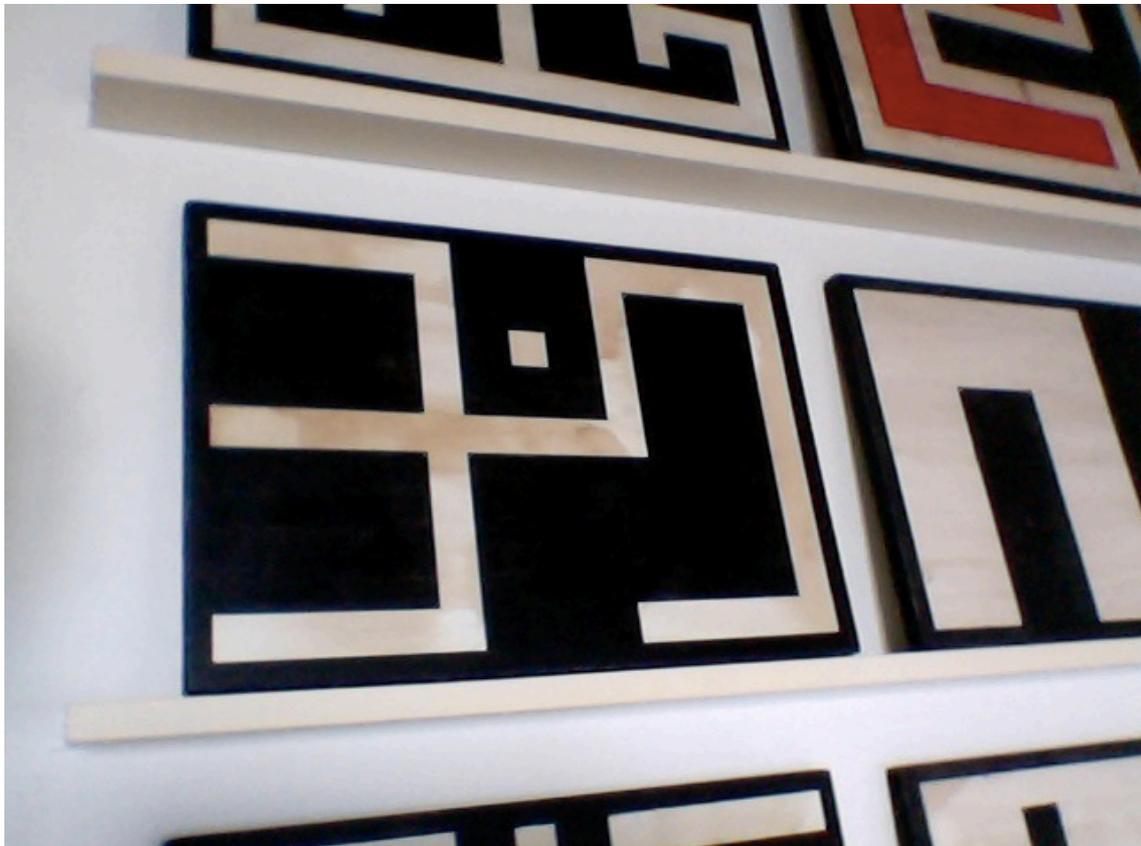


# WHY I AM PERHAPS NOT AN ARTIST

Ranko Bon



London

April 1996

## PREFACE I (April 1, 1994)

These writings should be read in the same way a collective exhibition is viewed. Connections may exist between the fifty-five pieces, but they are far from obvious and are often far from crucial. Following the metaphor one more step I find myself in the rôle of one of the artists whose works are exhibited. These chronologically arranged pieces were written over so many years that it would be unreasonable to suppose that the author could have remained the same person throughout. This selection from my *Residua*, a repository of uprooted thought launched in 1976, is a part of my offerings to the Hereford Salon in April 1994.

Collectively, these pieces might help answer the question from the title of this collection, which is also the title of one of the pieces—why I am perhaps not an artist? Also, these pieces might help answer the prior question—why the question in the title is important to me? But remember, disappointment with the answers is very likely. The answers are at best suggested.

I would like to end this preface with a disclaimer: I am not deliberately abstruse. In fact, I have struggled for years to achieve precisely the opposite. The reasons for my failure may have to do with myself, that is, my ability and willingness to speak in a clear voice, but it is much more likely that it has to do with our world, including my own world. No matter how much we may strive for clarity, we can achieve it only intermittently and incompletely. And those among us who are closest to this ideal perhaps elect not to speak at all.

## PREFACE II (November 1, 1995)

The first edition was sold in London art bookshops or distributed to friends who came to see my exhibition at the Hereford Salon in April 1994. Since October 1993, the Salon has been directed by my wife, Lauren Ariel Bon. In March 1995, we decided to direct it together, as well as to venture into publishing. Our first book has appeared less than a month ago. The second edition of my book appears under the Hereford Salon imprint because the pieces collected here reflect some themes important to us both. In fact, it is often impossible to disentangle the roots of these themes, many of which go back to February 1989, when we met. It goes without saying that we do not always agree.

The first book published by the Hereford Salon is a transcript of a series of conversations that may help other artists talk about themselves and their relationships with other artists. Similar books will appear in the future. This book is an intermittent monologue, but it is nevertheless open: it is open to interpretation, for it does not attempt to be exhaustive or authoritative, and it is open to dialogue, as it often adopts a tone that cannot but provoke reaction and rethinking.

About a score new pieces appear in this edition, and several of the old pieces have new *addenda*. My *Residua* grow by accretion both at the top and sideways. Many of the pieces collected here reflect the sentiment expressed in the title—the discomfort I feel whenever I fleetingly and tentatively think of myself as an artist. But I am even more uncomfortable when I identify myself with any other vocation, profession, or trade. In the end, I am an artist by default, if I am an artist at all. “None of the above” is my motto.

### PREFACE III (May 1, 1996)

A hefty and handsome edition of my *Residua* is about to appear in print, and this selection from it is thus less urgent. More to the point, the very question underlying this selection’s title is in question now that I have claimed that my *Residua* cannot but be a work of art because it does not fit any other class of objects—as I have argued in my “Homage to Manzoni” and “*L’art, c’est moi*,” for instance, both of which are included here. Still, this—I hope last—edition of *Why I Am Perhaps Not an Artist* is needed because I have already run out of copies of the previous edition before satisfying apparent demand. This is not because of a mad run on the last edition, though, but because the number of copies comprising it was rather small.

Many new pieces appear in this edition. Not all are at the end of the previous edition. Again, some old pieces have new *addenda*. In addition, some old pieces are included here to round off my ruminations on the spiritual in art—the theme that refuses to go away. In the end, this edition contains more than one-hundred pieces—twice as many as the first one, prepared for my first exhibition at the Hereford Salon. No matter how frugal one wishes to be with words, in the end there are always too many.

I will end this Preface with a story from Idries Shah’ *Wisdom of the Idiots* (1969). It is related of Ibn al-Arabi that people said to him: “Your circle is composed mainly of beggars, farmers, and artisans. Can you not find people of intellect who will follow you, so that perhaps more authoritative notice might be taken of your teachings?” He said: “The Day of Calamity will be infinitely nearer when I have influential men and scholars singing my praises.” Funny enough, this is almost identical to Lauren’s words this morning.

PREFACE IV (January 18, 2018)

Perhaps the only reason to give this book yet another chance is the abundance of *addenda* that have accrued since it first appeared. Abundance is the word, too. These extensions of the original pieces of writing have nothing to do with this particular selection from my *Residua*, though. They accrued over the years in connection with the original pieces all by themselves. By and by, they grew like barnacles. And no kidding. Which is why yet another edition of my old book is a startling joy, for even I am astonished by my progress.

Some of the new *addenda* show that I am not exactly an artist, indeed. Slowly but surely, I ventured beyond art for fulfillment. Although I still think of my *Residua* as a work of art, it points elsewhere nonetheless. In the end, the art of making oneself is the only art worthy of the lofty name. And liberation is the ultimate aim of that endeavor, which often takes a lifetime. All this is only hinted at in the avalanche of *addenda*, but it is there all right. Other books of mine are there for more insight.

So far, I have come up with many selections from my *magnum opus*. I call them books, and I see myself as a publisher. All my books are now available on the Ca' Bon Gallery website ([www.cabongallery.org](http://www.cabongallery.org)). And they are available for free. At the same time, my *Residua* are available on the World Wide Web ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)). Although I do not expect any recognition, let alone fame, I do hope that a few worthy readers will come my way in the fullness of time. The art of liberation is my one and only offer.

## ODYSSEUS OR MYTH AND ENLIGHTENMENT[1] (October 6, 1977)

What would have happened had Odysseus not been tied well enough to the mast? Imagine: He himself would have taken his ship to the Sirens! His cunning would have failed. So, sailors, plug your ears tight, tie him well, and let him enjoy the singing of the Sirens. Your cunning must complement his.

