expression and Meaning

She states that painting is a vehicle of expression by its visible presence alone, independently of any historical knowledge. Even though its particular meaning cannot be deduced from the picture as a purely visible phenomenon, the painting is still expressive, that is, it still conveys conceptions concerning human existence. This expressive content is what is commonly referred to as "timeless" in great works of art. She replaces the concept of timelessness by the

one of "potential content" which she describes as the expression in a work springing solely from its visual nature, an expression that can only be seen and therefore cannot be produced in the same way by other means. The potential content refers to the expression of the work, not to its meaning.

Whereas the expression of art remains relatively constant, its meaning is subject to change. The meaning exists independently of the visual aspect of the work, as a philosophical or political idea, a religious belief, intellectual knowledge, material or technical fact, or psychological insight.

Art as objective information

The visual elements of paintings are objective data. As a visual datum, the picture does not change. The potential content in its visibility is objectively and concretely there for the viewer. Deinhard posits a correspondence between the general form-relationships as they appear in the work and the extra-artistic structural relationships existing in the period in which and for which the work was created (1970, 1-17).

Art and value

Hanna Deinhard does not question how the artist manages to embody the structure of her historical age nor whether she consciously inscribes it as the potential content of her work. Her focus is on the decoding of the painting. How people judge

works of art depends on whether they are relating to its potential content or to its meaning. In her framework, the potential content does not refer to single historical facts but only and always to the general social structure of the period in which the work originated. Artistic quality is a function of potential content. Its degree, as determined through comparison, is measured by the relative complexity or poverty of philosophical (social) contents, not their specific character. Deinhard considers this criterion to be practically applicable to all epochs of art history.

However, in her view, judgments that are based on meaning are not artistic and therefore not objective, for they are not based on visual data but refer to extra-artistic (moral, political, economic) values (1970, 78). Implicit in this theory, is the assumption that artistic quality is also dependent on the extent to which it accurately reflects the fundamental structures of the society in which it was made. Deinhard goes on to say that precisely because the potential content of a painting is relatively unambiguous, it will and must be evaluated quite differently in different periods. The quality of a work, its timeless value, is demonstrated by the fact that it continues to evoke these changing value judgments or virtually contains them (74).

Although Deinhard sets out to establish an objective methodological approach to the problem of evaluation of art both as art and as an accurate reflector of other social

structures, she fails to avoid other methodological problems that are in fact inherent in her theory.

She does not present us with an explanation for how the artist perceives the fundamental structures of society which are present in the expressive content of the artwork. Nor does she discuss how one analyzes "potential content"; she seems to assume some universal symbolic language that connects the forms within the formal-relationships as well as connecting the formal-relationships with each other and with what they are said to express.

There is also a kind of circularity to Deinhard's argument in that one wonders which comes first, knowledge of the fundamental structures of an age in order to validate the form-relationships in a painting or knowledge of the form-relationships to connect with the fundamental structures of society. Furthermore, even if a universal formal language can be posited, her theory only applies to visual two-dimensional data. It is therefore of very restrictive use in a contemporary art world; it is also doubtful whether one could simply extrapolate from formal-relationships in painting to other art forms.

Art: reflection of social structures (actual or virtual)

For Hanna Deinhard, the universality of art resides in its potential content which is objectively accessible through analysis of form-relationships of art works. The specificity

of art lies in its meaning which is non-artistic and subjective and is related to the function of art in the society that produces it. In her theory, it seems to me that the "spirit" of the age is the basic structure (or attitude towards existential questions,) that underlies the specific meanings of each historical period. Artworks can and do express that fundamental structure, the existence of which is taken for granted.

Duvignaud's sociology of art seems to take as a given that any cultural creative production is both itself part of a "classification" order and also the expression of a conjunction of other classification orders (aesthetic attitudes, functions of art, social structural types), all of which make up the social reality. His distinction between signifying form and content allows an analysis of works of art that does not entail an interpretation of their meaning. Even though his analysis appears to be fundamentally structuralist, he holds on to certain humanist views of the power of human beings to act (certainly through the imagination) within the confines of the classification systems which they experience.

Although both Duvignaud and Deinhard develop a sociology of art that studies the work of art itself, they do so with regard to its formal qualities and consider that art is expressive, through these qualities, of the formal structures of society. They also both assume the existence of art as art, accepting the prevailing "institutional" definitions of what

art is. Although Deinhard refers to the specificity of art, it is only with regard to its temporal aspect and does not pertain to the defining of art as art.

Duvignaud does not get involved in any discussion of interpretation of meaning and therefore is not concerned with problems associated with the relativity of knowledge. Deinhard, on the other hand, does introduce the question of meaning and the epistemological problems deriving from it. In her view, however, meaning is eliminated both as non-artistic and unobjective information.

ARTWORK: EXPRESSIONS OF MEANINGS

The theories of Duvignaud and Deinhard exemplify a structuralist approach to the analysis of art, in which meaning is not central. The other main attitude towards art is founded in the philosophical perspective of phenomenology. In this framework, the artworks are viewed as objects of meaning. Although phenomenology does not necessarily involve hermeneutics, it becomes necessary to introduce a hermeneutics of art, in a sociology of art that interprets artworks in order to understand what they might express about society.

Art as knowledge

Janet Wolff (1975) defines art as an expression of knowledge, and the sociology of art as a special branch of the

sociology of knowledge. The content or knowledge, expressed in works of art, must be considered as relevant to any sociology of art.

First she establishes a general framework by answering the interconnected questions of how we know and what we know. She presents us with some arguments in favour of the relativity of knowledge⁷ and concludes by saying that the idea of an objectively existing world is generally discredited on all sides. At best one can take the Kantian position that, if there is such a world, beyond phenomena and at the origin of them, we can neither know it nor say anything about it.

Since knowledge can be seen to be socially and experientially determined, then we must reconsider the question of the objectivity of the social sciences. The essential relativity of the sociologist's own statements and observations appears particularly unavoidable. She considers that an undifferentiated concept of "knowledge" is a serious hindrance to sociological analysis, and refers to Mannheim's conceptions of "particular" and "total" ideology as a means to distinguish between two types of knowledge-of-the-world, the first leading to an avoidable bias and the second to the unavoidable bias of one's existence in the world.

Art and the Lebenswelt

For Wolff, artistic knowledge is a part of total knowledge of reality. Art must be understood in terms of the

life-world (Lebenswelt) of the individuals involved both in its creation and its appreciation or interpretation. Furthermore, since the claim is often made that art expresses a collective world-view, the concept of a social Lebenswelt is particularly relevant to the sociology of art.

Two main assumptions underlie the concept of a social Lebenswelt. One is that any meanings the world has for the individual are preexisting social meanings, insofar as they are learned meanings, acquired in social interaction and socialisation. The second is that the individual is not alone in this life-world, but shares it with others, and in this sense too it is a social world.

Some of the problems entailed in dealing with the interpretation of society as a Lebenswelt, concern the fundamental validity of inter-personal understanding (in this case the sociologist understanding his subject) and the object of this understanding which is to get beyond the individual social actor, to social groups and cultural products. However, the most important problem is to prove that there is such a thing as "real" society.

Existence of a "real" society

Wolff rejects both the Durkeimian conception of society as a reality sui generis and the other extreme view of it as an agglomeration of subjective constructions. She agrees with the dialectical view that acknowledges the "real" existence of

society while recognising at the same time its origin in individuals and their past and present interactions.

Even if one concedes the possibility of a "real" society, we are left with the important problem of the existence of a general social "content" or "reality" to be analyzed. Wolff fails to find a solution to Manheim's vicious methodological circle in a strictly phenomenological approach, nor does she consider that a structural approach can account for all the social facts expressed in art. She concludes that the collective consciousness cannot be proved to exist.

Hermeneutics

Wolff finds in hermeneutics a philosophical and methodological solution to the problems she has raised. In hermeneutic theory, subject-matter and method are intrinsically connected. With regard to the existence of a world view she concludes that "although it remains true that a social world view cannot be shown to exist and although there is no reason to assume a single world view for a complex group, it is methodologically both permissible and necessary to posit such a world view" (1975, 126). Furthermore the dialectical approach of hermeneutic sociology allows it to grasp structural wholes while referring simultaneously to existential meanings of historical individuals. It is because the frame of reference of meaning is retained that the premise of cultural unity becomes permissible: a unity by definition.

Hermeneutic circle

Wolff finds that Gadamer's hermeneutic circle is an answer to Mannheim's methodological problem of the vicious circularity of argument; this is because the circle is ontological rather than methodological: it is the reality of being of interpreter and interpreted, and their mediation and unity in the history of events. What makes it useful is that it is dynamic, consisting in a constant revision of the interpreters' prejudices which occurs through receptiveness to the otherness of the material.

The circularity of the hermeneutic method lies partly in its controlled oscillations between past and present horizons. It also lies in the simultaneous movement between whole and part. That is understanding the single aspects of a society supposes prior knowledge of the total context. This in turn however can only be grasped through its specific manifestations. The process is of a conversational nature, involving a continual checking and re-checking. . . . What prevents our prejudices and anticipations being totally erroneous and misleading is the vital fact of our belonging to the same universal tradition as those we are studying. The horizon of the interpreter is determined as a possibility. (1975, 126)

The advantage of hermeneutic interpretation of a world

view is that it goes beyond a pure phenomenology of interpersonal or cross-cultural understanding: it allows the mind to see itself in a context.

Art: hermeneutic horizon

Unlike Deinhard and Duvignaud, Wolff does not assume a given definition of art. In defining art as knowledge, she enters into the methodological debate that sociologists of art have generally avoided. She brackets neither the artist nor society and theorizes the existence of "real" society. Although she does posit the existence of a collective consciousness, she discusses the relative merits of structural and phenomenological approaches. She opts for the latter by personal bias⁸ but it appears to me that her choice is conditioned by her need to solve the methodological problems of value she raised; she could hardly take a social structure approach which brackets the individual human being since she attempts to demonstrate the nature of the link between individual and collective world-views. What art expresses may be the hermeneutic horizon between the artist and the collective.

Art as language

Wolff's position with regard to the question of the specificity of art is implied though not stated. It lies not in what art expresses but in how it expresses. It appears to

me that she connects with both Deinhard and Duvignaud in defining the specifically artistic as the formal aspect of meaningful content. What is specific to art is its mode of structuring meaning (its language). Although Wolff is clear on the point that in the social sciences the interpreter must be able to understand the language of the interpreted, she neglects to discuss the decoding of art as a language. If art expresses meaning, it does so in the language of art. If the social scientist is to interpret the artwork itself, then there is necessarily the need for an understanding of the artistic mode of communication.

Sociology and an aesthetic point of departure

Wolff leaves this question hanging. However, she does say that how art expresses the social collective seems almost exclusively intrinsic to the study of art itself. Even when there is no explicit discussion of aesthetic frameworks, within each sociological study there is an implicit theory of artistic expression.

But a theory which remains implicit always runs the risk of containing confusions and contradictions. For this reason it is felt that the sociological study of art must include a formulated conception of the expressive qualities of art and the pertinent respects in which the art may be said to express or reflect extra-artistic ideas. (1975, 53)

This formulated conception is not necessarily to be developed by sociology but the aesthetic point of departure must be clearly defined.

RESIDUAL PROBLEM

Up to this point we have identified several problems regarding art and sociology, raised by the association between them, as well as some of the solutions proposed. However, at the end of this chapter, we are left with a residual problem.

Problem of the value of art

In the sociology of culture, there is a kind of convergence which considers cultural practice as constitutive of the social order as well as derived from it. Art is considered a manifestly cultural practice and, whether it is seen as content derived from structural social form or as the impetus that shapes that formal structure, it is nevertheless considered as indexical of the society in which it takes place.

If we accept that art expresses society in some way, then we see that social scientists who want to establish "valid" knowledge about society through the study of art (culture in the narrow sense) are faced with an important methodological problem: the establishment of the "truth" of their findings in scientific terms. This raises many questions.

Problem of value-freedom

It seems that many social scientists eliminate the study of artwork at this level and, as I said before, research is limited to the observable cultural (art) structures and institutions of the prevailing social order. Art itself is left to other fields. These people concentrate on the means of production of art, on its function, in short on all its material aspects. They are interested in the relation of the artist and art work to political institutions, ideologies and other extra-aesthetic considerations, generally downplaying the art object (as art) from different standpoints. Since they avoid the art object itself and its interpretation, these social scientists can remain "objective" while still studying aspects of art.

Problem of interpretation of art

Other scientists object to the bracketing of art as art and propose that the analysis of content is central to understanding and establishing certain important truths about society. For these social scientists, new problems are raised, once the art object itself has been introduced as a vehicle of meaning about society. Questions about how this meaning is expressed, how one accesses non-measurable, non-observable data, how the artist grasps large social truths and injects these truths into artworks, and how the social scientist interprets these works to infer the "social truths", all turn

around the idea of the need for the answers to those questions to correspond to some kind of reality, to be "true", having reduced subjectivity to a minimum. Most current and past theoretical discussion in the sociology of art is basically an attempt to create frameworks that will deal with such questions, in as coherent a way as possible.

In this chapter, I identified two main approaches with regard to these problems. Structuralism, which relies on a formal analysis of art, seeing in the expression itself, a reflection of the formal aspects of society, avoids problems related to the relativity of knowledge and can remain somewhat objective since it doesn't get into the interpretation of meaning. Hermeneutical phenomenology, on the other hand, considers that art reflects society through its content or meaning which is accessible through interpretation.

Both these approaches to the art work deal with the methodological issue of validity of findings, each in their own way. Both are still left with a major problem, which is the identification of their corpus of study.

Residual problem: the identification of art

Art cannot be autonomous or it would have nothing to say about society. But it must have some kind of specificity otherwise there are no data to analyze. There must therefore be a way for the sociologist to identify art from non-art.

Traditionally, sociologists relied on the field of

aesthetics for their definition of art. Janet Wolff supports this position but insists that the sociologist of art should be conscious of the aesthetic framework adopted rather than simply follow a generally accepted definition, which has usually been the case.

Unfortunately, it would actually be quite difficult to follow these recommendations in a contemporary situation. For although traditional aesthetics strived to determine some set of universal rules that could be used to differentiate between art and non-art, this attempt has been fruitless: since 1850 odd, as soon as rules were set by one generation of artists, the next devoted all its energy to overthrowing or expanding that definition.

It seems now that anything can be defined as art. Clearly sociologists of art cannot draw on aesthetics to identify their data if they are studying contemporary, let alone current, societies, for there are no unified theoretical frameworks today that define art as opposed to non-art.

CHAPTER II

ART and DISCOURSE

At the end of chapter 1, we were left with the problem of identification of the corpus of study of the sociology of art. In the following chapter, I will present two approaches to defining art, leading to a differentiation between art as discourse in sociology and art as other than discourse, as the object of discourse.

THE SPECIFICITY OF ART

In most of the positions described in traditional sociology of art (Albrecht 1970, Foster and Blau 1989), there is no need for social scientists to identify their data: either their research rests on the assumption of some kind of "universal" of art, making the question of the specificity of art redundant, or they rely on the field of aesthetics to provide them with a definition of art.

However, modern Western societies have been witnessing radical changes in the forms and content(s) of art. This has led to a situation in which "questions about what to include or exclude from the category of art arise so frequently that they obtrude in any sociological analysis of art" (Zolberg 1990, 1). This has serious ramifications for contemporary

social scientists who respond to the problem differently. Their answers revolve around notions of autonomy and specificity and distinctions between the two.

Art: a "social category"

According to Raymond Williams, works of art are a social category and cannot be empirically presumed. In defining this social category, he comes to the conclusion that, in spite of the temptation to do otherwise, we must not move to the works of art themselves and leave aside sociological categories. The attempts to distinguish between art and non-art, between aesthetic experience, and any other attention or response and between good, bad or indifferent work are to be understood as social processes in themselves. The distinctions are actual elements of a kind of social organization (1982, 120-129).

Howard S. Becker (1982) also treats art as a social construction; according to him, the definition of what constitutes art is arbitrary and dependent on social consensus rather than on the work's aesthetic qualities. Furthermore he sees art works as products of collective efforts rather than as individual creations. Art is something to be demystified, the artist, simply another worker. These positions imply a contextualization of art both in time and in space, with a focus on function. Art has no autonomy; its specificity derives from social processes rather than from its own aesthetic nature.

Timeless quality of art

Although Raymond Williams denies the autonomy of art as external to history, as well as the specificity of aesthetic experience, he would agree to a relative autonomy, finding an observable general tendency to distinguish and to value kinds of work which are neither meeting an every day need nor evidence of some metaphysical reality. He considers that the purpose of such work is to serve as "recognitions of a deep human interest -in the renewed and renewable means of recognition, self-recognition and identity" (1982 129). In this, he reflects a general ambiguity towards the bracketing of art as art which is not uncommon, an ambiguity that Cesar Grana finds ironic and which he sees as the overprotestation of sociologists against the idea of art as a symbolic power. To him, this indicates their ongoing deferential attitude towards it (1989, 17).

Judith Kramer suggests that while sociologists often acknowledge the universality of art, they ignore its uniqueness. She goes on to point out that "if art is indistinguishable from anything else, then there is nothing distinctive about the role of artists or the institutions of art. There is therefore no sociological basis for attributing any special social function to art" (1965, 3). By denying the specificity of art, sociologists of art will lose their object of study.

Art as a question

In her 1975 book, Wolff considers that a definition of the nature of art itself, although a necessary frame for its study by social scientists, has usually been bracketed because of the normative implications of such a definition. Entering into the methodological debate that had generally been avoided, she defines art as an expression of knowledge, believing that the content or knowledge expressed in works of art, must be considered as relevant to any sociology of art.

Specificity of art: its mode of structuring meaning

In such a framework, each work of art differs as to its meaning or content. What is constant is simply that artworks express these meanings in a particular way. Janet Wolff defines the specifically artistic as the formal aspect of meaningful content: what is specific to art is its mode of structuring meaning, its language. This approach entails a hermeneutic sociology of art which Wolff considers to be both philosophically and methodologically possible, since she considers that it deals with the problems of validity raised by the introduction of "value" into social science. She concludes her first book with the recommendation that sociologists of art be conscious of the aesthetic framework informing their perspective, rather than work with an implicit definition of art as some sort of universal. In this, she shows an awareness of the many frameworks shaping aesthetics

as it attempts to keep up with modern art's constant re-definitions of itself, or in her terms, of the constantly changing artistic modes of structuring meaning.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF THE AESTHETIC

Wolff goes much further in a later work (1983), in which she affirms that the sociology of art needs a theory of the aesthetic of its own and must therefore recognise and guarantee the specificity of art. She attempts to demonstrate this necessity and to suggest possible ways of constructing such an aesthetics.

Aesthetics of reception

Wolff assumes that any aesthetics necessarily has to be an aesthetics of reception for, according to her, value is only assigned by those who experience the work. The question - what is art, is centrally a question about what is taken to be art by society, or by certain of its key members. These key members determine the nature of aesthetics on the basis of an attitude that is to be understood in terms of its specific moment of emergence.

She considers that, since the history of art and criticism originate and are practised in particular social conditions, they bear the mark of those conditions. She also states that these disciplines systematically obscure and deny

their determinants and origins. With these two statements, she introduces the concept of ideology in both its positive and its negative sense. She adds that even if we agree that the category of the aesthetic is itself a social-historical construct and that one's evaluation of art as art is a factor of one's existential moment, this does not solve the problem of aesthetic value (18-27).

Bias of aesthetic value

She cites Pierre Bourdieu in saying that the possibility of aesthetic appreciation is class-bound and partial (35) but remarks that this still does not explain why many works persist over time and cultures. She says that the recognition that art is always political does not mean that art is only political; even though there is sometimes an aesthetic motive to make political art, this does not demonstrate that all "good" art is good because of its political correctness. She concludes that the explanation of aesthetic value in terms of political value is at best only partial. Works must also be assessed on specifically aesthetic grounds (48-68).⁹

Aesthetic grounds for assessment of artworks

Those grounds are always necessarily related to and dependent on a theory of the nature of art or the aesthetic. She identifies two developments in aesthetic theory.

One is derived from Kant's Critique of Judgement which

holds that there is a particular aesthetic attitude with which one may look at anything. Art is what is produced or perceived with this attitude. The distinguishing characteristic in this Kantian judgement of taste is that it is "disinterested". However the question of the nature of the aesthetic attitude, of the "delight" involved in appreciating something apart from any "interest" is left unanswered, according to Wolff. A variation of this view stems from phenomenological theories in which aesthetic experience is characterized in terms of its own "intentionality", based on the "bracketing" of this experience from other outside experience (73-76).

The second approach, which comes from an Institutional theory of art, perceives art in terms of its social or institutional characteristics and defines it by reference to those objects and practices which are given the status of art by the society in which they exist (77-83).

Wolff's analysis leads her to say that the sociology of art must recognize the specificity of art, which she has deduced as necessary because art is more than political. For without this specificity, we would have no explanation for the fact that appreciation for some works extends beyond time and place.

THE TERM SPECIFICITY

In a discussion of the necessity to recognize art in its

particularity, Wolff suggests that "specificity" means different things to different people, and identifies three ways in which the term is used.

Relative autonomy of art

The first is in the sense of a separation of artistic activity from other areas of life and concomitant specialisation of aesthetic modes of perception. This is the "autonomy" of art that is repudiated in many cases, as a sphere of activity that is self-determinant (84-87).¹⁰

As a refinement of this repudiation, Wolff describes both Raymond Williams's view that everything does not have to be dissolved into some indiscriminate general social or cultural practice, and Lukacs's suggestion of specificity as the aesthetic itself, his argument being that the aesthetic is identified by its peculiar character of specificity, which falls between individuality and universality, a mediation between the individual and the general (84-87).

Specificity of artistic codes and practices

The second sense is that of a relatively autonomous operation of artistic codes and practices. In this view, concepts of specificity and autonomy are somewhat interchangeable. Although art is a social product, it is not simply a reflection of its social origins. The relative autonomy of art consists in the specific codes and conventions

of artistic representation which mediate and (re)produce ideology in aesthetic form. Wolff considers that this particular view of the specificity of art does not imply any universalistic or trans-historical features (88-90). This is an important positive aspect, in her view, because she adopts the postmodern rejection of universalism.¹¹

Specific characteristics of art

Wolff describes the third perspective as an attempt to identify the specific characteristics of art, given the relative autonomy of art. Some of these attempts are prevalent in philosophical anthropology (a theory of human nature) and in many psychoanalytic theories of art, which define the specificity of art by determining the human universals that find their expression or satisfaction in art. These are theories of universal needs or constants, which she dismisses as essentialist projects.

According to Wolff, an attempt to define the specificity of art does not necessarily have to be an essentialist project and she proposes discourse theory as a promising theoretical framework from which to develop a theory of the aesthetic.

She does not define "discourse". However, in view of her reliance on theories of knowledge, I would assume that her understanding of the concept "discourse" is related to ideas about the construction of knowledge in which artworks become texts to be read and interpreted, as opposed to things to be

perceived (Lyotard 1985,21). The argument that I develop is based on the notion of discourse as epistemic, as a theory about the "real", be this "real" physical, psychological or social. I believe this is consistent with both Wolff's and Lyotard's understanding of it.

According to Wolff, in discourse theory, consciousness and even the objects of thought are perceived as constructed in discourse. The way in which we perceive the world is a function of discourse: a painting must be understood as a discursive practice. The specificity of art lies in the codes and conventions of artistic representation that mediate and (re)produce ideology in aesthetic form (88-90).

The aesthetic is conceived as relatively autonomous of the social and political. It manifests its own particular qualities, understood as a function of discourse. A "good" work of art is one which is so designated by the rules and practices of aesthetic discourse. Wolff finds this a viable route towards defining art as art. However she sees as its weakness the fact that it cannot take on aesthetic pleasure (84-103).¹²

Two specificities

She concludes her book with the description of two possible specificities of art: one in the relative autonomous structures and signifying practices which constitute it, and through which it represents reality and ideology, and the

other with regard to the specifically aesthetic nature of the apprehension and enjoyment of works of art (108).

DISCUSSION

The essential points in Janet Wolff's theory are as follows. There is the need for a sociological aesthetics, which must be one of reception. The specificity of art lies in its non-political quality, that is to say its formal aspects which are best analyzed in discourse theory. However the framework of discourse theory cannot explain aesthetic pleasure. There may therefore be two specificities of art.

It seems to me that these basic points present some serious difficulties.

Why a sociological aesthetic?

One can extrapolate from Wolff's text that the need for sociology to have an aesthetic of its own rests on the fact that the fields of art history, criticism and philosophy are producers of ideologies that are misleading. This, one concludes, prevents the social scientist from achieving valid findings. My criticism of this no doubt accurate reading of aesthetics is that it is one-sided. It appears to me that sociology is not immune to the same biases. This is reflected in Wolff's notion that any aesthetics must be an aesthetics of reception, which is certainly not a foregone conclusion in

other fields. It is more likely that her choice has to do with sociology's need to use artworks as repositories of content expressing something about society. If one views art as meaning expressed through form, then a sociological aesthetics would necessarily be one of reception.

Wolff might well rephrase one of the concluding remarks to her 1975 book and say that sociologists of art should be aware of the "sociological aesthetics" informing their work.

Are there non-political grounds for a sociological aesthetics?

Wolff says that aesthetic grounds or criteria are always dependent on a theory of the nature of art. It seems to me that she is proposing an aesthetics that is also dependent on such a theory. How can this one be divorced from the political, since she herself says that such theories are a product of ideology.

Herbert Gans suggests that our understanding of the nature of art is a result of the "taste cultures" to which we belong. He considers that there are many of these cultures which differ mainly because of different standards held by their members. These standards are passed on through processes of socialization (Gans 1974). Sociologists are also members of taste cultures.

What one values as art can certainly be connected with the political, since taste cultures are not cut off from other aspects of social life. Even if we consider "political" in a

narrow sense, appreciation for art is tied into class structures and contributes to one's "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1990).

If this is true, then Wolff has not succeeded in demonstrating that sociology, any better than aesthetics can divorce itself from political grounds.

Is there more to art than the political?

According to Wolff, if aesthetic appreciation is rooted in particular social conditions, then we cannot explain the persistence of many works over time and cultures. Since such persistence occurs, there must be more to art than the political. (She has defined the political as the conjuncture of a set of variables that includes social, economic, historical, geographical, and philosophical or spiritual elements.)

One explanation for this persistence comes from Hanna Deinhard who proposes a differentiation between the "meaning" of art which rests on immediate and superficial local situations and the "expression" of art which offers a view of the deep structures of these situations. Both are located social constructions but the second explains the timeless quality of some artworks because of its broader context both in time and space. In this theory, the formal aspects of art have content: they express the underlying social patterns of the time in which the work was made. Since these patterns

change much more slowly than superficial meanings, appreciation for works that succeed in communicating them continues over time.

Another explanation comes from the polysemic quality of artwork. It is not surprising that appreciation for the same work of art may span time and cultures, since it can have many meanings. Consequently, not only will the same work of art be enjoyed for different reasons by different people in the same context, but also the same works may be enjoyed centuries later by new people for new reasons.

It seems that the persistence over time and cultures of certain works does not necessarily have to do with some non-political aspect. Wolff has not proved the separation between political and aesthetic value on which she posits aesthetic specificity.

Are aesthetic codes and practices stable?

