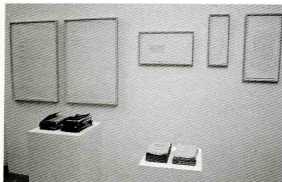




Spring for Fall, 30 mimeographed 'magazines' in box, 175" x 12", 1994



Installation View, Regen Projects, 'Invitational 1993', 1993

Normally, the treatment of literary or theoretical texts relies on some kind of configuration of a text's content and the formal patterns put together within an already established context. Although the organising principles may vary considerably, the technique always comes down to a set of connections that are held together by the text. These connections can be explicitly causal, building up the narrative, or associative not following a linear logic so that the only way to make the connection is to follow the intentions of the author. Our world or culture happens to organise things in a way that means that explicitly causal arguments are evidence of scientific, critical or documentary writings, while intentional, associative and often-fragmented connections are understood as signs of artistic literature. Pursuing these stereotypical assumptions, one finds that criticism, science and documentation are linked to an external public while the literary artistic text is associated – at least since the 19th century – with an internalised, private subjectivity. To write an 'objective', 'distant' and therefore 'cold' poetic text is still perceived as a somewhat transgressive act, just as criteria like 'taste' or similar seemingly subjective terms provoke confusion when used in scientific analysis. While today, in the field of writing, those borders are still amazingly intact; in the visual field there has been a much stronger amalgamation, at least on the artistic side. Conceptual and installation art have steadily eroded the division between 'subjective' art and 'objective' science and in many current forms of 'Kontextkunst' it seems to have disappeared entirely. Another indication of developments in the visual arts is the role of critics and curators, who, for many conservatives, is simply not distinguished enough from the role of the artist him or herself, while at the same time artists are pilloried for writing theoretical and critical texts.

Many of Francis Stark's essays are uncertainly located between cultural criticism and poetry, placing her within an established tradition of other visual artists such as the Danish Cobra member Asger Jørn or Franz West. Jørn defined his own form of science in his writings, doing so in order to turn it into a publicly accessible concept. Franz West took apart texts by Lacan and Wittgenstein in order to re-examine the individual parts in terms of both their content and formal qualities. Such texts by visual artists often appear hybridised or as samples that avoid classification as one particular genre of writing. One reason for the ease with which artists can mix genres might relate to the way collage and over-painting are already taken for granted in modernist art. However, an individual like Frances Stark is not simply a visual artist who writes, everything we know makes it clear that her writing is of equal value to her visual production. In conversations with the artist I noticed very early on her particular habit of continuously reading other writers. While the process of reading a literary or scientific text would normally come to some kind of end or even a final 'over and done with', for Stark reading is just the beginning of further re-readings and re-contextualisations to be repeated over and over again. These readings create a permanent new language, a fusion between her text and the other that becomes impossible to separate because both are parts of the same architecture. In one of her columns in *Arttext* titled 'Knowledge Evanescent' it first seems possible to identify a line of thought leading from one quote to the other, from Rudolf Steiner to J.D. Salinger, and all the way to Gurdjieff. However, this quotational level of the text is regularly interrupted by various biographical reflections mixing her own thoughts on various literary figures with reactions to her students and her own personal story. It becomes less and less clear if one

Previous page: *The end of all paying attention...*, carbon and ink on paper, 2001

FRANCES STARK

Martin Prinzhorn

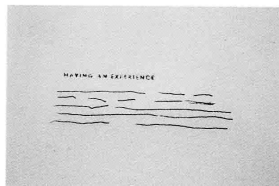
The housewife in public

level determines the other or if everything has already flowed together. A footnote becomes a reminder to the author herself to read a text, while her situation as a teacher overlaps with a TV series about an art student. She first hears the art student in the background of a phone conversation with her gallerist and later learns about her progress from her real art students. On points like this fiction and theory intertwine with her biography to such an extent that it is impossible to identify a beginning or end anymore. Nevertheless the title of the essay can't just be taken literally – knowledge rather manifests itself in fleeting disappearances between all the different levels.

These various levels become even more obvious in the book *The Architect & The Housewife* where they are located in the dichotomies between public and private, outside and inside, male and female. This is a book about the essential questions of modernism. In the beginning, it quotes Oscar Wilde's *The Artist as a Critic*: 'If you wish to understand others you must intensify your own individualism' – private differentiation as a pre-condition for an outside understanding in public. Before that we find another line of association, to do housework with a kitchen cloth means a housewife, while the term housewife in the public realm of the internet means porn. Then we jump from Weininger's definition of the female between (private) mother and (public) prostitute to Wittgenstein and then quickly back to Weininger and his definition of genius as resistance against the female. In between there is a short consideration of the home of the housewife, a building that would not be possible without an architect. This short staccato somehow fails to make it clear whether the private is developed as a public concept or the public as a private concept. It only points out the impossibility of separating them out.

The home and its interiors feature in the first part of the book, but mainly it is about fear and its connection to the home, its privacy and loneliness. The genius of Stark's text is again this interweaving of a personal situation with reflections about art, as, for instance, when installation art is defined in terms of the relationship between inside and outside, or between the architect and the housewife. There are certainly plenty of other essays that deal with these spaces and their context as a central motif for cultural analysis, but Francis Stark develops this subject out of her own dialectic, allowing endless reversals if not total oppositions to emerge. By locating the effect of literature as an internal process, she allows it to unfold first in the spirit. This spirit, bound by the limitation of our intellect and perceptual possibilities, stands in contrast to the infinity of our thoughts. One thing becomes clear in *The Architect & The Housewife*, writing about public and private is in itself thinking in a public space. This becomes apparent in the text because there is no theoretical reference or consideration that is not already imbedded in a private context. At one point Stark deals with a text by Daniel Buren where he talks about the studio and 'the unspeakable compromise of the portable work of art'. Buren, speaking as a modernist and, even more so, a minimalist, discusses the impossibility of transporting an artwork into a 'neutral' exhibition space when it is always united with a particular location. In quoting this, Stark also contextualises it – a couple having to enter into compromises in order to resolve differences. This passage is then followed by a short paragraph about couples leading up to the quote by Adolf Loos 'all art is erotic' and thus returning again to architecture.

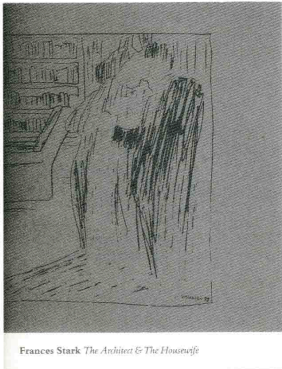
Having an experience, detail, carbon on rice paper, 1995



Throughout the whole essay, Stark discusses contradictions while at the same time alternating between different levels of text that to a greater or lesser extent respond to the contradictions discussed while doing so in such a quick and seamless way that they define and dissolve those opposites at the same time. Not accidentally she quotes the film *Safe* by Todd Haynes in which the protagonist develops an allergy against her whole environment, though it is never exactly explained whether this was due to external or internal causes. Long sections of the book are also given over to the Californian artist Jorge Pardo, whose own artistic practice, addresses the ambiguous space between architectural design and artistic sculpture and who has recently produced a whole house as a sculpture. This can be read as a parallel to Frances Stark's texts. Spaces occupied by only one position simply don't exist anymore. Just as architecture sometimes ventures from the functional into the realm of the decorative, so art can itself tread onto the territory of the functional.