### *Addendum I* (October 28, 1995)

*Perché lo sconfinato rispetto, l'ammirazione per chi comanda? L'ambizione di comandare a propria volta? Ciò che scrive Comte (che pure passa per autoritario): "ogni partecipazione al comando è radicalmente degradante", lo condividiamo pienamente. Noi non abbiamo stima per chi comanda. Anzi, lasciamo che comandino proprio quelli per cui non abbiamo stima.*

From Manlio Sgalambro's *Del pensare breve*, Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1991, p. 76.

### *Addendum II* (May 18, 2000)

If Odysseus had not plugged his shipmates' ears, they would have done it on their own.

From Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1998 (first published in 1997), p. 420.

### *Addendum III* (August 23, 2002)

Twenty-five years ago, when I wrote the original piece, the connection between Odysseus and myself was farthest from my mind. At least in terms of my journey across the globe, I must add. That connection is obvious only now. If I follow Pinker in thinking about the mind as a society of agents, or of the brain as an archipelago of loosely connected islands of neural activity, then the mystery is resolved in one fell swoop. My own Odysseus, the commanding agent of my mind, was allowed to wander and explore the world precisely because the other agents had been cunning enough to obliterate all the dangers of the journey. If some of them are stirring once again, it is because the journey is nearing its end. It is time to untie Odysseus from his mast and unplug the ears of his mates. There are no more dangers in sight or within earshot. Whence the sudden awakening. Or is it enlightenment?

*Addendum IV* (March 6, 2013)

The last *addendum* was written less than a month after I bought my house in Motovun. I knew that it would take me about a year to inhabit it, but my trip appeared to be at an end. Enlightenment was nigh, or so it seemed to me at the time. And it was sweet while it lasted. It took me only a few years to become embroiled again, as well as to start dreaming about continuing my trip for yet another bout across the vast and nasty seas. Odysseus rebound to his old mast one time too many. Be that as it may, it is wonderful to read about my temporary bliss. No matter how short it lasted, my homecoming struck me as a sure thing. If only home existed!

*TESTAMENTUM XII* (January 11, 1978)

Dilemma of an intellectual: *ratio mortalis versus mors rationalis*. Way out: *mors intellectualis*.

*Addendum I* (August 22, 1980)

As Adorno writes, “without abandoning it, we can think against our thought, and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be a definition worth suggesting.”[2] In other words, there is no way out. If there is a resting place, it is on the edge, where one can rest only in motion. Along a tight rope without origin or destination—*ad vitam aeternam*. What remains is skill and cunning. “There is no other way out of history than regression,” and the destiny of such breaks is “a mere parody of the supernatural.”[3] The burden of reason must be accepted:

A sign of irrationality would not by itself be the same as philosophical irrationalism. Irrationality is the scar which the irremovable nonidentity of subject and object leaves on cognition—whose mere form of predicative judgment postulates identity; it is also the hope of withstanding the omnipotence of the subjective concept. Like the concept, however, irrationality itself remains a function of the *ratio* and an object of its self-criticism; what slips through the net is filtered by the net. The philosophemes of irrationalism too depend on concepts, and thus on a rational element incompatible with them. One of the motives of dialectics is to cope with that which Heidegger evades by usurping a standpoint beyond the difference of subject and object—the difference that shows how inadequate the *ratio* is to thought. We cannot, by thinking, assume any position in which that separation of subject and object will directly vanish, for the separation is inherent in each thought; it is inherent in thinking itself. This is why Heidegger’s moment of truth levels off into an irrationalist *weltanschauung*. Today as in Kant’s time, philosophy demands a rational critique of reason, not its banishment or abolition.[4]

Thinking against thought escapes the *mors intellectualis* only through metaphysics, “traditionally the chief refuge for the still unrealized ideas of human freedom and fulfillment,”[5] proceeding paradoxically in view of a paradoxical reality. But, the metaphysically homeless may find a refuge only in thought capable of resisting itself, that is, in thought secured against hypostasis as well as against resignation. Dialectics, thought in permanent struggle with itself, does not succumb to “the need for something solid.”[6] For there is nothing as solid as death itself, the absolute separation of subject and object, the ultimate model of “breaking out.” Paradoxically again, this separation appears to the subject, for a brief moment at least, as absolute integration of subject and object. The ultimate parody of the supernatural: death as the essence of existence (Heidegger).[7] The philosopheme of pure identity as death reincarnated, as Auschwitz from within.[8]

*Addendum II* (June 1, 2016)

Clever as Adorno’s proposition undoubtedly is, for thinking against thought is quite a step forward for philosophy, *mors intellectualis* deserves one more step in the same direction. And that is abandoning thought altogether. Reaching enlightenment by abandoning thought at will and for as long as one wishes is my own understanding of yoga’s ultimate goal (“No-Bullshit Enlightenment,” January 18, 2016). To my joy, this piece shows that I hinted at it early on in my own development. For better or worse, it took me more than two decades to discover yoga, as well as nearly four decades to bring it to fruition exactly in line with my precocious flight of intuition.

THE ARTIFICERS (July 10, 1978)

To create by remembering; to unbury the corpses whose ghosts have long since ceased to scare even the children; to more or less systematically deny that anything has been in vain, and that, therefore, everything has been in vain; to drag out the glory of old swords and old testaments while exposing them to the corrosion of daylight; to pull out the roots thought already rotten, and thus destabilize the increasingly weak foundations of the tree of knowledge, pretending that its poisonous grapes are thereby vindicated; to entice that shade of laughter which threatens without giving an impression that all has been and will be well; to compel the words back into their pre-established grooves in the magic formulae, making them fragile, brittle, and yet unavoidable, unforgettable; to nourish the myths already beaten into the pulp of history and aesthetics, and poetry; in short, to concoct all of humanity into one shapeless heap of throbbing flesh, bones, nerves, hair, and lard, creeping anywhere and nowhere, destined to vegetate rhythmically forever—that is the task of the illustrious artificers, the priests of continuity, the priests of dead and deadly change, of mobile immobility, of the standard according to which all the movement may be measured and ridiculed...

My tired hand is twitching. It refuses to obey, to execute. For I am not only aware that my note does not make any difference, but also that my testimony

may be my own indictment, and that in my individual case it may indeed be significant. And yet, all this may be secondary. I am simply not sure, not sure...

#### ON RETROGRESSION (December 17, 1978)

I pause to reflect. Ahead of me a cloud of dust. The thunder of their heels. Way ahead, I know, they crawl, fighting the unknown. The threadbare path underneath me is cutting deeper and deeper into the jungle. I look down the road. What if... I walk slowly the other way. Yes, there is a green sprout here and there. Soon I encounter a few bushes where kings on horseback used to entertain the poets. Further down I can see the trees. I start to run. Yes, the crowd behind me is trailing a long tail... There is no road ahead of me. The jungle is taking over. I will soon be forced to crawl myself. But at least I will be alone. I pause again, but a presentiment pushes me forward—one day I will spitefully laugh in their faces, when I reach them, from behind. The tail will catch the dog, at last.

#### *Addendum* (December 29, 1982)

The power of a country road is different when one is walking along it from when one is flying over it by airplane. In the same way, the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out. The airplane passenger sees only how the road pushes through the landscape, how it unfolds according to the same laws as the terrain surrounding it. Only he who walks the road on foot learns of the power it commands, and of how, from the very scenery that for the flier is only the unfurled plain, it calls forth distances, belvederes, clearings, prospects at each of its turns like a commander deploying soldiers at a front. Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text, that road cut through the interior jungle forever closing behind it: because the reader follows the movement of his mind in the free flight of daydreaming, whereas the copier submits it to command. The Chinese practice of copying books was thus an incomparable guarantee of literary culture, and the transcript a key to China's enigmas.

From Walter Benjamin's *Reflections*, New York and London:  
A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,  
1978, p. 66.

#### ON TECHNIQUE (January 23, 1981)

There are moments when your mental processes quite palpably fail to reach the level of thought. This is sometimes so pronounced that you notice it with consternation. The garbage suddenly demands conscious expression. You are amazed that all this, a subhuman jumble, could be going on in your precious head. But, you caught it there, you witnessed it, and now you must do

something about it, if not justify it. Not the thought, mind you, but the lack thereof. A premonition forces you into an erect posture. Grotesque, but nevertheless human. And you soon discover that such moments can be traversed by means of a simple technique—an orderly internal dialogue. The efficacy of this old device is astonishing, indeed. It seems however that it is almost completely immaterial what you think about. The very process of thinking feels soothing and it gradually restores the natural order of things. After some practice one experiences reasonably quick recoveries. The crucial thing here is that you tend to become quite cynical about the content of thought in general. It appears to you increasingly often that thought as such is instrumental, let alone its products. Like prayer, it is a device that ensures a modicum of wellbeing here and now. This bit of exceedingly vulgar hedonism is somewhat disturbing as it stands, but at least it does not pretend to exhaust the subject of thought. It is but a forewarning, and it is perhaps bound to retain this status. Yet, this topic might be picked up the next time you confront this recurring problem. You can never tell.

*Addendum I* (October 11, 1993)

But you are now aware that the flight from the subhuman jumble can lead the other way, too—away from language, away from thought, away from the mind, away from the new brain. More, you are now aware that you had better move the other way while there is still time for the long journey. For the cat is far, but the mackerel is farther; the cockroach is far, but the watermelon is even farther; the paramecium if far, but the mud is even farther...