Defining the specificity of art by its language or forms of expression is not a very useful definition in that it does not apply generally to all the arts nor does it remain very stable. Each form of art redefines itself through its language: it is constantly changing the codes and practices by which it exists. This suggests that such a definition would only be useful for past cultures. Any attempt at cultural analysis of current or even contemporary society based on the content of art as understood through its language would

require the social scientist to establish the current specific characteristics of art. The problem of interpretation remains, in that the language spoken by the art object must be understood by the interpreter.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONTRADICTIONS OR PREFERENCES

There is an inherent clash in Janet Wolff's theory when she attempts to combine the phenomenological quality of artistic experience associated with meaning (the political), and the structuralist belief in unchanging observable codes (the aesthetic). This is because the concept of the subject as non-existent in much discourse theory goes against a necessary subject\author and subject\interpreter in a hermeneutic approach. She attempts to deal with this contradiction by saying that "the fact that meaning and subjects are produced in discourse should not preclude the observation that discourses themselves are produced somewhere" (1984, 94). This seems to me to be a rather weak argument of the chicken and egg variety.

Furthermore, she faces another contradiction between her view of the specificity of each art experience and her sense of some undefined universal quality of art which she cannot identify.

Although both the concept of "art" and the discourse of criticism are historical and contingent, nevertheless those works of art generally positively assessed by the discipline of criticism do in fact manifest certain universal or transcendent qualities which explain their persistence through time and their appeal beyond the confines of their own social and geographical origin. Other "artifacts" defined as "non-art" by the processes and discourses referred to do not have these qualities. (1984, 17)

Wolff also considers that although discourse theory offers the beginnings of a perspective and a vocabulary through which we might analyze the specificity of art, it cannot account for the aesthetic experience which is part of the appreciation and evaluation of art. Although she tries to avoid adherence to doctrines of essentialism, she invokes the existence of aesthetic pleasure which may actually stem from a somewhat essential condition.

It is to her credit that she states these problems clearly but she fails to solve them. The questions she herself raises do not lead her to re-evaluate her own assumptions or ethical choices which therefore remain as a bias.

Postmodern anxiety

Zygmunt Bauman (1988) provides us with a point of view

that may shed some light on Wolff's predicament. He considers that "postmodern" anxiety arises from the feeling that the kind of services that intellectuals have been historically best prepared to offer are no longer in demand. These services had consisted in the provision of an authoritative solution to the questions of cognitive truth, moral judgement and aesthetic taste, involving a search for universal standards which has become not only gratuitous but unacceptable.

Postmodern sociological strategy

In his opinion, postmodernity's commitment to the permanent and irreducible pluralism of cultures entails a realization of the futility of modern dreams of universalism. Given this situation, one of sociology's strategies is to focus on the development of interpretative skills for the study of diverse "life-worlds". He states that, as interpreters, sociologists are much more concerned with the correctness of their interpretation of a fact than with ascertaining the "truth" of it. Rendering the messages mutually communicable becomes the major problem. Bauman considers that the flaw in these strategies is that they lead to social irrelevance (Bauman 1988).

Janet Wolff seems to be engaged in the very strategy that he describes. I believe that the contradictions and unresolved questions in her theory result from her inability to accept that the findings of a sociological analysis of art, taking

place at the conjunctures of many specificities, are limited to those specificities, including a definition of art and a mode of interpretation. In attempting to find the specificity of art, she is searching for the kind of truth that the concept of particularity denies. Her latent attachment to notions of universality may be a testimony to her fear of irrelevance.

ART AS EVENT

It appears to me that Wolff's interest in discourse theory as a way to get at the specificity of art, is an extension of her ideas on art as a form of knowledge, for discourse theory simply sets up a framework for understanding how knowledge is constructed. She remains in an interpretative position when she claims that any aesthetic necessarily has to be an aesthetics of reception. This is consistent with her need to access the knowledge contained in art. However, she undermines her own attempts to define art for sociological purposes when she says that

Art and Aesthetics do not deal in the kinds of knowledge which can be true or false. . . . It may be that aesthetic knowledge (the experience of art) and its associated aesthetic judgements are not appropriately analyzed by the critical theory of knowledge, for although aesthetic judgements may

claim the status of "truth", aesthetic experiences generally do not. (1983, 36)

Art as discourse: a trap

Wolff appears to be trapped by sociology's need for art to be discourse, her difficulty in defining the specificity of art resulting from the context or place from which she asks her questions.

Jean-François Lyotard approaches the definition of art from quite a different place. He looks at art itself, the object, and sees as flawed from the start any attempt at considering it as just another form of discourse.

The pivotal difference between Lyotard and Wolff is in how they approach the art object. Whereas she states that "it is clear that there is nothing in the nature of the work or the activity that distinguishes art from non-art" (1983, 14), he is adamant that in fact there is a fundamental difference.

Art as other than language

In Discours figures (1985), Lyotard protests that on the contrary, what makes art, is that it is not language. There is a constitutive difference between text (discourse) which is to be read or interpreted and art which is to be seen (perceived) (9). He points out "Que le monde soit à lire signifie qu'un Autre, de l'autre côté, écrit les choses données" (10). If the physicality of what we perceive is to be read, we plunge even

beyond metaphysics, into theology.

Since Wolff considers that art is a form of knowledge, discourse rather than physicality, its content as meaning becomes of primordial importance. The symbol is taken, not as a thing, but as opaque meaning to be unravelled, involving a hermeneutics of art.

Exteriority of art

According to Lyotard (1985), the position of art contradicts the position of discourse. Art shows that what is transcendent in the symbol is its form, that is to say a spatial manifestation or event that the linguistic cannot incorporate without doing away with itself, an exteriority which cannot be interiorised into meaning.

Phenomenology cannot reach the "eventness" of art because, faithful to Western philosophical tradition, it is still a reflection on knowledge and as such must absorb the event, pulling the Other into Same (21).

But art is placed into "other" as plasticity and desire (brought on by separation). The real symbol provokes thought, but first it presents itself as something to be perceived. And surprisingly, it remains to be perceived, it remains of the senses and all discourse exhausts itself before it.

The eye is also in speech because there can be no articulation without the exteriorisation of a "visible" and because, with expression, comes a "visible" within discourse,

some form of gestural exteriority. However, it is not because the object is signified in speech that the arbitrariness of its relation with speech is nullified. This would be taking the name of the object for the object itself.

Negation in art

The exteriority of the object of which one speaks is not a function of meaning but of designation; it comes from a rupture, a split that is necessary for language to be useful as a system. There is a kind of negation in language, a distance which speech opens up before it that resides in the negative form "not", mediated by desire because it is associated with a lack. The negation in art is at the centre of sight, as distance. There is nothing to see without distance, without the separation between seer and seen. What art shows is this negation in sight: the distance or gap between object and subject. As it constitutes them, distance is precisely what gives object and subject a hidden side, a content, and therefore institutes them as signs, with their possibility of appearance and withdrawal, their thickness.

Reflectivity of art

One might confuse this primacy of form in the symbol, described by Lyotard, with a reinvestment in the body as principle site or point of departure of knowledge, maintaining a form of body\mind dichotomy. But in fact he points out that

it is not the body that unsettles discourse. Something outside this dichotomy disturbs both body and language. The event or manifestation of perception is not located in the body but can only be in the vacant space opened up by lack or desire.

This disjointing force is reflective and since reflection is located in a negation that allows the permutation of the terms it keeps apart, only art and not language permits reflection, for while the negation of art allows permutations of terms, in language, this would lead to nonsense rather than to reflection. It is through a reflective rhythm that art offers us the experience of ontological dislocation. In the experience of perception, perceiver and perceived are constituted in a common rhythm. The act of perception points, in the rupture it makes evident, if not to a subject, to a kind of subjectivity: perception is felt or lived, or at the very least it structures the lived (1985, 21-50).

Truth as a possibility

Lyotard is also in opposition to Wolff's notion of "truth" and "objectivity". While she considers that Art and Aesthetics do not deal in the kinds of knowledge which can be true or false and that aesthetic experiences generally do not claim "truth" (1985), he quotes Georges Braque who said that truth has no opposite (1952, 38): experience, since it has no opposite is in fact truth. Lyotard goes on to say that today no-one can speak for truth, but truth as a possibility must be

maintained. He says that truth cannot pass through a discourse of meaning (since any meaning can be contradicted): when language attempts to reinstate truth, it only manages to create clumsy reconstitutions of it. One can feel truth in the rhetorical aspects of discourse, on its surface, and this sensorial presence is called expression (1985, 17).

Expression of art

Lyotard points out that all expression is not truth. Untruth and truth go together, not as opposites in a system but as a thickness that is both recto and verso. We need to learn to distinguish, not truth from falsity, but between two expressions: one that tricks the look, that captures it (brings "other" into "same"), and one that, beyond limits, gives it the invisible to see. This second expression is the work of artists (17) who give us, therefore, the possibility of truth.

For Lyotard, clearly the specificity of art (or its separate nature) does not have to do with the particularity of its code or language. It is in its expression of the experience of a relation between object(perceived) and subject(perceiver), between form and meaning. It is neither the meaning of experience which language presents nor the experience itself which "real life" presents, but the expression of the experience in its invisibility which art presents.

THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Lyotard argues against what Wolff concludes is the first specific characteristic of art, that is to say "the signifying practices which constitute it, and through which it represents reality and ideology" (Wolff 1983, 108). What Wolff describes as the weakness of discourse theory in its inability to explain the nature of aesthetic pleasure, in fact points to the weakness of her first argument: when one denies that the specificity of art lies in the experience of its manifestation, one is hard put to understand the pleasure it evokes.

Presupposition of a future

Lyotard addresses the question of artistic (or aesthetic) pleasure in "The Sublime and the Avant-garde" (1989), in which he says that all intellectual disciplines and institutions presuppose that not everything has been said, that words already heard or pronounced are not the last words. After one pictorial work, another is necessary, permitted or forbidden. That it happens "precedes" the question pertaining to what happens. An event, an occurrence, art, is infinitely simple, but this simplicity can only be approached through a state of privation. He goes on to say that there is not much difference between an avant-garde manifesto and the curriculum at the Ecole des Beaux-arts:¹³ both are options with respect

to what they feel is a good thing to happen in the future but both also forget the possibility of nothing happening (244-245).

The sublime

Lyotard finds in Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime an understanding of the pleasure in art. He explains that the possibility of nothing happening is often associated with a feeling of anxiety. This anxiety can be accompanied by pleasure in welcoming the unknown, and even joy, obtained by the intensification of being that the event brings with it. The "sublime" is this contradictory feeling.

The pleasure of the sublime is very different from the one brought by beauty, which is a calm feeling of satisfaction, of repletion. The sublime results from the relief created by the suspension of the terror of nothing further happening, a relief that recognizes that it is only a postponement of our impending death. Once again "it" is still happening. "Here" and "Now"¹⁴ there is this painting, rather than nothing and that is what is sublime (250-251).

The stake of art

The feeling of the sublime has to do with intensity and ontological dislocation. "The artist attempts combinations allowing the event. The art object no longer bends itself to models but tries to present the fact that there is an

unpresentable. . . . The stake of art is to be witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy" (252). What the work of art must do, therefore, is to make seen that one sees and not what is visible.

DISCUSSION

Several aspects of Lyotard's approach bear further discussion or clarification.

Art as a position

The first is that his theory of aesthetics is as rooted in a socio-cultural context as any other theory. His philosophical base is post-structural which means that although he eschews grandiose themes or narratives and believes in specific conjunctures, these are structural "places" as opposed to the subjective moments of a phenomenological perspective. He attempts to identify the nature of art more in terms of its position in a social structure than in terms of its capacity to reflect that structure. Art is seen as primordial function in the social structure. Knowledge, or discourse, occupies a different place. Or, to use another structural metaphor, discourse and art are different games with different stakes.

However what may be truly inconsistent in this framework is the suggestion of a certain subjectivity that is made in

his analysis of the relationship between spectator and symbol. As he describes this dynamic which is key to his entire theory, one senses the necessity for some sort of subjective consciousness, for it all to work. Lyotard suggests this himself but does not develop the idea further (1979, 23). If one agrees with Jacques Derrida's idea that the concept of "perception is interdependent with the concept of origin and of centre and that whatever strikes at that metaphysics strikes also at the very concept of perception" (Derrida 1972, 272), then Lyotard does appear to be straying from structural and post-structural denial of the subject, in his retention of the concept of perception. This may not be as quite as surprising as it appears when we remember that structuralism threw into question the existence of a fixed centre or subject, not the subject or centre itself. Derrida himself says that "the centre is a function, not a being -a reality but a function. . . . The subject is absolutely indispensable" (1972, 271). It seems to me that when Lyotard refers to "perception" he is also considering it as function, rather than as a metaphysical origin. In fact he may actually be making the sort of move in the structuralist game that modifies the game itself.

Ocularcentricity

Secondly, the theory of art developed by Lyotard is extremely ocularcentric. This could be construed as an

inconsistency in Lyotard's postmodern framework since the visual has been identified as the master sense of the modern era.

This dominance has come under attack from many directions. Cartesian perspectivalism has generally been considered as the visual model of modernity. It can be characterised by a single unmoving disembodied eye looking through a hole into a rationalized space. This model has been criticized for widening the gap between spectator and spectacle and for creating a reifying vision. Cartesian perspectivalism is also seen as supportive of a scientific world view as well as of the bourgeois ethic of the modern world (Jay 1988).

If Lyotard's ocularcentricity fit this model, there would be a serious incoherence in his work as a post-structuralist. However, his view corresponds in many ways to the alternative scopic regime proposed by the Baroque which "revels in the contradictions between surface and depth, disparaging as a result any attempt to reduce the multiplicity of visual spaces into any coherent essence" (Jay 1988, 17).

The distance between perceiver and perceived that is proposed by Lyotard, is not the static one of Cartesianism in which the viewer remains constant while he surveys and, in a sense, possesses what he sees. Rather it is a rhythm created by the appearance and disappearance of one and the other. In fact his argument is that the distance in sight between object

and viewer ensures the exteriority of the object from the viewer. Moreover, Lyotard's visual model is far from disembodied or de-eroticized, since it is built around the notion of plasticity (body) and desire.

If Cartesian ocularcentricity is in league with positivistic science and its notions of truth, then the centrality of sight in Lyotard's framework is a critique of that model. For he explains how sight institutes a distance between viewer and viewed, creating a gap that can never be bridged to make the viewed part of the viewer's truth. In fact, it seems that the truth lies in the experience of the seeing, of the creation of that distance, not in any knowledge that the viewer might gain about or through the object seen.

Absence as desirable

Thirdly, his integration of the concept of the sublime in his theory of art could lead to some confusion.

In traditional modern aesthetics, the feeling of the sublime arises when one yearns for a union between self and other, that is forever absent although always desired. This is connected with notions of modern alienation, and in many aesthetic theories, starting with Hegel, art is discussed as an intermediary point where this union might take place. In the Baroque experience, the sublime feeling comes from the melancholy one feels when we necessarily fail at presenting the unrepresentable. This is akin to traditional aesthetics'

understanding of it as a yearning for an impossible presence.

In Lyotard's theory of art, the feeling of the sublime is linked with success rather than failure. His concept of the sublime has to do with a more radical absence, the ultimate absence of the next moment. It does not come from a yearning for union but from the realization that this absence has been deferred. Art has worked on us if it creates this realization.¹⁵

The meaning(s) of art

That art is other than discourse does not negate the possibility of it expressing something about society.

The object quality of art, the "thingness" of the symbol, is very different from objects found in nature, which in themselves have nothing to say about society. Art is a humanly created thing. This created thing is also different from other created things such as bicycle wheels or urinals which do indicate something about society.¹⁶ What makes art's "thingness" different is that it is artifice. This provides it with the very symbolic quality that makes it possible for both artist and perceiver or interpreter to attach a meaning to the art object. This also guarantees that there is no limit to the meanings that can be attached to it.

However, the fact is that the work of art, the expression, the object, is itself before it is meaning. Picasso attempts to explain this when he says:

If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings, it may be very true, but its not my idea to give this meaning . . . I make a painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are. (qtd. in Chipp 1968, 487)

DISTANCE

The first half of this chapter presents a view of art as discourse, a view tied in with an understanding of art as the container of meaning about society. Defining art as discourse sheds no light on the nature of art itself and we are left completely in the dark as to the specificity of aesthetic experience, the stumbling block in Janet Wolff's theory.

Wolff starts off with the understanding that art says something about society, and that what it says can be interpreted. Her problems begin when she attempts to establish a distance between art and the object of its "discourse", a distance she needs if any kind of objective knowledge is to be gained about society from art. Furthermore some distance between the sociologist and her object of analysis is also necessary for without it, anything that is said about anything is simply part of a large discursive melting pot and nothing is "truer" than anything else.

The aesthetic experience remains for the sociologist, as for any other person, what results from participation in a

particular kind of event, before it is an information bit to be deciphered. The sociologist's reading of that event will be an overlay which may correspond in part or not at all to other readings of the same event. This is not to say that these readings are irrelevant. Their value is a function of the quality of the framework that is brought to bear on the interpretation. Their relevance has to do with the impact they make on what surrounds them, as they are added to the general theoretical picture.

Apparently, Wolff finds it difficult to accept such limitations, as evidenced by her attempts to find a theory that is more generally applicable. Whether she has succeeded or not, the framework that she has developed is extremely valuable in its own right for it leads to the creation of a "thick description" and can "make available to us answers that others guarding other sheep in other valleys have given and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said" (Geertz 1973, 30).

It becomes clear that, unless we can step out of a discursive approach to the understanding of art, we can neither analyze art in relation to its own discourse nor in relation to discourse about it.

I devoted the second half of this chapter to a presentation of Lyotard's view of art as other than discourse, a theory in which art is seen as more than meaning, even though meanings can be constructed about it, and from it.

Since Lyotard puts a distance between art and discourse, his contribution allows us to explore the relationship of art to discourse in general and to discursive frameworks in particular. It also allows us to define the specificity of art in ways that are not directly limited to an aesthetics of reception.

I believe that a reading of art as discourse is reductive rather than productive because it contributes to a theoretical world that is simply a discursive analysis of discourse. This can very easily become irrelevant. Lyotard's reading of art (for reading it is) is productive: it opens up a space in which we can understand art in a larger structure that also includes discourse.

CHAPTER III

AESTHETICS and ART

We ended chapter II with the suggestion that the distance between art and discourse be explored, in other words with the presentation of a possible dichotomy. This idea came from the examination of discourse on art in the sociology of art. If we want to explore the relation between art and discourse, it seems inevitable that we confront art and aesthetics.¹⁷ In the following chapter, I will present an overview of the positions taken in aesthetics toward the autonomy of art and its relation with social life. I will also continue to explore the art\discourse dichotomy in my ongoing attempt to define the nature of art.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CHAPTER III

In my efforts to create an overall picture of the general area of aesthetics and art, I have presented some theories or conceptual frameworks of the nature of art, developed in fields related to sociology and cultural studies. Among these are several elements that I retain to frame the following chapter, in which I discuss some of the current ideas in art theory and contemporary aesthetics.

Elements from chapter I

Artworks both reflect and affect society. This implies the recognition that art has some kind of social function. In mirroring society, art allows us to learn about ourselves, acting indirectly on society, since it is to be supposed that our learning then informs our actions. Through mirroring, art can reinforce the status quo but it can also critique society and propose solutions.

The assumptions underlying this general position are those of modernity, positing the separation between social spheres, between subject and object, as well as a teleological notion of progress.

Elements from chapter II

These assumptions are debatable. Spheres of social activity are not autonomous. The subject and object dichotomy is not necessarily valid. In fact dichotomies in general are in serious question.

Furthermore many things allow us to learn about ourselves. If art presents us with a message, among many others, about society, either a critique or a reinforcement, then it is simply yet another form of discourse. In itself this is not enough to define its particular nature. In this framework, it is therefore only through the particularities of its discursive form, that art can be understood as a distinct category.

But contrary to the assumptions of modernity, we find that theories, discourse(s) are rooted in the specific socio-cultural conditions of their emergence. The distance between discourse and its "object" is thus drastically reduced, throwing into question the validity of any information about society.

However, providing discursive information, "mirroring", is just one possible function of art and it is a limiting one, in the framework of postmodernity. Another of its roles might be to act outside discourse, as an impulse to discourse. In this analysis, a different relation between art and society is explored in which both art and discourse have their own function. A form of distance between art and discourse is re-instated which allows the relation of discourse and art to be studied. Their relation is one of "otherness" one to the other, both belonging to our current western social structure.

The Hegelian heritage

Underlying all these theories is the "irritating" ontological question of existence embodied in the exteriority\interiority dichotomy: whether there is an "object" to be known, whether there is a "subject" to know. People have alternatively opted for one or the other side of this binary opposition or at least have given one side primacy over the other. Some theories attempt a union between the two, a union in which both sides are fused together to form a new

oneness. These attempts often hide a sublation of one side into the other or face logical difficulties without solution within the theories themselves (Lyotard 1993a, Bürger 1991).

The structuralist perspective, particularly in linguistics, argues against a dualist philosophy, which in effect is a critique of Western philosophy itself. It attempts to invalidate the premise of being as presence by using the concept of "sign". However, as Jacques Derrida points out, structural linguistics itself unknowingly perpetuated the Hegelian inheritance of metaphysical duality. Linguistics attempts to attack, by the concept of sign, the metaphysics of presence as being, in the dichotomy between self and knowledge. But a sign is the result of the opposition between signifier and signified, and cannot exist without this duality. This invalidates the critique directed against metaphysical complicity of self and knowledge, since the argument is based on the concept of sign which only makes sense within the duality of its components (1972, 251).

Another current approach, a prevalent strategy in postmodernism, has been to reject both sides of the dichotomy and concentrate on how each side is mediated. In such an approach, both sides of the dichotomy are eliminated, since everything is intermediary. The paradox does not disappear, however: it simply becomes a matter of definition.¹⁸ In a sense, the mediation itself becomes the "real", and we end up with yet another conundrum. For, as Lyotard explains, to deny

a binary system is to deny the existence of an intermediary. In a philosophy of mediation through Logos, there is no given prior to mediation, and therefore no object before meaning. "Il n'y a pas de sens avant le langage" (1985, 43).

Much current discussion revolves, either directly or indirectly, around this "modern" paradox. The question is whether or not postmodern solutions actually resolve it, or find, in ignoring it, a satisfying *modus operandi*.

MODERNISM UNDERSTOOD THROUGH POSTMODERNISM

Marshall McLuhan proposes that the new environment always uses the old environment as its material (1978, 86). This certainly seems true if we think of modernism as the old environment and postmodernism as the new, implying a periodising concept of the terms. He also states that the preceding environment [modernism, for the sake of discussion] acts as a control of the new one [postmodernism]. What is seen and noticed in postmodernism is modernism and therefore, what we know of modernism shapes or defines postmodernism. Another binary system. What can intervene within the environment is an anti-environment [possibly the critical avant-garde] which serves to transform the current environment [postmodernism] from ground into figure. One of the peculiarities of art is to serve as an anti-environment, a probe that makes the current environment visible (88). In endowing art with this capacity

to take an external position to the environment, McLuhan posits a possible distance as well as a subject. This is a modernist perspective, in that it perpetuates the notion of duality.

Nevertheless this appears to me to be the way that much postmodern\modern debate is framed, with its inherent critique of both positions while continuing to use the specificity of art as focus point.

Modern grand narrative

It is said that modernity was the dream of progress towards a better state for all mankind. This idea of a possible, probable or necessary progress was rooted in the belief that developments made in the various spheres of social existence would benefit humanity as a whole (Lyotard 1979, Habermas 1978). These spheres could contribute all the better if they specialized and investigated their own domain; this was with the understanding that the resulting specific knowledge(s) would be shared, creating the possibility for informed social participation.

Technology as villain

One area in particular took precedence over the others, that of science\technology (Habermas 1983). This whole scenario is based on certain assumptions which postmodernism ascribes to modernity and for which it blames the state of the

world today. As Kenneth Frampton said,

modernization can no longer be simplistically identified as liberative in se in part because of the domination of mass culture by the media industry and in part because the trajectory of modernization has brought us to the threshold of nuclear war and the annihilation of the entire species. (1983, 19)

Furthermore, current techno-scientific development cannot be understood in human terms: it seems to proceed of its own accord in a process of ever increasing complexity. Humanity appears to be either fighting for survival in actual terms or survival in the complex world of advanced technology. Progress seems to have been a myth. The autonomy of the various spheres of social life, far from creating the possibility of educated exchanges and cross-fertilization, have developed more and more hermetic languages and contribute to another kind of repression, that of the specialized over the non-specialized. Technology has given economic mastery over others and "knowledge" has given authority.

Binary system of thought

These notions all seem to be related to a binary system of thought, since from certain assumptions that are made to uphold these ideas, come a whole series of dichotomies. "Human emancipation" is a totalizing concept that suggests

universality. Hidden in universality is particularity. Knowledge implies a knower and a known. It also makes a distinction between known and unknown and, from there, to real and unreal, to subject and object, to content and form. From the notion of "progress", we can infer teleological perspective, and better or worse states, and someone to judge which is which for someone else who doesn't know.

ART AS ANTI-ENVIRONMENT

It is often very confusing to try and differentiate between modernism and postmodernism when reading cultural theories of art. This is because there is a difference between modernity and modernism which is sometimes unclear in much postmodern critique.

If one periodizes modernity as having followed preceding traditional societies, coinciding with capitalism and Cartesianism, then modernist art can often be interpreted, in fact, as a critique of modernity. One has only to think of cubism and its rejection of modernity's understanding of "reality". Its presentation of a multiplicity of points of view, of the collaged "real", so to speak, is akin to postmodern critiques of the modern. In this sense, modernism can be seen in part as "anti-environment" within the "environment" of modernity.

If modernity is understood as characterized by the

elaboration of autonomous spheres of activity, and of the fracturing between self and others, with the never ending search for an identity that disappeared with traditional society, then modernism coincides with the object of postmodern critique.

The ambiguity of modernist art within current debates makes it a very interesting point of interface and explains why it is often at the centre of postmodern social critique.

The autonomy of art

If modernity is characterized by the dissociation and specialization of the three crucial spheres of activity, the cognitive, the ethical\political and the aesthetic, then it is generally considered that autonomy of these spheres has not led to an expected cross-fertilization and thus to connection between them. Rather, it has brought about the problem of hermeticism and overspecialization with the authoritative position this entails.

These aspects of "autonomy" are debated now through rejections of esoteric and elitist practices as well as re-evaluations of the assumptions of "mastery", in all fields.

The same debates are also current in the field of aesthetics in which the autonomy of art is severely questioned and even denied on the one hand, while it is redefined on the other, and upheld as a necessary condition for art to maintain a critique of the current social "real".

Form or content

The autonomy of art has even been considered a mixed blessing from which it has sought to escape.

According to Peter Bürger, autonomous art has been accompanied by the consciousness of its own inadequacy since its inception. It has been unable to rebuild the oneness of a world which modernity "collapsed into the torn halves of subject and object" (1991, 12). These can only re-emerge in art, not as bald opposition but as the incessant mutual inversions of the categories of form and content" (13). Modernist art can only take the route of choosing one side or the other, construing itself as political (and joining life) or as form without meaning.