Eventually the formalist divisions between modernisms and postmodernisms break up to the point that their forms can change meanings precisely according to the context out of which they evolve. Art that quotes functionality appears modern, architecture that uses decoration appears postmodern. In Frances Stark's literature, the spaces of literary and scientific writing are drawn together and yet come to mean the opposite of each other.

Translated from the German by
Charles Esche/Silke Otto-Knapp



Frances Stark *The Architect & The Housewife*

bookcover
The Architect and the Housewife, published by
Bookworks, 1999

Martin Prinzhorn

FRANCES STARK



Impossible the grassy maxim's dream

to grow as green as others seem

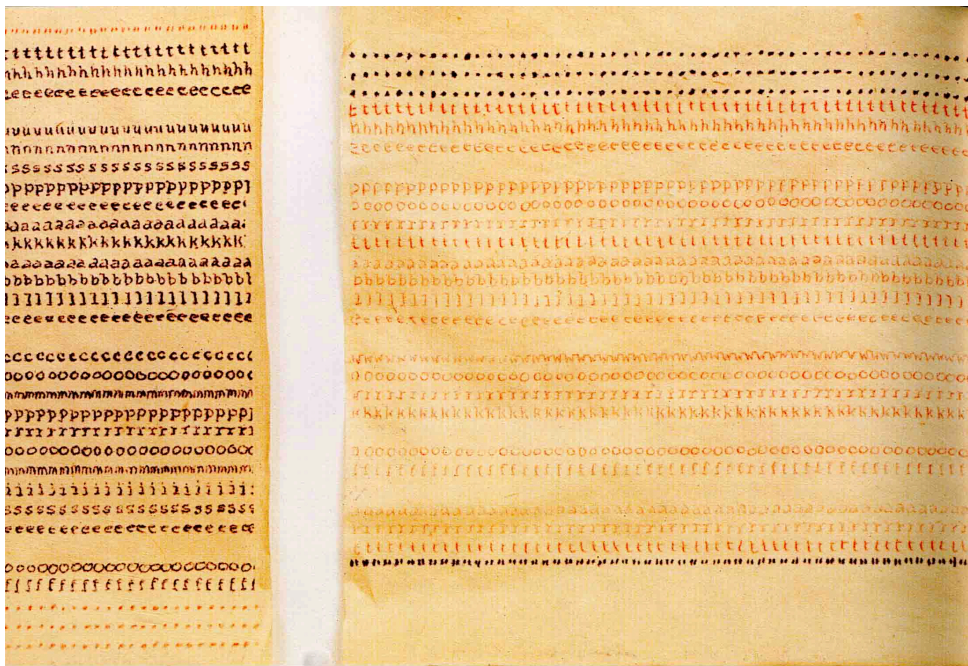
Oh, to be as sound as a song

not simply flat and half as long

So dark, dark green the envy at which this hirts

In other places light's pitched happy tents.

Frances Stark



The Unspeakable Compromise of the Portable
 Work of Art: #2, in a series of 16, detail,
 54.5" x 24.75" each, 1998



The Unspeakable Compromise of the Portable
 Work of Art: # 11, in a series of 16,
 chair, 43" x 20" x 19", 2000

"The Unspeakable Compromise of the Portable Work of Art":
Number 2 in a series of 16 (purple and red).
 1998

Frances Stark

Diptych, 54 1/2" X 24 3/4" each

Carbon, mimeograph carbon w/ water, linen tape on paper

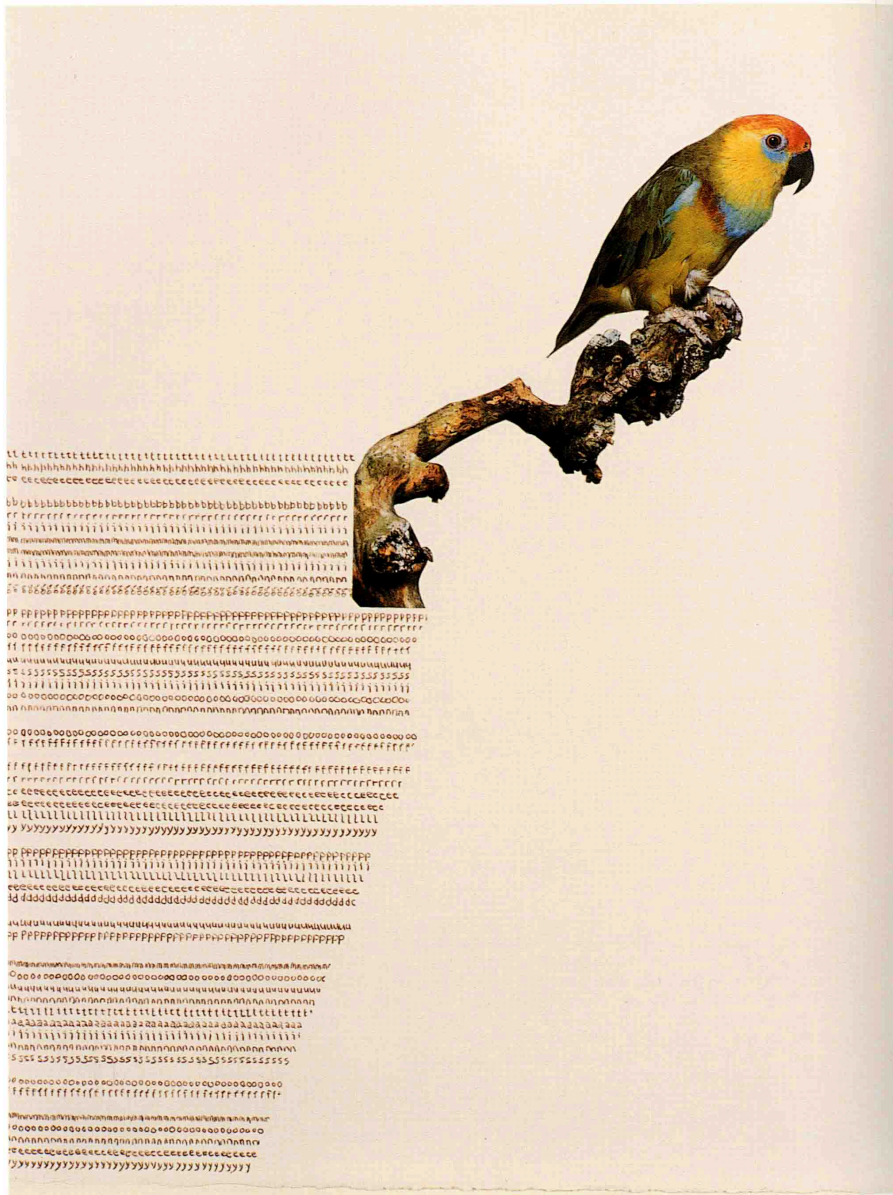
This piece hangs vertically with approximately one inch between each sheet. They should be aligned ~~mm~~ at the top.