*Addendum II* (September 4, 2015)

The original piece is wonderful to read, for it offers an understanding of thought that has little to do with lofty ideals often associated with it. As a flight from the subhuman jumble, it is much closer to earth, as it were. Coherent sentences and paragraphs proceeding from introductions to conclusions are soothing all by themselves, and this is often shoved under the rug. But the first *addendum* is even more wonderful to read, for it offers an entirely different flight from the subhuman jumble. In my dotage, the latter flight strikes me as so much more plausible and also infinitely more pleasing than the former. And I am amazed that this foresight came my way so many years ago, and with such stupefying clarity. As for the long journey, it is still ahead of me entire. Alas, enlightenment is not for sissies.

THE IDIOT (March 13, 1981)

Despite Knyaz Myshkin's indubitable advantage over me—for he was a real idiot, while my idiocy is still nascent, still unconfirmed, and most likely rather shallow—I can recognize some similarities and bonds between us, as they are occasionally reflected in the faces of others. While I talk and talk, spilling tea and knocking down oversized vases, dear to someone's mother or aunt, I can see how my enthusiasm, my uncontrollable conviction, my faith, separates the listeners into two clearly identifiable groups. The more I improvise and the

more I let myself be carried away by my knowledge, the more clearly I can distinguish those smirking from those gaping and eager. The fissure only propels me further, entices me to mend it, until I feel utterly exhausted and until the embarrassment caused by the truth and beauty becomes too hard to bear. Then I quit, admitting failure, bowing, apologizing inaudibly, kissing their hands lovingly and thankfully, while they reach for the door, pulled by an almost visible magnet out there, where they will be able to breathe freely again, away from my love and my devotion and my trust. But the fact that I am aware of this only demonstrates to what extent my idiocy is still mere fiction, a literary exercise, and thus a conscious lie. And this is therefore the first problem I must attend to after my speeches, lectures, sermons, after my exhibitions, my ventures into my soul and their soul, and after my renewed attempts to join them and be one with them.

#### THE HORRIBLE DIFFERENCE (August 13, 1981)

Thus spoke a lofty morosopher: Indeed, it is not our task to slip them a little knowledge while they are having breakfast, nor to cajole them with sweet and easy words suggesting a common ground while they are being entertained. It is their task to seek after us—after our knowledge—and in earnest. They shall experience the horrible difference themselves. Our knowledge shall be fortified and protected, and our language shall be made foreign to them. Our folly is our shield. For they shall be compelled to exert a real effort if they are to break the barriers of their ignoble ignorance. The greater the barriers, the more they will learn from us... Nobody listened, of course. A good thing, too.

To Perry Mehrling

#### KANDINSKY (September 5, 1981)

If one considers that constipated face under a ridiculous hat in the blurred group portrait of the Bauhaus luminaries, or the flatness of his narrative geometry and his rather large canvases loaded with symbols that were so readily assimilated by the blooming bourgeois “art” between the two wars in Europe, one can hardly believe that Kandinsky could ever draw tears from a cold museum visitor, somewhere in New York, today. That would be wrong, though. I am a witness. Kandinsky’s mad courage, his deliberate recklessness, his urge and his will combined, astonished me for the first time, as though I was a novice, someone unaccustomed, a mere amateur. The abandon of his early canvases is so well concealed that one is likely to mistake it for something else, indeed opposite. Only the scaffolding of his excursions remains, the constitutive *rigor mortis*. The rigor of Kandinsky’s two-dimensional constructs is perhaps the only visible remainder of the terror that had propelled him into the unknown. It is so palpable that it congeals, solidifies, and provides the sole connection with the dead master. Every line, every cut, thus suggests the outlines of a ghost—the live content that cannot be domesticated by bourgeois aesthetics. Kandinsky is still there, between the lines.

ON ADORNO'S "*PRESQUE RIEN*" (October 25, 1981)

If enlightenment indeed leaves practically nothing of the metaphysical content of truth, while metaphysics immigrates into micrology—a haven from totality (or embarrassment?)—and the residual “something” implodes into unreflected need, desire, or urge, then thinking must ultimately confront itself as the need-in-itself (or Kant’s thing-in-itself twice secularized?), or as a moment of the objective context of delusion; our thinking otherwise threatens to emigrate once again, to seek itself elsewhere and only elsewhere, in another object, and to hypostatize coercion (or just logic?) as the absolute—for the greater glory of the species. In other words, if dialectics is indeed the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion, while in dialectics an opponent’s strength is absorbed and turned against him, then the implicit methodological imperative of dialectics compels us to start by orienting it inward, where we suspect the need itself resides...

*Addendum* (June 29, 1982)

But this is far from sufficient, however. The heroic gesture, the sword of toothless reason defiantly turned toward one’s own rebellious heart, is assuredly necessary, although, by itself alone, it remains criminal insofar as the gesture is not generalized—in order to, paradoxically, prevent universal bloodshed—and insofar as the spectacle is not abandoned with a victorious and compassionate smile, once the absurdity and excess have been squarely faced, but not ridiculed. *Est modus in rebus*, as Camus claims:

Moderation is not the opposite of rebellion. Rebellion in itself is moderation, and it demands, defends, and recreates it throughout history and its eternal disturbances. The very origin of this value guarantees us that it can only be partially destroyed. Moderation, born of rebellion, can only live by rebellion. It is a perpetual conflict, continually created and mastered by the intelligence. It does not triumph either in the impossible or in the abyss. It finds its equilibrium through them. Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others. Rebellion, the secular will not to surrender [...], is still today at the basis of the struggle. Origin of form, source of real life, it keeps us always erect in the savage, formless movement of history.[9]

True, the need resides in our very bodies, but the plurality lodged in this expression compels us to endure, indefinitely if the need be, by providing as many examples of individual heroism as we are capable of providing. Every excess threatens to vindicate and thus absolve prematurely, in spite of the warnings of our calculated ignorance (expressed so aptly by Adorno’s “*presque rien*”) that implicitly compels us to remain, against all odds, tolerant

even toward ourselves. Yes, our responsibility toward all the human beings extends, miraculously, even to ourselves.

*SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI*[10] (January 14, 1982)

The urge precedes the content, let alone the form (of your own thought?). Occasionally, you must make an attempt to touch the fickle kernel, although the reason is still absent, or simply immaterial. Reaching ever anew, for the past and the present do not contain a common denominator accessible to you, you always return to the point of origin. An empty page, a suspended hand, a dry pen... Recurring with some regularity, and yet hardly periodic, the origin invariably strikes you as new—as undigested. Given the lack of any other point of reference, you are forced to accept it as such, as a novelty tasted so often but without an enduring imprint. Otherwise, you would have to postulate a groundless alternative (a mere confidence trick?): your own progress, not to mention others'.[11]

ART AND SELF-EXTINCTION (July 12, 1982)

The hopeful optimism of critical thought never ceases to amaze me. Take Horkheimer's "Art and Mass Culture," for example.[12] In view of fascism in Europe, monstrous and yet temporary by conjecture, he sees everything in plain daylight, but nevertheless chooses to reserve a certain degree of ignorance, and thence hope. The strong evidence already amassed to demonstrate the divergence between art and mass culture is explained away, and their ultimate convergence is first assumed and then postponed indefinitely:

Dewey says that art is "the most universal and freest form of communication." [13] But the gulf between art and communication is perforce wide in a world in which accepted language only intensifies the confusion, in which the dictators speak the more gigantic lies the more deeply they appeal to the heart of the masses. "Art breaks through barriers [...] which are impermeable in ordinary association." [14] These barriers consist precisely in the accepted forms of thought, in the show of unreserved adjustment, in the language of propaganda and marketable literature. Europe has reached the point where all the highly developed means of communication serve constantly to strengthen the barriers "that divide human beings" [15]; in this, radio and cinema in no way yield the palm to airplane and gun. Men as they are today understand each other. If they were to cease to understand either themselves or others, if the forms of their communication were to become suspect to them, and the natural unnatural, then at least the terrifying dynamic would come to a standstill. To the extent that the last works of art still communicate, they denounce the prevailing forms of

communication as instruments of destruction, and harmony as a delusion of decay.[16]

Returning to Dewey in the closing paragraph, Horkheimer writes:

In a beautiful passage of his book, Dewey explains that communication is the consequence and not the intention of the artistic work. “Indifference to response of the immediate audience is a necessary trait of all artists that have something new to say.”[17] Today even the imaginary future has become questionable, because, once again, man without humanity is as solitary and abandoned as humanity within the infinite universe. But the artists, continues Dewey, “are animated by a deep conviction that since they can only say what they have to say, the trouble is not with their work but those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not.”[18] The only hope remaining is that the deaf ears in Europe imply an opposition to the lies that are being hammered at men from all sides and that men are following their leaders blindly with their eyes tight shut. One day we may learn that in the depths of their hearts, the masses, even in fascist countries, secretly knew the truth and disbelieved the lie, like catatonic patients who make known only at the end of their trance that nothing has escaped them. Therefore it may not be entirely senseless to continue speaking a language that is not easily understood.[19]

Yes, let us hope for the sake of hope. But there are at least two avenues for thought that ought to be explored in the meanwhile. First, by what means will the spell be broken, and what is the rôle of art, as opposed to mass culture, in breaking the spell? In other words, what is the basis of the inescapable hope, if it is not to become self-sufficient? And second, what if the time has run out, and the artists unconcerned with communication will in fact never have a chance of communicating with the masses, for there will be neither the artists and their dormant works, nor the masses—their being suspect of all communication notwithstanding? What if the postponed present has no future whatsoever?