The modernist choice, however, does not appear as clear cut as this when we consider Harold Rosenberg's understanding of the basic substance of art as

the protracted discourse in words and materials echoed back and forth from artist to artist, from work to work, art movement to art movement, on all aspects of contemporary civilization and of the place of creation and of the individual in it.... In a word art has become the study and practice of culture in its active day-to-day life. Begin by explaining a single contemporary painting (and the more apparently empty of content it is the better), and if you continue describing it you will find

yourself touching on more subjects to investigate - philosophical, social, political, historical, scientific, psychological - than are needed for an academic degree. (1972, 48)

This is a theory in which form and content are interrelated, in which form can even become content. Rosenberg also seems to posit a necessary relation between art and the aesthetic, even a collapsing of the two. This "rapprochement" to the point of identification is evident in much current theoretical writing as well, so much so that both artists and theoreticians have thrown into question the border between art practice and art theory. This apparent lack of clear distinction between theory and art has prompted some rethinking of the relation between art and aesthetics.

Bridging the gap

Not only the autonomy of art but that of all three spheres is seen as problematic for people who associate the ills of modernity with this splintering of culture and its separation from life. Habermas considers that the remedy for this alienation can only come from changing the status of aesthetic experience to when it is no longer primarily expressed in judgements of taste, but used to explore a living situation; that is to say, when it is put in relation with problems of existence. What Habermas requires from the arts and the experiences they provide is, in short, to bridge the

gap between cognitive, ethical, and political discourses, thus opening the way to a unity of experience (qtd. in Lyotard 1993c, 39).

All-encompassing aesthetic

Terry Eagleton objects that, although the aesthetic somehow may bring these alienated regions back into touch with one another, in doing so, it overruns them. Truth becomes an elegant solution satisfying the mind and morality and politics are converted to a matter of style, pleasure and intuition. The autonomy of art, or rather, of the aesthetic, becomes all-encompassing (Eagleton 1990). This state of affairs is quite evident in Jack Burnham's systems approach to art. According to him, we are now in transition from an object-oriented paradigm to a systems-oriented one. Change emanates not from things themselves but from the way things are done. He points out that according to John Kenneth Galbraith (the economist), while aesthetic decision making has become an integral part of any future technocracy, as yet few governments fully appreciate that the alternative is biological self-destruction. For this reason, Burnham suggests that only the didactic function of art continues to have meaning and that "in an advanced technological culture the most important artist best succeeds by liquidating his position as artist vis-a-vis society" (Burnham 1978, 163). This appears to be somewhat of a pragmatic acceptance of the complicity between

art and capital, although Burnham does go on to say that the "liquidated" artist functions as a quasi-political provocateur, though not in a moralizing or idealist way (161).

Art and life

This aesthetization of the political leads Bürger to wonder whether "a sublation of the autonomy status can be desirable at all, whether the distance between art and the praxis of life is not a requisite for that free space within which alternatives to what exists become conceivable" (Bürger 1993, 242). Jameson, on the other hand, sees no alternative but to go on affirming the end of "an autonomous sphere of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life -from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself- can be said to become cultural in some original and as yet untheorized sense" (1993, 87).

It appears that art and its connection with life, whether as separate or as one, is not as clear cut an issue as we might suppose. We may even be led to question the relation between art and aesthetics, traditional or current.

CRITICAL INVERSIONS

In interaction, both modernist and postmodernist art are in turn, in McLuhan's terms, new environment and anti-

environment. Lyotard puts it another way when he says that "the postmodern is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received if only yesterday, must be suspected. . . . A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. . . . Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant" (1993a, 45). "Postmodern" must be grasped in terms of the future, that is to say the "futur antérieur" verb tense. It becomes an attitude rather than a period in history.

These continuous critical inversions are active in many of the main features of "postmodernism".

Rejection of the universal

Peter Bürger sees the category "autonomy" as arising out of a process of individualization both with regard to production and reception of art and reaching its full state in modernism (1984). This, no doubt, is an explanation of how the modernist aesthetic is often linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, a connection that is nebulous in Fredric Jameson's mind when he refers to some vague organic link between the two (1983). This aesthetic modernist rejection of the universal causes some unsettling in much postmodern analysis and its often monolithic condemnation of modernism, for postmodernism also condemns universality: any attempt at finding a common "universal", linking all humankind is somehow

dismissed as a hopeless modernist project, whether or not it is a reactionary move.¹⁹

Postmodernism argues against universality both with regard to authority and to totalizing visions. But we also find that it resists the "unique individual" in terms of authenticity with its inherent reliance on authority. Many theorists are concerned by what they perceive as the negative consequences of all these manifestations of resistance.

Birth of others, loss of difference

Postmodernism is treated as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions; what results is "pluralism". However, pluralism, far from being a recognition of others, is often considered to be more of a reduction to difference, to absolute indifference and interchangeability.

In the visual arts, we have witnessed, with the attack against mastery or authority, the gradual dissolution of once fundamental distinctions (original\copy, authentic\fake...). Each new term now seems to contain its opposite and this indeterminacy brings with it an impossibility of choice or rather, the absolute equivalence and hence interchangeability of choices. In answer to this, Craig Owens points to feminist works with their insistence on difference as a convincing argument against "pluralism" but also against totalization (Owens, 1983, 58-77).

Hal Foster puts a similar idea very forcefully when he says:

What is this subject that is . . . so bemoaned? Bourgeois perhaps, but patriarchal and phallocentric certainly. For some, for many, this may indeed be a great loss, a loss which leads to narcissistic laments and hysterical disavowals of the end of art, of culture, of the West. But for others, precisely for Others, it is no great loss at all. (1985, 136)

He is reacting to notions like Jameson's, that the loss of mastery experienced by our culture anticipated both the melancholia and the eclecticism that pervade current cultural production (Jameson 1983). Foster's remark is not an adoption of pluralism, nor does he necessarily advocate indeterminacy or the death of the subject. He simply supports feminist (or other) resistance to the one Subject.

Complicity of culture with capital

Much early discussion on postmodernism was concerned with its definition. While it seemed that there was quick acceptance of the existence of a major change in the other spheres of social life, it was more difficult to identify the differences between modernism and postmodernism. This is partly because, as Lyotard explains, postmodernism is a necessary part of modernism (1983, 45). When one thinks of the

postmodern as a break from the modern, it becomes a periodizing concept whose function it is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order (Crimp 1983). It is therefore seen as the cultural version of the post-industrial or post-capitalistic world of globalization. Under this guise it is often criticized for being in complicity with Capital and for contributing to our fractured state. This explains why much of what is written about postmodernism somehow blames it partially for our current condition, for our loss of meaning and direction. We have witnessed the effacement of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture. What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally.

One view is that distance and critical distance in particular, has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. Our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spacial coordinates and practically incapable of distancing, of positioning the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital. This whole extraordinarily demoralizing original new global space is the moment of truth of postmodernism (Jameson 1991, 64-87).

DISAPPEARING BOUNDARIES

In Les structures élémentaires de la parenté (1949), Claude Levi-Strauss presented us with a "scandal" which destroyed the credibility of the distinction between nature and culture, a duality that was congenital to metaphysics. Levi-Strauss pointed out that the incest-taboo shows up in his studies as a limiting case in this dichotomy, because it is both universal (nature) and regulated (culture).

Derrida suggests that, having discovered this falsifying element, Lévi-Strauss still felt the necessity of using the nature\ culture opposition while at the same time realizing the impossibility of making it acceptable; he considered that the distinction between the state of nature and the state of culture, while lacking any acceptable historical signification, presented a value which fully justified its use by modern sociology: its value as a methodological instrument (Derrida, 1972).

Since one cannot discuss the subject while denying the object, consider the particular without the universal, imagine the mind without the body, these oppositions can be used as long as they are useful, provided they are not given the status of "truth". In spite of this, much postmodern critique focused on the dissolution of the dichotomies, exposing their limits to such an extent as to lose sight of their methodological usefulness.

Loss of the "real"

Existence in a pluralistic postmodernity composed of so many language games, specificities and congruences without subject or object, all disappearing into mediation, seems a dismal life. We are left in neither a public nor a private world but in what Jean Baudrillard describes as "gigantic spaces of circulation, ventilation and ephemeral connections" (1983, 130). No spectacle, no secret: this opposition is effaced leading to the obscenity of transparency. And with it comes the crisis of the "real". An endless unwrapping of images upsets the balance between reality and the imaginary. Images can only be succeeded by other images, in the end, leaving us totally indifferent. We become schizophrenic and experience the world as composed of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which we cannot link into a coherent sentence (Baudrillard 1983).

Death of the subject

Douglas Crimp considers that the fiction of the creating subject has given way to the frank confiscation of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence have been severely undermined (1983, 53). As a consequence, not only has the creating subject become a fiction but the subject has altogether been discredited. Neither the object nor the subject can be considered as viable. In the face of this, Baudrillard himself saw some

advantage to the alienation of the private universe of the subject from the rest of the world. Its benefit was the existence of Other which could still fool us for better or worse (1983, 130).

Rather than an alienated subject, we are fractured into non-subjecthood: the end of individualism as such. According to Jameson, "what we have to retain from all this is an aesthetic dilemma: it is no longer clear what artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing", since nobody has a unique private world or style to express any longer, all that is left is meaningless imitation of dead styles (1983, 115).

Borders

Opposing this, Peter Bürger points out that borders such as those between art and non-art, or fiction and reality, do not disappear as easily as the theorists of the postmodern suppose. They exist, instead, constantly under the sign of their own disappearance. However, it is not the boundary between terms that is active, but us. The dialectic of the boundary indicates therefore a dialectic of the subject . . . the precarious form of potential experience . . . the ever fragile mediation between the general and the particular (Bürger 1991, 5).

For Lyotard, the nature of art is precisely its capacity to show this potential experience. For in art, perceiver and

perceived never become one in uniting the experience of inside and outside. Instead each is constantly being shifted by negation or desire, this shifting taking form in what Rosalind Krauss calls a beat or a pulse (1988, 51), a discontinuous continuity between subjective identification and objective manifestation. This beat or pulse is the invisibility that is expressed in art.

ART AND SOCIETY

Underlying many of the preceding views are assumptions essentially no different from the prevalent conception of art as the reflection of society, discussed in earlier chapters. It is clear that this position still holds for many postmodern theorists and theorists of postmodernism. Art is presented either as failed critique of the current state of society because of its apparent incapacity to resist its appropriation by consumer capitalism or as a reinforcement of those current social conditions.

This is Jameson's view when he asks what the critical value of the newer art is. He wonders whether anything within postmodernism functions against its society in ways which are variously described as critical, contestatory or subversive. He states that "there is a way in which postmodernism reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism. Is there a way in which it resists that logic" (Jameson 1983, 125)?²⁰

Avant-garde as a position

There are many problems involved in thinking of art in critical relation to society in post-industrial and postmodern times. This is tantamount to re-investing in the idea of an avant-garde. But unless "avant-garde" can be divested of its connection with the historical directionality of art, it can no longer be sustained as a liberative position or even one of resistance: the Avant-garde as a historical moment is tied in with the autonomy of art which is linked with the "modernist myths" of progress considered now to be severely compromised. But since postmodern thinking still considers resistance to be one of art's functions in society, it must allow it the distance of somewhat of an autonomous position. There has recently been a certain rethinking of the wholesale rejection of "avant-garde" and a re-evaluation of it as a necessary position or attitude for social critique.

Distance between art and the "real"

Lyotard is suspicious of the diverse invitations to suspend artistic experimentation in order to reconnect art with life. He sees in them an identical call to order: artists and writers must be reunited with the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, they must be assigned the task of healing it. He finds evidence of this in all the theoretical approaches that urge the liquidation of the heritage of the avant-garde. Lyotard points out that if

artists and novelists do not want to become supporters of what exists, they must resist lending themselves to such therapeutic uses and question the rules of their art as they have learned and received them from their predecessors. Soon those rules must appear to them as a means to deceive, to seduce, and to reassure, which makes it impossible for them to be "true" (Lyotard 1993b).

For modernity, in whatever age, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities. Lyotard considers that the various avant-gardes have humbled and disqualified reality by examining the many techniques or devices used to make us believe in it (Lyotard 1993a, 40-46).

The status of art

Peter Bürger takes an opposing view or at least he introduces the idea of current criticism of the historical avant-garde as avant-gardist. "The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art [a style] but art as an institution that is unassociated with the praxis of the life of men" (1993, 239). When avant-gardists demand that art should become practical once again, they are concerned not with socially significant contents in works of art, but with the way in which art as an institution

functions in society. He goes on to say that "the avant-gardist attempt to reintegrate art into life is itself a profoundly contradictory endeavour. For the (relative) freedom of art vis-à-vis the praxis of life is at the same time the condition that must be fulfilled if there is to be a critical cognition of reality. An art no longer distinct from the praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it will lose the capacity to criticize it, along with its distance" (240).

Terry Eagleton is equally ambivalent. He states that postmodernism represents the "latest iconoclastic upsurge of the avant-garde, with its demotic confounding of hierarchies, its self-reflexive subversions of ideological closure, its populist debunking of intellectualism and elitism" (1990, 372). But it is a failed avant-garde in that its wholesale abandonment of critique and commitment, its cynical erasure of truth, meaning and subjectivity, and its "blank, reified technologism have handed over truth, morality and beauty to the enemy" (373).

The status of the aesthetic

Hal Foster tells us that Adorno marks the last moment in the adventures of the aesthetic. He describes this moment as the belief in the aesthetic as subversive, as a critical interstice in an otherwise instrumental world. This notion is the one to which we cling, even though the criticality of this aesthetic space is now largely illusory (1983). It may be

illusory, in Eagleton's terms, because the aesthetic has in fact invaded all spheres of life.

Fredric Jameson remains convinced of the aesthetic's critical potential and suggests that what we now need is an aesthetic of cognitive mapping. He proposes that "the new political art will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, to its fundamental object -the world space of multinational capital; at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects" (1991, 91).

It becomes apparent that many theories such as the preceding ones, assume a close connection if not identification between art and aesthetics, indicating the erosion of another boundary. This makes it difficult to conceptualize any distance between art and discourse on art. Rather than describing art and elaborating criteria for value in art, as traditional aesthetics did, current art theoreticians appear to be prescribing the course of art, linking its value with political ethics, linking it, in fact, with their own theoretical positions.

Avant-garde: rejection of the aesthetic

Eagleton takes an opposing view. Although he maintains that we must end up with an art that is connected to social praxis, he finds that only an art which rejects the aesthetic

can seek to "to override, in its own way, that moment at the birth of modernity when the cognitive, ethico-political and libidinal-aesthetic became uncoupled from one another". For him, this is the revolutionary avant-garde: the creation of an art that is not art (1990, 370).

ART AS NON-ART

Traditionally, art has been seen as the place in which subject and object meet, in which the individual and the collective unite and define themselves. Consequently it is no stranger to the problems raised by binary oppositions and to the ramifications of the various solutions proposed. Many postmodern attempts to move beyond the subject\object dichotomy have focused on art. This is not surprising if we agree with Lyotard that the very nature of art suggests a continuous movement of disappearance and reappearance between perceiver and perceived.

Art: "différance"

The beat within the dichotomy in art (Lyotard 1985) and the displacement inherent in binary relations in which signifieds and signifiers are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations (Derrida 1978), allow the possibility of a change of site, of a so far unseen beyond. For according to Lyotard, "the artist and the writer are

working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event" (1985:46) in unmapped territory. This is a way in which the traditional dichotomy in art as the place where subject and object meet can be redefined without denying either the subject or the object. What is redefined is the way in which they meet: a non-meeting, a remembrance, a prophecy.

Art's resistance to the aesthetic

Howard Caygill talks about art's obligatory resistance to aesthetic. He proposes that instead of being bound by aesthetic, we should become aware of its metaphysical boundaries, instead of being directed by it, we should disturb its directions by intimations of a different unnamed site. He suggests that we think art without aesthetic, without investment in its dichotomies, into a beyond-aesthetic which cannot be spoken, although it can be not-spoken through negation or through excess. This gradually opens a new space not only for art and the thinking of art, but also for other practices such as "politics" (1991, 18-21).

But, as we have seen, to move beyond the binary trap does not, and it seems cannot, make dichotomic oppositions disappear. "Beyond-aesthetic" and "aesthetic" simply become terms in another opposition. To think of art without aesthetic should not mean an avoidance of aesthetic but an examination

of the relation between art and aesthetic. This is more likely to yield an understanding of art as different from aesthetic without having to resort to the description of "places" or concepts that are of difficult, not to say impossible, access.

DEFINING ART

We initially constructed a very broad frame in which we placed art as a human cultural activity that is socially relevant. From there, we attempted to differentiate art from other human cultural activities or objects with social importance.

What is an artistic activity or object?

This activity involves form, content, process, maker(s), receiver(s), place and time. These elements are present in varying degrees and in various relations to each other in each artistic event or "object". The varying relations between these elements make it possible to distinguish one artistic activity from another. However there is nothing distinctive about any of these elements in themselves that would allow to discriminate between a contemporary artistic activity and any other socio-cultural activity.

It is safe to say that, today, there are no materials used, no shapes and sounds..., no media, no content, no techniques, no intrinsic personal qualities for either artists

or "audience", no context to be found exclusively in art.

Art has no observable inherent characteristics. We must agree with Janet Wolff when she states that "it is clear that there is nothing in the nature of the work or the activity that distinguishes art from non-art" (1983, 14). Art cannot be defined by analyzing only the object or the activity. And today, very few people would attempt to do so.

One could look to its social importance, which is to say the meaning it has for society, for an answer. This proves to be just as inconclusive.

What does art contribute to society?

How is art socially relevant? This question involves a discussion of the aesthetic experience and situates the particularity of art in relation to the value it has for people, individually or as a group.

One view is that art adds something that is lacking in society. It consoles us, cajoles us, inspires us, humbles us or gives us hope. What is lacking might be defined differently in different contexts, but art's role is always to satisfy human or social needs. The need to connect the various social spheres (Habermas), the need to heal social or personal wounds (Beuys), the need to know what is happening (McLuhan), the need to find new social possibilities (Duvignaud), the need to remember that tomorrow may not come (Lyotard), the need to connect with others (Berger), the need to find our buried

selves (Freud) and any number of other needs are put forth as the reason that we have art. These needs can only be fulfilled if we consider that art reflects or expresses society and the individuals within it. If the specificity of art derives from its reflection of society, there must be some particular quality of that reflection or expression.

Another approach views artworks as content of a cognitive nature that is presented to the perceiver through a particular kind of language. But this in itself cannot define art as art since almost everything can be said to do this.

Is there a specific content in artworks?

The definitive element could lie in the kind of content artworks present. Then the content must be defined and only if the content is art itself can it be seen as distinctive. If this is the case, there is very little such content would have to offer society, unless something more than simple content is at stake.

Is there a specific language in artworks?

The particular quality of art could be derived from the form in which content is expressed. Art might be a specific kind of language. The language of art is either directly or indirectly formal and symbolic. It defies fixed interpretation which throws into question the usefulness of art as a communicator of cognitive knowledge. Furthermore, there are

also formal and symbolic qualities in many, not to say all, other aspects of social life. That artworks have a formal symbolic aspect does not define them as art. Not only that, but much current work that is defined as art is overtly textual and verbal, with fairly explicit content and minimal symbolic quality. What can we make of this? Clearly the language of art is no more specific than its content.

Is art a particular kind of experience?

Art is often considered to work through analogy. This allows the perceiver access to some form of experiential knowledge that is not cognitive but that can become so with interpretation. But again we have only to think of sports to object that many other human and social activities can be perceived as analogous expressions of other "realities".

What about non-art?

It may appear that we have come full circle. Since "art" has become somewhat synonymous with "aesthetic", according to some theorists, it now seems necessary to define the nature of non-art, in order to establish an art that resists sublation into "aesthetic". The theories that I have outlined so far have not established the nature of art, but nor have they defined non-art. It seems clear to me that the difficulties encountered in defining art would be equally impossible to overcome in an attempt to define non-art.

Must we now conclude by saying that anything can be art and that art can be anything and leave it at that? Or end the discussion with the usual comment that what we call art is a matter of opinion, in other words, that it is relative?

Reframing the question

I believe that our movement has not been strictly circular: our point of origin has changed. For, although we are not any closer to defining the nature of art, we are now able to rethink the problem. This is extremely valuable since, as Gilles Deleuze points out, the solution to a problem always depends on the manner in which it is framed and on the symbolic field that is available to those asking the question (1978, 311).

To define art as rhythmic disappearance or as non-art or as beyond aesthetics appears extremely suggestive to me of a different way of conceptualizing the problem. Rather than try and understand art as reflecting society or informing our social behaviour, it may be more useful to think of it in terms of movement and place. Rather than try and pin art down, so to speak, we might incorporate in our analysis its undeniable elusive quality.

In the following chapter, we will attempt to understand why art seems to be undefinable and how this very aspect may in fact relate to its function in our lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF ART

At the end of the first three chapters of this work, we are left at what seems to be an impasse. For in spite of much effort in several disciplines to define the nature of art, we are still far from doing so. In the following chapter, I will offer an explanation as to why this might be so and describe another route we could take.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRE-SUPPOSITIONS

Some of the problems in the many attempts to define the nature of art stem from the philosophical pre-suppositions underlying the use of the term "nature".

The nature of nature

With Descartes's "Cogito, ergo sum", alienation was created as the gap between self and consciousness. Even as it established its basic dichotomies,

real	imaginary
self	consciousness
subject	object
presence	absence
beginning	end
nature	culture
...	...

metaphysics directed its efforts towards eliminating the gap

between them: 1) by opting for one or the other, by including one in the other; 2) by seeing "unity" as a lost beginning and/or a desired end; 3) by justifying one (presence, the present) by the other (absence, the past, history); and 4) by developing frameworks that suggested possibilities for unity. (Hegel's notion of art as the bridge between the two chains.)

These strategies all imply the idea of a centre, and the history of philosophy is none other than that of a series of substitutions of one centre for another: essence, existence, substance, subject, consciousness, god, man..., all of them tied into presence as being.

Moreover, when we talk about the "nature" of art we are not referring to the nature/culture dichotomy directly.²¹ We could substitute the term "essence" of art for "nature" of art, in the sense of its truth, its fixed unchanging centre, that which distinguishes it from anything else. The "truth" of art is inserted in the self and consciousness dichotomy and is seen as some form of bridge between the two alienating opposites of subject and object.

Structuralist critique

Derrida (1972) shows how structuralism is a critique both of the "fixed centre" and of the validity of the dichotomies the centre is based on. He demonstrates how the existence of philosophical oppositions is thrown into question in the work of Lévi-Strauss.

In Les structures élémentaires de la parenté, Levi-Strauss defines the terms of the dichotomy as follows: 1) belongs to "nature" what is universal and spontaneous, not depending on any particular culture or on any determinate norm; and 2) belongs to "culture" what depends on a system of norms regulating society and therefore capable of varying from one social structure to another. But, as he points out, the incest-taboo shows up in his studies as a "scandal" in the nature\culture dichotomy: a limiting case because it is both universal (nature) and regulated (culture). This throws into question the validity of the opposition.

In further work, Levi-Strauss shows that no one myth deserves, any more than another, its referential privilege in a given culture, and more importantly, that there is no unity or absolute source of the myth; the focus or the sources of the myth are always shadows and virtualities. Everything begins with the structure, the configuration, there is no fixed centre (qtd. in Derrida 1972, 257).²²

Displacement of metaphysical suppositions

Most of the main proponents of structuralism continued to work through structuralism but also critiqued it. In a sense their work became "post" as the inherent critique of structuralism within structuralism.

Lévi-Strauss showed us the way out of the paradox he encountered when his work demanded that he use the

nature\culture opposition to demonstrate the impossibility of making it acceptable (since the "scandal" he finds to disprove the nature\culture dichotomy can only exist if the dichotomy does).

He concluded that the distinction between the state of nature and the state of culture, while lacking any acceptable historical signification, presented a value which fully justified its use by modern sociology: its value as a methodological instrument (qtd. in Derrida 1971).

In Derrida's view we have two choices: 1) to undertake the systematic and rigorous questioning of the concepts in the dichotomies; and 2) to conserve these old concepts while exposing their limits, here and there. This, I believe, is the strategy he later employs in his process of deconstruction.

Both Janet Wolff and Jean-François Lyotard are working in a postmodern context and both have elements in their theories that are derived from structuralist critique. This is evident in their approach to art with regard to how they treat its dichotomies and with regard to how they use the term "nature".

PARADOXICAL "POST" ATTITUDES

I have suggested structuralism and phenomenology as the two main models qualifying the question of what art is. I have also proposed that postmodern aesthetics can only be understood in relation to the dichotomies of modernism.

Wolff revisited

When it comes to the nature of art, a contemporary phenomenological approach remains within a Hegelian frame which is tied into traditional philosophy, that is to say the metaphysical problem of the relation between "being" and "knowing". Truth is understood as the degree of accuracy of the knowledge we have about "being", about the nature of things.

Since Janet Wolff situates art in epistemological rather than ontological terms, accepting therefore the existence of the dichotomy of being and knowledge or consciousness, she rejects the structural critique of Metaphysics. However her postmodern resistance to Hegelianism is demonstrated by her precision in situating the "specificity" of art in its own (changing) context: the context varies but the conceptual dichotomy remains true, within a particular situation.

She rejects structuralism on the basis of its critique of being as centre but she is careful to refer to the "specificity" of art rather than to its "nature", indicating her rejection of the metaphysical search for fundamentals, for truth. For Wolff, the use of the term "nature" of art would imply an acceptance of the doctrine of "essentialism" which she rejects, even though she will not relinquish a humanistic and phenomenological view of the subject as "fixed" centre.

Lyotard revisited

Lyotard's understanding of art, which is derived from structuralism, appears to be situated in the opposite metaphysical camp, for he seems to opt for an ontological primacy when he says that art is the opposite of discourse. But his position is also (post)structural and postmodern²³ in that the "nature" of art is neither "here" nor "there" but in the movement between them; he does not describe art as a being but as a function.

When Lyotard uses the term "nature" he is not referring to some "natural" essence of art. He is indicating a change of focus from content and language to the characteristic aspect of art that opposes it to discourse. This view is derived from the maintenance of some form of dichotomy that exists not in relation to "truth" but as a structural necessity.

Aesthetics revisited

In the section on aesthetics, we find that the discussion about art stems around the many postmodern attitudes that are prevalent today, that is to say, around the dissolution of "modernist" dichotomies. It appears, however, that the disappearance of boundaries between dichotomies is seen by some as both impossible and undesirable. Furthermore, in current art theory, there is some exploration of the relation of art to aesthetics; this is only possible if one posits that there is a difference between the two: what happens then is

the establishment or the recognition of a new boundary between discourse and art. This boundary is then subject to examination or to a process of deconstruction, an enterprise taken on by Lyotard among others.

Both Wolff and Lyotard propose theories about art that rely on the existence of dichotomic structures, if only for methodological purposes. Where they differ significantly is in how they consider the concept of centre.

Lyotard does not define art as content. He attempts to locate its place in the general social structure in which he situates both art and discourse. In this, he is approaching it from a structural perspective which refutes the idea of a "fixed" centre as originator of meaning.

Wolff does maintain a "fixed" centre: she elaborates a theory of art as "content" inscribed in form, originating from the subject (creator and/or interpreter). Her interest is in what art says and the genesis of that meaning. As I have shown, this does not lead us to the formulation of a satisfactory definition of art.