The ~~mpm~~ purple one goes on the left, since it contains the first half of the phrase...the red, the right.

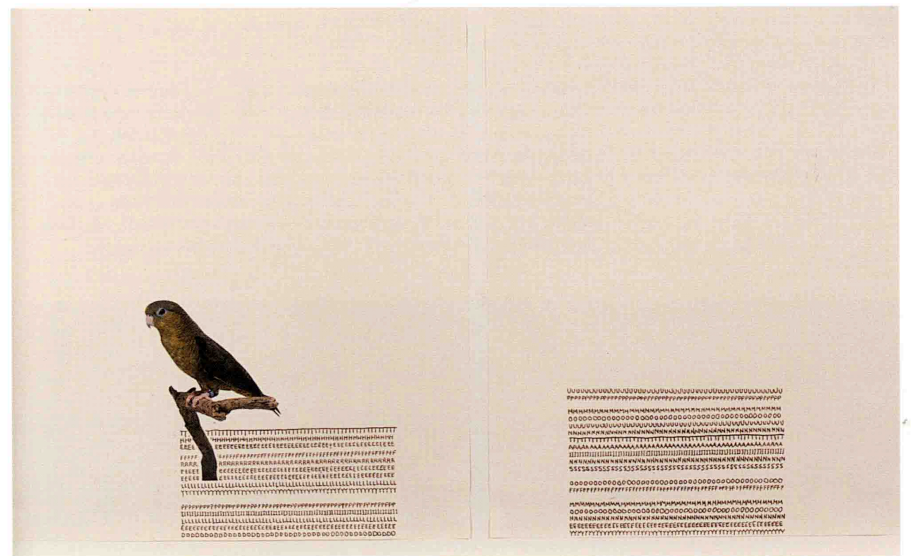
Hang with small nails or tacks through the taped corners of the drawing. No push pins please. It is nice when the tips of the nails or whatever you use are white-ish and blend with the tape. If there are any problems with holes or tears just tape over with ~~xxx~~ gummed linen hinging tape.

This is all very ordinary, but I want to tell you (that would be you specifically Janice Guy) a kind of funny story about the packaging in which you have received this drawing. It is a monster, I had to make it myself. Marc had to borrow some cardboard from Dan Bernier and as you can see I have used a tube I got from Acme (a long time ago) and so Marc was having a discussion with Wilhelm Schurman or whatever his name is and I'm in the middle of the gallery fighting with dull ~~ex~~ utility blades creating this ~~f#&~~*ed-up humongous tube-holder for like the smallest, most manageable drawing. I could see that W.S. was looking over at me, possibly concerned I might out myself, possibly in awe of such an inept gallery worker, possibly anything ~~ally~~. but I didn't know it was him anyway. So when I was done I had a pile of freakish scraps so I made a kind of costume. I have never made a cardboard costume before, but it just seemed like the right thing to do and it was fun and everything was falling into place perfectly (I guess I could draw you a diagram so you can have an idea) and so I approached Marc & this mister W.S. with my cardboard and I could see how very pleased he was, in his eyes, and then he commented that he had been wondering what kind of CHOREOGRAPHY was going on over there. Oh by the way I was not actually "wearing" the costume. I just thought this was so fun and it made me really happy and it's only the cardboard really that has anything to do with the portability business, or maybe it's about the "commerce" of delivering artworks...but I also thought I should tell you because one of the first things Marc said about you is that you make your own clothes. He figured I would find this interesting because I have made a few things for myself recently -- my box here, is a good indication of my sewing skills but "style", style manages to get in somehow. And now I really don't know where I'm going with this, so, back to the matter at hand.

As I said the quote is from Daniel Buren, I thought it was circa '71 but it could be as late as '79. THE DRAWING IS FOLDED IN 4, FOLLOW CREASES WHEN FOLDING BACK UP AGAIN. 1ST IN $\frac{1}{2}$ then in $\frac{1}{4}$ again. THEN ROLL.



Mountains of Money (detail), carbon and collage on paper, 22.5 x 30", 2001



Piled-up, diptych, carbon and collage on paper, 14 x 11", 2001

What was supposed to follow was a medium-sized essay about my work, by someone other than myself. As fate would have it, certain circumstances – luckily having nothing to do with me – prevented the writer from submitting a text. I, of course, was dying to see what this writer would end up writing. A couple of years ago I remember reading a letter from the editor of a small LA publication in which he, in effect, was calling on more artists to strike up a discourse with each other, half-punitively conjuring up the image of an artist racing to the news stand to eagerly take in the handful of words that had been churned out in his or her honour. Granted he was referring to newspaper and magazine reviews, which are pretty different from lengthier, more considered essays, but even so, the presence – or absence, as the case may be – of someone else's protracted attention immediately reveals the economy of insight-production. So, faced with this glaring attention deficit and a fast approaching deadline, I thought, why not ask a little from a lot of people, rather than a lot from one person. I made a quick list of people and then tried to think up some very specific questions. There were a lot more people I thought of asking but to whom posing questions wasn't so easy, and then there were some pretty good questions that I couldn't gather the courage to actually pose, and then, of course, some people are pretty difficult to get a hold of.

Richard Hawkins, artist

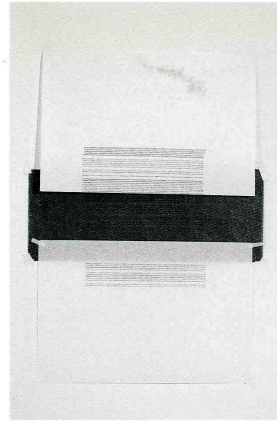
Remember when I saw you on the corner of Fair Oaks in Pasadena and you said you wished you had made the cat videos yourself? If they were your videos what would you say if I asked (without sarcasm), 'what were you thinking when you made those videos?'

I remember seeing you. And I remember thinking that but I don't actually remember saying it. (Note to myself: look up 'encroaching senility'.)

Tables turned, I would of course have said, 'Oh well, you know. Nothing really.' Which would be true but I don't think that's what you're looking for here.

Vince Fecteau once told me that after seeing some early pieces of mine, magazine pages with post-it notes stuck on them, he'd thought to himself, 'You're not supposed to be able to do just that'. Meaning, he explained, that he kind of giggled at such a dumb and minor alteration, just one post-it note on a torn-out magazine page, framed and in a gallery. That giggle, to me (especially coming from Vince whose work I admire), was the perfect response.

With very little information Vince was able to imagine a dabbler – so he said – who sits next to a pile of browsed-through magazines, tears out pictures of the cutest guys, slaps on post-it notes – either to remind himself of a particularly cute one or to simply block out parts of the picture he doesn't like – and, in the end, picks a few out of the stack that seem better than the others. A dabbler (or if he were a sculptor, you could say 'tinkerer') does merely that. But, and this is where Vince absolutely 'got' what I may have been thinking at the time, isn't there a kind of 'effective mereliness'?