Once the question has been posed in this, brutal, fashion, it becomes obvious that art will either remain decorative, as the masses will remain in their catatonic trance forever, regardless of the interpretation imposed upon the accursed “forever,” or it will become engaged in order to secure, for some future generations, the very possibility of divergence and the consequent postponement of communication. Can this paragraph be closed with a victorious exclamation, so typical of impotent reason, to the effect that *tertium non datur*? Hopefully not! And that pathetic conclusion offers an upper bound on our hope, present and future, in a world that is so dangerously close to self-extinction. In this, to paraphrase Horkheimer, television in no way yields the palm to intercontinental ballistic missile and its multiple nuclear warheads. Only to that extent can we agree with Horkheimer, who, for better or worse, lived in a comparatively benign and innocent world of mere fascism.

A VULGAR HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE  
(June 28, 1982)

It is conceivable that the only salvageable moment of the religious life of the species, which will not be simply discarded and forgotten, is precisely the sum of its practical traditions—its material substratum, as it were—congealed and preserved in a constellation of techniques, devices, procedures, expressions, physical arrangements, and rules of thumb appropriate to specific conditions and situations. It is indeed conceivable that the stupidest routines and the most dreadful details of religious performance (and religious labor?) contain the essence of our spiritual experience. An enormous amount of testing, sifting, and refinement of quotidian worship and spiritual survival has already been accomplished through millennia and across the planet. Consider, for example, the very forms of sacrifice and prayer, the temples and altars, the communal singing, the prayer and worry beads, the institutions of monastic seclusion and mass pilgrimage, etc. Also consider the rocking and swaying, the rhythm, the repetition, the dancing, the language of curses and blessings, the masks and symbols... (Could reading and writing be added to this list?) This is not to say that ideological—as well as utopian, for that matter—“superstructure” is irrelevant, but merely secondary, or even derived, and undoubtedly comparatively unstable. This is furthermore not to say that we now need another scientific or professional discipline—a praxeology of religious life, or an architectural vocabulary of prototypical vehicles of faith—which would secularize and thus annihilate these apparently ignoble physical remnants of accumulated wisdom of the species. And finally, this is not to say that here lies buried another panacea. Far from it. My intention is primarily to shift the emphasis, and to point at heaven and hell as material facts of our childhood. (Could reading and writing possibly be construed as unreal or immaterial, that is, unproductive?) And our collective childhood is something we cannot choose *ad libitum*. Although we could accept, for the sake of the argument, the possibility of alternative histories, ours has been determined and it consequently surfaces as predetermined. The fact nevertheless remains that we have learned something or other, that we have established a correspondence with the unknown, or, at least, that we have stumbled upon the needs and ways of satisfying them that will not surrender to reason. For the “causes” are both too far and too many. The most precious lessons are perhaps already built into our very bodies—into our physical performances, including those associated with language—where they linger unattended. Again, my intention is primarily to shift the emphasis, and to point at these internal ruins inhabited by ghosts of our misunderstanding. The ruins themselves are sacred, as the species is sacred and irreplaceable.

*Addendum* (January 12, 2005)

I was right, of course. A stroke of genius, this piece. In the early Eighties, I was at least a decade ahead of the groping neuroscientists, who established the link between religious labor and brain activity associated with religious bliss only in the Nineties. But I am not about to continue lauding myself here. The reason for adding a few words to this note is to bring to the fore my parenthetical remarks about reading and writing. These remarks are prescient,

too. Indeed, much of my reading and writing can be construed as religious labor. My *Residua* is my proof, if any is required. The only difference between 1982 and 2005 is that this strange connection is not parenthetical any longer. Neither is it strange any longer. It is up front. In your face. And up your ass, dear reader.

*PERPETUUM MOBILE* (August 28, 1982)

Writing for posterity is nonsense today. Insects and reptiles do not read. Plants do not read either. Lest one is willing and able to invoke extraterrestrial archeology, a couple of million years from now, every stab at the truth is a mere gesture. That last straw is nevertheless appealing, and perhaps necessary. Thus I welcome you, fellow wanderers, for my species cannot harm you any more. The pointers I will have left for you will hopefully fill you with a sense of pride: “Behold—a glimpse of faith!” Thucydides inbound, as it were. The Mediterranean tragedy in the focus once again.

*Addendum I* (February 22, 1994)

The longing for my fellow wanderers may have led me toward my symbols, my boards of symbols, my books of symbols and crude representations of distant worlds? The longing may have led me to divine a way to commune with my fellow wanderers, at the cost of my own comprehension of our communion? A pathetic hypothesis, to be sure, but a hypothesis worth exploring.

*Addendum II* (February 7, 2015)

Wonderful, this. Writing for posterity was nonsense even thirty years ago or so, let alone today. This civilization is on its hind legs, for sure. What with climate change and the concomitant World War III, the return of illiteracy is a question of centuries. But invoking extraterrestrial archeology strikes me as far-fetched as this stage of my life. The longing for my fellow wanderers is perfectly understandable, and perhaps even laudable, but it still smacks of youth. And innocence. The solution to the riddle is obvious by now, though. For crying out loud, I am the vaunted posterity! The posterity entire, no less. And I can still read and write, as witnessed by yet another *addendum* to this fabulous piece. Fellow wanderers are for the birds.

CAPTAIN FLEMING’S INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE (August 28, 1982)

And smiling—both to himself and his past—he told with reverence how he had touched the file of the executed poet Gumilyov, calling it the affair of lycée pupils. It was as if a Pushkinist were telling how he had held the goose quill pen with which Pushkin wrote *Poltava*. It was just as if he had touched the Stone of Kaaba, such was the bliss, the purification in every feature of his face. I couldn’t help but think that this too was a way of being introduced to

poetry, an amazing, extremely rare manner of introduction in the office of the criminal investigator. Of course the moral values of poetry are not transmitted in the process.

“When reading books I would first of all turn to the notes, the comments. Man is a creature of notes and comments.”

“How about the text?”

“Not always. There is always time for that.”

Obscene as this may sound, Fleming and his co-workers could partake of culture only in their work as investigators. Their familiarity with persons of literary and social circles was distorted but nevertheless real and genuine in a sense, not concealed behind a thousand masks.

From Varlam Shalamov’s *Kolyma Tales*, New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1982 (first published in 1980), pp. 214-215.

*Addendum* (December 27, 1988)

At the risk of insulting the reader’s intelligence once again—as well as betraying my unflinching respect for the Soviet police establishment—I feel compelled to say that I conceive of this passage as a proof of the form and content of my *Residua*. There are two aspects of this proof: first, the claim that “man is a creature of notes and comments” comes from a professional with immense literary experience in the Soviet Union, where literature is a serious business; and second, Shalamov’s literature has nothing to do with fiction.

*NON SEQUITUR* (March 20, 1983)

The customary reply to those who pathetically complain that things are getting worse is that people have always felt that way. By implication, all such feelings are spurious. A friendly gesture and a tap on the shoulder punctuates the delivery of this ancient remedy. An occasional philistine will be compelled to illustrate this “argument” with a couple of tattered quotations from times past. The more seasoned the source, the better. Those who complained end up by shaking their heads and smiling crookedly, doubtful about this elegant flight of reasoning but reassured in their own incapacity to fathom all the evidence. Thus it comes to pass that no-one even notices that the very logic of the implicit argument is faulty, for it is entirely possible, on its own grounds, that things are in fact getting worse, and that this is the actual reason why people have complained about the world in the past as well. The argument at best affirms this perception by radicalizing it. Such radicalization is too radical, of course, and it consequently cannot but immobilize and defuse every attempt to address the perceived condition here and now. It is therefore necessary to complain against this logical fallacy as soon as it is committed,

no matter how distressing it may be to contemplate it after so many centuries of palpable progress.

*Addendum* (June 5, 2001)

Sadly, this is what Alain Besançon does in the otherwise compelling introduction to *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*.<sup>[20]</sup> He reflects on his own experience at the Paris Biennial:

I walked through rooms capriciously strewn with debris, little piles of sand, roaring machines. On the walls were charred objects, the macabre remains of some death camp, obstetrical tools to turn your stomach, a neon tube in a corner. I could strike up a song on the death of art, take the side of the haggard guard, sitting overwhelmed in his own corner of the room. But let us be cautious. The theme of the decadence of art is as old as art itself.<sup>[21]</sup>

Predictably, here he cites Plato and Baudelaire, the obligatory if involuntary accomplices to the fallacy. To his credit, Besançon begins this paragraph by saying that this is the experience everyone has had. More important, he concludes it by acknowledging that the lament, which has arrived on our doorstep having rolled from age to age, might be for good this time. It indeed might be.