I do not deny the semantic content of artworks, but since it does not shed light on what makes art distinct from non-art, I suggest that structuralism might provide a model for understanding the nature of art in a way that redistributes the elements of the problem, yielding another picture.

STRUCTURAL MODEL OF THEORY

Although structuralism can be said to focus on meaning, it is "revolutionary" because it analyzes the "shape" of meaning or content, rather than interpreting its semantic value. It is a theory about structure, about theory as constructed. It asks: What are the elements of meaning? How does it work, that is to say, what are the elements at work? How do these elements interact? What are the consequences of this interaction?

Gilles Deleuze (1978) proposes a description of structural research. This description provides us with a sense of the criteria involved in all structuralism(s).²⁴

In the following pages, I have used Deleuze's (post)understanding of structuralism as a backdrop against which I contrast other (post)structuralist views.

Seriality

A theory organizes its data into series: many series, or chains. A theory would not function without more than one series since it is a process of confrontation between neighbouring series. The elements of a series are side by side in differential relation to each other. Confrontation takes place between two differential systems or two series of elements and relations.

Positions or places and singularities

Structuralism is a way of thinking that is topological. Series or chains are composed of positions or places that are in neighbouring or ordinal relation to each other (not hierarchical), like 0,1,2,3,....

These places take precedence over what comes to occupy them: they are a succession of imaginary attitudes or roles (signifieds) receiving "objects" in a process of classification. For example, according to Foucault, death, desire, work... are qualifications of places or positions that will make mortal and dying or desiring or working those who come to occupy them.

A singularity or particular occupancy or distribution of occupancy is only one actualization of all the possible distributions. Since they are in ordinal and neighbouring relation to each other, singularities create an ordering of the places in the structure. This is similar to Castoriadis's notion of the existence of connections between natural objects as signifiers, in the sense that lion is linked to mane is linked to claws... (1975, 125).

Introduction of the symbolic order

Deleuze states that the most important aspect of structuralism is the introduction of the symbolic, a third order in our thinking to add to our usual modern dialectic between the real and the imaginary. In the symbolic order,

elements are determined reciprocally.

It seems à propos at this point to differentiate between the various meanings assigned to the terms "symbolic" and "imaginary". In Lyotard's use of "symbolic", the term includes both form and meaning, but what is transcendent is its quality of exteriority which allows it to provoke thought and also to exhaust meaning. This is akin to Deleuze's notion. Castoriadis defines the "symbolic" as a system of signifiers with virtual unlimited natural and historical connections; it always goes beyond a strict attachment to precise signifieds or meanings and can lead to unexpected realms (1975, 121). This aspect of the symbolic is related to Lyotard's sense of it.

According to Deleuze, the most important difference between the imaginary and the symbolic is the differentiating role of the symbolic as opposed to the assimilating role of the imaginary. This distinction is similar to the one made by Lyotard between the symbolic and discourse. For Deleuze, the imaginary is connected to meaning.

Deleuze also considers that the order of the symbolic is structurally "deeper" than those of the real and the imaginary, that without it, structures would be static. In this, he differs from Castoriadis who sees the final or radical imaginary as the common root of both actual imaginary and symbolic. He defines the "imaginary" as something invented, or dreamed up. For him, the imaginary capacity is

the ability to see in a thing what it is not, to see it as other than it is. It is the imaginary component of a symbol that prevents the exhaustion of its substance (1975, 127). Lyotard, on the other hand, attributes this to the exteriority of the symbol, rather than to the interiority of the imaginary.

What I retain from this is that meaning is a result of a classification of signifiers according to signifieds but can only come about by a kind of a displacement, which is occasioned by the difference between the places on the chain, a difference which is only made evident or even created when the places are put in relation with each other and with the signifier. This putting in relation constitutes the symbolic.

Since any signifier is potentially able to fill many spaces, meaning is always produced in excess, because of the combinations of the places in the structure.

The empty space and object-x

Structures are actualized in one or another current form: a particular structure is one that is differentiated from the non-differentiated virtual structure. This means that time goes from virtual to actual and not from actual to actual. This aspect of structures is what allows the concept of historical discontinuity that Foucault developed. It also explains how Duvignaud's understanding of art as a "new deal" can work. In Castoriadis's approach, the imaginary capacity of

invention explains these changes from one actualization to another (1975).

Deleuze accounts for structural shifts differently. According to him, structures also contain a paradoxical but crucial element that is always present in corresponding series. This element is an empty space that is not occupied by a term but nevertheless is followed everywhere by an eminently symbolic object-x, a space that is always accompanied without ever being occupied or filled. Object-x is eminently symbolic because it is somehow present in two series but belongs to neither series in particular. It never stops moving both within these series and from one to the other, with extraordinary agility. The empty space is not a lack in the negative sense, but in the positive sense of "questioning".

Although object-x is not distinguishable from its place, it is in the nature of this empty space to move all the time, to jump around, (like the dummy in the game of Bridge). This way, object-x is always elsewhere in relation to itself. It has the property of not being where we look for it and also of being found where it is not. Object-x never stops digging and filling the gap between the two series.²⁵

When Castoriadis describes the imaginary capacity as the ability to see what is not, he is touching upon something similar, for although he does not explain the structural mechanism as such, he suggests the kind of agility that is necessary for it to work. In a structural approach, it follows

that if the series upon which x travels, are necessarily displaced one in relation to the other, this can only be because the relative positions of their elements in the structure are first dependent on the absolute place of each of them, at each moment, in relation to object-x which is always moving, always displaced in relation to itself.

It appears to me that it is this aspect of structures in particular that may shed some light on the nature of art, for as we have seen art appears to escape identity and to be both displaced and displacing in the "series" that it relates to.

Structural accidents

The empty space is the only space that must never be filled, even by a symbolic element. It must maintain the perfection of its emptiness, to move in relation to itself and to circulate through the elements and the varieties of relations. It must always escape its other half that must always strive to occupy it. These are necessary conditions for the structure to be dynamic. Structural mutations or forms of transition from one structure to another are always in relation to the empty space and the displacement of object-x. (Here again, we find Lyotard's basis for defining art as the indicator of an emptiness, and also his understanding of interiority\exteriority). It follows that two structural accidents are immanent (and, I believe, imminent) in structure: 1) the empty space is no longer accompanied by the

nomadic object-x; its emptiness becomes a real lack. The signifier has disappeared: the flow of the signified no longer finds signifying elements scanning it. This is the scenario in which everything becomes interpretation, what is described by some as loss of the real; or 2) it is filled, occupied by what is accompanying it and its mobility is lost to a sedentary and static fullness. The signified has vanished: the chain of signifiers no longer has a signified running along it. Baudrillard (1983) describes this state of affairs when he suggests that we can no longer link material signifiers into a coherent frame: meaning is impossible.²⁶

Structural hero

Deleuze introduces the structural hero as a necessary element to resolve these accidents or contradictions within the structure. This hero is linked to a praxis which is a point of permanent revolution. Many current views of "avant-garde" or McLuhan's concept of "anti-environment" can be seen as points of permanent revolution, as can Lyotard's definition of postmodernism.

As I understand it, this view of structuralism offers a very promising frame from which to identify the particularity of art. But, before going on, it would be valuable to consider (or forestall) the critiques that we might make of it.

(POST)STRUCTURALISM

We can determine to what degree a structuralism is "post" mainly by how much importance it attaches to the generalizing power of linguistics and to what extent it deals with the paradoxical displacement of the role which Hegel had occupied within French thought (Macksey and Donato 1972, xiii).

Structuralism's inherent self-critique

Derrida (1972) points out that although structuralism attempts to critique Metaphysics, its efforts are in some sense doomed, especially when it remains tied to linguistics as a model. He underscores the logocentric metaphysical presuppositions implicit in a great deal of linguistic thinking, and in doing so shows that the generalizing power of linguistics "becomes strategically inoperative, at least for any attempt at analysis which would claim to be independent of the notion of subject-centred concepts of presence and identity. In other words, structural linguistics itself unknowingly perpetuated the Hegelian inheritance" (Macksey and Donato 1972, xiii).

Derrida explains that structural linguistics uses the concept of sign to attack the metaphysics of presence as being, in the dichotomy between self and knowledge. But a sign is the result of the opposition between signifier and signified, and cannot exist without this duality. However, if

we give up the concept of sign we must also give up the critique we are directing against metaphysical complicity of self and knowledge (1972, 252).

Language as theory

Initial structuralist works were extremely logocentric, but this was soon seen as questionable, since reliance on linguistics as a model depended on the distinctness of the various hierarchical levels that it ordered and brought into play. This distinctness was shown to be non-existent.

However, according to Deleuze, since structure is theory, not reality, it can only relate to language; this is because language is a theoretical take on a "real", or rather it shapes our take on the "real". This theory also proposes that things, objects have a silent language of signs (1972). Such a language depends of course on the manipulation or transformation that we have imposed on these objects. (This is certainly true if we wish to avoid the metaphysical question of "God" as original "manipulator", as "fixed centre", dictating the world to us.)

A (post)structural theory of language considers it in a broad sense as discourse. It uses the unavoidable dichotomic confrontation between series or chains that relate to each other because of their neighbouring proximity. The series of dichotomies form the tenets of a domain; analysis of these dichotomies, through various methods of deconstruction, throw

into question the "truth" of those tenets. In a sense this is akin to what I have been doing, in a modest way, with regard to discourse on art.

Structuralism makes no claims to analyze the "natural" real, although Foucault has certainly thrown into question the existence of such a real. It is important to note here that in Lyotard's analysis of art, when he defines art as other than language, he associates language directly with discourse, or theory, which he considers to be an assimilation of the "other" (1985). In this, he disconnects with structuralism and with post-structuralism(s) that are based on language. He attempts a re-introduction of some kind of "real" in what remains as a relatively structural approach.

Binary oppositions

Structuralists have been criticized for maintaining the concept of binary opposition. While they have added the symbolic as a third dimension in this opposition, it functions as an underlying element to what remains as a confrontation between series. The main flaw in binary oppositions is the assumed stability of terms in that opposition. It is considered that in a structural perspective, distinctions between signifier and signified can only be maintained if one term is believed to be final. In some way, therefore, the text is bearer of stable meanings.

To this a deconstructionist would oppose that signifieds

and signifiers are never independent of each other. In fact, the concept of the "empty space" and its accompanying object-x can even help us understand how we can arrive at unstable meanings. The relation between the two seems to underlie the logic of deconstructionism, as the organizer of the various "chains" of signifiers and signifieds: it destabilizes the relational chains, while it is itself in constant movement.

Furthermore Lyotard points out that the very notion of interpretation implies a binary system, however ephemeral it is. In Lyotard's understanding of it, language is defined as the "namer", as the interpretation, which means that it must be along the chain of the signified, of the imaginary, which consists in so many places or boxes that are names to which an object is attached. There is no reason to suppose that, within a structuralist perspective, this same "object" or signifier cannot also be a signified along another chain. If structure is language, all the chains are of the imaginary, and also of a "real" of sorts. The confrontation between chains is between two series of imaginaries, and within each chain, the name, the singularity, the box of the imaginary, contains a signifier which is also an imaginary.

So we are left with binary oppositions, as well as with the concept of centre, because they are a methodological necessity, even though they cannot be given the status of "truth", for they are continually being displaced.

Fixed centre

Early structuralists were often considered (by their detractors) to be searching for invariant structures or formal universals. This is a flaw indeed for a postmodern view which condemns universalism as a "master" narrative in both senses of the term. As I indicated earlier, this search led to the finding of "scandals" that were absorbed within structuralist critique.

The only constant becomes the need for movement or dynamism within the structure. This movement is not progressive, that is to say it does not demonstrate a necessary linear continuity. In Delcuze's analysis of structuralism, time does not move from actual to actual but from virtual to actual.

In a way, Lyotard's theory suggests an unfolding of time which might imply a linear view of the development of art, both in terms of its creation and in terms of its history. This would be an unacceptable position from a postmodern perspective. However, when we consider his sense of art as reflexive, in which perception creates a discontinuous beat between interiority and exteriority, constituting perceiver and perceived in a common rhythm, one can relate his view to a postmodern perspective.

Contemporary theoretical work can no more escape structural critique than contemporary art practice can avoid the consequences of the work of Marcel Duchamp, in his

deconstruction of the art object. Even the most anti-structuralist views can only be held from a position made possible by structuralist critique."

One philosophical framework is just as likely (or unlikely) to correspond to a "real", a "referent", either posited or actual, than another. The question is not whether such frameworks are "true" but whether they can be useful in understanding something. In my view, structuralism, as described by Gilles Deleuze, is extremely productive, in that it opens an undefinable space. This space by its very quality may relate to the nature of art.

THE PLACE OF ART

In order to situate our problem in this framework, we must establish the series involved in what I have presented so far and see where "art" fits in.

Artworks as intermediary

In chapter I, the problem of the nature of art was established in relation to what can be seen as two chains, one of the social "real" or "reals" and one of the knowledge we have of these reals. Art was placed between these chains as a "reflector" or a transfer mechanism from one to the other, as the signifier of an actual objective "real", the referent.

Social "realities"

...

(Object)
(Réel)
(Referent)

Discourse

...

(Interpretation)
(Imaginaire)
(Signified)

Because they framed the problem in this way, it became necessary for social scientists to define art in order to explain it as container of valid information and as transfer mechanism of this information. The problems arose when it became clear that artworks could be placed on the chain of the real as well as on the chain of the interpretation, which made them relatively useless as valid (objective) channels of information.

First set of analytical distinctions

Chapter 2 provides us with a set of distinctions that leads to a re-evaluation of the social "real" as signifier rather than referent (or as well as referent) and of its relation to knowledge or discourse. This suggests a new way of understanding the positioning of artworks.

Distinction between artworks and discourse in general. In Wolff's framework, although artworks are part of discourse in general, they are distinct from it in that they have their own language of signs. According to Lyotard, artworks and discourse are distinct from each other because the reflexive quality of art allows permutations of terms, while in language [as discourse or meaning], such permutations would lead to

nonsense. This allows the unchanging symbol to outlast each succeeding interpretation, but also to present itself again and again for each new interpretation.

Distinction between artworks and real life. Secondly, artworks are distinct from real life because they are artifice, symbolic constructions (Lyotard). We can also distinguish between works of art and "reality" since they are a form of mediation between what is to be known and the knower (Wolff), implying both an "object" of knowledge and acquired knowledge. **Linking artworks to both chains.** Artworks are linked to real life because they have the character of an event (Lyotard) or because they are symbolically analogous to it (Duvignaud, Deinhard, Wolff); they are connected to discourse because they are subject to interpretation, as well as the subjective expression of an artist's take on the "real". It follows that they can be placed between these two series as an element that is connected to both, while belonging to neither.

These distinctions and links lead us to a revised series of two chains: on one side, the "objects of knowledge", on the other what is known about those objects and hovering between the two, artworks.

Social "realities"

...

(Object)
(Réel)
(Signifier)

artworks

Discourse

...

(Interpretation)
(Imaginaire)
(Signified)

Of course, each of these chains is composed of signified (the place) and signifier (the occupant of the place). By analogy, one of the chains is the signifier and the other is the signified.

We have shown in Chapter II and III that we cannot isolate a definition of art based on artworks. We cannot assume, therefore that this picture is complete enough to give us an understanding of the specific nature of art itself.

Second set of analytical distinctions

Some theoreticians propose the need for a distinction between artworks and discourse on art. They find this necessary because aesthetics is too closely linked with the praxis of life to be properly critical of it (Eagleton, Caygill). This may be true but we can also assume a distinction between artworks and aesthetics: we have found one between artworks and discourse in general and consider that discourse on art is contained within discourse in general.

If artworks are objects of aesthetic discourse, they become "realities" and can move to the left of our map. We can transpose our set of distinctions and create a second distribution of our initial elements.

Artwork "realities"

...

(Object)
(Réel)
(Signifier)

Discourse on art

...

(Interpretation)
(Imaginaire)
(Signified)

Placing art

We are left without a middle connecting element. However, since we have been unable to isolate a definition of art based on artworks, we must assume that art is distinct from artworks although connected to them. We can also consider art as both separate and part of discourse on art.

Furthermore, Lyotard implies the presence of a third element when he suggests that it is something outside body (artworks) and language (discourse) that unsettles both. This disturbing element is connected to both chains and also separate from each of them. It appears then that this element might be art, since it is distinguishable from artworks and from aesthetics as well as connected to them both. While we still have not defined it, we may insert the term "art" between our two series.

Artwork "realities"	art	Discourse on art
...		...
(Object)		(Interpretation)
(Réel)		(Imaginaire)
(Signifier)		(Signified)

THE NATURE OF ART

Although the terms of these maps are presented as static this cannot be accurate, for if one thing has been made extremely clear in this thesis, it is that art is a very "slippery" element, impossible to pin down.

Object-a(rt)

It appears that art is not assignable, that is to say that it cannot be fixed to one place nor identifiable to one species or kind. It only has an identity to escape that identity, and it only has a place to move away from it and to be displaced in relation to any place. If this is true then it can be related to "object-x and the empty space", for in each infra-structure, object-x is identifiable though not definable (Deleuze 1978).

The "art" in artwork is what cannot be assigned. It does not have to do with specific form, nor with specific content, but with the relation between the two.

Only through its symbolic manifestations do we have access to art. But this is only to witness its disappearance, for the moment of pure reception or perception (if it exists at all) is fleeting. In this sense it seems right to consider as Wolff does that any aesthetic theory is one of reception, for the immediate second moment of artistic manifestation is a discursive one. However, what is ignored in this attitude is a prior moment, the moment of emptiness which I associate with a leap, a necessary break in supposed discursive continuity.²⁸ The making of art, which in my framework is described better as the placing of art, requires mental agility.

Artworks\art\Aesthetics

In the confrontation between the series of artworks and the one of aesthetics, art is the eminently symbolic element, both defying and inviting interpretation.

Along the chain of aesthetic signifiers (artworks), the set that includes medium, place, time, process, content, viewer-work relation, etc., there is no fixed place for art although there is always an empty space for art to be. The same is true with regard to the related series of signifieds, the set of aesthetic theories or definitions. Art functions as a displacer of meaning and reality. It upsets the correspondences between artworks and aesthetics. This function is necessary to keep the structure dynamic.

Relation of art and aesthetics

Discourse and Art are irrevocably imbricated. The stake of discourse on art is to give art the impulse to step beyond discourse, to resist each new interpretation and yet to remain as possible source for the next interpretation. The artwork or art object is explained or placed within a theoretical discourse: each time this happens a correspondence between the art object and knowledge is established. But also each time this happens, new artworks challenge that correspondence. The danger is that rather than transgress the theory, the artworks become an illustration of it, support it. This would involve one of the structural accidents described by Deleuze, in which

the signifier disappears and only the signified remains. If aesthetics becomes divorced from artworks, then the other structural accident happens in which artworks no longer signify anything. Both these accidents are always imminent and seem particularly so these days.

In the light of this understanding of art, the non-definitions with which I ended chapter 3 can be re-evaluated. When Caygill refers to a "beyond aesthetics", he is conjuring up the space in which art is not, but that is in necessary relation to object-a. This "beyond aesthetics" must remain always elsewhere, for it is the space that is open for action. When Eagleton refers to non-art, what comes to mind is the need for art to avoid definition. When Lyotard, describes artists as working without rules to create the rules of what will have been done, he is describing the relation between object-a and the empty space.

The concept of "avant-garde" or of resistance becomes a necessary quality of art. Only the resistance is not one to a particular state: it is the resistance of art to being fixed, to losing its mobility in relation to itself. People often try and make art say something in support of their own position but in fact if art is in the service of any position, if it becomes fixed as "social agitator" for instance, a structural accident results and the case vide is filled. If this happens, the dynamism of the structure disappears: there is no more room for change. Art no longer resists anything.

Defined in this way, "avant-garde" is not a reference to advanced art; avant-garde is art. For as Lyotard says, the avant-gardist task remains that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to what follows (1993c, 256). Art as avant-garde can be found in the relation between object-a and the empty space that it accompanies.

Society, art\works and the sociology of art

In the sociology of art, object-a is active also, for artworks seem to function as displacers in that they are unstable objects of study. They therefore act as catalysts in a precise series. They throw into question validity as main criteria of the social sciences. As a result, sociology itself changes: its domain is expanded to include ethics, philosophy, aesthetics . . . and its capacity to generalize is reduced, for the "truth" of its findings is only temporary.

Art as reflection

Artworks are social productions. They are interpreted and analyzed, the object of much discourse. As objects of discourse, artworks are "realities" in themselves. Because artworks are artifice, they are different from life's "realities" and because they are symbolic, they differ from discourse with its "knowledge" of life's "realities". The art object acts as a marker of art, that throws into question the

relationship between its real and our knowledge of it. It can do this because it has symbolic force and may lead to new links between meanings or knowledge and "reality".

Since art is a "fake real", it functions in society as a displacer, a shifter of the correspondences between the real(s) and our knowledge(s) of them. It can do this and has done this in manifold ways, involving, to various degrees, content, form and process. The artist connects with an existing discourse on some aspect of the social "real"; the symbolic forms or fake reals that she creates displace or throw into question the supposed truth of our interpretations. However, for art to do this, artworks have to reflect or "say" something: a view of art as expression of content about society, although incomplete, is not wrong.

Wolff has constructed a frame of analysis which deals with the problem of validity of one's interpretation of artworks. However her theory would only be satisfactory for the sociological study of art if she had settled the question of identification of a specific corpus of study as well. She must limit this corpus to artworks: for, in neglecting to distinguish between art, artworks and especially discourse on art, she has failed to establish a useful definition for the practice of the sociology of art.

ART AND SOCIETY

We have shown that artworks are linked to aesthetics by object-a(rt), and we have also said that they link the social real and discourse on that real. If object-a is the active element in the artworks\ aesthetics chain, it might also function as a displacer in the larger social structure. We could then link our two maps. Our second picture might possibly be positioned into the first one:

Social "real"	[artworks-art-aesthetics]	Discourse
...		...
(Object)		(Interpretation)
(Réel)		(Imaginaire)
(Signifier)		(Signified)

And from there, since artworks are included in social reality and aesthetics are part of discourse in general:

Social "Real"	art	Discourse
...		...
(Object)		(Interpretation)
(Réel)		(Imaginaire)
(Signifier)		(Signified)

With this picture in mind and with the concept of object-a(rt), we can take another look at the key questions that have been raised so far, both with regard to the practice of art and with regard to matters of larger social importance.

Social crisis(es)

It is often said that our current society is in a period of crisis. This state of affairs is defined in several ways, according to the divergent positions adopted by various social critics. This crisis can be seen, in fact, as the imminent danger (or the occurrence) of one or the other of the structural accidents described by Deleuze, and is generally presented as either a crisis of truth and/or a crisis of the subject, of agency.

Crisis of truth

We can think of correspondence between structural spaces and their occupying objects as involving some distinction between "true" and "false". The work of Janet Wolff exemplifies this idea. Clearly her purpose is not to demonstrate some universal truth; nevertheless, her aim remains to uncover "true" meanings that lead to "true" knowledge about reality and ideology, however provisory the nature of those "truths" might be. This can only work in a system of correspondences. If there is no object-x to unsettle the relations between chains, the question of truth cannot arise, for one or the other of these following situations would occur.

In the instance of the disappearance of object-x, everything becomes meaning and the "mark of the question" has been erased. The empty space is unaccompanied, creating a real

lack. A general social paralysis ensues in which there is no movement, no action, no "leap", no indication of the space for change.²⁹

In the second instance, the empty space is occupied and dynamism is lost. When this happens, there is no indeterminacy, that is to say, no undetermined available meaning and consequently no space for movement, for questioning, for thought.

According to Lyotard, truth is outside a discourse of meaning. He proposes a different view of truth, suggesting that today no-one can speak for it, but that "truth" must remain as a possibility. In Deleuze's framework, this amounts to saying that the maintenance of truth as a possibility guards against structural accidents, for it ensures the mobility of the relation between series. This means that object-x must always scan the chain of signifieds in order to unsettle its correspondences. It also implies that an open space must always be available to ensure the possibility of a question.

Intervention of object-a(rt)

Within this context, we can discuss object-a as the structural hero necessary to maintain (or to re-establish) the dynamism of our social structure.

According to Lyotard, it is in the nature of art to keep the possibility of truth alive. The artist creates what cannot

be contradicted, the event, that "something is". But inherent in this event is the possibility of it not being (1989). It is essential to maintain the mark of this possibility, for it indicates a space that is open for what may come next, as well as the possibility of nothing. Art maintains our awareness of the edge between the possibility of something and that of nothing, an edge that science must ignore but cannot do without, since its impetus is to push that edge further away, so that our words, our knowledge, may confound silence.³⁰

Crisis of the subject

There is another less exalted way in which object-a intervenes in society: as bricolage, as creativity.

When Foucault described the subject as filling positions already inscribed in the structure, and Levi-Strauss opposed the idea of bricoleur to the one of engineer, intellectual and emotional panic buttons were activated, in reaction to these critiques of our assumption of the immobile centrality of the human subject.

Lévi-Strauss underlined our dependence on already existing "identities" when he described mythmaking in which the bricoleur uses the means at hand, whatever is already there, in language, to construct myths. As Jacques Derrida explains, the idea of the engineer exists in Levi-Strauss's theory as the defining opposite of the bricoleur: he constructs the totality of his language (from scratch). Lévi-

Strauss shows that the engineer is a myth because the idea that a subject could be the origin of his own discourse is impossible: he would be god . . . so a bricoleur made the myth of engineer (Derrida, 1972).

One response to this has been to consider the creating subject, and the subject altogether, as "dead" (Crimp 1983, 53). To quote Jameson again, "what we have to retain from all this is an aesthetic dilemma: it is no longer clear what artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing", since nobody has a unique private world or style to express any longer, all that is left is meaningless imitation of dead styles (1983, 115). In other words, human agency has been reduced to empty action or endless repetition, a social crisis indeed.

Such a reaction to structural critique of the subject does not take into consideration the necessary contribution of object-x and the empty space in structural thinking, while it very clearly relates to both structural accidents.

Derrida points out to his critics that he does not "destroy the subject, but situates it . . . one cannot get along without the notion of a subject . . . it is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions" (1972, 271). He refers to Lévi-Strauss's concept of "freeplay" (which coincides to a great extent with Deleuze's "object-x and the empty space"), showing it to be the disruption of the subject, not the death of the subject. He considers that the tension of

freeplay is in the concept of "presence as being". Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, and according to Derrida, "if it is to be radically conceived, freeplay must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence; being must be conceived as presence or absence, beginning with the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around" (1972, 264).

In Les mots et les choses, Foucault sheds some light on the question when he says that "On ne peut plus penser que dans le vide de l'homme disparu. Car ce vide ne creuse pas un manque; il ne prescrit pas une lacune à combler. Il n'est rien de moins que le dépli d'un espace où il est enfin à nouveau possible de penser" (1966, 353). I understand this in relation to the concept of presence as "identity". A fixed identity of the subject implies that object-x has occupied its empty space; if this fixed identity has disappeared, there is room for bricolage, a process of creation. Bricolage is nothing more than the redistribution of existing elements, creating new ones, only to use these as material in the production of different mythical configurations.