A Mountain, carbon, paper, tissue, linen, tape,
28 x 20", 1998

I'm not sure how much that explains. Underneath your own question is the same impulse as Vince's: 'You're not supposed to do just that'. What would I have been thinking if I had made those cat videos? Whereabouts would I get the wherewithal to just think that my cats are interesting enough to point a video camera at? Who, in effect, would have given me permission to do something so potentially mundane, half-baked and self-indulgent?

Not to go into this too awfully much, but acquiring permission is a bit weird for me. My shrink says it's due to a 'punitive extroverted superego'. Which is to say that there are always more reasons to not do something than to do something. When it drives me too much toward inertia I have to create for myself a counteractive force, a 'permissive extroverted superego', if you will. Which doesn't always do that much good since you could imagine a seagull painter using the same excuse to make yet another dreary, bland seagull painting. So it has to be a 'perversely permissive extroverted superego', a kind of combination fuckedupness-barometer/permission-giver who, with one eye winking permission, has the other eye turned critically toward whatever's goofy enough, fucked-up enough and sincere enough to be worth doing.

I often call to mind Morticia Addams for this purpose. I imagine my Wednesday-self proffering up for approval some always-already genius (this is fantasy, ok?) bit of demonality. Ghastly smile drawn, Morticia pours her eyes over my latest work and drinks in all of its, as I've said, goofiness, fuckedupness and sincerity. 'Did you clean up the blood?' is usually all the permission I need.

So, then, the voice of Morticia is probably the one which might have said that making videos of my cats would have been ok. 'Sure, by all means, as long as somebody gets hurt.'

She might have said, pressed by me for further description, that despite my stumbling onto something, decisions that are totally my own have already been made. That cats playing at being scary is profoundly goofy. That, in contrast, dogs at play – with their groomed handsomeness and trained amicability – would not have been on the same level of fuckedupness; they're already camera-hogs. That these cats in particular have developed tools that they inevitably trot out, each distinct but given to transposition: one, a paws-forward clambering, the other, an arched-back bristle-tailed stare over its shoulder, and that these tools are always being recombined and contextually reinvented, motifs that occur and recur in seemingly endless reinvention, their only purpose to keep the game perpetual. That indulging my cats to scratch floors and claw up furniture is a permission I siphon back toward myself when I can't find it anywhere else. That, overall, despite the dumb casualness of simply turning the video camera toward some cats, my own insights are on display and are, in fact, quite evident. Which, in turn, makes a potentially innocuous video of cats at play absolutely well worth doing.

I doubt if Richard Hawkins would have been thinking all that if he had made Frances Stark's cat videos. But it is how I would have thought of them in retrospect.

Does that answer the question?

Elinor Jansz, greengrassi, London

I deliberately didn't pose any questions to any of my galleries but somehow I thought it would be nice to hear from you. I don't know exactly what I want to ask you yet, I just know I want to ask you something ... let's see ... I could ask you about that little mimeographed edition I made there in the office, since you bought one, or I could ask you about those two collages I just sent you, since you said you really liked them (that way I'm not totally fishing for compliments, I'm just fishing for the fleshing out of compliments, I guess). So...?

It's hard to imagine saying anything in the knowledge of what's been said before. I am trying to write about Frances without decorating my words or hiding behind someone else's, and I'm starting to feel a certain congruity between what I am struggling to do here and the challenge Frances sets herself, in order to make work in her own voice of what she describes as a porous relationship to her experiences. Her delicate notations carry spirals of aching enthusiasm for others which lead into an internal world of minute observation and enquiry. She made a booklet to accompany a show in 1998 using a mimeograph machine which combines low-grade technology and handcraftedness. Frances bound the pages with a staple gun and inserted a sheet of parchment between the two parts so that the booklet rustles reassuringly as you turn its pages. The pale-purple carbon letters only just make contact with the page hovering above it in loose clusters and constellations that have a material fluidity echoing free associations from backyards to Bjork to Novalis to Bob Dylan in endless imaginative digressions.

Susan Kandel, editor, *artext*

Since you have experience editing my writing, is there anything you would like to say about the relationship between my writing style and my visual work? (Hopefully it won't have to do with my utter failure to meet deadlines.)

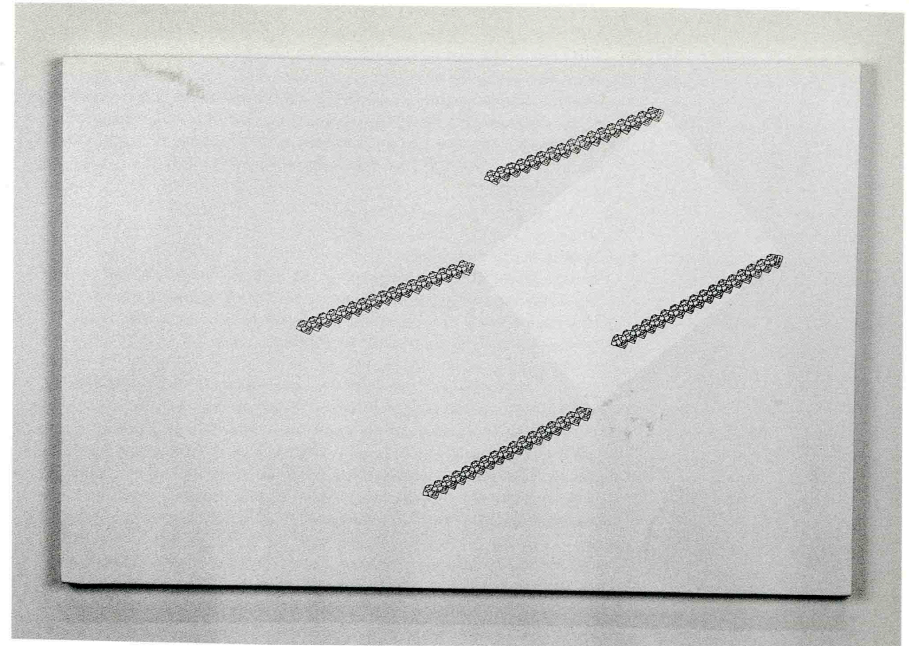
Frances, you're two-faced, but don't worry – I mean that in a good way. First things first, and what's first, in your writing as well as in your artwork, is fragility. Talk about meandering, false starts, back-tracking, second- and third-guessing, laments about what you don't know and can't do. You enter and exit without fanfare; you tread oh so lightly. But this lightness is only one side of everything you make and say. The other is sly and utter control. I've figured out why your column comes in dead last every issue. Your wonderfully self-deprecating excuses aside, you don't want me to have time to fuck around with your words. Passive-aggressive comes to mind here, and it's been highly underrated as an aesthetic/textual strategy. In your case, it sure gets the job done. To put a mythological spin on things, think of the Roman god, Janus, usually represented with two heads, placed back to back. He could see in two directions simultaneously, but I suspect he could still learn a thing or two from you.