ON SOME UNIVERSAL ASPECTS OF PROGRESS (July 7, 1984)

It is related that Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev once travelled together on the Trans-Siberian railway. At some point the train stopped in the middle of nowhere. After a while, Stalin got up, opened the window, stuck his head out, and shouted: “The engineer to be shot immediately, and his deputy to be exiled for twenty years.” He closed the window and sat down: “We will get going presently.” After half-an-hour Khrushchev got up, opened the window, and shouted: “The engineer to be rehabilitated, and his deputy to be brought back from exile.” He closed the window and sat down: “We will start moving in no time.” Another hour passed. Brezhnev got up, pulled down the shades, sat down, and started rocking rhythmically: “To-dum-to-dum, to-dum-to-dum...”

*Addendum I* (May 6, 2010)

I just stumbled upon yet another version of this story in Ben Lewis’ *Hammer and Tickle: A Story of Communism Told Through Communist Jokes*.<sup>[22]</sup> However, it also involves Gorbachev. “Comrades, comrades,” he pleads with Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev in the end, “let’s all get out and push!”<sup>[23]</sup> Sweet. Quintessential perestroika, too.

*Addendum II* (May 17, 2016)

Jokes like these used to be really funny. The tougher the regime, the funnier they were, as well. This applies not only to the Soviet Union and its orbit, but also to all communist regimes around. In my own experience of Tito's Yugoslavia, there were funny jokes galore. But why are such jokes not as funny today as they used to be years ago? Telling them was dangerous, for you could go to prison for it.[24] Once the communist regimes started collapsing left and right, the danger quickly evaporated. And the jokes stopped being really funny. Which says a great deal about humor in all its guises. Returning to the funny title of this particular piece, one universal aspect of progress is that it kills humor for good. And no kidding.

KUBLAI KHAN (1216-1294) (October 19, 1985)

"And the much-admired Philomena," said Marco Polo, "is such a vast and varied city that each and every city that has ever existed and that will ever exist can be found nested within it, complete with its inhabitants, domestic animals, and singing birds." The Great Kublai Khan asked: "Does this mean that no description suffices to give it shape in my mind's eye?" Marco replied: "On the contrary, my lord, this means that every description is equally as valid as any other in this regard." But the Khan was puzzled. "Show me," he said, "what have you brought from that city, so that I can admire it in its art." All Marco Polo could produce was an unadorned spherical mirror. The Great Khan raised the shining sphere to his eyes to contemplate its exquisite reflections. And he was satisfied: "Now I can hear the birds singing, now I can see the arching back of a cat perched on the highest tower of the temple, now I can feel the breeze in the hair of the young woman who walks past the fish market toward the harbor..."

From Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, 1974 (first published in 1972), p. 39.

*Addendum I* (November 4, 1995)

Last year Gerhard Richter exhibited polished steel spheres in his show at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London. I sent him this piece *via* Robin Vousden, one of Anthony's men. Richter never replied.

*Addendum II* (November 21, 2001)

A few years ago Lauren became interested in spherical mirrors. Much of her work the last year or so has revolved around them. Simon Rae-Scott has helped her make a whole series of computer images involving paintings by old masters and their reflections in spherical mirrors. So far, she has exhibited prints of these images in Miller Block Gallery in Boston and Robert Berman Gallery in Los Angeles. The postcard with the invitation to her last show, showing her holding a spherical mirror in the palm of her hand, is very much

to my liking. Lauren sent it to me just before her visit to London, where she is at the moment together with our children. I let her know how much I liked it and I asked her to bring me a wad, which I would send to the people in the art world with one of my pieces pasted on its back. This is what she did. A few days ago she gave me thirty-five postcards. And I just decided to send her postcards around with this piece from old Calvino.

*Addendum III* (June 17, 2013)

Of course, the original piece has nothing to do with Italo Calvino. The much-admired Philomena and the spherical mirror from the story are my own idle inventions. Over the years, I have come up with quite a number of such attributions only to eschew any connection with literature. Yuck. As for Gerhard Richter, I cannot be sure. It is well possible that he had come across my little trick in his searches through the literature of the period. Turning to my ex-wife, it is anyone's guess. We used to be close for a while, it goes without saying. But it is always a palpable pleasure to come across this piece. It smacks of Calvino, all right. Ah, the unparalleled joys of stray attribution.

*TESTAMENTUM CXI* (November 30, 1985)

All of my attempts, literary and otherwise, can be summed up in one phrase: remembering the future. But that sounds so very trite!

*Addendum I* (December 21, 1985)

A painter, an architect, a scholar, a mathematician, a planner, an economist, a man of letters, an administrator of things sublime and secret: a variable. Kandinsky, Mies van der Rohe, D'Arcy Thompson, Norbert Wiener, Kevin Lynch, Michal Kalecki, Montaigne, Jorge Luis Borges: a constellation of constants, that is, constraints. To dream the strongest dream ever dreamt: the objective. And the verdict, the most hopeful and humiliating of verdicts: *laudator temporis acti*. Ontogeny and phylogeny intertwined.

*Addendum II* (March 4, 2013)

Referring to the *addendum* above, many other variables have crossed my path over the intervening years: a teacher, an artist, an editor, a father, an historian, a lover, a pensioner. The constellation of constants has grown, as well: Marcel Proust, Seneca, Kazimir Malevich, Karl Marx, Marguerite Yourcenar, Patanjali, Franz Kafka, Edward Gibbon, Jalaluddin Rumi, David Lewis-Williams, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Jules Renard, Murasaki Shikibu, Piet Mondrian, Pietro Aretino. Luckily, the objective has remained the same throughout. Referring to the original piece, though, the verdict is still the same: remembering the future. But the future is very well defined at this stage of my life: it is enlightenment and nothing but enlightenment. Returning once again to the variables, now I am a teacher. As for the constants, Patanjali is the one and only teacher I now recognize. Perhaps I am boasting a bit, but things are much clearer today than they were twenty-eight years ago. Hooray!

*Addendum III* (February 14, 2016)

It is high time to bring this piece and the previous *addenda* to a close. Remembering the future? Pray, what future? All that remains at this stage of my life is the everlasting present. Phew!

*Addendum IV* (March 8, 2016)

Having written the last and apparently final *addendum* only last month, today I decided to check all the names of people listed in this piece on MIT Pantheon, a website that ranks individuals of note by their global fame (pantheon.media.mit.edu). Among other things, the site uses the World Wide Web to rank individuals by the number of searches and mentions in sources such as Wikipedia. All together, there are close to eleven-thousand individuals in the ranking that stretches some six-thousand years into the past. The site is a joy to ferret through and toy with. There is much to be learned from it about the human species.

And here are the people listed in the first *addendum* with their MIT Pantheon rankings in the parentheses: Wassily Kandinsky (752), Mies van der Rohe (3237), D'Arcy Thompson (0), Norbert Wiener (2213), Kevin Lynch (0), Michal Kalecki (0), Montaigne (421), and Jorge Luis Borges (1505). Those with zeros do not appear in the MIT Pantheon ranking. Kalecki's omission quite surprised me, for he was second only to Keynes in his economics of the Great Depression.

Here are the people mentioned in the second *addendum* together with their rankings: Marcel Proust (227), Seneca (101), Kazimir Malevich (1701), Karl Marx (39), Marguerite Yourcenar (1659), Patanjali (0), Franz Kafka (402), Edward Gibbon (2666), Jalaluddin Rumi (536), David Lewis-Williams (0), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (144), Jules Renard (0), Murasaki Shikibu (689), Piet Mondrian (817), and Pietro Aretino (2524). I was quite stunned that Renard was not in the ranking, but such is life. Be that as it may, he remains one of my favorite writers.

For good measure, I checked the ranking of a few more people important to me that I listed without thinking: Siddhartha Gautama (28), Friedrich Nietzsche (114), Yoganis (0), Genghis Khan (44), Fyodor Dostoevsky (158), Marcus Aurelius (63), James Austin (0), Homer (9), Idries Shah (0), Blaise Pascal (67), John Maynard Keynes (295), Theodor Adorno (1221), Gustave Flaubert (707), Mircea Eliade (6252), Wassily Leontief (3768), Federico Fellini (662), Aesop (55), Nikolai Gogol (420), Tacitus (169), Lao Tsu (74), Isaak Babel (5326), Pablo Picasso (50), J.D. Salinger (3844), James Lovelock (5568), Daniil Kharms (5684), John Cage (1740), Walter Benjamin (987), and Mikhail Bulgakov (1310). Again, I was surprised not to find Yoganis in the ranking. In my mind, he is foremost yoga guru of our times.

What have I learned from this exercise, though? First of all, I am both surprised and delighted by so many zeroes in my own Pantheon. Only Patanjali is excused this ranking because his place of birth is not known, and

that is a precondition for inclusion in the ranking. All the others are so much more precious to me because they are not recognized by the crowd. I feel similarly about all those with surprisingly low rankings, such as Mircea Eliade, Daniil Kharms, Isaak Babel, and James Lovelock. They are brothers, as it were. On the other side of the spectrum, some high rankings also surprise me and give me much pleasure. Homer is foremost among them. The great bard certainly deserves his place close to the very top of the ranking list. Not surprisingly, the top of the list is reserved for people of greatest antiquity. More often than not, it takes time to become famous. And that is about all I have learned from the MIT Pantheon this time around. Plenty, to be sure.