In Derrida's mind, there are two interpretations of structure, of freeplay: "one dreams of deciphering a truth, an origin which is free from freeplay or one tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of the game" (1972, 264).

Far from being dead, the "creating subject" can only exist in the space created by absence.

Intra-conclusion: art as theory

Jack Burnham pronounces, in yet another death notice, that "Art is disappearing because the old separations between nature and culture no longer have any classification value. . . . The basic social revolutions currently under way present us with an extremely altered set of divisions, implying new priorities and patterns of existence" (1973, 181). His view is based on the idea that art is a mythic form and that myth serves to mediate between the classification of nature and culture. His "doomsday" understanding of art is wrong on two counts. While the old separations between nature and culture may indeed be irrelevant, this does not invalidate the dichotomy itself; its terms are always in a process of redefinition but never cease to relate to explanations we give ourselves about our place in the world. Furthermore, the concept of myth is more than a mediation between nature and culture. Since a bricoleur made the engineer, myth is another way of describing theory, and Burnham himself is under the influence of object-a, even as he proposes its "mythical death".

Even if one considers art to be a mythic form, and this would very much depend on how we define myth (as we shall see in chapter V), it is far from dead. With its focus on

creativity, art acts as a re-presentation of the subject as "object-x and the empty space" in the social structure. When we consider artworks as structures, they present themselves as a theory of subjectivity. This concurs with Lyotard's view of the primacy of the symbol over interpretation. In the social structure, artworks are theory as theory, not as content.

Art is also a matter of love and desire for, as we can infer from Lyotard's concept of aesthetic pleasure, art teaches us to love the empty space, the absence of self to self, as the place that indicates the presence of "here and now", and marks the deferral of the end of the game.

Inter-conclusion

Although I am sure that much more could be said about the nature of art, I think that I have exhausted what I have to offer for now in the mode of theoretical discourse. I suppose that this is because Chapter IV has provided an understanding of art which satisfies me with regard to the questions that were prompted in the first three chapters.

However, there remains one important area to be discussed namely, the method(s) to be used when attempting to represent artworks in discourse. Even though the temptation is great for an artist to dismiss such an attempt, artworks must continue to be the subject matter of discourse on art, otherwise a "fatal" structural accident would occur.

In the following chapter, I explore the implications of an issue that has consistently recurred throughout this work: the question of validity and the impact of this question on methods of representation or analysis of works of art.

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY AND THE "LANGUAGE" OF ART

As I indicated in the introduction, the second component of my dissertation, including the present chapter, is a result of the opposition I set up between art theory and art practice.

The first part of this chapter describes the research methods that I used for the theoretical aspect of the project. In this sense, it is a validation or justification of the findings of my study, as they stand, before the inclusion of its final component, the artwork.

Although I believe I did provide an understanding of the nature of art which I presented in chapter IV, I have not as yet considered how to discuss artworks themselves. This is the problem which I address in the second part of this chapter in which I develop a theoretical framework, presenting a critique of an epistemic approach to artworks and attempting to elaborate more suitable methods for the final part of my dissertation.

JUSTIFICATION

Until the present chapter, there was (I believe) no incoherence between the object of my study and my method of approaching it. What was this object? It was neither art, nor artworks, but discourse on art. The following sections provide

a methodological discussion of the "theory" component of this research project.

What is methodology?

It appears to me that the methodological aspect of even the most quantitative and positivistic research has to do with the relation between the form a project must take in relation to the form of its content, as well as to its aims. If these "forms" are not analogous, if they are at odds with each other then the value of the work is questionable, unless of course such incoherence is inherent to the "problématique" itself. By content, I mean the research questions or hypotheses; these frame or limit the work and conversely are defined and redefined by it.

Methodology as interface

Our methodological approach is the meeting place between the world we are studying and the knowledge we construct of it. It posits a screen between knower and known that is both sturdy enough to ensure their separation and permeable enough to allow one to grasp the other. This is why serious researchers are so careful to define and justify their corpus of study and their mode of access to it. Many examples of such methodological considerations can be found in chapters I and II of my thesis.

Methodology as epistemology

There are still arguments about the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods in research. In fact, I see each of them as a different "language". As we know, form in research involves more than the difference between statistics and words. Although entirely verbal, the "language" we use in theoretical studies, how we organize our text, how we substantiate what we say, are factors as methodologically relevant in an analysis of discourse on art as the use of a multiple regression is, in a study of the relation between market value and number of sales.

Since the quality of the research depends very much on how well the form it takes applies to the form of the object of study, there is no intrinsic value in either of these methods. What really is crucial is that when we refer to the "quality" of the research project, we are introducing a notion of validity that very clearly situates methodology in an epistemological context, that is to say, in a metaphysical framework.³¹

Research question(s)

I undertook this project because a number of recurring questions about art were imposing themselves on me, and it became imperative that I deal with them in order to move on with my work.

These questions had to do with the contemporary

intellectual situation of postmodernism, its critique of modernist premises and the impact this had on current art practice. I wondered whether art had a "nature" of its own that distinguished it both from theory and from "real" life. What could artists do after postmodernism(s)? I was no more satisfied with the general sense that "anything goes" than I was with the feeling that aesthetics had collapsed into ethics and that art was in "obligatory" relation to overt political (in the large sense) commitment and even to "correctness". The other possibility, it seemed, was to connect art to science and see it as another mode of research. This was the option that I found most promising although I also had reservations about it.

In short, it appeared to me that art practice could amount to aesthetic pastiche, ethical proselytising, or an alternate form of science. Of the three I decided to explore the last. My reasons for this choice were based on personal preference, naturally, but also on the fact that much of the postmodern critique of modernity seemed to concentrate on the impact that a certain kind of scientific thinking had had on us. In my view, an exploration of the differences and similarities between science and art would shed some light on my questions about the nature of art, its relation to theory and the function it might have in society. This exploration would focus on some of the dichotomies critiqued by postmodernism, in particular, that of being and consciousness

which is central to scientific discourse.

Hypotheses (to be verified)

The following hypotheses, of course, amount to answers that I had to my questions before starting the research project.

My main hypothesis supposed the particular nature of art practice to reside in the fact that, as a discipline, it inherently addressed the problem of the link between subject and object. I believed that art would indicate a way in which subject and object, self and other, or the individual and society could connect. I had a view of art as "social sculpture" with a focus on communication as the means to achieve collectivity. A Beuysian and Habermasian view, more or less.

My secondary hypotheses related to the "nature" of art. Art had to contribute something specific that science could not offer. I assumed 1) that art practice invoked experience as its principle mode of gaining and of transmitting knowledge ("savoir" and "connaissance"), which is rooted both in the specificity of the practitioner and of the perceiver and in the wider collectivity in which it occurs; and 2) that art practice was based on "savoir" rather than "connaissance", to use a distinction made by Jean-François Lyotard (1979), in which I understand "savoir" to be knowledge of how to conduct ourselves through life in our social world. This is not only

knowledge of facts (connaissance) but knowledge through action of how to act.

I will discuss the usefulness of these ideas more thoroughly later on in this chapter when I attempt to identify the way in which artworks function in the process of artmaking and what kind of methodological approach is required in order to "translate" artworks without doing violence to them.

Further assumptions (disproved)

I also had some assumptions as an artist which informed my understanding of art and which would underlie part of this project.

I considered that it was up to each artist, as it is up to each scientist or each philosopher, to be aware of the particular ontological and epistemological assumptions under which he or she is working, assumptions which are specific to the times in which he or she lives and to the kind of "truth" being investigated. I felt that this would ensure internal validity in this work.

This point of view was ignorant of the implications of applying a metaphysical framework to art: such an application already places art within a "scientific" domain, as I discovered when doing work for chapters III and IV.

I considered that human beings are located specifically in time and physical space, but also in cultural and social, political and economic spaces. I also believed that location

in space implied movement from space to space. I saw human beings in motion, travelling from location to location. Furthermore, it appeared to me that the spaces were also in motion.

Each location created a specific convergence of all types of spaces; in the experience of that convergence, human beings, each and every time, re-evaluated the situation and reconstructed or readjusted themselves.

As I later discovered these intuitive ideas fit very well, with some modifications, within the developed structural framework I presented in chapter IV.

What was much more problematic was my understanding of the role of art, since I saw it as a creation of specific spatial locations, points of convergence that unite, in one experience, physical, social and spiritual spaces. I saw art as an attempt to research and communicate this particular "truth", providing the perceiver with, at one and the same time, a tool for understanding location and a unifying experience of convergence of spaces.

I found that my understanding of art, (the assumptions that I was making about it,) were inconsistent with the views I had (that were later substantiated by my theoretical research), about structurality and movement.

I developed a theory of art that was more coherent with my framework and which could provide more satisfying answers to my research questions. This was the content of chapter IV.

Triptych: split corpus

Whether substantiated or disproved by my research, the assumptions I just described nevertheless had led to the shaping of my project as a triptych: the first part to be in the "scientific" domain of theory or discourse on art; the third to be a sculptural installation and therefore in the domain of art practice and the second to be the discourse of artworks which I naively thought would link the two others."

Such a split appeared necessary in view of the questions that interested me; it also seemed coherent with the set of hypotheses I had developed.

I still hold with the methodological necessity of this split, although (and because) it has led me to the problem I am now exploring. In order to examine the relation of art to theory and its differences (if any) from theory, a study of theoretical discourse on art is unavoidable. But a theoretical discussion about the specificity of a practice, lacking an experimental component in that practice, would be somewhat incoherent. Since I was attempting to show that art has a specific contribution to make, unless I could include that contribution, my overall study would lack an important dimension.

Furthermore, I felt that this particular component would, by its very inclusion or exclusion, raise the most interesting problem of my thesis. Since I am comparing art practice and theoretical practice, by including a sculptural installation

as integral part of the research, I am creating a sort of ethnographic study in which the separation between artist and theoretician is both completely analytic and also factual, in terms of the dual product of theory and sculpture.

The interface between the sculptural component and the theoretical one was to have been an analysis of the discourse of art via the work of artists.

Selection of theoretical material

I found that a limited bibliography chosen relatively at random would reflect the prevailing attitude that any apprehension one might have of reality, even, and surely especially, of academic reality, is one that is constructed from a sample taken both objectively (books available at the library, books that I have come across recently through suggestions from other academics in the field, or selected according to a title search with current technology, etc.) and subjectively (by the choice of the words in the title search, by the elimination of texts which did not seem useful to my study because of either their topical or their current relevance, by the inclusion of texts that I remembered from other projects, by going back to the original texts quoted in other texts, etc.). I consider that this randomness exists in all studies to some extent or another, either consciously or unconsciously. Such an approach is only misleading if one believes that there is a specific place to end up, at the end

of one's research.

This random method of selection could have constituted a list of texts that was too homogeneous or too short to be suggestive of fertile ideas, or one that was too heterogeneous or too large, making it impossible to pull together any kind of a useful whole from which to elaborate a perspective.

Both these possibilities were avoided because I approached the texts as "quasi-undirected interviews" in the field. When I began coming across the same "new" ideas over and over again, as well as the same critiques, in new texts, I considered that I had "exhausted" the terrain for the time being. I then chose to focus on certain of the more representative authors, and occasionally on those who presented a very different point of view. My sense of this particular bibliography is that it was both suggestive of many possible points of view and conducive to the "creation" of a useful theoretical picture.

Method of analysis of theoretical material

I used a process of *découpage* and collage with which I am familiar as it is a method often used in artmaking. This method is also overtly prevalent in much theoretical writing today, as I noticed during the preliminary stages of my study. Recent critical writing appears more often as an assemblage of quotations than as a creation by a single author (e.g., Ulmer 1983; Foster 1983). Furthermore, the most prevalent books in

theory are anthologies of essays by different authors, organized thematically by an author\editor (e.g., Macksey and Donato 1972; Kostelanetz 1978; Foster 1983 and 1988; Benjamin and Osborne 1991; Docherty 1993).

A great deal of Jacques Derrida's work can be seen as a process of *découpage* and collage (Derrida 1978). This is a technique by which we remove certain elements from their larger context (in this case, some authors from others, some texts by an author from his other texts, some parts of the same text...), in a process of selection such as the one I described above. These elements are then juxtaposed; this juxtaposition forms a new context through what one might call an interactive effect. This new context sometimes presents a suggestive perspective from which to view the individual elements which might then be redefined through analysis. These redefined elements in turn can affect the original context from which they were extracted. The new context might also present a new and valuable theory, although it is always understood as a temporary one, since it can then be subjected to the same process.

Such a method is appropriate in a post-structural, postmodern context which proposes the existence of a multiplicity of points of convergence of many variables as well as the impossibility of a totalising synthesis.

I believe that the methodological approach that I have just presented is coherent with the object of my study in the

theoretical component of this project. I will discuss the implications of this approach further, considering "methodology" as a specific mode of research.

METHODOLOGY AS VALIDATION

Methodological justification both validates and constitutes epistemic discourse, which includes discourse in the humanities as well as in the sciences.

Connaissance or epistemic discourse

According to Jean-François Lyotard, scientific discourse follows a double rule that is applied to statements about an object of study (the referent), and the relation of "truth" between the object and the statements about it. This rule is the falsification\verification process of validation, through which what is said about something can be verified or falsified by comparison between the statement and the object of discourse.

The truth of a statement and the competence of the originator of that statement are subjected to the approval of a collectivity of equals which has been formed through a process of education and examination, also based on the falsification\verification rule (1979, 44). The language of scientific knowledge, or *connaissance*, is isolated from other languages. Validity is not intrinsic to the statement itself,

it is founded on the competence of the originator, and the memory of past statements, fixed in time (1979, 38).

Methodology: epistemic discourse on art

The first four chapters of this project are well within the confines of epistemic discourse. In my effort to develop a valid theory of the nature of art, I built on the authority of other theoreticians. I examined their statements, their theories and tested them for logical inconsistencies that might "falsify" their conclusions.

I subjected the arguments of one to comparison with those of another and evaluated through a process of logical argumentation which of the two I considered to be valid, and on what grounds. I referred to the expertise of many recognized thinkers in order to substantiate my own evaluations. I made every effort to exclude "unfounded" personal opinion. In the elaboration of my own contribution, I stated my assumptions very clearly. I developed a logically coherent analysis. As I progressed in the work, I was very careful to eliminate any inconsistencies or contradictions, anticipating criticisms that I thought might invalidate my findings. This very chapter fulfils an epistemological role, for it is an attempt to justify my research methods.

All the tactics I have just described were also used by the authors I studied. From this I can conclude that my method of approach to this corpus was appropriate with regard to fit

between form and content: I used an epistemic mode to investigate and report on epistemic discourse on art.³¹ Whether such a mode is valid for reporting on (or criticising) artworks remains to be seen.

The second part of this chapter examines the "fit" between artworks as objects of study and various research methods.

CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMIC DISCOURSE

If artworks are not discourse, as I proposed in chapter IV, then it becomes necessary to investigate the validity of "methodology" or epistemic discourse as a mode for the study, interpretation or critique of artworks, and to suggest possible alternatives. In order to do this, I call upon various theories about critical methods.

Description

Susan Sontag proposed in "Against Interpretation" that the new criticism of art should pay much more attention to form than to content. She suggests that what is needed is "accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art" (1966, 13). This is because interpretation is a way in which one uses art as a tool for non-art intentions, in which one subverts it.

According to Sontag, "the contemporary zeal for the

project of interpretation is often prompted by . . . an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances" (6). She considered that in our society, we must learn to recover our senses and that "in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (14).

Merleau-Ponty put a connected idea differently when he said that "science manipulates things but refuses to inhabit them" (qtd. in Donato 1972, 91). He considered that we should stay as faithful as possible to the "object" that we are trying to understand. He contrasted description and analysis, preferring the former because he believed that it could remain closer to some kind of original unity between the world and the subject.

In later years, Merleau-Ponty realized that no description could be completely adequate because it is a linguistic effort in which the signifier is simply the mediating term that leads to the semantic aspect of language. He came to "prefer the wordless silence of painting, which for him was closer to the unbroken continuity of subject and object in which being is grounded" (Donato 1972, 91). This "being" is embodied presence which links subject and object through "pure" perception, leading to all-encompassing meaning.

Analysis of systems

As we saw in chapter II, Jean-François Lyotard presents

the "perception" of a painting as an event that points to the "break" between subject and object rather than to any continuity between them: we are made aware of the event of seeing rather than of what we see. In a direct break with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological view of the continuity between object and subject, the linguistic model disrupts the notion of unbroken continuity. It shows that the order of the signified is secondary to the one of the signifier. This allowed Foucault to say that the order of words makes sense of the order of things (1966).

Working at the same period as Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss claimed in Les structures élémentaires de la parenté (1949), that the notion of discontinuity is essential to the understanding of any given phenomena. Within his subject matter, Lévi-Strauss also distinguishes two orders.

One in which his object of study is apprehended as its own end, governed by its own laws constituting it a system, and the other order, namely, that through which an individual enters, perceives, and understands the system. The two are discontinuous and the anthropologist's task is to study the former and to discard the latter. (qtd. in Donato 1972, 94)

The second order referred to by Lévi-Strauss is the one of interpretation.

Mythomorphic discourse

According to Derrida (1972), Levi-Strauss's work on myths is remarkable because it puts forward a structural science of myths which also reflects on itself, criticizes itself, as discourse.

Levi-Strauss contrasts the bricoleur with the engineer. Bricolage consists in using already existing language, whatever is at hand, to make myth. The engineer constructs his language from scratch. In Jack Burnham's words,

the bricoleur builds up structures by fitting together events while science, in operation, simply by virtue of coming into being, creates its means and results in the form of events thanks to the structures which it is constantly elaborating and which are its hypotheses and theories. (1973, 11)

Levi-Strauss states further that no one myth deserves more than any other its referential privilege in a culture and that there is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus points or sources of the myth are always shadows and virtualities. Everything begins with the structure, the configuration. The mythopoetical power of bricolage is based on the abandonment of all reference to a centre, to a privileged reference. But the absolute requirement of scientific discourse, the discourse of the engineer, is that we go back to the source, to the centre, to the founding principle.

It follows that the discourse on myth cannot itself have an absolute subject, a centre, without shortchanging the form and movement of the myth. Since myth is an acentric structure, scientific discourse cannot convey it: centering a language which is describing an acentric structure misrepresents that structure. If scientific discourse does violence to its subject, that is to say, changes it in any way, then it fails as science, since it does not represent its object truthfully.

Lévi-Strauss concludes that, in opposition to scientific discourse, mythological discourse must be mythomorphic: it must have the form of that of which it speaks, there exists no veritable end or term to mythical analysis, no secret unity which could be grasped: scientific discourse on myth has to be mythological discourse (qtd. in Derrida 1972).

When considering Lévi-Strauss's conception of bricolage, it appears, at first glance, that artworks are simply another form of myth. At any rate, it is clear that their introduction as source material raises similar problems. Consequently, epistemic discourse is likely to be as inappropriate for artworks as it is for myths.

THE LANGUAGE OF ART

In the following sections, I will explore the relation of artworks to myth and various approaches to criticism (or interpretation, or analysis) entailed by this relation.

Myth and narrative knowledge

In Lévi-Strauss's understanding of it, myth is an acentric form, not because it lacks an author but because it has an abundance of them: it is created from the work of many authors because it is constructed from pre-authored elements of other languages or events that have been re-introduced in a process of bricolage. This is very similar to what Lyotard describes as narrative knowledge, in which authorship is not an issue, in that it does not affect the "validity" of the story, but also because the "story" is in some way "authored" each time it is retold or experienced.

Both these forms seem to accomplish the same "task" of justifying "culture" or "historical intention" by presenting it as "nature". As Roland Barthes said, "in myth, things lose the memory that they were once made" (1972, 142).

Roland Barthes describes myth as a double order semiological system. It takes as its signifier an already existing sign or meaning, the signified in the linguistic order. When linguistic meaning becomes mythical form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind. It becomes empty and history evaporates. The form that has been emptied when a signified is turned into a signifier becomes the vehicle of analogies which are supplied by history, therefore motivated. The traces of weightless meaning in the mythical signifier give credibility to the concept of the myth and the myth reader sees the myth as an inductive system in which the

signifier and the signified have a causal relationship (1972, 126-129).

The very principle of myth is that it transforms history into nature. The myth reader is led to rationalize the signified by means of the signifier. . . . Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. (1972, 129;142)

As soon as one language speaks about another one, a "langage-objet", it mythologizes that language and denudes it of its meaning. It misrepresents its object while pretending to mirror it.³⁴

Roland Barthes's concept of myth is extremely valuable as it provides a framework for distinguishing between discourse and language. This means that artworks, although they are not discourse, and therefore not myth, according to Barthes, can still be considered as a linguistic system.

Orders of language

So that we might understand how artworks can differ from myth and what linguistic system they belong to, it is necessary to distinguish between orders of language.

The first order is operational and, in Barthes's terms political, because it only represents nature inasmuch as it transforms it. A second order language is created when the subject and object are no longer in transitive relationship.

The object is "celebrated" as an image at our disposal. This language is a metalanguage, but not entirely mythical. It is articulated language and easily invaded by myth because it is "composed of a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating". It is the locus of myth, however, because "myth can only work on objects which have already received the mediation of a first language" (146). Myth is third order language, metalanguage par excellence.

The language of artworks

If we think of artworks as belonging to an order of language, the various positions from which they can be approached correspond to each of the three levels.

Janet Wolff defines the specificity of art [artworks] as residing in its particular language. The weakness of her theory comes from the fact that she does not differentiate between "metalanguage and langage-objet". Her approach presupposes that art is in the order of myth: in her view, not only do artworks "reflect" society they also use social "meanings" as signifiers; they become discourse themselves.

It seems to me that a great deal of discourse on art attempts to mythify art but, in doing so, becomes myth itself. Barthes considers metalangage as myth, robbing a "langage-objet". Nothing is impervious to myth, which can corrupt everything, even resistance to it. If a language is too full, that is to say with few virtualities, it is simply wholly co-

opted: an equation becomes the sign for mathematicality, poetic license signifies poetry, and art becomes a signifier (for instance) in Bourdieu's "mythological" concept of "cultural capital" (1990). There are many examples, in chapter III, of discourse on art that turns art into the impoverished signifier of a mythical system.

If one views the artist as a bricoleur putting together an artwork by using already existing elements, combining the many "languages" of its social context, then artworks can be understood as an articulated language which is a second order metalanguage. According to Jack Burnham, what we refer to as aesthetic choice has its roots in totemism. He bases this idea on Levi-Strauss's work on totemic systems which are defined as consistent systems of metaphor that unify the natural environment with society. The function of totemism and art "is to guarantee the convertibility of ideas between different levels of social reality" (1973, 11). This view implies that art produces images of these different realities that stand in for them and that are movable and interchangeable. It represents reality in a language that contains virtuality as well as displaced meaning and is therefore extremely vulnerable to myth.

We might argue that ideas cannot be so easily converted for in that conversion from one level of reality to another, there is a "problématisation" of the correspondence between the two which could offer a resistance to myth. However, even

resistance to myth becomes fodder to it. It appears that nothing can escape the ravages of mythological discourse (Barthes 1972 129).

Barthes discusses a first level order of language that myth cannot overtake: this is non-mythical language, spoken in order to transform reality, not to preserve it as an image: it is "langage-objet" because it becomes the object of second order language, but also because it "speaks" the object, not about the object.³⁵ As we have seen, myth can only work by using as its first term or signifier, the final term or signified of a prior order metalanguage (129-146). Myth cannot take over a "langage-objet" directly since such a language is unmediated.

Barthes sees artworks as reaching "the threshold of myth endowed with the same signifying function" (115) as any other first order language: artworks are not myth, they are on an operational level, which includes both the aspects of creation and reception. The very function of art as object-x and the empty space is to escape mythologizing: it ensures that artworks remain at the level of a langage-objet.

POST-METHODOLOGY

Although artworks are not myth, they present similar characteristics in that they are also acentric structures. The idea of mythomorphic discourse on myths leads to the one of

"artistic" discussion of artworks and points to a solution to the methodological dilemma with which I started this chapter. However it is a solution that presents its own problems for it seems that we are once again confronted with a form of the subject\object dichotomy.

In the following sections, I present several approaches to understanding the connections between the "reading" of an object of study and the expression of that interpretation. This is important because criticism (discussion of artwork) involves two moments (at least) in which method is crucial to "validity". The first one has to do with the interpreter "reading" the artwork and the second is related to the expression of that "reading" for another reader\interpreter.

Interpretation\description

Artworks become a reality that is represented and even "celebrated" in metalanguage. When Susan Sontag sees interpretation as aggressive misrepresentation, her suggestion to engage in "accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art" (1964 13) attempts to redress what she perceives as a misleading approach in that it falsifies the work of art, overlaying meaning upon meaning on it. In effect she wants to protect art from myth. However it is doubtful whether description can remain strictly descriptive for words always carry traces of value and meaning, turning even simple description into interpretation.

Even supposing that this were possible, the description becomes the creation of a metalanguage that lends itself to pillage by the mythical order.

Interpretation\analysis

Rather than description, Levi-Strauss contrasts interpretation (the interjection of the subject) with analysis (the elimination of the subject). He recognizes the existence of the two orders which he sees as discontinuous. However, he rejects interpretation as inappropriate for anthropology and concentrates on analysis of the structure of his object of study. There is a paradoxical quality to Levi-Strauss's method because even though he discards interpretation (the signified) in favour of analysis (the signifier), the object of his analysis points to the relation between signifier and signified, since myth is simply another version of these two components of signs. This would seem to indicate that it is impossible to ignore either analysis or interpretation.

Both Levi-Strauss and Sontag consider that valid criticism starts from the object rather than from the subject, and depends, in fact, on the elimination of the latter.

Subject\subject\object

Georges Poulet presents us with another point of view which sees criticism as originating from the interiority of the subject, and not only of the receiving subject but of the

creating subject as well. He says that "criticism seems to oscillate between two possibilities: a union without comprehension, and a comprehension without union" (1972, 66). He wonders whether these two forms can be practised in combination through a "kind of reciprocation and alternation" (67).

He insists on the primacy of adhesion to the work (object of study) before there can be differentiation from it. This adhesion allows the "fusion of two consciousnesses" (63) which in turn leads to a differentiation between the subject present in the work and everything else. At this point the critic finds what "is previous to the work and on which the work depends for its very existence" (72). The way to the object is, in fact, from subject to subject, to object.

This view reminds me of Jacques Lacan's "inmixing". He believes that the message always comes from the place of the other. Lacan's theory is, of course, a theory of the subject, but it is useful to consider it, in an attempt to understand the relation between subject and object, in criticism.

In order to explain the subject, Lacan uses the image of a Mobia strip which is a wide and flexible band joined together at both ends, after it has been twisted once. If you run a finger along its edge, you reach your starting point, without removing your finger, having covered both edges of the band completely: there are two separate edges (two subjects) which are(is) also only one line. The unconscious is a

thinking with words and thoughts that escape one's vigilance. I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not. "It is as if a demon plays a game with your watchfulness. . . . The question is to find a precise status for this other subject. . . . It is necessary to find the subject as a lost object" (189-192).

If we think again of object-x and the empty space, it becomes clear that it is a way of describing the subject as both subject (object) and subject (identity) in constant displacement with each other.