Laura Owens, artist

For some reason I want to ask you if you were surprised when I first showed some paintings, but of course you knew they were coming – can I ask you, what did you think when you saw them?

I was really excited to see her paintings because I felt Frances entered into a dialogue with other painters and paintings. This seems like an obvious statement, however, for me it was an important addition to thinking about her work that was perhaps not so explicit before. The piece of paper and its materiality (i.e. a bend, a watermark, ink stain) has always been so deliberately considered in her work, as has the idea of paper as a place of writing and a place of drawing. I was curious how this type of hyper-attention would play itself out.

The surface of these paintings are amazing. It is better than an eggshell, more matte, more smooth. It is not like paper. I remember touching them and being shocked at how incredibly silky they felt.



Untitled (now, no paper 2), carbon, acrylic, casein on canvas, 24 x 36", 1999

Another interesting thing that happened with the paintings was that with the transition to a more three-dimensional structure, perspective appeared. With the works on paper there is a deliberate flatness, the space of writing, the page of a book. I remember one painting that was like a table, the legs made out of language, literally a space to write. I asked my friend Edgar, a painter himself, if he remembered when he first saw Frances's paintings. He pulled a book out of his bag that Charles Ray, his teacher, had loaned him. The book was about Thomas Eakins and he began to tell me how Eakins's father was a writer. An interesting link was that Eakins portrayed his father, and many other men, either writing or doing some other activity (such as surgery) while sitting at a table. Eakins was obsessed with writing, and in all of Frances's previous work it appears that she was too. It is interesting that when making a painting, she, like Eakins, chose to portray the place where writing takes place.

Since she started to make works on canvas it seems that both the paintings and drawings have an added depth of field, whether it is through slight ideas of perspective or through washes of colour imitating landscape. These are just a few thoughts, I would really like to see a lot more paintings from her.

Laurence A. Rickels, theorist/therapist

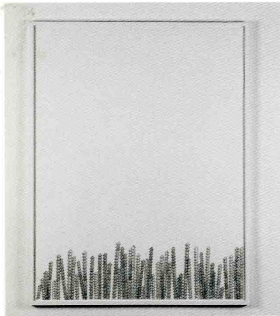
You own *W is for Werther*. Why did you buy it?

Sometimes an author's great notion and commotion will exchange a thousand words for the fitting pictogram. What saw me coming was the WordPerfect symbol for 'file', emptied of former contents, forming a return-carriage repetition column (the stencil effect doubles the computing still or overkill back onto the typewriter, a doubling that's right on the mark also in the genealogy of these media). *The Sorrows of Young Werther* has served a mascot text in all my books beginning with *Aberrations of Mourning* (1988) and continuing through *Nazi Psychoanalysis* (to appear in Spring 2002). Goethe's best-seller, which doubled on contact with reception as its own copy-cat suicidal following, internally staged Werther's own reduction through his thoughts and his art – the 'thought dashes' and his silhouettes – down to the typeface of his text. It is a reducing plan that suggests a merger going

through, a replicational text-act caught up in the act of 'suicitation', at the same time as the hero's self murder. The closing line of the book, the reference to Werther's improper burial as suicide, could be the opening line of a vampire fiction. And through the outer-corpus experience of this Werther effect, the suicide epidemic infecting his close readership, Goethe acclaimed to be afflicted by the haunting of a brother's improperly buried ghost. And thus I have relied for some time to come on *The Sorrows of Young Werther* for what I have seen it to be: the owner's manual of what I like to refer to as the 'Teen Age'.

DeWayne Stark, my father

As you probably know, I have used the IBM card when making artworks. Could you explain what those are, how they work, where they came from (things like that)? And if you have any thoughts on how they might function in a work of art I'd be interested to hear ...



no, no, no, now – Grass, 132 x 102.5 cm, 2000

Old-man Hollerith's card has fallen into disuse lately. I'm not sure when its use peaked but I can recall that during the Vietnam war people were shipping their data to the Far East where it was punched into cards and the punched cards were returned to the States for use. The card, when blank, is a piece of card stock of the colour and print design of one's choice. When the card is a virgin it contains no information but, after punching, it can contain just about anything: your age, birth date, sex, rate of pay, number of hours worked, etc.

A primary use of the punched card was the dreaded timecard. At one time in my life a timecard was a great producer of stress. Getting the card into the time-clock before the start of the working shift everyday took all my effort. Punching it out at the end of the shift ended the working day. Actually the time-clock didn't punch the card but printed a time message that was hand read by the timekeepers who placed a pencilled daily total on the bottom of the card. The pencilled-in data would later be punched in the card and the card fed into the computer. Keeping the card in machine-readable condition was necessary for the system to work. The saying 'Do not fold, spindle or mutilate' existed for a reason. I have seen many a talented engineer or scientist whose most important job of the week was to make sure the timecards got in and were filled out right.

Before the coming of the personal computer, access to the computer was through the punched card. Each line of a programme was punched into a card, and a programme might consist of boxes and boxes of cards. These programme cards were input into the system via a card reader. As the system grew in size the speed and capacity of the reader increased. Just imagine the frustration of loading a three-thousand-card programme into a system then finding just one card with a single punch in the wrong place and having to do it all over.

A card could be punched by a keypunch machine that was operated much like a typewriter, with one major difference. You couldn't backspace and correct an error. Once a hole was punched it was final. Many a final grade in college was determined by how well one could keypunch. When a mistake was made while punching one could take the card in error and eject it, place it in the punch's reader and dupe up to the error column. Knowing the short cuts on the keypunch could save countless hours of frustration. Checking the keypunch stock to make sure it did not have pre-existing punches could also help one maintain one's wit. The computer's card reader will only accept certain punch combinations and illegal multi-punches caused by someone putting used cards back into the new card hopper could drive a programmer to drink (many did anyway).

Besides the use as timecards another very popular use was the payment coupon. At one time I was involved in the design of products that used punched-card media in the input/output devices. We had just finished a circuit-board interface for a small Burroughs card reader. We were about to test it but couldn't find any punched cards anywhere. We went looking in the dumpster behind the building but the cards we found were too damaged to

use. Our next search was through all the cabinets and drawers in our small office. Finally we discovered thirty-six payment coupons for the company president's new Cadillac, which we ran through our reader over and over that night for testing. When we were done we replaced the cards in his desk. He never knew and the next day we ordered a keypunch from IBM but that is another story. [And another story is IBM and Hollerith's instrumental involvement in the holocaust.]

Odene Mitchell, my mother

All my questions have to be loaded, to a degree, but not too loaded. With you I'm finding this is an especially difficult balance to achieve. Because of your interest in something described as 'the work', I have become increasingly aware of how often art is referred to as 'WORK'. Could you say a little about your concept of 'the work', where it comes from[*] and what it means. How might this help or hinder you in understanding my own 'line of work' so to speak?

I have often drawn parallels to something called 'the work', and what an artist creates. My personal interpretation of 'the work' is work on oneself, observing one's own behaviour and attempting to adjust the way one sees and interprets the world so that one's behaviour becomes more supportive of all of creation. It's really a 'soul-building' activity, one that strengthens that part of our being which helps us to interact in the physical world in a transformative and nurturing way, and is as ancient as man's ability to contemplate himself in the universe.