#### ON PORNOGRAPHY IN WESTERN ART (December 25, 1986)

In the town of Odessa a man was arrested for embezzlement. During a search of his apartment items of pornography were also discovered. Charges were immediately proffered against him under two articles of the Criminal Code. While confessing to the embezzlement offence he nonetheless denied the charge of possessing pornography, for which he stood to receive an additional sentence of between three and eight years in a concentration camp.

The local investigators were unable to deal with the case and sent the evidence to Moscow for examination by a commission of experts. The commission included specialists from the Pushkin Museum of the Arts and from the Tretyakov Gallery, who established that these were ordinary lithographs of pictures by Rubens, Titian and Giorgione. The second charge against the swindler was dropped.

From A. Anatoli's (Kuznetsov) Foreword to Petr Sadecky's *Octobriana and the Russian Underground*, New York: Harper & Row, 1971, p. 7.

#### PLUM TREE BLOSSOM (December 20, 1988)

A mandarin fell in love with a courtesan. Learning of his predicament, she sent him a message: "I shall be yours if you plant a plum tree in your garden, nurse it to maturity, and send me its first flowers, so that I may wear them in my hair on occasion of your visit." The mandarin planted a plum tree in his garden and protected it tenderly from frosts and pests alike. As soon as the first buds appeared, delicate and fragrant, he watched them develop from dawn to dusk. When the tree was in full bloom at last, he sent the courtesan a message: "Alas, you shall never be mine, for I have failed to comply with the generous propositions of your offer."

#### GENGHIS KHAN AND PICASSO (May 9, 1989)

What do Genghis Khan and Picasso have in common? They are creatures of my weakness. They are my witnesses in moments of dread and doubt.

Whenever I feel that my heart is shrinking in view of petty adversity, I invoke the names of these two gentlemen by asking a rhetorical question: “Would Genghis Khan or Picasso feel this way in a similar situation?” As soon as I consider my condition in this light, my chest swells to capacity once again and I regain my customary equanimity. And the efficacy of this simple device never ceases to amaze me.

*Addendum I* (April 7, 1998)

These two fellows surfaced again a few months ago, while Lauren was pestering me to go to a marriage counselor with her. I resisted as long as I could, trying to explain to her that I could not imagine being counseled by anyone, except perhaps the likes of Genghis Khan or Picasso—that is, people I deeply respected. She was not amused. In the end I had to give up because she was threatening with divorce in the case I refused to cooperate.

*Addendum II* (May 8, 2013)

Amazingly, Genghis Khan and Picasso are still my witnesses in moments of dread and doubt. I have learned much more about both of them over the years, but this has only strengthened their place in my mind. Interestingly, no-one has joined them in the meanwhile. Attila and Jalaluddin Rumi have perhaps been the only candidates for such a lofty position, but only just. Genghis Khan and Picasso are perfectly enough for my purposes, anyhow. As for the marriage counselors my ex-wife managed to find, they fared pretty poorly with me. Chances are that they still remember me as the toughest nut to crack in their careers. In retrospect, I should have settled for divorce way before counseling.

MAGDALENA ABAKANOWICZ (September 2, 1989)

Abakanowicz was new to me. As we talked about her sculpture several times this summer, it was truly wonderful that we stumbled upon a poster advertising her exhibition during our layover in Frankfurt. The exhibition turned out to be located just across the Main from the hotel where we stayed for the night. Both of us felt blessed because of this unexpected offering. It was like meeting an old friend far away from home.

Judging from her work and the black-and-white photograph in her catalogue, a poised woman. A woman at peace with the world. A woman with whom one could watch a sunrise in silence the second day of friendship. For some reason, Abakanowicz's nature seemed to matter. Her weathered face and the twinkle in her eyes were reflected in the texture and spirit of her sculpture. She was there, everywhere.

Although I enjoyed many of her pieces exhibited at the Städtische Galerie in Stadelschen Kunstinstitut, her sarcophagi simply entranced me. Bulky, coarse, scorched, they all exhibited two shallow humps and several blind protrusions. Round, heavy, awkward, they were constructed with roughly

hewn pieces of wood and smeared with tar. There was something boat-like in the way they were put together, but there was also a suggestion that they were made out of concrete cast in place. They appeared abandoned, windblown, eroded by time. Yet, they were vibrant, animated, live. Despite the fact that they were exhibited in cramped glass cages lined up like soldiers in the Kunstinstitut garden, the four sarcophagi exuded a mesmerizing power.

We shared this sensation, albeit not necessarily for the same reasons. The sarcophagi struck me as unprecedented and extraordinary to the point of being extraterrestrial. I saw them as scale models of much larger structures resting in ruins millions of light years away. I saw them as tangible proofs that such structures had been waiting and waiting for us out there. I saw them as an eyewitness, as Abakanowicz's accomplice in space exploration. And I saw them several centuries ahead of time. For all that I will remain forever grateful.

To Lauren Weingarten

ART IS SHIT: A GENERALIZATION (October 5, 1989)

It is already forgotten that, during the Dada period, the then leader, Tristan Tzara, in a manifesto proclaimed:

Dada is this; Dada is that; Dada is this;  
Dada is that; Dada is nevertheless shit.

This type of humor, more or less black, is lacking in the newest generation, who believe, in good faith, that their neo-Dadaism is more sublime than the art of Praxiteles!

From Salvador Dali's Preface to Pierre Cabanne's *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1987 (first published in 1967), p. 13.

ON ONANISM, AGAIN (February 27, 1990)

Years ago I agreed with John Friedmann that my writings had suffered from "onanistic thinking." At the time I argued good-naturedly that this was understandable against my East European background, where "onanism" would in all likelihood be reckoned as something positive, even heroic—as coitus deliberately interrupted to prevent insemination. The horror of unwittingly contributing to the existing order was indeed something characteristic of my old world. Thus I felt that marginal scribbling was vindicated.

However, at the time I would not feel comfortable with the generalization of this argument beyond the proverbial iron curtain. The old curtain seemed real. In retrospect, I apparently believed that East Europe was a geopolitical

phenomenon. Upon returning to the States, I apparently believed that onanistic thinking was behind me forever. Poised for great endeavors, I must have felt secure in my cavalier concession to Friedmann.

Things have changed. Things have definitely changed. I am more and more convinced that most of the problems the human species has faced through its grisly history are structural—intrinsic to the species, rather than to any specific political and/or economic order. The historical record is besmeared with atrocities that boggle the mind. The entire species is an abomination. True, there are some exceptions, there are occasional individuals who bring us hope, but they are so few and far between that it is shameful to brag about them. For each and every Bach, Einstein, and Mondrian there is a legion of murderers, rapists, and thieves. For each and every noble soul there is an army of scoundrels. It is shameful to remain oblivious to the balance sheet of history.

So, I am back in the realm of marginal scribbling. I am back in the world of onanistic thinking. Now that East Europe has been reduced to ruins, the evil spirit of the region has spread unchecked. It has been liberated from its geopolitical shackles, as it were. Thus I feel vindicated once again. And I shudder from the possibility of contributing to any order whatsoever.

*Addendum I* (November 4, 1993)

*Ditto* for painting.

*Addendum II* (March 6, 2015)

The first *addendum* made me smile when I came upon this piece in search of my ruminations about marginal scribbling. If only my painting could be called marginal doodling! Marginal it definitely is, but it is far from doodling. In fact, it is more like punching and slashing with utmost care. Be that as it may, I am delighted to come across onanistic thinking one more time. A wonderful term, too. If you must think, be sure that your thoughts do not take root, let alone bear fruit. Perish the thought.

BON BUDDHISM IN A NUTSHELL (October 1, 1990)

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait. Do not even wait, be quite still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked. It has no choice: it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

From Franz Kafka's "Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the True Way," *The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections*, New York: Schocken Books, 1970, p. 184.

WHITEKNIGHTS (November 24, 1990)

A fat crow strutting through the wilted grass of Whiteknights: no coat, no dishwasher, no marriage certificate, no social insurance. It never ceases to amaze me how debilitating our civilization has turned out to be!

*Addendum I* (February 10, 2001)

O generation of the thoroughly smug and thoroughly uncomfortable, I have seen fishermen picnicking in the sun, I have seen them with untidy families, I have seen their smiles full of teeth and heard ungainly laughter. And I am happier than you are, and they were happier than I am; and the fish swim in the lake and do not even own clothing.

From *Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, 1908-1969*, London: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 42.

*Addendum II* (February 12, 2001)

I circulated this piece and the *addendum* to the “Let’s Make Art!” list in connection with Michael Landy’s current show in London, where all his belongings will be systematically destroyed in public in a few short weeks. Billy Childish responded by quoting Matthew, 6:25-29, who reminds the anxious that lilies of the field neither toil nor spin and yet they do not worry about their food and clothing. Indeed, in this context at least, lilies are more wondrous than the fish, and the fish are more wondrous than the crows. Down the evolutionary scale, as it were.