Going back to Poulet's thoughts on criticism, it seems to me that one could apply the mobia strip image to his ideas. The experience of an object of study is one which alternates between adhesion (subject\subject) and separation (subject\object) in order to allow for the place of otherness from which comes the message. This is no light weight reading of a work: it amounts to a form of (psycho)analysis, undergone by the reader who is no longer the same subject\subject after the experience: it is a productive method of reading.

This idea of adhesion and separation is repeated in Jacques Derrida's approach to criticism, with some difference, and more concentration on the links between the text of one's criticism and the one of the object criticized.

Découpage\montage

According to Gregory Ulmer, "in contemporary critical

writing the issue is "representation" -the representation of the object of study in a critical text" (1983, 83). This implies a re-evaluation of the relation of the critical text to its object.

Jacques Derrida has used the modernist method of collage\montage to complicate what has been assumed as the boundary line between the text and what is classed as real, placed outside the text, but discussed in the text.

Collage involves a break or discontinuous relation between elements in a context. Images or messages are cut out, severed from where they were and transferred to another space. Because of this transposition, they become always already performed or extant. Montage is the "dissemination" of these borrowings through their new settings. Derrida does not abandon or deny reference, but rethinks it. He relies on collage\montage as the stylistic device with which to deconstruct mimesis.

In "grammatology", Derrida replaces the linguistic "sign" (composed of signifier and signified, the most basic unit of meaning according to structuralists) with a still more basic unit, the gram (or *différance*). This is where collage as a play between absence and presence is suggestive: no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not present. One can only produce a text in the transformation of a pre-existing one, for each element has within it the trace of the other elements of the chain or

system. This creates a reading effect that oscillates between presence and absence since signifieds and signifiers are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations (1967).

In writing, Derrida tells us to "clip out an example, since you cannot and should not undertake the infinite commentary that at every moment seems necessary to engage and immediately to annul itself" (1981, 300), for "[to] write means a graft" (Dissemination, 355). The system of reference that is created by this "grafting" works in terms of "différance". It repeats the object, but in repeating it moves it. One text has been superimposed on another.

Rather than producing a mimesis of the object (which, in any case, is a distortion of it, as we have seen) Derrida's writing attempts to mime the object in discourse, even in the case of a visual work (1986, 213-290). What is implied by textual mime is "that knowledge of an object of study may be obtained without conceptualization or explanation". This kind of criticism functions as an "epistemology" of performance - knowing as making, producing, doing, acting (Ulmer 1983, 94). Writing may show more (and other) than it says. It is this "surplus value" (allegory) of writing that interests Derrida.

According to Ulmer, traditional criticism is vertical (interpretation), whereas post-criticism (narrative allegory) is horizontal (literal interpretation) and favours the material of the signifier over the meanings of the signified.

He considers the method to be objective because the "object" leads, criticism being a translation into words of the inner logic of the thing or the event. Once articulated, the material can be rearranged in order to render intelligible its "truth" (1983, 95).

In La vérité en peinture (1978), Derrida certainly attempted to let his writing do his explaining. By this I mean that he avoided one unified metalanguage and used instead the method he was describing in his description of it. He created a situation in which we have to experience his content rather than have it explained to us.³⁶

To write\about

Roland Barthes's efforts are directed towards reaching an understanding of the core of the relation between the writer and the other. He is mainly concerned with the writing of literature but his ideas can also be applied to the writing of critical text, especially since he considers that radical literature is in fact text which is critical of language itself.

He attempts to identify the positional field of the subject "I" in writing, by analyzing temporality, person and diathesis or voice (passive, active and middle) in grammar. This study leads him to wonder whether the verb "to write" is in fact to be used in the middle voice, rather than the active one.

Discursive temporality is the opposition of two radically different systems: the temporal system of the discourse itself, which is adapted to the temporality of the speaker and for which the utterance is always the point of origin, and the temporal system of history which has to do with the recounting of past events without any intervention from the speaker and which is consequently deprived of present and future. This points to the fact that the speaker-referent relation and the speaker-utterance relation are not to be confused. He contrasts the "present of the speaker" which he says is "grounded on a psychological fullness", with the present of what is spoken. This "what is spoken" is not the referent: it is the "what is spoken" in the speaking or writing. It is a mobile temporality in which the event and the writing become absolutely coincidental (1972, 137-140).

In his discussion of "person", he says that "when a narrator recounts what has happened to him, the 'I' who recounts is no longer the same 'I' as the one who is recounted. . . . The 'I' of discourse can no longer be a place where a previously stored-up person is innocently restored" (140). There is a large degree of intersubjectivity (overlapping of message) between the "I" who writes "I" and the "I" which is read by "thou", but they are not the same.

Grammatical voice indicates the way in which the subject of the verb is affected by the action. This is what determines whether the action is passive, active or middle. Middle voice

is not an intermediate space between active and passive. It is a voice that indicates that the subject is in a relation of agency with regard to the action of the verb, not a psychological subject who is anterior to the action. The subject is effecting and affected by the action, but the action is not done to the subject. The subject always remains inside the action even if there is an object involved.

He concludes that "in the modern verb of middle voice 'to write', the subject is immediately contemporary with the writing, being effected and affected by it" (143). He considers that the meaning of this new use of "to write" is to "substitute the instance of discourse for the instance of reality (or of the referent), which has been and still is a mythical 'alibi' dominating the idea of literature" (144).

"Valid" reading(s) and writing(s)

The various positions I have just described (or hinted at) differ in many ways, sometimes fundamental ones. What they all point to is the difficulty of the relation between an "object" of study and discourse about it. Sontag and Levi-Strauss focus on the referent as point of departure and suggest "description" or "analysis" as methods that respect the integrity of the object studied, both in terms of reading "it" and writing "it". Poulet considers that the only way to reach the object that is previous to the work, is through the subject, in a process of alternating identification and

differentiation between two subjects, the reading one and the writing one. Both subjects are anterior to discourse, but affected by the process.

Since the critic is both a reader of "the object" and a writer about it, for yet another reader, Poulet's introduction of the double subject (inverting "I" and "thou"), both present in the moment of reading, is an interesting one. Barthes touches on this also, but rejects the anteriority of the subject that Poulet seems to rely on. He considers that discourse is in "bad faith" when it makes literary form simply the expression of an interiority constituted previous to and outside of language (1972, 138).

Derrida proposes that there is always *différance*, that any "I" is an always already existing "I", but that in repetition of this "I", it is no longer the same; therefore, there is no possibility of a non-anterior "I", any more than of a "stored-up 'I'". He considers that the "object" can be reached somehow from text to text in a method that makes "quotation" productive of not only an understanding through experience of the "object" of study, but also of surplus meaning. This is akin, in some way, to Poulet's method of "adhesion" to gain access to knowledge. But whereas Poulet calls for adhesion of two subjective identities or "thinkings", Derrida proposes the adhesion of text to text, not in the former's sense of union, but in the opposite sense of juxtaposition between the text of the critic and the text

of the object, a juxtaposition from which the reader can experience the inner logic of the thing or the event.

Even though such considerations as the ones I have just presented are not involved in the elaboration of "epistemic methodology", they remain concerned with questions of "validity". Jacques Derrida expressed this very clearly when he asked, in 1971, whether

all discourses on myths [were] equivalent? Shall we have to abandon any epistemological requirement which permits us to distinguish between several qualities of discourse on myth? A classic question but inevitable. (258)

He also pointed out the paradox inherent in "bricolage" as a critique of language, which is that even though a bricoleur made the myth of the engineer, the very idea of bricolage is menaced by the dissolution of its opposite . . . the engineer (1971).

Many of the recent productions in post-criticism have concentrated on establishing methods of "translation" of works rather than "re-presentation" of them, and in doing so have re-evaluated the concept of validity and the criteria necessary to arrive at it.

VALIDITY

One fact strikes me particularly about post-critical approaches and that is the impossibility of generalization from one object to another, or one corpus to another with regard to methods of study and expression. Each object or corpus is positioned in its own set of conjunctures which includes its modes of access and "dissemination".

In this section, I wish to develop a *modus operandi* for the final component of my project which includes contextualization of my sculpture and the sculpture itself.

The "break" in object within this project

If artworks were indeed metalanguage, myth in Barthes's terms, discourse in Lyotard's framework, then an epistemic discursive (mythical) analysis of them would be quite justified. However, we have shown in earlier chapters that artworks are not discourse. If artworks are "langage-objet", then discursive analysis simply uses them and empties them of their meaning; it appropriates for purposes of "intentional" mystification. The initial chapters (I through IV) as well as this one are discursive and may even be myth but this is consistent with the corpus being discussed which is also discourse or myth.³⁷

The discontinuity in this thesis occurs at the point of the practicum.

Any work of art exists and is made within the context of other artworks, which make up a large part of the framework from which an artist draws the sources of new work. This means that some form of interpretation of artworks is inevitable, even at the level of artmaking.

However, unless an artist is writing theory, it is rare that her interpretation of other artworks is put into words. In this particular instance, it is necessary that I attempt to describe the context of the sculptural installation. The question becomes how to remain as faithful as possible to the artworks themselves.

I will retain several elements that pertain to artworks as I conceive of them, in order to map out a method of translation or transposition that is "valid".

Artworks as "markers" of art

As "events", artworks inject discontinuity or interruption in a discursive flow. They are constituted through a process of collage drawing upon unlimited sources. The subject matter of a work, its discursivity, its meaning, consists in the elements "already existing elsewhere", that are brought into play by the work and in the work. The symbolic, the "mise en relation" of these elements, which happens in montage, allows artworks to move from a second order language to an operational one, overthrowing the old readings of these elements and constituting an absence of

meaning while creating a surplus of meaning.

Art has to do with the relation between form and content, between object and subject, as I showed in chapter IV. Artworks are symbolic manifestations (actualizations) of art, giving us access to a moment of witnessing and questioning our place in the world. They make a hole in text, a silence in discourse that is immediately filled, but that remains as the place of desire. Artworks are specific form in artificial relation with specific meaning, neither "real", nor "interpretation", presenting each intermittently and allowing no (fixed) central position, and therefore showing us the gap between the two.

As I said earlier in this chapter, I am creating a sort of ethnographic study with this thesis, in which the separation between artist and theoretician is both completely analytic and also factual, consisting of the dual product of theory and sculpture. I believe that artworks are the ultimate metaphor for the subject, as a manifestation of object-x and the empty space. This links the two components of this project.

"Faithfulness"

My method will be formed by the following considerations and techniques.

There must be a relation of analogy between the object and the interpretation: mime rather than mimesis. The

discontinuity of the collage method of artmaking must be reflected in the next chapters. Epistemic notions of validity must be altered; a double form must exist to parallel the distinction between artwork and discourse.

According to Ulmer, "texts represent or mime not by means of signs but by signing -the signature. What remains of "identity" in a post-critical text is constituted by the new mimesis -the contamination between language and its user" (1983, 107). Since contamination has a rather negative intimation, I would add that in Barthes terms, the "person" of my discourse is not a "stored-up 'I'" but one in which the present of the speaker overlaps the "mobile temporality" of the event of speaking. I hope to continue to write in "middle voice", a voice in which I and "what is spoken" remain inside the action as effecting and affected by it, even if there is a subject\object involved.

In chapter VI, I expect to show the context of artists words and works from which I draw the sources or elements I use in the making of the sculpture. Other people's work, other objects, have suggestive power, whether or not I use the elements I isolate in adherence or contradiction with their prior context. There is no question of accurate "quotation" in this sense, as a condition of validity. In chapter VII, I will do the same thing but with regard to the genesis and development of the sculpture itself.

CHAPTER VI³⁸

(s)CUL(p)TURE AND NATURE

*It is this constant game of hide and seek between
Is it this constant game of hide and seek between the
the meaning and the form which defines the myth
meaning and the form which defines an artwork?
(Barthes 1957, 118).*

*The diversity of the signified in artworks exactly
The ubiquity of the signifier in myth exactly
reproduce: the physique of the alibi . . . object-x and the
reproduces the physique of the alibi. . . .
empty space . . . reality is not where I think it is.*

*An alibi? No. Because an alibi is the justification of a
In the alibi there is a place which is empty and
false reality, made necessary by the "true" reality, which
one which is full (I am not where you think I am; I
must be disguised. There is little "true" reality. Little
am where you think I am not). . . . Nothing
reality, little truth, might be possible. A mythical signifier
prevents [myth] from being a perpetual alibi . . .
has two sides: old meaning that is now used as image or form
[since] its signifier has two sides [it always has]
of new content.
an elsewhere at its disposal (123).*

Myth has stolen the signified of a prior language,
The meaning is always there to present the form;
because the "new" content of the myth is only credible if the
the form is always there to outdistance the meaning
old content of its signifier is recognizable to everyone, in
(Barthes 1957, 123).

fact, almost a cliché. A signified turned into signifier: no
elimination or contradiction, just subversion of the "old"
signified in support of mythical content . . . empirical
The very principle of myth: it transforms history
verification of indisputably "natural" reality.

into nature (129).

Out of nature.

Writing [poetry] and pictures: they are both signs;
Artmaking, like mythmaking, is language piracy. So that
they both reach the threshold of myth endowed with
on some level artworks must be myth since they consist in the
the same signifying function; they constitute, one
theft of already existing bits and pieces which have been
just as much as the other, language-objet (115).
taken from a former context and transformed.

Artworks steal the signifier, not the signified. The

There is one language that is not mythical: the "bits and pieces" of language used in artworks are the language of man the producer: wherever man speaks "events" of the language, not the representation of a specific in order to transform reality and no longer to "old" content. Artworks manipulate form rather than meaning.

preserve it as an image, wherever he links his In action upon the image, artworks unsettle the signified, language to the making of things (Barthes 1957, show it to be historically contingent and therefore cannot 146).

function as mythical carriers.

Myth . . . abolishes the complexity of human acts, Artworks stand as evidence of complexity, invoke the co- it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does existence of subject and object in a dialectic without end, away with all dialectics, with any going back and make obvious the multiple subjectivities that lie behind beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a the immediately perceivable, indicating a world in which the world which is without contradictions. . . (143).

"object" is turned into contradicting "realities".

It is extremely difficult to vanquish myths (129).

Mythmaking is impossible if the memory of their making is

*In myth things lose the memory that they were once
alive. Artworks must call attention to themselves, to their*

*made (Barthes 1957, 129). Truth to tell, the best
artificiality as artworks. Their "reality must be a contrived*

*weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its
one, in which there is no possible misrepresentation of*

turn, to produce an artificial myth (129).

"reality" as natural.

It must be clear that it is our business not to

Rather than create reality, or even suggest reality

*supply reality but to invent allusions to the
corrections, artworks point out the existence of the non-*

*conceivable which cannot be presented (Lyotard
conceived.*

1993b, 46).

The various avant-gardes have humbled and

In questioning the rules for making art, in emphasizing

*disqualified reality by examining the pictorial
the artificiality of artworks, we show the lie and therefore*

*techniques which are so many devices to make us
tell the truth about truth-telling.*

believe in it (45).

Artwork displaces the correspondences between meaning and
Modernity in whatever age it appears cannot exist
reality. It shows the unbridgeable distance between subject
without a shattering of belief and without
and object. It should not be called to order as a method of
discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality
serving the current reality or for promoting a desired one.
(Lyotard 1993b, 43).

Artwork(ing) places its artist in the alternating
subjective states of subject\author and subject\receiver, a
Cette situation [d'écriture] est celle-là même où
naked moment in which subjective knowledge vacillates ...
s'opère un certain ébranlement de la personne, un
the gap between object\matter and subject\matter of a work, is
renversement des anciennes lectures, une secousse
also unbridgeable for its perceiver, who is presented with the
du sens, déchiré, exténué jusqu'à son vide
unknowable.
insubstituable, sans que l'objet cesse jamais
d'être signifiant, désirable (Barthes 1970, 10).

What Habermas requires from the arts . . . is to
 to bridge the gap
 bridge the gap between cognitive, ethical, and
 to bridge the gap
 political discourses, thus opening the way to a
 t o b r i d g e t h e g a p
 unity of experience . . . (Lyotard 1993b, 39).

. . . artists and writers must be brought back into
 Such a sense of unity can only produced in discourse
 the bosom of the community, or at least, they must
 since discourse constructs reality in its representation of
 be assigned the task of healing it (40).
 "reality". Because artworks alternate between representation
 . . . the painter and novelist must refuse to lend
 of "event" and "event" itself, they cannot bridge the gap
 themselves to such therapeutic uses [to serve what
 between what we have in our mind and what cannot exist there.
 Habermas has in mind] (41).

At this point, my understanding of artwork(ing) becomes

The works [postmodern artists] produce are not, in prescriptive: if it does not question the "dogma", whatever principle, governed by pre-established rules . . .

those rules might be, then it is, at the very least, inferior

those rules and categories are what the work of art art. Currently artworks rarely take the chance of being wrong.

itself is looking for (Lyotard 1993b, 43).

In order to exist publicly today, artworks follow

All that has been received if only yesterday, must prescriptions for political and aesthetic correctness, and

be suspected (43).

form follows meaning.

Artworks (the ones we see at any rate) are fast becoming

The distance between art and the praxis of life discourse, rather than a challenge to it. Or they are

[may be] a requisite for that free space within meaningless formal exercises. The radicality of the border

which alternatives to what exists become between art and discourse is in question.

conceivable (Bürger 1993, 242).

This is not acceptable.

*It is no longer clear what artists and writers of
If meaninglessness is not insignificance, then
the present period are supposed to be doing, since
meaningless art can actually protest the imposition of a
nobody has a unique private world or style to
certain form of resistance, i.e. the adoption of the dominant
express any longer, all that is left is meaningless
discourse of resistance.*

imitation of dead styles (Jameson 1983, 115).

Quoting past artworks works to question the prevailing
*Art's purpose . . . is to interrupt the purposeful
aesthetic. These "meaningless" quotations create a break in
steps we are always taking . . . towards a surer
the continuity of the development of art. They crack the
grasp on things. It wants to make us hear . . . the
temple of art. They mythologize a mythology. This crack, this
stifled call of a language . . . which affords no
disruption of credibility becomes the abyss before which we
grasp on anything. For this utter insecurity, is
stand.*

the source of all authenticity (Maurice Blanchot).

The institution of art is its discourse. So that if art

The European avant-garde movements can be defined
is to remain distinct from discourse, if it is to remain art,
as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois
then it must resist its own institution.

society. What is negated is not [a style] but art
Even if it is the institution of art associated with a
as an institution that is unassociated with the
pre-defined and very "correct and desirable" praxis of life.
praxis of the life of men (Bürger 1984, 239).

Artworks must resist the institution of art.

The avant-gardist attempt to reintegrate art into
Everyday life is the common and repetitive experience of
life is itself a profoundly contradictory
the dichotomies and contradictions that have been the
endeavour. . . . An art no longer distinct from the
protected domain of philosophy. Unique and private worlds are
praxis of life but wholly absorbed in it, will lose
only individual points of view, particular resolutions of
the capacity to criticize it, along with its
everyday paradox.
distance (240).

"My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the

transformation of the idea of sculpture.

This leaves place for paralogical acts that destabilize

. . . how the concept of sculpting can be extended
and redefine seemingly stable and impregnable institutions. By

to the invisible materials used by everyone.
definition, these acts or "coups" originate from outside the

THINKING FORMS . . . SPOKEN FORMS . . . ; SOCIAL
logic of the system and spring from inventiveness, rather than

SCULPTURE : SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS;
innovation. They are a factor of the imagination, of non-

EVERYONE AN ARTIST. This is why the nature of my
rational thinking.

sculpture is not fixed and finished. Processes

Quantum theory and microphysics have given us cause to

continue in most of them: chemical reactions,
question the whole idea of a predictable and continuous

fermentations, color changes, decay, drying up.
trajectory. With catastrophe theory and the idea of chaos as

Everything in a STATE OF CHANGE" (Joseph Beuys qtd
the natural order, evolution is discontinuous, paradoxical.

in Tisdall 1979).

A monument is an enduring reminder. Immovable evidence.

The logic of sculpture is inseparable, it would stubbornly unchanging in itself, it sits in a place which seem, from the logic of the monument . . . a changes. The context of the monument.

sculpture is a commemorative representation. It It invariably marks a cultural grave because even as it sits in a particular place and speaks in a serves to represent an importance of the past, it points to symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that the absence of that past. Ephemeral sculpture almost seems a place (Krauss 1983, 33).

contradiction in terms.

One enters an absolute loss of place . . . one Richard Serra's Tilted Arc contradicted the actual use of enters modernism . . . that operates in relation to the place he designed it for, and this in formal terms. This this loss of site, producing the monument as work became immovable (temporarily) evidence of the breakdown abstraction, as pure marker or base, functionally of the logic of the monument: it overruled the place, with placeless and largely self-referential (35).

meaning. A monument in weight and size. Monumental imposition.

Something that is not landscape and not architecture can

In being the negative condition of the monument,
be moved around from place to place. An object in space or in
modernist sculpture . . . had become pure
place, out of place.

negativity . . . the category that resulted from
The separation between landscape and architecture is
the addition of the not-landscape to the not-
simply a way of stating a particular form of the inside\
architecture (Krauss 1983, 36).

outside binary system. In some sense this is a false dichotomy

because landscape can be understood as an extension of

. . . there is no reason not to imagine an opposite
architecture: a human composition of the outdoors, an outside
term -one that could be both landscape and
room, a place inhabited by the human imagination.

architecture (37).

There is no reason now not to imagine another term -that
could be both landscape and not-landscape, both architecture
and not-architecture. Is landscape not architecture?

In exploring the dichotomy between landscape and

The true avant-garde of architecture . . . is in architecture, sculpture is placed on the border between them.

the jetties, towers, tunnels, walls, rooms,
It cannot encompass both but moves from one to the other,
bridges, ramps, mounds, ziggurats, the buildings
alluding to each in turn, displacing them both, abstracting
and landscapes, structures and constructions of
them from their self definition.

environmental art (McDonough 1983, 233).

Identity limits. When Alice Aycock (and others) makes

"dwellings" that are not dwellings, protective places that

In architecture, a wall is structure and materials;
don't protect, inside spaces that are outside, she throws into

to Aycock it is charged with psychological and
question the selves of architecture and landscape. Displacing

mythological possibilities. Haunted, mysterious,
the elements on the chains . . . her sculpture performs its

threatening, it is as full of tales as it is of
symbolic role . . . object-x.

nails (McDonough 1983, 239).

Such art is pathetic because it chases something that

Any art that refers back to the "self" even in actually never is. Expressionism which searches for and wants

terms of space is not abstract but pathetic
to communicate the centre of self, or the origin of being or

Any kind of expressionism involves the pathetic
the ultimate presence seems now to have been a naive project,

remains of the self (Robert Smithson 1979, 218).

since it is à la recherche d'un soi révolu qu'on ne peut que

The self is a fiction which many imagine to be real
se raconter et qui dès lors ne fait plus partie d'expression,

(218).

mais de narration. La grandeur de ces oeuvres se trouve dans

la mise en evidence de l'impossibilité de cette unicité.

On ne peut plus penser que dans le vide de l'homme

It is only in the space that is created by the absence of

disparu. Car ce vide ne creuse pas un manque; il ne
identity that change can occur. Sculpture, as monument,

prescrit pas une lacune à combler. Il n'est rien de
identifies a space, expresses it as place. When sculpture and

moins que le dépli d'un espace où il est enfin à
place disconnect, abstraction becomes possible. A

nouveau possible de penser (Foucault 1966, 363).

representation of dislocation.

In the process of occupying it, sculpture points to the
The sense of place . . . explored by minimalist
space itself. An object marks undifferentiated space and
sculpture . . . Carl Andre . . . Time as well as
creates the illusion of "place". Or a differentiated space
motion through space became essential to
marks an object.

experiencing the works (Beardsley 1977, 13).

. . . experience of an interaction between the
The differential is the symbolic and comes from the
perceiving body and the world which fully admits
"experiencer".

that the terms of this interaction are temporal as

well as spatial, that existence is process, that
I think structuralism is the story of the space and the
the art itself is a form of behaviour . . . (Robert
process of filling it instead of the story of what fills it.

Morris in Beardsley 1977, 13).

I relate to space as virtuality.

I feel space as virtuality.

The space is always there, occasionally filled: a place.

Things can never return to a former place. As soon as
Whence things have their origin, there they must
their place leaves them, they pay penalty and are judged for
also pass away according to necessity; for they
their injustice, their lack of fit. This quote of a quote of
must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice,
a quote of a translated quote only functions according to the
according to the ordinance of time (Nietzsche, in
current placement, with all the weight attached to the
Ian Hamilton Finlay in Abrioux 1985, 229).
quoter(s) (in this case).

A person who is "here" but would rather be
A work placed in space is a collage between the object
somewhere else is an exile or a prisoner; a person
placed and the context within which it is placed.

who is "here" but thinks he is somewhere else is
To yearn for a time gone by, a return to the garden of
insane. But when you are here and don't know where
Eden (Alan Sonfist...): exile. To think that "here" can be
you are because you've misplaced your landmarks or
defined (and so elsewhere): insanity.

bearing, then you need not be an exile or a madman:
To be lost simply suggests space open to place.

you are simply lost (Margaret Atwood 1972, 19).

*There is a fine line between polishing and removing
the marks of manufacture . . . The void is not
silent. I've always thought of it as potential
uterine space, virtuality relating to presence\absence of
space. I'm coming to think of it more and more as a
self and other. Embryology is the story of what fills the
transitional space, an in-between space. It's very
space but the space is untold, unutterable.*

*much to do with time (Anish Kapoor in Grande 1994,
Perpetual recreation . . .*

142).

The space is always there, occasionally filled: a place.

I used to say I will make no more holes. Now I know

*I will always make them. I am drawn to them with
Making a hole . . . cannot be making nothing.*

*the same urge I have to look over a cliff edge. It
The hole is the whole thing, from entering the womb in
is possible that the last work I make will be a
life, to entering the grave in death.*

hole (Andy Goldsworthy 1993, 24).

Abstraction is what has been retained from space and
Where ever the eye sees space there is no
time. In the case of art involving the outdoors, to place a
abstraction. Space is apart from the abstract which
structure in space always constructs a vista. Some artists do
is all mental (Robert Smithson 1979, 218).
this specifically (Nancy Holt, Mary Miss, ...).

. . . that area between events which could be
called the gap. This gap exists in the blank and
As soon as "nondescript" space has been noticed, parts of
void regions or settings that we never look at. The
it are abstracted, "de-scripted"

emptiness could be defined by the actual
Content is an abstraction from time and space. The
installation of art. Installations should empty
situation or event that is set up by the artist cannot empty
rooms, not fill them (Robert Smithson 1979, 60).
a space in absolute terms. It can only empty it of its current
content. We always have the choices between possible
abstractions, and in upsetting the conventions that have
already been set up, we can create a gap in meaning.

Questioner: (to Haacke) Don't you identify your
piece with a type of gardening?

Haacke: Oh, I suppose. But the intention is very
different.

. . . make something which experiences, reacts to its environment,

. . .

changes, is non-stable . . .

Questioner: How is this different from someone
. . . make something that is indeterminate that always looks different,
going out and working in a garden? Would that be a
the shape of which cannot be predicted precisely . . .

form of earth art?

. . . make something that lives in time and makes the "spectator"

Haacke: Well, I suppose he doesn't do it for the
experience time . . .

same reasons that I do (Hans Haacke 1969 in Robert
. . . articulate something natural . . . (Hans Haacke 1965, in Burnham

Smithson 1979, 162).
1983, 112-113).