An artists 'work' manifests their own vision of the world, and challenges all of us to further examine our own understandings and beliefs. Your specific body of work has a subtle seduction into the most minute aspects of language. Not meanings, but the rhythm and texture and colour of words. I also see that as 'soul building'. You show us the beauty and flow of the language we use everyday to interact with others around our personal experiences of life. I have always been in awe of your intellect, and expected 'the work' to be reflected in your published writings and teachings. I am delighted that you have chosen the visual arts to tantalise us into a new way of thinking about the words and world that we see everyday. I'm not so sure it is as necessary for me to understand or 'interpret' your work, as it is to reflect on what it evokes in me, and how I can use that for my own personal growth. I believe that is how most of the general public approaches the 'work' of artists.

Cerith Wyn Evans, artist

I just made a piece that used this sentence (from Robert Musil's *Man Without Qualities*): 'It is life that does the thinking all around us, forming with playful ease the connections our reason can only laboriously patch together piecemeal, and never such kaleidoscopic effect.' Do you want to say something about this sentence?

This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroisation; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection ... the appearance of a new modality of power in which each individual receives as his status his own individuality and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterise him and make him a case.

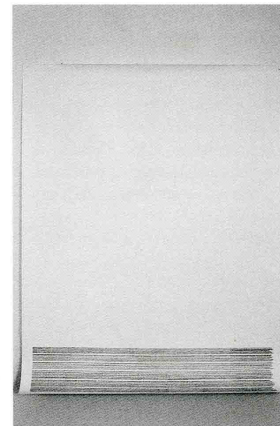
Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

Does the novel, whether founded on verisimilitude or fantasy, pretend to do anything else but be lifelike – life being movement – or does it pretend to substitute illusion for life?

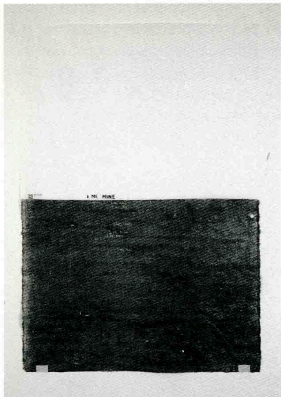
Fabre, 'The Art of Analysis', *La Princesse de Cleves*

For a long time ordinary individuality – the everyday individuality of everybody – remained below the threshold of description.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*



Erosion's Fertile Debris, carbon on paper, 77 x 60", 1998



I, Me, Mine, carbon, gesso on rice paper,
36.5 x 24.5", 1996

Morgan Fisher, Filmmaker

FS: You are an archivist, I presume, so since, as you've said, you have one of my most ephemeral – and possibly anomalous – pieces in your archive, would you be so kind as to retrieve it from the files and speculate on what it is?

MF: I wish I could say that the impulse to save things, especially things my friends make, makes me an archivist. It's not an archive until you can find something when you need it. When I looked for your piece I couldn't find it. I know it's around here somewhere, I just don't know where.

FS: I don't know how much you know about my work, but what I know you know is that I am a huge fan of your film *Standard Gauge*. Perhaps you would like to speculate on my passion for your voice-over... (which is not to say I'm not passionate about that which it's actually 'over').

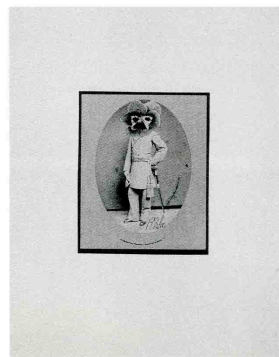
MF: Maybe you like it for the best of all possible reasons, because it embodies something that you recognize in your own work. Perhaps it has an exact equivalent in your work, although it appears in a different form. What your work and *Standard Gauge* share is the principle of commentary on a fragment. This is the activity of paleography, and a part of paleography is the act of negotiating a relation to a text from another time. So, not to interfere with your pleasure in the voice-over, which of course makes me very happy, I want to suggest that the voice-over, the commentary, only does its work in relation to the fragments that the film shows you. No fragment, no occasion for commentary, nothing for the commentary to be attached to, no distance to be registered and to be meditated on. In your pieces that go on the wall, you aren't the author of the fragments of text that your work elaborates. Someone else wrote them, and you found them. They mean something to you. The question is what to do about that feeling, how to make it manifest. I found the fragments of film that make up *Standard Gauge*. They meant a lot to me, I was obsessed with them. The question was what to do about that obsession. A part of the power of the fragments was in their autonomy, their distance from me. I had to accept that distance, rather than thinking of them as things I could make my own, or bring closer to me, through reworking them by visual means. They're like relics, so that would have been sacrilege. To preserve their autonomy as visual artifacts, I was forced to another medium, words. The pieces of film are there for you to look at, to form your own relation to, quite apart from what I have to say, and my talking is the elaboration of how utterly enthralled I am by them, how much they mean to me, how much I believe in them. In your work the original fragments of text are there for people to form their own relation to, but they are surrounded by your elaboration of your feelings about them. But because the fragments you work with are already writing, the response you don't allow yourself is to write, that is, to compose in words. Your writing is writing as copying, inscription, writing as labour. Inscribe over and over again a fragment of a text of which you are not the author is a demonstration, an acting out, of belief in the power of the fragment. It's a way to meditate on the distance, always insuperable, between you and the fragment of which you are not the author but exercises power over you. And it's copying in a double sense, not just the words, but recreating by hand the appearance of words set in type, which only reinforces the notion of enacting belief through labour. And at the same time this simulation of type enacts the notion of not allowing any kind of self-expression in written form – composing, handwriting – to exist in the space of the written that as a sort of sacred object the fragment alone should occupy. If this summons up a picture of you as a one-woman scriptorium, perhaps it's completely to the point. But now to return to what I suggested at the beginning. In your pieces the repetitions of text produce a field that registers as a visual event, a picture. It's a little diagrammatic to put it this way, but *Standard Gauge* starts with visual fragments and elaborates them with writing; your works start with written fragments and elaborate them with pictures. My voice-over corresponds to your pictures-out-of.

Dirk Snauwaert, curator, director Kunstverein München

Would you care to comment on the title of the exhibition I did with you: *Ich suche nach meine Frances Starke Seite*?