MARCEL DUCHAMP (December 10, 1990)

A mother and son visited the Seattle Art Museum. Several rooms were devoted to the work of Marcel Duchamp. When they came to one in which all of the paintings were black, the mother, placing a hand across her son’s eyes, said: “Come, dear, mother doesn’t want you to see these things.”

From John Cage’s *A Year From Monday: Lectures and Writings*, London: Calder and Boyars, 1968 (first published in 1963), p. 88.

MY REWARD (January 8, 1991)

Millions are starving in Africa again, the war in the Persian Gulf is likely to break out any day now, there are more and more signs of a global depression, and so on and so forth, but I am about to turn off the light and drift into a peaceful and pleasant dream: my reward for a steadfast belief in my total and everlasting incompetence.

MAPPLETHORPE (March 31, 1991)

Try as I might, I cannot shake out of my mind Mapplethorpe's self-portrait I saw yesterday in a French art photography magazine: dressed only in an over-designed leather jacket and knee-high leather boots, he is crouching with his naked buttocks pointed toward the camera. The man is scrawny, almost emaciated. Like an angry, old nag, he is glaring into the camera over his shoulder. A long leather whip is stuck up his anus. From this overworked orifice, there radiates a multitude of deep, black scars. Crater-like, desiccated, brittle, and cold, Mapplethorpe's eye is the eye of death.

PROGRESS REPORT (June 25, 1991)

Step by step I am getting nowhere.

*Addendum I* (October 27, 1993)

This is a wonderful example of my unabashed immodesty!

*Addendum II* (February 21, 2015)

Unabashed immodesty, indeed. Nowhere is quite some place to be. And it is well past the muster of most humans. Judging by so much I had written that year, it was my second-marriage-to-be that was getting nowhere. And in the most trivial sense of that word. Sadly, it took it an entire decade to fall apart for good. Returning to nowhere, I am still approaching it step by step. Or so I sincerely hope. Alas, immodesty is in my bones!

THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING (August 27, 1991)

I have long expected that I will return to painting one day. Painting has been gradually replaced in my mind by visual arts in general, but the dream has persisted. Although I have had no specific idea about the timing of this second coming, recently I have been thinking about it in connection with my early "retirement" in Italy. Many people maintain such romantic notions, I am sure, but I have been confident in the ultimate realization of my dreams. This summer I have taken the plunge. First at the vacation in the Dordogne valley and later in Tuscany I have begun the long journey back to the old flame of my early youth. The only problem with all this is that my writing has simultaneously become so very wooden. Alas, there is always something...

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA (August 28, 1991)

Last night Lauren and I spent an hour or so with her slides of Piero della Francesca's paintings. She got the slides last week in Arezzo, where we saw his exquisite frescoes in the church of San Francesco, and where we visited Milton Glazer's exhibition of works inspired by the Renaissance painter.

Projected onto the bare wall of our livingroom, the paintings received us almost without a remainder. The slides felt especially soothing to me after an entire day dedicated to petty office chores accumulated during my absence. The coherence of Piero della Francesca's world was a marvelous antidote to the fragmentation of my own existence. Perhaps Lauren's slides of Masaccio's work, which we saw in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence a fortnight ago, will do the trick tonight?

#### THE BOOKS OF ANSELM KIEFER (November 2, 1991)

As our civilization drags on and on, drooling at the mouth and stinking at the feet, creaking in the bones and flapping in the wind, it becomes ever more difficult to forget, to exorcise, the few glorious victories of old that only make us that much more feeble and resentful and brittle in our relentlessly happy and comfortable surroundings, and it is therefore those who manage to forget the most, to smear the most, to scratch out and deface the most, whom we nowadays recognize as our true heroes, our artists, and our spiritual leaders, our high priests, for we hope that they will help us shed, or at least neglect, our farcical duties, our lofty ancestors, our dreams of a better tomorrow and an even better yesterday, our ever more pitiful rights, and our need to partake in the fabulous art, which will soon, we dare to hope, cave in under the crushing weight of so many generations of talented men and women. And there will be peace at last. Nothing but peace. At last.

#### *Addendum* (July 15, 1992)

Kiefer's show in Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London is not only disappointing, but discouraging. One of the most promising disciples of Joseph Beuys has turned out to be just that, a mere disciple, rather than a master in his own right. Prematurely given to ponderous mannerism, Kiefer is ready for definite labeling and classification, the *sine qua non* and the ultimate revenge of the marketplace.

#### MISSING LINKS (December 23, 1991)

Since this summer I have been painting on double-bed sheets with acrylics squirted straight out of the can. Most of the sheets are dedicated to the life of Jesus Christ, and especially to those aspects of his life which have been neglected by other artists. The last two sheets are best examples of ignored or avoided topics. A fortnight ago I produced a piece depicting the events immediately before the immaculate conception. It is entitled "*Ejaculatio immaculata*," and it depicts God and the holy sperm at the beginning of its journey to earth. God is standing on a cloud and holding his hands up to show that the ejaculation is indeed immaculate. Four angels are witnessing this moment; one of the angels flutters to the side to let the holy sperm pass by. Two days ago I produced a sheet depicting Saint Mary in labor. Jesus is protruding out of her vagina, aureole and all. He is blessing the viewers with his right hand. Two angels are in attendance here, as well. The piece is

entitled “*Ave Maria, mater Dei.*” In both cases the titles are written in large cursive letters at the base of the painting, so that there is no mistaking the subject. Now, I am puzzled by the neglect of such themes by my predecessors. Were they considered to be unholy and therefore unworthy of painting? Or, were they considered to be too holy and therefore unsuitable for painting?

#### SOL LE WITT'S ADMONISHMENT (December 24, 1991)

You must practice being stupid, dumb, unthinking, empty. Then you will be able to *do!*

From Sol LeWitt’s letter of April 14, 1965, to Eva Hesse, quoted by Lucy Lippard in *Eva Hesse*, New York: New York University Press, 1976, p. 35.

#### *Addendum* (May 18, 2018)

In retrospect, I love the first sentence of this quote, but the second one puzzles me quite a bit. If you are successful with your practice of being stupid, dumb, unthinking, and empty, why in the world would you wish to do anything? For crying out loud, you are there already! Thus I wonder about this quote. As well as about myself at the time it was plucked. Apparently, I still wanted to *do* something or other. Ridiculous, to be sure.

#### AN INTERNATIONAL ART TRADE FORECAST (December 30, 1991)

Anything is possible, anything goes. As it approaches the new millennium, the contemporary art scene is looking colorful, at times loud, and even impertinent. In Spain and Portugal, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union, it is staking out new terrain and capturing new sales markets, a fortified European art trade; and while art is convalescing in the smaller countries of Europe such as the Netherlands and Belgium, Switzerland and Austria, art in the United States has grown weary—but despite the prophecies of gloom that cannot be overheard, the stage is still set for expansion. And a German art that has never been stronger since the age of Dürer.

From Klaus Honnef’s *Contemporary Art*, Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1990, p. 221.

#### ON NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (January 9, 1992)

A friend once told me about one of his brother's exploits, for which he was quite famous. The fellow was endowed with courage and style, as well as with business acumen. As far as I remember, he was the director of one of the most successful Slovene firms in the late 1970s. One day he was invited to a

prestigious gathering of European business leaders. It took place in Stockholm. The meeting started with great pomp, but it soon became clear that no-one felt comfortable enough to speak squarely about the problem at hand, which escapes me now. After an hour or so of unproductive discussion, my friend's brother raised his hand. When he was recognized by the chair, he got up, delivered a sonorous fart, bowed, and sat down. Having recovered from the initial shock, all the present burst into laughter. When the uproar subsided, the discussion acquired a very different tone. The gathering turned out to be a resounding success.

#### TEN PRINCIPLES OF BON BUDDHISM (April 10, 1992)

1. Salvation is the immediate task of every individual. It cannot be attained through efforts of others on one's behalf. One should begin now by facing life as it is and by learning about it through direct and personal experience. The understanding of the teaching will gradually follow.

2. The truths upon which Bon Buddhism is founded are natural. They have been taught through the ages by the enlightened individuals who have discovered them through direct experience. Enlightened individuals are known as buddhas in the east, but they can be found in all cultures and climates.

3. The first fact of existence is change or impermanence. All that exists passes through the same cycle—birth, growth, decay, and death. Life alone is ceaseless, ever seeking self-expression in new forms. Life is a process or flow, and those who cling to any of its forms, however splendid, will suffer by resisting the flow.

4. The universe is evolving and it functions according to law. The ever-changing universe is the expression of the law of natural causation, of action and reaction. All effects have causes, and an individual's character is the sum total of his or her thoughts and acts. Each individual is the sole creator of his or her circumstances and final destiny.

5. Life is one and indivisible, though its evolving forms are innumerable and perishable. It is inextricably bound with the universe as a whole. Life never ceases, though all life forms must die. Their remainders ultimately become part of new life forms. From an understanding of life's unity arises compassion, a sense of identity with, and kindness toward, all forms of life. From it also arises a sense of care for the natural habitat of all living creatures. The universe is the habitat of life in all its manifestations. Life being one, the interests of a part are those of the whole.