What is a garden?

Every day life is created by a toning down of scale.

Gardens are built on the idea of contrast: one
Little variety in proportion. A reduction of contrast.

thing superimposed on another thing, art on

wildness . . . one can feel clanking machinery

Daily contradictions, reflections of cosmic oppositions,

among the fields as a picturesque effect . . .

are made mundane in the mind. Opposing forces are kept in

enjoying the jostle of contradictory forces and the

equal proportion, but the threat of an imminent change in

mind kept awake by the tensions (Harbison 1977,

scale remains. This eventuality is both exciting and

19).

frightening.

Unexpressionist artists suggest several

relationships, such as over\under or front\back,

The imagination works to make everyday life and also to

fully aware that they are designating something

overthrow it.

which exists elsewhere, nearby and all around:

ungraspable everyday life (17).

There is no such thing as everyday life.

Sowing: once choice of seed established, and earth well

Gardening activity is of five kinds, namely, prepared, wilfully, the fruits of sowing are random.

sowing, planting, fixing, placing, maintaining. In

Planting is more controlled. Planting is placing with an

so far as gardening is an Art, all these may be eye to permanence, but the small plant will grow according to

taken under the one head, composing (Ian Hamilton a construction\destruction dynamic of the elements.

Finlay in Abrioux 1985, 38).

Fixing is establishing the rule by which everything else

can be moved: framing the question. The most artificial aspect

Two basic systems . . . Development: pure of the process, in which arrogance must be held in check.

individual creation; the new; change; progress;

Placing is defining both what has been fixed and what is

excitement . . . Maintenance: Keep the dust off the placed. It feels permanent while it is known to be transitory.

pure individual creation; preserve the new; sustain

The goal of maintenance is to keep the need for order and

the change; defend and prolong the advance . . .

the need for violence in balance, demanding constance of

(Mierle Laderman Ukeles in Burnham 1973, 53).

attention and the will to survive.

As you set foot in a forest, you change it. Pure forest

The atmosphere of any place produces a specific is unattainable. Unless you become part of it; this takes work. When I say atmosphere I think I mean many time, for the "forest" is as elusive as the "primitive things . . . I am not just trying to understand a culture".

rock. . . . I have to understand why it is there

Choosing a site to place an already existing work is a and the time it has spent there, the way it has collage of sorts. The work is in addition to what is there but affected that place (Andy Goldsworthy 1993, 167).

this addition is subtractive because it denudes the space (at The investigation of a specific site is a matter of least partially) since it redefines it.

extracting concepts out of existing sense data

Choosing a site through which to work, in which to work, through direct perceptions. Perception is prior to is the start of a relationship.

conception when it comes to site selection or Virgin land -- disused area -- familiar ground

definition. One does not impose, but rather exposes each presents its own questions and each calls for its own the site . . . (Robert Smithson 1979, 47).

work.

Seen in environmental terms, the artistic process
Seen in environmental terms nothing is divisible from
is indivisible from nature because it involves
nature, whether the material is man-made or not.

working with materials (Grande 1994, 30).

Transience in my work reflects what I find in
Truth to material includes its disappearance. Material is
nature and should not be confused with an attitude
not always solid and heavy. Is time material? Even though we
towards art generally. I have never been against
cannot hold it. Even stone which is as hard as a rock was
the well made or long lasting (Andy Goldsworthy
"liquid" at a time. Transformation of material is not untrue.

1993, 9).

The rock and its environment are part of the same matter.

Somehow to have something physical that generates

ideas is more interesting to me than just an idea
Material digging into material ground is generative.

that might generate something physical (Robert
Lifting and moving suggest ideas about weight that cannot come

Smithson 1979, 187).

from thinking about it.

*It is the case with gardens as with societies: some
Fixing is a constant activity. It is the function of
things require to be fixed so that others may be
discourse performed by social thinkers, enacted by us.*

placed (Ian Hamilton Finlay in Abrioux 1985, 226).

*By manipulating nature through art, we have treated
Art has not discoursed on nature. Nature is its material.*

*it . . . as something to be framed. Nature becomes
Framing or fixing is not exclusive to art, it is "human*

*a device to be used and one of its main purposes is
nature". Changing frames is vital for survival, since what is*

*to have a name attached to it (Grande 1994, 30).
framed changes. Art removes the current frame and presents*

*Dedicated poet-gardeners are rightly viewed not as
another possibility.*

amateur horticulturalists, but as social thinkers

distilling ethical values from the transformation

Distillation of social values is neither the function of

*of their landscape (Bann qtd. in Abrioux 1985, 37).
the poet nor of the gardener.*

In making art, we produce something opaque that can act

*Every style of art is a camouflage through which,
as a transparent view onto something else. This something is*

*by our own reconstruction, we think we see 'real'
another view of "reality" and for a (short) while we believe*

*nature (Ian Harrison Finlay in Abrioux 1985, 134).
(or like to believe) that we have seized the real thing. The*

opacity of art screens out our former view.

But . . . in making art, we also add something to

*Every garden is a replica, a representation, an
"reality" and therefore effectively modify it . . . as in*

*attempt to recapture something, but the form it
gardens, where a tree planted is nature changed.*

finds for the act is that of a mental picture, so

"Just another of the images of art" presupposes that we

*in spite of its special properties a garden is just
are striving for the reality as opposed to the image of*

*another of the images of art (Harbison 177, 3).
nature. Gardens are a let-down because in the end they are*

only representation of nature.

In an overt art\garden, we don't expect nature.

What is missing for most gardeners to make them
feel like artists is a sufficiently harebrained
plan, an inclusive enough subject for imitation
(Harbison 1977, 4).

Gardens encourage the exploration of primal questions
about existence. A daily experience of the precariousness of
life. They are the site of the sublime of every day.

I've always been interested in the idea that as an
artist one can somehow look again for that very
first moment of creativity, when everything is
possible and nothing has actually happened (Anish
Kapoor in Grande 1994 142).

*Its manifestations [of the contemporary] occur
I can see in the bird's eye that it knows I am as much
before our very eyes, and yet our eyes are unable
nature as it is. In fact I may even be an elemental force to
to control or define them, just as words are
this bird as it wonders whether it should take a chance and
incapable of describing them in time, at the same
cool off in the cement bird bath.
time (Celant 1969, 5).*

Words are not nature.
Art is not nature.

*The borders between civilization and nature are
The forest fires are raging
confounding. . . . We are no longer certain what
as we water our garden.
nature really is (Grande 1994, 16).*

*Is man a part of nature? Is man not a part of
To wonder whether man is nature or not implies that we
nature? So this causes problems (Robert Smithson,
think we are something special. Are we?
1979, 196).*

CHAPTER VII
PRELUDE TO THE THIRTEENTH MONTH

This chapter is a story and a description of the elements involved in the sculptural installation. Parts of it, written as the work progressed, actively contributed to the making of the sculpture. Parts of it, written after the fact, are an attempt to present the reader with some of the ideas that inform the work as well as stem from it.

GENESIS

The title came last.

May 1994:

This installation is very difficult in coming. Weeks of wondering what to make; falling into illustration; unable to break away from the theories that I have been studying so intensively. Many pointless hours at work in the studio.

June 1994:

Finally I gave up.

I've been promising the children a fountain. So that's what I'll do. Something completely separate and non-theoretical. I've been digging this hole for two weeks, with a cement horse's head which I have placed in various positions in

relation to the hole, looking at changes in scale with the head as marker. A very benevolent and noble head.

July 11th, 1994:

The whole hole.

An empty hole is different from a pond in which the hole is filled but evident. Something versus nothing. How much work it takes to make the edges of nothing! This hole is something!

July 1994:

It happened!

Emptying my head of "art", I work at making a pond and this generates ideas.

Reading Robert Graves.

An early myth of creation:

Out of chaos She rose. Having no place to set her feet, She separated water and air. And ran southward, dancing on the waves to amuse herself. In so doing, She created the North Wind. Whipping around, She caught some in her hands out of which Ophion (Python) sprang. As She danced, enthralled, he wrapped himself around her and She produced a huge egg. She bid him to coil around it seven times which he did. And from it poured out all nature.

Things come from doing.

Like creation, like art.

I am digging the pond, where nothing grows in my yard. A barren spot, where the sun never shines, although it is south. A place where She and the North Wind have not yet met.

I now find that the pond is the wrong shape and fill it. To dig out a crescent moon. It is not a fountain any more. It is the meeting place between Her and the North wind.

The water flows silently, creating a ripple on the surface. It is lined with roundstones, stacked one on top of the other, precariously yet solidly fitted. These stones are all parts of spheres, often egg-shaped. And although there are three tons of them, I can move them easily.

August 1994:

Digging the pond created an excess of earth that had to be dealt with. A positive of the negative: a mound.

As I move northward in the yard, there is more sun. There is a tree bordering the barren space of the pond. A phallic vertical in a very flat horizontal plane. The mound must be placed in relation to both the pond and the tree.

The process of fertilization for the creation of the world has taken place. Very light green plants that flower in early spring are planted in the top of the mound, a harbinger of things to come.

August 20th, 1994:

The horse's head can't stay in the pond and mound area. It is too figurative and would only decorate the space without adding to it. A waste of a good horse.

At the point of juncture between the two basic sections of the yard, there is a tree that has been cut except for a few branches shooting off from the side. A waste of a tree.

When I put the tree trunk and the head together, out sprang a flying horse. Pegasus. The rainmaker. The son of Medusa who turns all who see her to stone, protecting the secrets of the goddess.

September 1994:

The pond, the mound and the flying horse have been made. The installation now has a thrust.

The experiments with plants in various parts of the yard have yielded enough information for me to plan certain growth patterns for next year.

The relation between the theoretical part of the thesis and the sculpture is no longer inhibitive.

Mythical sources, mythologized.

The problems left to be dealt with next spring:

- the integration of the flower beds
- the very non-descript north-west side of the yard.

October 1994:

The sculptural work is put on hold for the winter. Time to move back into theory.

May 1995:

The yard is in two main sections with a central meeting point, overlooked by Pegasus. These two sections curve around the house, from south-west to north-west. The western sun is dominant because of large trees on the south.

In my reading of them, Greek myths seem to deal with two main issues: the relation between human beings and the cosmos and the power struggles between female and male forces, with the male eventually taking over.

In very early pre-hellenic myths, the goddess has three aspects which coincide with female fertility cycles: the maiden, the nymph and the crone. Later these parts were given names (Athene, Aphrodite, Hera) and became different and changing entities, according to the needs of the societies that held them dear. All three had powers, but gradually the post-fertile goddess was presented as more petty than powerful.

We still value Athene and Aphrodite today, but denigrate, ignore or hide the third stage of womanhood.

And why is that?

Because the crone could see into the future and had the power of death; she exacted the price for next year's spring. Harsh

but vital.

The price was high in very early times because it meant the sacrifice of the annual king at the winter solstice. This outstanding male was then rewarded for his part in fertilizing mother nature by everlasting life in the western "orchards", the Elysian Fields, where only the souls of heroes are admitted.

May 15th 1995:

The South end of the yard is the place of the pond (named Athene's Pond) and the mound (Python and the Egg). The North end will work well as the place of the king. It is the sunniest part of the yard.

The space must be defined and separated from what is behind. Not a square fence but one that activates the space.

A logarithmic spiral both closes in and opens out ("The King's Curve").

To base this spiral on the Golden Section is to tie into Greek proportions, although the Fibonacci sequence was discovered much later.

The rectangle is laid down on the North-South axis which relates to the two yearly cycles of growth and withering. The spiral is constructed in two parts, a trellis and a stone wall. It starts at the dead tree stumps which I have transformed to refer to male genitalia and on which vines grow: life supported by death (Dionysus). The vines also

continue along the spiral, curving within the rectangle and coiling into a basin of water. Following the fence, a line of tall sunflowers, which bloom in the fall. The flowers are like crowns and like suns. Their seeds grow according to the golden ratio in two spirals, one that is clockwise and one that is anti-clockwise. The spiral of the fence can be considered either one or the other, depending on whether one starts at the centre expanding outwards or the reverse.

June 1995:

Now that the North end (named "The King's Orbit") is as conceptually complete as the South end (named "The Goddess Sequence"), the question arises about their separation one from the other. And how to manage the borders between them. And also what to do about the flower beds, to understand them as more than ornamental.

The King's Curve is a logarithmic progression. The South end is defined more as a directional progression, starting in winter and early spring and ending in late summer and fall, with each phase an echo of the fertility cycle of the month and of life. A series of crescent moon shaped arrows, pointing to the North end and leading to a non-meeting with the king's curve. Two mutually exclusive spaces, that only make sense in relation to each other.

The flower beds are reshaped into crescents and planted according to the degree of sunlight. This creates an automatic

spring to fall sequence in my yard. Since flowers lean towards the sun, in this garden, they lean northward, pointing towards the King's Curve.

July 1995:

One final element is needed. The disruptive one. This is done by digging another pond, which is a rectangle of human proportion, lined and bordered with stone, including a figurative reference to the human being, placed in the space between The King's Curve and The Goddess Sequence, in the sun, with aquatic plants in it. This is "The Mortal\Hero at Winter Solstice".

And marking the time\place conjuncture is The Fool: Sundial for the Sinking Sun, a vertical figurative element situated against a wall at the East side of the yard. This element casts a shadow according to the position of the sun, but only from mid-afternoon to sundown.

ASSOCIATIONS with CHAPTER VI

This section links "Prelude..." with the sub-headings of chapter VI, showing how I have situated my work within certain notions of sculpture as a practice.

and myth:

Digging, lifting, moving, placing, these are all "acting

speech", first order language, not myth. The objects or situations created by these actions are the result of mind compromising with matter. And they can provide the basis for stories. Old stories made into new ones.

Using old myths to understand current ones. Recycling current "truth" into old myth. Digging up feelings and transforming them into myth. Making a new myth and transforming it into feeling. And learning from this a way to be, in the power struggles between male and female.

and reality:

The visa card bills.

Finding the time.

Compromising with other people.

The weather.

My personal limitations in endurance and physical strength.

[In defining a nature of art, one also defines its function or necessity . . . i.e. if the problem of society is mostly a loss of the real, then art "must" be defined in that realm, in its relationship to the "real" (30\06\94)].

and unity:

A separateness between me and what I am acting upon is a pre-requisite. There is no unity: it is more of an alternating action between what happens this time and what happens next time.

and resistance:

The works cannot be moved into a gallery space and there is very little to say about them except that we have a beautiful garden. They are appealing to my neighbours and give them ideas about their own back yards.

and evolution:

A garden work lasts only as long as somebody cares about it. Its tendency is to self destruct. It will not evolve into a more valuable work of art as time passes.

Every day, one of the stones must be put back. The plants must be fed. The insects disposed of. The fungus cleaned away.

The progression of evolution is towards entropy and destruction of the art.

and monument:

The architectural additions are far from permanent. The walls are constructed through the juxtaposition of stones, using weight and shape to balance them. They often need re-adjustment. However they create "interior" spaces that are relatively fixed, in contrast to the ephemeral feel of the plants. This is deceptive because the perennials are more likely to reappear in the same form next year than some of the walls.

and limits:

[Roots of trees . . . lines as they travel underground. The paths are created according to the structure of the ground. Physical (geographic) events that give the lines their form and direction. Where the water is, where rocks are, where other roots are, where buildings are . . . (28\06\94)].

"Prelude..." is made from many spaces bordered by different kinds of "fences" which all create boundaries indicating shifts in context and function.

Actual barriers between the work and what surrounds it. Changes in elevation, putting the neighbouring spaces on different planes.

Suggestions of a border that are only lines blending into the horizontal.

Elevations, above the horizon line, free-standing walls.

Excavations, below the horizon line, invisible walls.

and displacement:

[To answer the question of what to do with the earth that comes out of the recess . . . make it into a mound -the positive of the negative (28\06\94). Nothing gained, nothing lost (30\07\94)].

All the pieces that make up the installation are basically constructed from the same materials. Various kinds of stone, earth, water and plants.

The sense of displacement occurs through use of material and shape. The materials are displaced from one piece to the other in terms of proportion. For instance, one can find a few of the round stones of the Goddess Sequence in the King's Curve. There are basins in both. Shapes in one are repeated in another.

Even though each piece is distinctive and can be described by the material that was mostly used to build it, we are being transported incessantly from one to the other and back again.

and identity:

The aging process. As I do this work, I affect it, but am changed by it also and move in my own sense of self.

Faces: Lines on faces. The process of expression of biographical events and their impact on the subject.

The expression of attitudes or interpretations by the subject, of events.

Roots of trees. Lines as they travel underground.

Medusa's serpent hair.

and space:

[But I don't have the space! Choices: either make it smaller but in proportion, or make it the same but cut off (29\06\94)].

Give the space a purpose. Divide it into many places. Organize it.

[The way to get at it is by emptying the head of reason and letting other waves or forms of thinking take over. It will come if there is room (04\07\94)].

and site:

The site has to do with the topic: a garden is a choice site to think about nature and culture and the border between them. [Hacking away at old cement, reclaiming the site for new purposes. A lot of this project has been to activate abandoned spaces (12\05\95)].

The site has to do with opportunity.

In this site, it would be wrong to ignore the passing sun.

and context:

[Installations always encounter ambient circumstances that dictate conditions. In this case -cement footings for a long disappeared building, lurking under the earth just where the posts had to be sunk, just where the ivy had to be planted (12\05\95)].

and abstraction:

[One's energy has to be free from other kinds of torment. Concentration (04\07\94)].

and process

[The process of physicality -digging down for my fountain,

which became a waterfall, which became a pond, my "work in progress. Digging down bit by bit, creating levels, creating a pool and a mound, creating recesses (28\06\94)].

and material:

"Nature"

Stone: hard, dry, stable, barren and very old.

Earth: soft, moist, mobile, fertile and ageless.

Water, air, sun: nurturing and killing, ever changing.

Plants and Trees: supported by nature\organized by culture

"Culture"

Fences, Artifacts (Horse head, Fool's head and vertical rope, male and female heads, cement sphere, column parts)

and sensuality

The sight of the hole getting bigger and the mound also.

The sound of the shovel as it pushes through; and of the thud as the earth is dropped.

The smell of the clay that is under the earth. The smell of sweat.

The feel of the resistance. My weight as I lean on the shovel.

The taste of salt, of dryness and of water.

Fertility.

and culture

Hyacinths. Dew Drops. Primroses. Wild Violets. Holly. Lilies of the Valley. Blue Cone Creepers. Starflowers. Wild Phlox. Sweet Williams. Common Bleeding Hearts. Beacon Silver. Iris. Lilacs. Clematis. Delphiniums. Cosmos. Roses. Thumbelinas. Bright Eyed Impatiens. Rainbow Coleus. Zinnias. Maiden Pinks. Pink Mallows. Queen Anne's Lace. Water Lilies. Water Hyacinths. Blue Moon Lobelias. Blue Cupid's Darts. Summer Phlox. Coneflowers. Grandmother's Bluebells. Foxgloves. Daisies. Poppies. Day Lilies. Brown Eyed Susans. Hydrangeas. Dragon's Blood. Sunflowers.

and life:

[Managed to work in spite of many contre-temps.

i.e.: a lot of rain, tree falling in yard, sprained ankle (11\08\94)].

and scale

What is outside us. What is inside us. A matter of scale.

and discourse:

[All my theorizing interferes with the genesis of this new body of work (28\06\94). This work must come from other sources than my theoretical work because I postulate that art is distinct from discourse although connected. I don't want to fall into the trap (29\06\94)].

[Working on the mound. Observation: my head works faster than my arms. Extrapolation: time with matter is slower than time with meaning. It is very difficult to break away from theory (04\07\94)].

and intention

Intention is the child of need.

The need to nurture fertility. To make something happen. to act.

and art:

[The horse's head has been necessary to me because it is both an "objet d'art" and a common cement garden ornament. Where I place it, will cause it to take one direction or another. Besides which it is something to talk to (10\06\94)].

"Prelude to the Thirteenth Month" is art because it is in my backyard, because it is private, because it is shared, because it is here, because it is not here, because it is moving, because it is an idea, because it is a fact, because it is a garden, because it is nature, because it is myth, because it is real, because it is fake, and because it is none of these things.

FRAGMENTS

There are many references in this installation, to other artworks, to gardens elsewhere, to historical myths and to personal stories. Some are there because I intended them to be; there are some of which I am not yet aware. Some will never be there for me, although they appear to others.

I have associated the formality of geometry with the "wildness" of unbounded growth, the economy of contemplative space with the excess of ruins, would-be temples and mock sculpture. These are all garden traditions.

I have "domesticated" Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" and "lightened" Richard Serra's "Tilted Arc". I have paid homage to Andy Goldsworthy and to Anish Kapoor.

But most of all, I hope that I have made a garden that invites visitors to spend the time they need in it to create their own references, gain their own insights and be moved in the process, as I have been.

CONCLUSION

As François Châtelet said at the end of the fourth and last volume of his monumental history of philosophy, "le lecteur de ce volume . . . sait bien qu'en une telle affaire on ne saurait conclure" (1973, 330).

In a sense, I started out with a question of value, wondering what artists can do for a postmodern world, and if art had something to offer that cannot be found elsewhere. This led me to explore territories that were concerned with art and its relation to society. Narrowing down "society" to one of its subsets, I presented a view of the contributions of the sociology of art. This proved fruitful since the question of art as a particular practice is acutely relevant to sociologists of art who need to define their corpus of study.

I found that their debates often revolved around epistemological issues raising many questions in the area of methodology. This is because the sociology of art opposes subjectivity and objectivity, content and structure, and the specific versus the universal, all variations on the subject\object dichotomy.

I identified two main approaches to dealing with these questions: structuralism and hermeneutic phenomenology. The first relies on a formal analysis of art, seeing in the expression itself, an analogue of the formal aspects of society, while the second considers that art reflects society

through its content or meaning which is accessible through interpretation.

I then focused on two particular points of view, leading to a differentiation between art and discourse. I discussed Janet Wolff's view of art as discourse, a view tied in with an understanding of art as the container of meaning about society. To this position, I contrasted Lyotard's concept of art as other than discourse, a theory in which art is seen as more than meaning, even though meanings can be constructed about it, and from it. I found that Lyotard's contribution allowed me to explore the relationship of art to discourse in general and to discursive frameworks in particular. It also opened up possibilities for defining the specificity of art in ways that are not directly limited to an aesthetics of reception and interpretation.

Having been left with the opposition between discourse and art, I turned to discourse on art for more insights. In further exploration of the art\discourse dichotomy, I introduced some of the positions taken in contemporary aesthetics towards art and its relation with social life. My ongoing attempt to define the nature of art led to an investigation of the possibility of an "avant-garde" position through a re-examination of the borders between art and non-art.

Having come to the end of the first component of my project, I considered that although it had yielded a great

deal of matter for thought, it had not provided a conception of the nature of art that satisfied me. I found that not only was I lacking an answer to the question of what art is, but also that I had unearthed the problem of the validity of discourse on art. I set out to turn the morass I had created into a set of productive ideas.

Based on a "post-structural" framework, I developed a theory of the nature of art that was founded on its very elusiveness. I started from the position that since art seems to be undefinable, this very characteristic may in fact relate to its function in our lives. I developed a framework derived from a post-structural view of structuralism, in which art is understood as function rather than content. I distinguished between art, artwork and discourse and showed the applicability of this view to the problems raised in earlier chapters.

I then attempted to deal with the issue of validity of criticism or discourse on art and to develop a method for "translating" artworks. This aspect of the thesis had much to do with the fundamental dichotomy of art, the one of form\content or object\subject. I started by describing the research methods that I used for the theoretical component of the project. In this sense, I attempted to validate the findings of my study, as they stood. I contrasted this with a critique of that approach and demonstrated how inappropriate it would be to apply such methods to artworks themselves. This

is the fulcrum of the entire project, because it is the "break" point in this particular thesis, at which both artworks and discourse engage and disengage.

I had started out with the idea that artworks were other than discourse and set up my project with one major constraint which was that it had to include a sculpture. This can be viewed as the "empirical" aspect of this dissertation with one crucial difference: that the sculptural installation was not intended (and did not become) an illustration of the theoretical thrust of the thesis. The inclusion of an artwork as part of the research design had an important impact on the dynamics of the process; it highlighted and kept active the border between art as practice and discourse on art. It also foregrounded the dual relation of object\subject and subject\object to be found in anyone attempting to translate an artwork.

The third component is divided into two written chapters and a sculptural installation. I introduced formal changes for these last two chapters, putting into practice the ideas that I had developed in the second component of the dissertation.

Chapter VI is written in double voice, reflecting, among other things, the fact that both ideas and form make up the sculptural work, in a non-linear mode. In this part of the thesis, I examined the production of artists as well as critical writing, but I did so as part of the process involved in the sculptural installation. I framed the artwork in its

context in terms of art, sculpture and social issues.

In chapter VII, I focused on the material shaping of the sculpture. The form I used is that of a sort of dialogue between the constructing, which involves materials, techniques, labour..., and the artist. This dialogue is presented to the reader as sporadic monologue or journal of the work.

Both these chapters present the qualities of collage and montage and interact in the production of the "final" piece, which is the sculptural installation. They attempt to remain faithful to their object through mime rather than representation.

Finally, in an appendix to the thesis, I have included photographic documentation of the sculptural installation, in order to give the reader some idea of its appearance. However, like Robert Irwin who resisted "false" presentation of his work even through photographic reproduction of it (Weschler 1982, xi), I feel that a photograph can neither capture a sculpture in its space nor replace the experience of its interaction with the viewer. It can only act as a visual reference to the work.

Have I answered my initial questions?

It is obvious that nothing definitive can be said about the hypotheses that I put forward in the introduction to this dissertation. However, I believe that I have proposed a view

of art and artworks that opens up a space for action. The questions I had asked revolved around the two basic dichotomies of object\subject and nature\culture.

With regard to the first, I consider art to be a metaphor for creativity. As "freeplay" it demonstrates that, although the fixed identity of the subject is neither believable nor desirable, the subject is far from "dead". The "creating subject" can only exist in the space opened up by absence. This does not lead to empty pastiche; it calls for modesty, the modesty to recognize that our subjective identity, our consciousness of self is a myth, created from whatever is available and existing only to disappear, becoming material to be used in yet another turn of the game. It also requires courage, the courage to create a self while abandoning all claims to it, to go on proposing possibilities through praxis.

As to the nature\culture dichotomy, I suggest that while the old separations between nature and culture may be irrelevant, this does not invalidate the dichotomy itself; its terms are always in a process of redefinition but never cease to relate to explanations we give ourselves about our place in the world. I propose the possibility of object-a(rt) as the structural hero necessary to maintain (or to re-establish) the dynamism of our social structure. Art indicates a space that is open for what may or may not come next. Therefore, it maintains our awareness of the edge between the possibility of something and that of nothing, an edge that science must

ignore but cannot do without, since its impetus is to push that edge further away.

Both artworks and scientific discourse must continue to function as two massive chains in the social structure which is kept alive by their continuing displacement of each other. The methods of exploration of both artwork and criticism are productive, each in their own way. The same can be said for the opposing points of view of structuralism and hermeneutics. Nevertheless, it is important to realize the value of explorations along the borderline of opposing research methods and frameworks.