The title *Ich Suche nach meine Frances Starke Seite*, at first made me smile. Ironically, it mirrored the Kunstvereins appropriation praxis of certain phrases and sentences for exhibition titles. The reactions to these titles were mostly disapproval since there seemed to be no way for the addressed to figure out what to expect in an upcoming exhibition. The functionalising of titles in order to transport some sort of product message has alienated the phenomenon 'title' from its specific genre, which has more to do with literature than with descriptive journalism, it is more elusive than communicative. The laws of brand politics in communication transfers are neglected by this title, that's for sure. My 'Schadenfreude' for such a proximity in failure to compressible communication, soon shifted into sympathy due to the level of the melancholic introspection the title suggests. The reference to the self as subject of analysis as much as an author of the artwork and the exhibition, should make us feel uneasy considering the exhibitionism some current photographic practices confuse with the analysis of inhibitions and behavioural codes. The introspective parameters this title maps out and the ambitions it triggers, are that of an uncompromising dissection of the 'I', but then again only if one considers that the 'meine' and the proper name correspond to one and the same person, Frances Stark. According to the initial signals and parameters, the verb 'Ich suche' set the directions for the automatic link of the quest for the intention of the artist, her deeper motivation in existential and psychological terms. Romantic literary traditions appear to be about the search for unknown dimensions of subjectivity and the quest for the ultimate inner core of the self. Stark's patient re-copying of hypnotic phrases taken from the great novel tradition or of icons used in data processing, cryptically evoke the basis of perception in the linguistic procedures of reading, writing and symbolical construction. The ambitions implied in this trope of the quest suggest that an in-depth scanning of the different aspects and consequences of the artist's own aesthetic program was the focus of this exhibition, a kind of questioning of the 'State of Things' in the work. This reading of the title made the proposal shift from an autobiographic melancholic journey to the depths of the self and evolve into a reflexion of a possible analysis of both the 'authors' name, a brand logo for in the spectacle of cultural consumption and market value. The reduction of a practice to a streamlined recognisable logothetic icon, such as the author name, functions in the exchange values of the cultural industry, is also indicated here as a goal of the quest, that of finding a strong side in the competition, and the way a monographic, syncretic exhibition like the one at the Kunstverein Munich, operates as a canonising process of one's own work for the institutional context. In this oscillation between the prozaic German introspection reading and its translation into English, the word *stark* receives another quality and spectrum of interpretation. It brings in a narrative line, which Stark has referred to before in the Virginia Woolf 'Room for oneself' question, the location of the place for women in the landscape of cultural production. In retranslating the title into English, the 'strong side' points to the still problematic question of the role and position of the female author in the artwork.

Ecce Homo Series, 2 (General Lee), Collage on paper, 30.5 x 22.5cm, 2000



(Left from top)
 At Home 1999/1997 (*Wir Zusammen Kunst Befruchten*), video still, about 1.5min, 1999
 At Home 1999/1999 (*The Achiever*), video stills, about 3min, 1999
 At Home 1999/1966 (*Sunshine Superman*), video stills, about 4.5min, 1999
 At Home, 1999/1976 (*Epistle to Dippy*), 1999, video still



(Right from top)
 At Home, 1999/1976 (*Dvorjak's New World Symphony*), video stills, about 1.5min, 1999
 At Home 1999/1980? 79? (*Jealous Again*), video stills, about 2min, 1999
 At Home, 1999/196? (*Everything's Good About You*), video stills, about 2min, 1999



Afterword

Charles Esche and Mark Lewis After all is said and done:
 a sense of wonder

We embrace things we consider unheard of, first on account of the variation in the course of nature, at which we marvel; then on account of our ignorance of the cause, which is inscrutable to us; and finally on account of our customary experience, which we know differs from others' ... From these conditions proceed both miracles and marvels, since both culminate in wonder.
 Gervase of Tilbury, circa 1210

Here, the thirteenth-century English noble Gervase of Tilbury generously casts the problem of the new, and as yet unknown, as wonder. Of course, eight-hundred years ago it must have seemed as if there was a significant, even infinite world to discover by way of voyage, story or rumour; much to be conjured, sustained in uncertainty, imagined at arm's length and at times feared (without necessarily destructive malice) by means of a sense of wonder. Pleasure was inspired by rarity and by the wondrous acknowledgement of the brilliance and variety of creation. Wonder emerges in the middle ages as *the* subject of natural history and philosophy and becomes a central preoccupation of medieval travel writings, the latter almost always a mixture of 'real' observation and imaginatively recast second-hand reports by 'reliable sources'. But if the imagination fuelled and inspired the depiction of far-away Eastern lands brimming full of magical creatures, awe-inspiring man-made structures, incredible beasts and other natural wonders, it equally gave form to medieval natural philosophy, natural history and medicine, each of which was similarly infused with, and determined by, so called poetic license.

Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, in their book *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, have demonstrated that many of the recurring themes and motifs of medieval philosophy and natural history were 'absorbed from courtly, literary and theological sources'. Thus wonders, their descriptions and, when objects, their physical display, were respected and given great value, in part through their association with these 'artistic' areas of medieval life. Romance literature of the 12th and 13th century was a particular influence in this respect and, generally speaking, descriptions of marvels and wonders were richly tapestried with the rhetorical figures and excess characteristic of that art form. In effect, for a medieval writer to wonder at the world was to, *de facto*, immerse him or herself in the arts. So complete was this association in the minds of writers and readers alike that, with the appearance of the Cabinet of Wonder in the 16th century, art and nature were literally presented together in a single place; their juxtaposition a confirmation of their common bond in wonder. In short art and nature shared a common intellectual space.

To register wonder in this way was radically to open up boundaries, subvert classifications and dissolve familiar oppositions, in effect to keep the 'not yet fully known' or understood inside the realms of possibility and imagination, even as it came increasingly under putative inspection and display. In search of wonder, medieval writers would depict the very margins of the world (the East, Africa and 'beyond') as the places of 'variety and exuberant natural transgression'. These foreign lands were understood to be teeming with objects of wonder and products of advanced civilisations, as much exemplifications of god's creative genius as they were objects of scientific or natural curiosity. During the middle ages, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has put it, the wonderful was not yet an 'autonomous sentimental totality and the particular effect of the work of art, but an indistinct presence of the grace that, in the work, put man's activity in tune with the divine work

of creation, and thus kept alive the echo of what art had been in the Greek beginnings: the wonderful and uncanny power of making being and the world appear, of *producing* them in the work'. But this would not last for long.

By the 17th century, the natural sciences, history and philosophy were slowly attempting to rid themselves of this association with wonder. Admiration was still permitted, but awe was to be excised. In effect, what 17th-century natural philosophers attempted to do was to distinguish between two different types of wonder: learned and vulgar. Learned wonder could only be achieved by diligent inspection. And as wonder was not simply observation, it could not be experienced by just anyone, but rather by a specialist, a *connoisseur* of wonder – a precursor, perhaps, of the aesthetic connoisseur. Wonder more generally, so-called vulgar wonder, was not to be trusted. The medieval sense of wonder was predicated on the idea that at some very basic level the world, its objects and organisation contained marvels that could only be glimpsed in terms of some divine or unspeakable truth. And this put it at odds with the Enlightenment's growing faith in science and its more general establishment of specialised areas of knowledge. 17th- and 18th-century intellectuals were persuaded that if everything was eventually knowable there was nothing really to be learned by believing in wonder, for wonder would quickly disappear under the sign of science, or rationality.