I believe that art is a mode of contestation as long as it finds a way to continue being witness to indeterminacy. What each artist (or art mode) chooses to destabilize is a matter of context and personal commitment. What is important is to keep on "doing it", whether "it" is artmaking, or art criticism. The final resistance of art, its *raison d'être*, is to protest, or prevent "the end of the game".

Finally, as Robert Harbison said, "a gardener takes what is there and begins to bend it to his will, but it is always getting beyond him" (1977, 4). While digging a pond, I found that a thesis can be much like a garden and that what connects them is art.

ENDNOTES

Notes to Chapter I

1. I use the term "philosophical" although I realize that structuralism is in fact a critique of philosophy which is seen as governed by Metaphysics, that is to say questions of ontology and epistemology.

2. The term "humanists" in these texts seems to refer to people in the humanities rather than to people who espouse the philosophical views and assumptions of Humanism.

3. I am considering the work of art itself as the focus or nodal point of the discussion, assuming that it exists, but not attributing any foregone specific nature to it. I find this useful because art, in the barest terms, is an object or process or action, a practice at the interface between the artist and the public. It has no meaning in itself, any more than a table has, without some theoretical framework to back it up. And theoretical frameworks are what constitute culture as a signifying practice. And what these theoretical frameworks make of the practice of art depends on their position in the debates.

4. In this reader, 46 contributors discuss art according to the institutional characteristics defined by Albrecht (1970), one of the editors of these 750 pages. These characteristics are: specialized personnel, special types of roles and activities, particular groupings and organizations, distinct norms, values and beliefs, appropriate marking symbols and implementation through certain types of physical equipment.

5. 511 pages, 23 contributors

6. They also appear to have a rather limited understanding of Morse Peckham who developed a psychological theory of art as the means to create non-threatening situations of cognitive dissonance as a rehearsal for real life situations. This misunderstanding is due to their definition of art, which is not the same as Peckham's, but which they take to be. I include this remark in order to demonstrate the problems that arise when one uses an assumed definition which is uninformed on contemporary views while attempting to study a contemporary problem: there is a contribution by Morse Peckham in Aesthetics Contemporary [43 contributors, 444 pages] edited by Richard Kostelanetz and published in 1978, ten years before Foster and Blau's book.

7. Reality is socially constituted. This applies not only to subjective reality, but also to objective reality -that is, to those aspects of our world which we do not feel to be personal interpretations of perspectives, but which are communally confirmed, and accepted as in some sense "real" independently of the observer. Reality covers also those cultural facts which are regarded as "existing" as an objectivity, which happens as soon as a cultural fact is accepted as a pre-existing background to action, in other words as soon as it is institutionalized. In all areas of knowledge what we take as objective is in fact what is handed down in the socialization process as objective. The fundamental prejudice which inclines us to ask why reality cannot be absolute and, as such, immediately perceived is nothing but commitment to the axioms of the scientific method; Metaphysics questions these axioms and concludes that not only is it impossible to prove the existence of certain things-in-themselves, but that it is hard to see how it even makes sense to talk about "absolute reality" (Wolff 1975, 28).

8. According to Wolff, whether one takes the social structure or the social individual as one's frame of reference is in a sense merely a question of choice. But she considers that "the issue nonetheless becomes a debate about values and politics when phenomenologists maintain that structuralism is inherently conservative, taking as it does the status quo as

its starting point;" her own position is that "structural analysis is immoral, being essentially anti-humanist and not giving primary importance to the dignity of the individual" (1975, 50).

Notes to Chapter II

9. There are problems with these statements. One of these is a very common lack of distinction between a discussion of art as opposed to non-art which does not involve value and a discussion of good art versus bad art, which does. Another is the apparent identification of aesthetics with only one of its traditional questions, that of the distinction between art and non-art. A third is that this assumption must consider the artist as a receiver of her own work.

10. Autonomy in this case does not have to do with the specific nature of art as art, but with the self-determination of the field.

11. Although Wolff rejects structuralism on "ethical grounds" because of its "anti-humanist" stance, she nevertheless uses the structuralist critique of Metaphysics and of the Hegelian dialectic, from which postmodern rejection of the universal, of essentialism and of progress is derived.

12. I wonder if this is in fact true. It seems to me that Foucault deals with that issue indirectly in his notion of the elaboration of the self and the control of pleasure, pleasure deriving from the senses and transposed from there to the mind. (L'usage des plaisirs. Paris: Gallimard, 1984. Vol. 2 of Histoire de la sexualité. 3 vols.)

13. By definition arrière-garde.

14. "Here" and "Now" are titles of paintings by Barnett Newman. These paintings are mentioned by Lyotard as examples of the sublime in painting. Their titles bear witness to the point that Lyotard makes about painting in general. Newman's extreme economy of means results in the creation of works that are in fact visual Here-and-Nows.

15. Embedded in this idea, is the assumption that the fear of nothingness or death is very generally not to say universally felt.

16. I use these examples knowingly because they were objects used by Marcel Duchamp. His treatment of these non-art objects, when he introduced them into an art defined space and removed them from their everyday context, transformed them into symbolic things. Duchamp's work continues to be discussed and analyzed, interpretation following interpretation.

Notes to Chapter III

17. I use "aesthetics" in a broad way to include criticism, art history, philosophy of art..., any discipline that studies art itself rather than art as the vehicle to information about society.

18. We define some discourse as object of analysis.

19. The current fear of essentialism or universalism is a deterrent in attempting to define anything in its specificity. This fear is evident as disclaimer after disclaimer is made in most texts attempting such a task.

20. One could argue that such a reinforcement is a resistance to ethico-political positions such as Jameson's.

Notes to Chapter IV

21. Even though the idea of art as artifice relates to both nature and culture.

22. It seems that Margaret Archer follows this suggestion when she uses a dichotomy between agency and culture as an "analytical" distinction (1988).

23. I define (post)structuralism as a critique of structuralism, which is derived from structuralism as well as inherent to it. I consider postmodernism to be in a similar relation to modernism, with the added dimension of it being the resulting practices stemming from that critique.

24. It is interesting to note that the creators of structuralism did not elaborate a theory of structuralism; this was left to both its proponents and its antagonists as they analyzed "structural" works.

25. Here is an example based on The purloined letter (The gift, 1845) by Edgar Allen Poe. According to Deleuze, Lacan uses this story in his structural work (Deleuze 1972).

the two chains

king	unseen letter	police
queen	hidden letter	minister
minister	found and taken letter	Dupin

The places "unseen, hidden and found" are occupied by different subjects. The meaning or in this case power of the elements on the chain changes according to the space (unseen, hidden, taken) that they occupy.

Object-x and the empty space

The minister has the queen in his power, while he has the letter and she knows he has the letter.... She will have him

in her power while he thinks he has the letter and she knows that he thinks so -erroneously.

The letter assigns power, by not being where it is supposed to be. The letter is only powerful as long as it is not used, as long as it is missing.

Structural accidents

-if the minister uses it, then it is no longer a continuing source of control over the queen for him. The letter becomes fixed.

-if the queen produces it, the minister knows that he no longer has it, that it is not where he thought it was; he knows where it is.

Structural hero

Dupin maintains the absence of the letter from its place, by faking the letter and therefore tricking the minister, giving the upper hand to the queen. The situation will remain dynamic until the minister realizes that the letter is with the queen: placed.

Nota bene: relation to the real referent

The power assigned by the letter is not necessarily connected to actually having the concrete letter itself:

-the minister could still have power while not having the letter, if the queen, not having the letter, still believed that the minister had it. (Of course he would have to know that she did not have it.) The power assigned by the letter changes according to who has it and who does not, but only as

long as the letter is missing.

The actual letter is proof to either the queen or the minister of where it actually is, the referent. But all you really need for this to work is for people to think that is where it is. Therefore the actual letter in some way becomes redundant.

26. In some sense, this describes the autonomization of the imaginary referred to by Castoriadis (1987, 132), which leads to the institution becoming autonomous and predominating society.

27. One has only to list some of the implications of structuralism:

critique of empiricism or of knowledge as founded on the concrete gathering of more and more evidence assuming the possibility of totalization.

critique of meaning: the relation of meaning to sign is a shifting one. Meaning cannot be said to correspond directly with any sign (or with any external reality).

critique of historicism, inherent in the critique of being as presence in which history is seen as justification for the present.

critique of the immobile centrality (identity) of the human subject

critique of reason as the sole mechanism of thought, with the

invocation of praxis as part of the functioning of structure, as well as the introduction of chance : une théorie, c'est jeter un coup de dés.

28. This is why Kirby can say that whether or not something is art depends on the intention for it to be art, whether or not it is avant-garde also depends on the intention of the artist (Kirby, Michael, "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde", Esthetics Contemporary, ed. Richard Kostelanetz. New York: Prometheus Books, 1978. 36-70. One could even include the notion that intention is also part of reception, so that what is perceived as art is dependent on the intention of the perceiver.

29. Bureaucracy is such a threat to change because it is coming closer and closer to filling the "case vide", doing away with the spaces in which one can act outside of the predictable pattern. These actions are needed to keep society alive. This tendency is very present in the university which used to be thought of as the very core of the dynamic relation between knowledge and reality. As the tendency to legislate change increases, it is becoming less and less of a space in which one can act outside a predictable pattern.

I believe this is also true of the art world.

30. Within a "knowledge-based" system which I define broadly as the "scientific", I suggest the existence of two very general series, the chain of our knowledge(s) and the corresponding one of the objects of those knowledge(s). In this system, science and art act as case vide and object-x, respectively. The "scientific-otherness" of object-a(r)t is in necessary relation to science. I would also propose the "artistic-otherness" of science as the necessary condition of art for, without science's push to deny the unknowable, there would be no need for art to resist definition, to create events that jar the coherence of discourse.

Notes to Chapter V

31. A professor in a phd seminar in quantitative methodology once judged a study I had done, mostly on style. I had taken an "inexpert" conversational tone in my writing, and I had not strongly adopted one point of view, leaving no position for a possible invalidation of my findings.

Although I did not realize it then, within his framework he was right: "the form" I had used did not fit the content. He graded my paper very severely, even though he had no criticism to offer of the overt content of my paper, its stated facts. Inadvertently, I had presented him with an unconscious critique of scientific discourse and had merited the reprimand of someone who adhered to its code.

32. This is the source of my error: I had assumed artworks to be discursive. Even though my own work in the first half of the thesis had demonstrated the fallacy of this view, I did not realize that the gap between artworks and discourse on art could not be bridged without revising my method of approach. This just goes to show how hard it is to divest ourselves of our assumptions.

33. I would like to make it clear, however, that even though the traditional scientific approach to knowledge included claims to truth, it is not my intention to imply that I adhere to this view. I draw my sense of postmodern discourse or knowledge from Lyotard's understanding of it as involving a multiplicity of heteromorphic languages. I believe that any consensus to be had on the rules of the game (whatever it is) is strictly a local contract and subject to eventual cancellation (1979). Lyotard tells us that the scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and realizes that they are never subjected to argument and proof. He classifies them as belonging to another mentality . . . as opinion, prejudice, ideologies (1979, 48). But, in Lyotard's view the final legitimization of scientific discourse goes to the narrator . . . and not the narrator of modernist metanarratives but of postmodern small "stories" (1979, 98).

34. When art is considered as a mirror of "reality", as content, the representation of the art object in discourse becomes a third level interpretation. One could re-invoke Plato's criticism of art as mimesis of mimesis. His view of ordinary things as imitations of transcendent structures which art imitates, compels art to justify itself as a valid representation and also throws into question the value of interpretation of art as the source of "scientific" information.

35. Actions speak louder than words.

36. Lacan does a similar thing in his lectures (Lacan, 1972). In Mille plateaux, Deleuze and Guattari presented us with the intricacies of multiple spaces and levels in a book which can be opened and read at any point (1989).

37. This is not so monolithic as I imply: the texts I used varied as did my treatment of them, especially with regard to "post-critical" texts such as The anti-aesthetic edited by Hal Foster (1983) and Thinking art: Beyond traditional aesthetics edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (1991).

Note to Chapter VI

38. I have not included page numbers for the following chapter. This is to reflect the non-linear mode of thinking that is part of the creative process. Were I to publish this chapter separately, it would not be bound but presented in the manner of a portfolio. Each page is a distinct entity.

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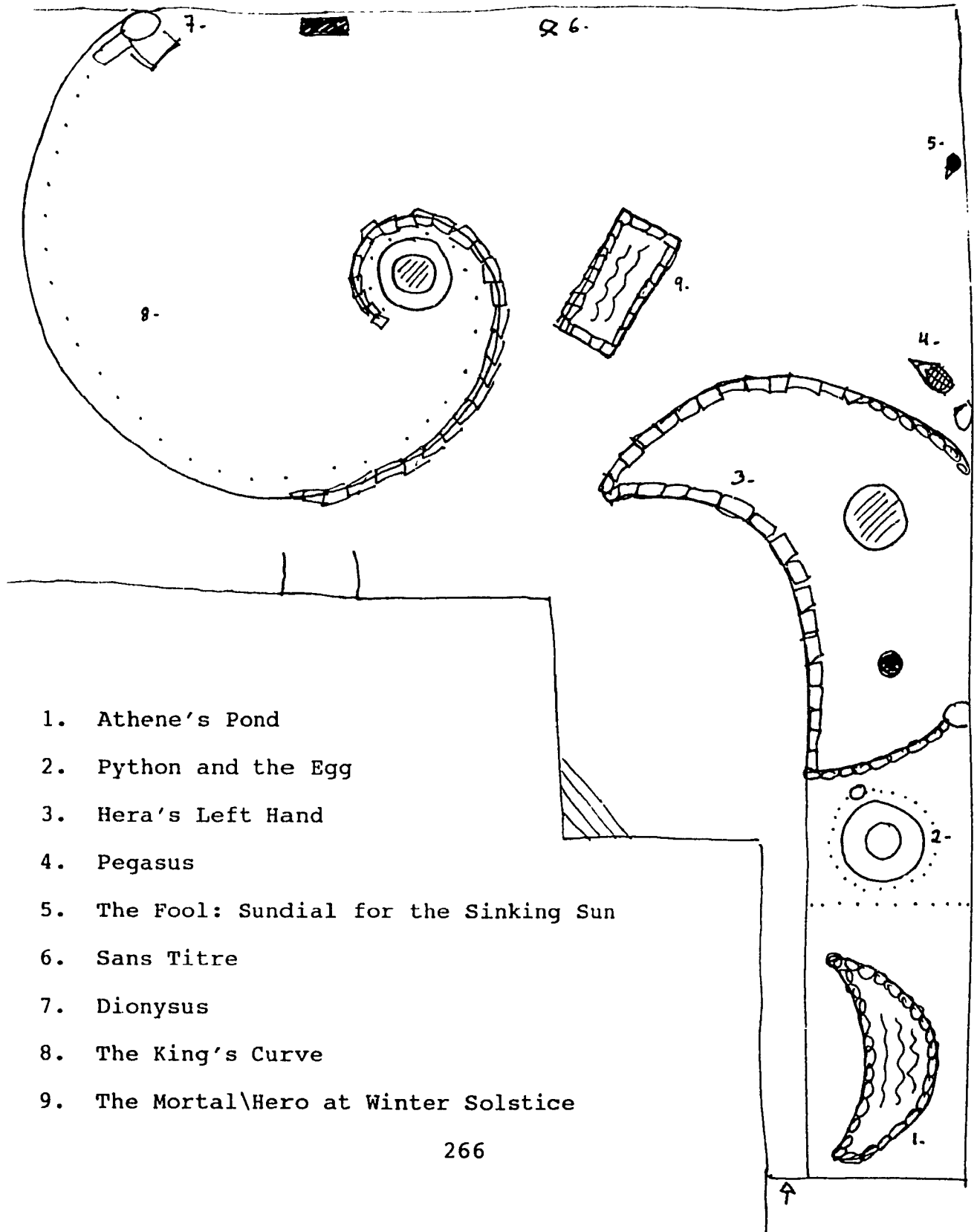
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APPENDICES

MAP OF THE SCULPTURAL INSTALLATION

(Scale: __ = 1 pace)



MATERIALS USED

Stone : St Chrysostone flagstones, fieldstones, riverstones, fragments of buildings

Cement : heads in the pond, horse head, fool, sphere, basins

Wood : fences as supports

Water

Vegetation

Mechanical Aids : subpump, electrical installations

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

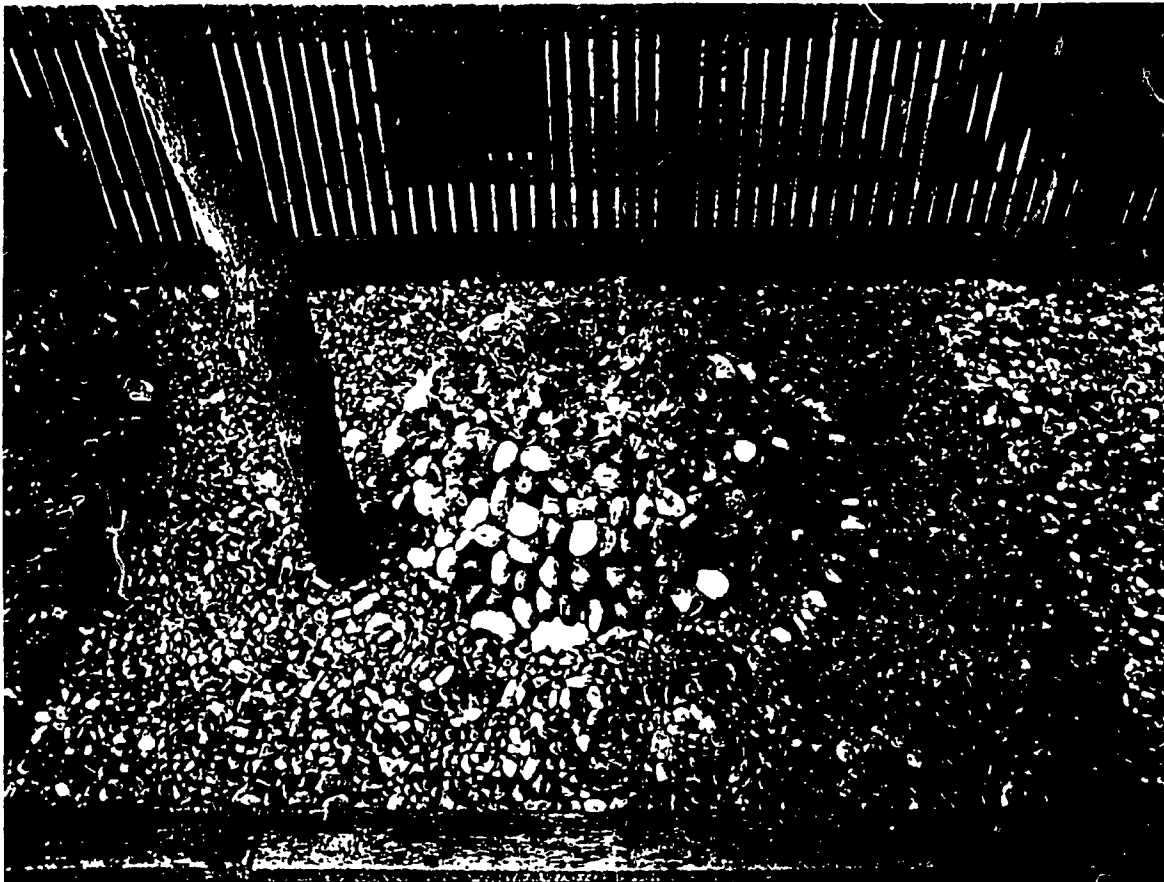
1. The Goddess Cycle
2. Athene's Pond
3. Python and the Egg
4. Hera's Left Hand, and The Fool . . . (in the background)
5. Hera's Left Hand
6. Pegasus
7. The Fool: Sundial for the Setting Sun
8. Sans Titre
9. The King's Curve
10. The King's Curve (detail)
11. Dionysus
12. Mortal\Hero at the Winter Solstice
13. Mortal\Hero . . . (detail)
14. Mortal\Hero . . . (detail)



The Golden Cycle



Athene's Pond





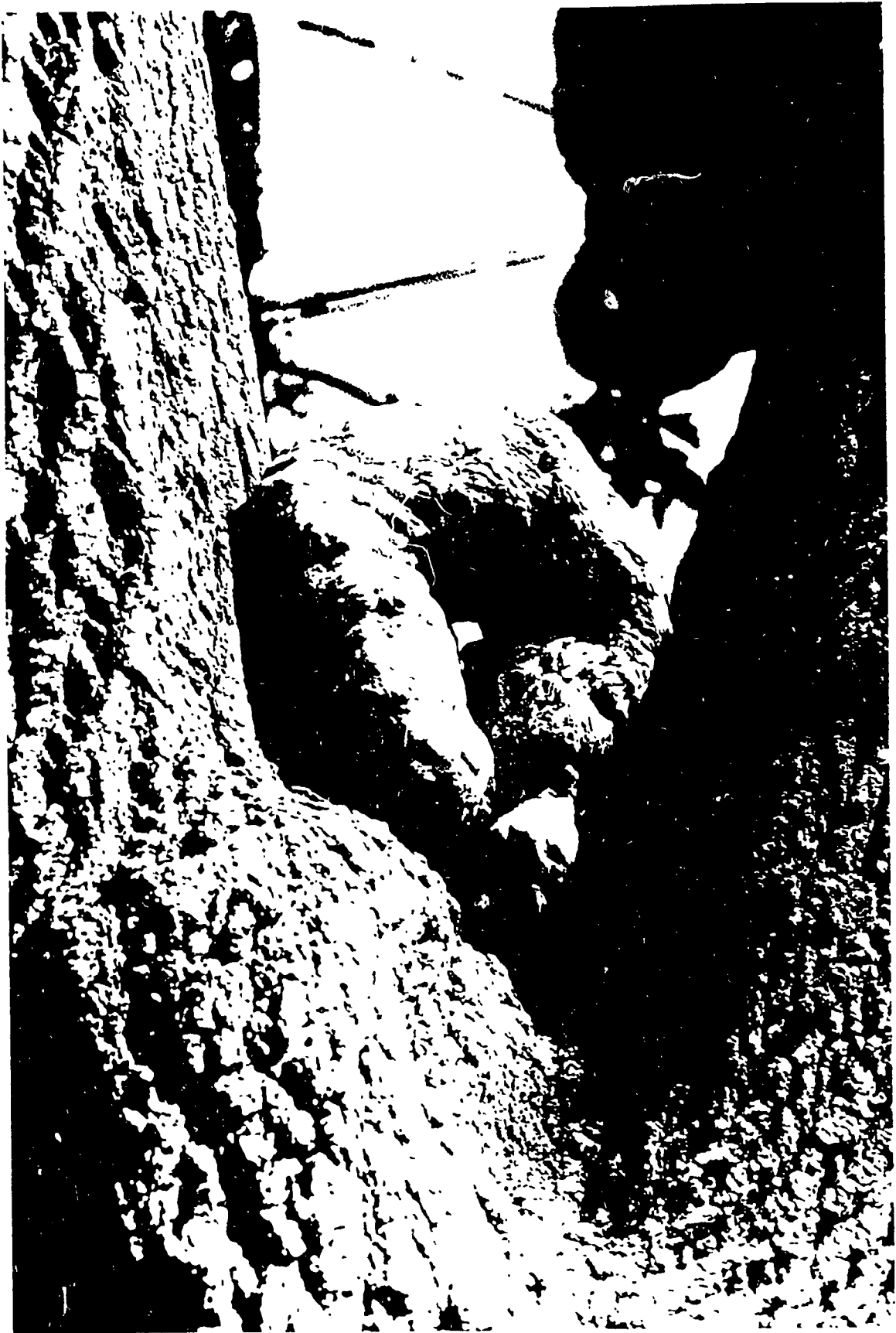
Bera's Left Hand



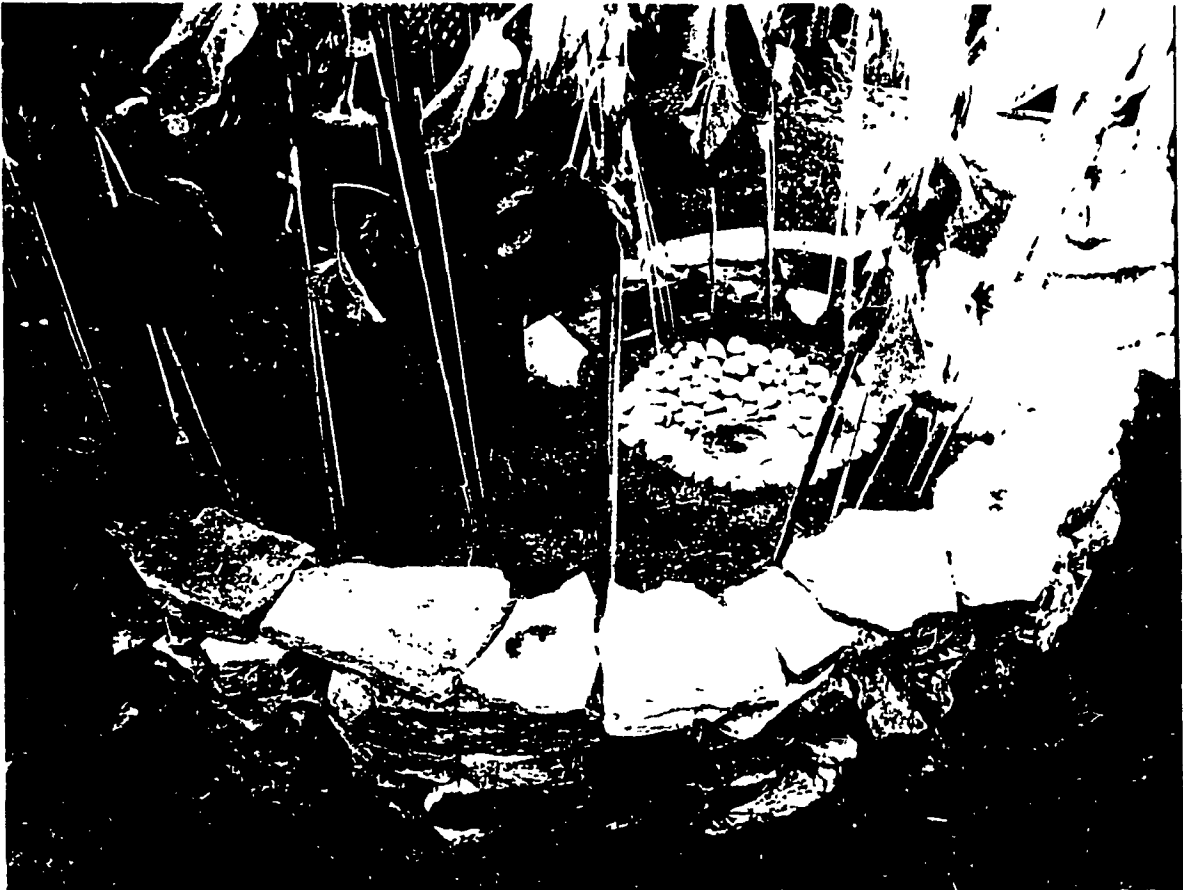
Pegann



The Pool: Sundial for the Sinking Sun



Sans Titre



The King's Curve



The King's Curve (detail)



Dionysus



Mortal\Hero at Winter Solstice



Mortal/Hero at Winter Solstice (details of opposing ends of pond)