And as wonder departed rapidly from the scenes of science, philosophy and natural history, which were henceforth to accumulate their respective knowledges on the basis of strictly empirical evidence, so too the experience of looking at art began to be framed by a discourse understood to be proper to it: *aesthetic judgement*. Wonder, what is left of it, simply becomes the property of art, increasingly isolated and detached from the world at large. The spectator of wonder becomes equally detached as he or she engages in a diligent inspection of objects. It is as if at some point, says Agamben, the spectator in front of the work of art 'lingers so long on the instant of wonder as to isolate it as an autonomous sphere from any religious or moral content'. So what happens to wonder in its full sense of conjuring majesty and unexpectedness in the world? Can we even speak of it now? Is it simply denuded of its worldly engagements by aesthetic judgement, cast from the realm of interest to become merely interesting (odd, charming, delightful and ultimately beautiful)? Might it become something to be conjured with again (that is to say, more than just 'interesting'), this time in the great artistic flirtation with the future that is modernism, a flirtation that dreamed of absorbing science, history and revolution in anticipation of unknown forms of organisation? We move from the wonder of discovery to the wonder of anticipation.

The Art of Strangeness

Habitualisation devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war...And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.
Viktor Shlovsky

By the time of the Russian Formalists, there was an implicit understanding that though the world may be a putatively new one, its signs were stale and clichéd, readymade and overused. Shlovsky's paradoxically familiar quote suggests one of the ways in which modern art set about trying to re-think its own relationship to that world, to prepare itself for the future and to locate its own strength and power in trying to imagine how that future might be conceived. Wonder, if you like, was not necessarily to be found in the encounter with something genuinely new and therefore outside of signification, as was the case in Gervase's time; rather, it was now to be experienced in the *ostranenie* of everyday life, through the making-strange effect that Victor Shlovsky compared to the knight's move in chess. We know, of course, that for the avant-garde in particular and for modernism more generally, the only way that something wholly new could be conjured was

through a destructive encounter with an object or idea already known – an iconoclasm of existing signs, the destruction of the past to make possible the radically new. And if the medieval wondrous encounter/exploration of the world involved the depiction and exploration of its extreme edges, then so too was the avant-garde's impulse to try and parse something wondrously unknown out of the very margins of meaning, but this time of a world already thought to be known.

According to a certain theorisation, encounters with objects that are wholly unknowable necessarily leads to only one thing: to want to know them. And in knowing them comes conquering and destruction. (Early medieval attitudes to the sources of wonder – the East, Africa and other 'edges' of the world – eventually went from awe, reverie and respect to denigration, destruction and ultimately colonisation.) This is the dialectic of enlightenment, what Adorno and Horkheimer have theorised as the tyrannical effect of the subject-object predicate, the submission of nature necessary for the survival of human culture, but it's undoing nevertheless. To want to know is to want to appropriate, control, name and eventually destroy. And nothing, it seems, can escape this logic of discovery. By turning from the unknown to the known modernism might have felt that it could produce wonder in and at the world at large, and perhaps escape the logic of the colonisation of the unknown.

If early 20th-century modernism recognised the possibility of wonder in the realm of things known far too well, then this recognition was not simply a return to the curiosity of earlier times. By establishing new possibilities of knowledge and history for a future not yet known, modernism staked its own future. Wonder was both a means and an ends of this stake. As wonder returns in the objects and signs of a tired and restless world, it also returns in the anticipation of a future. Modern art invested itself in the idea of a modernity that had not yet come and that would always already continue to form itself. In some radical sense the future would never cease to be unknown. (And, here, modernism's connection with the medieval age's own relationship to the world of divine creation is clear: both are premised on the *continuation* of wonder, on a never ending source of surprise and investigation.) If modernity was to remain unknown then it would, in turn, change forever the way 'the unknown' itself, the very agent of this investment in the future, could continue to exist. Wonder, then, of an unrecognisable future; the unknown within the empire of the unknown. So by introducing wonder into familiar and previously 'known' signs, modernism allowed for the possibility of a future where signs could perhaps continue to remain somewhat unknown in some basic marvellous, even ontological, sense. A future produced, in part, through wonder that, in turn, could sustain wonder everywhere.

In its pursuit and flirtation with a projected future, modernism broke with previous artistic models that had, to greater or lesser extents, both worshipped and tried to emulate the achievements of the past. In effect, prior to the emergence of modernism, the past was a known entity, more or less perfectly formed and available for study and/or imitation. T.J. Clark, in his recent book *The End of An Idea*, has argued that it is precisely because of this radical one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn from the past to the future that trying to understand modernism today as itself a past authority is so difficult, perhaps all but nigh impossible. Modernism was experienced, articulated and formed within a sense of a *coming modernity*, a modernity which art could conceive as having a continuous and changing stake in. Modernism was the once scandalous theorisation of a coming modernity that is already here. No longer able to experience the wondrous expectation of what that modernity might possibly be, but instead living inside of the failure of that expectation, blocks us, perhaps, from the sense of wonder that modernism articulated as a condition of its own investment in the future. Which I suppose means that art can only really sustain its relationship with the present if it can truly imagine that the future, that is to say modernity, can proceed through its end. This opens the way for a more traditional relationship to the future, a relationship very similar to the one first imagined by modernism.

A temporary failure to recognise: déjà vu as a sense of wonder

...every time aesthetic judgement attempts to determine what the beautiful is, it holds in its hands not the beautiful but its shadow, as though its true object were not so much what art is, but what it is not: not art but non art.

Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*

Plato described the effect of the creative imagination as one of 'divine terror'. As is well known, he called for the banishment of the artist from the city precisely because this divine terror threatened to turn the world into a collection of uncertain signs and to introduce dangerous unfamiliarity where there was steady and useful habit. In short, Plato feared that the divine terror of the imagination would make the future seem vertiginous, terrifying and unknown. Of course this idea of removing art, of banishing the artist, seems preposterous, laughable to us today. Not because there is no one to do it (because there is always someone – an official, a policeman, an artist even – who can will that result), but because to banish art today would serve absolutely no purpose at all; art does not produce 'divine terror' anymore. It is this very powerlessness that the historical avant-garde roared against, and that roar turned into a demand to put 'art into life' – to destroy art in the name of life – as art's very stake in the future. Since the inception of *Afterall* some two-and-a-half years ago, if there has been a single idea that has run through the journal, repeated itself in different forms and through various declinations, it is this general idea of art's failure to be at once autonomous and in the world. Art's failure, that is, to produce something of Plato's 'divine terror' without giving up on its hard earned self definition. This failure has not been imagined in terms of something that must be tried, unchanged, over and over again until it succeeds (like the salmon attempting to spawn recklessly up river). Rather it is a failure conceived as perhaps the very ontological basis for thinking art's relationship to the world since the birth of Romanticism. Art's self-definition has been cast in the light or mirror of an *expected* relationship that has failed to be.

This failure has been experienced and sustained as subject for the work of art. In some sense, any art that attempts to deny that failure is really only underlining art's inability to return to the moment when wonder was not simply the domain of aesthetic judgement, but of the aesthetic's stake in all things. The mourning for its passing has been played out as a long philosophical question: if art cannot be in life and disappear inside of it, then it can at least try and test how it *differs* from life, in the hope that the testing might reveal something of its original dream.

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