6. Reality is indescribable in its infinite and ever-changing variety. All forms of life are manifestations of this reality. The purpose of life is the attainment of enlightenment, the extinction of the limitations of self-hood. Thought can never encompass reality, but direct experience and appreciation of reality can be attained through enlightenment. To be enlightened means to fully and

directly partake in life's flow, not only on occasion but at all times and under all circumstances. All forms of life are endowed with the potentiality of enlightenment and the process therefore consists of becoming what one is, of realizing one's nature. Not all will attain enlightenment, but striving for it is rewarding in all its stages.

7. The path to enlightenment must be trodden by the whole individual, not merely the best of him or her, and heart and mind must be developed equally. By right thought and action one can gradually purify one's inner nature, and so by self-realization attain in time a sense of inner peace and unity with the universe. The right thought and action can be discovered only by introspection.

8. Inward concentration and meditation lead in time to the development of the inner spiritual faculties. The subjective life is as important as the daily round, and periods of quietude for inner activity are essential for a balanced life. Bon Buddhists should at all times be mindful and self-possessed, refraining from mental and emotional attachment to the passing show. They should be attentive and alert, always fully aware of their inner lives and their surroundings.

9. There is no authority for truth save the intuition of the individual, and that is the authority for the individual alone. Other individuals, those farther along the path to enlightenment, may serve as teachers and exemplars, but they cannot be intermediaries between reality and the individual. All suffer the consequences of their thoughts and acts, and learn thereby, while helping their fellows to the same deliverance. The utmost tolerance should be practiced toward all religions and philosophies, for no one has the right to interfere in the journey of others.

10. Bon Buddhism is a system of thought and a way of life which is reasonable, practical, and all-embracing. It has no dogmas, satisfies the reason and the heart alike, insists on self-reliance coupled with tolerance for other points of view, embraces science, religion, philosophy, psychology, ethics, and art, and points to the individual alone as the sole creator of his or her destiny.

To Christmas Humphreys

IN PRAISE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION (August 25, 1992)

It just flashed through my mind that the most strenuous physical activity in which I engage regularly is—shitting.

ARVO PÄRT (December 13, 1992)

In the booklet accompanying Arvo Pärt's *Miserere*, Herman Conen introduces the piece entitled “Sarah Was Ninety Years Old,” composed in 1977, with a

story from the opening scene of Andrej Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, made in 1985-86.[25] Alexander, an intellectual, tells the story to his son as he is planting a withering tree. Once upon a time there was an old monk by the name of Pamve who planted a withering tree on a mountainside high above the monastery and told a novice by the name of Joann Kolov to water it every day. Pamve died and Joann watered the tree until it blossomed three years later. To wit, faith was ultimately rewarded, just as Sarah ultimately conceived late in life despite of Abraham's jeers. A wonderful story, except that it would have been even more wonderful had the miserable tree never blossomed.

To Derek Croome

#### PAINTER'S DILEMMA (July 19, 1993)

One learns with some nostalgia that the cult of icons had reached such proportions in Medieval Europe that icons frequently served as godparents at baptisms, which was one of the reasons why the Byzantine Emperor Leo III ordered in 726 the destruction of all icons and holy images throughout his dominions.[26] One learns with some longing that the early wonder-working icons of the Madonna are usually kept veiled in Italian churches, to be shown only on religious holidays.[27] In particular, one learns with a touch of envy about the miraculous fresco of the Annunciation in Santissima Annunziata in Florence, renowned throughout Italy for its curative powers, which is shut off by a silver screen and hidden by a heavy curtain that is raised once a year, on the Feast of the Annunciation, and which is housed in a Renaissance marble temple designed by Michelozzo.[28] For it may be that live paintings can be made only by anonymous painters?

#### *Addendum* (August 28, 2000)

I keep all of my boards in cardboard boxes piled up on top of each other in the attic in Reading. Only those on which I am working at any one time are not packed away. I have not seen my boards for close to two years now. Although I do miss them, I do not mind our long separation. The longer they are out of sight, the less I feel that they owe anything to me. My boards will be miraculous to behold when they eventually burst out into the light.

#### MY BOARDS (September 26, 1993)

Since two years ago or so, I have been using smallish pine boards for most of my paintings. The standard dimension is thirty by forty-three centimeters, but some are much smaller. The boards are about one centimeter and a half thick, which gives them a nice weight. The size of the boards allows me to paint them practically anywhere, as well as to move the finished boards at will. I sometimes take the smallest boards on my trips abroad to domesticate the barren hotel surroundings and to give my paintings a bit of experience of other places. The wood grain shows through the paint, and in places the sap

penetrates to the surface, as well. The sap makes me especially happy. I first paint the boards white, and then I use only black and red paint for my rigid little compositions. Black and red never touch, though. I paint on both sides of the boards. When a piece is finished and the paint dry, I strip down the paint with steel wool. Much of the paint is thus removed, to show the grain of the wood. The last thing I do is varnish the boards with blood. The blood congeals very quickly and produces a warm sheen. Although the smell of dried blood is disconcerting the first few days, it soon becomes almost appealing. It is a pleasure to touch a finished board, which fully dries and thus loses a bit of its original weight in a week or two. As a board dries, it also bends slightly, giving it two very different sides. The convex side I take to be the front. I stack the boards in rows on shallow shelves mounted on the wall or on free-standing racks I have designed for this purpose. Two or three boards are stacked one behind the other. I often change the order and position of my boards, my silent companions. The woody sound of reshuffling gives me immense pleasure. The boards are sturdy and robust. Dents and scratches improve them. Every time I revarnish them with fresh blood they become a bit darker and a bit more mysterious in mood. My boards, my enigmatic friends.

#### *Addendum I* (April 26, 1994)

According to William Gates,[29] in the Yucatec Maya language *nab* means “to anoint or varnish,” and *nabzah ti kik* means “to cover (flow over) with blood,” where *kik* is “blood.” By the way, Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller[30] concur with this meaning of *nab*—“to daub” as with paint, “to varnish,” “to anoint”—but they also provide another and apparently unrelated meaning, “water-lily.” Now, the expression *nabzah ti kik* corresponds exactly to what I am doing with my boards.

#### *Addendum II* (August 4, 1994)

The first set of my boards was made in the Winter of 1990-91. They were envisaged as props for my first and only play, written in December 1990 upon reading several short plays by Samuel Beckett. His “Breath” influenced me most because of its simplicity and brevity.[31] All of a sudden I felt an urge to write a play of my own and to explore the theater as a vehicle for my symbols. One of my symbols served as the title of the play.

There are six motionless characters on a dingy stage—four of them sitting on stools on a rickety shoulder-high platform in the middle of the stage, and the remaining two sitting on stools by the curtain on each side of the stage. They are dressed in dirty and greasy white, including skull-caps tied under their chins. Their hands and feet are wrapped in white cloth. They are all older men, preferably in their sixties. They are unshaven. They chant in deep and raspy voices while displaying white boards with my symbols, painted in black. Each character holds on his lap a stack of boards. Their size—thirty by forty-three centimeters—stems from the need to manipulate them on one’s lap. A faint chime times the lowering and raising of boards, which are handled with consummate skill and care. The woody shuffling is the only other background

sound in the play. The light is dim, apparently sourceless, but the four boards held up by the characters on the platform are lit by as many spotlights. The play lasts about ten minutes.

To demonstrate how the boards would look like, I produced sixteen of them—one for each of my symbols. When it became clear that no-one would be interested in my play, and that became clear in a few short weeks, the residual boards needed to be put someplace. I designed a two-tier rack, had it made by a cabinet-maker, and placed all the boards on it in several layers. Something resembling an object of art was thus born. But it all started with Beckett, Lauren's favorite playwright. At the time, she was working on a stage-set for four or five of his short plays, directed by John Winter, our friend and neighbor, at the Progress Theater in Reading. Her stage-set turned out to be quite wonderful.

*Addendum III* (July 21, 1996)

One part of my artistic process which I have failed to elucidate so far is its very end. I usually “varnish” my boards when it is sunny, which is rarely the case in England except in the dead of summer. On account of the foul smell, I leave the boards to dry outdoors. The odor of blood presently attracts innumerable flies and a few wasps. As the frenzied insects crawl about my boards, sucking the rapidly drying blood, they make apparently random traces with their nozzles. When the varnish dries up, they all vanish as miraculously as they had appeared. My little helpers enjoy art only at its freshest.

THINGS DEAD AND ALIVE: FRAGMENTS FROM A LETTER TO A FRIEND (October 16, 1993)

Whenever I take a look at art objects made at different epochs I can determine whether the things I am looking at are “dead” or “alive.” Although I cannot define these two terms, and although I cannot teach another person to experience things in the same way, the notion that they are either dead or alive is perfectly obvious to me and I can always divide them accordingly. In fact, more often than not I can instantaneously decide how to classify objects of art in front of me in these simple terms. More, I rarely change my mind (my heart?) on this score.

Now, I feel that “professionalism” in the arts has led to an ever-larger number of art objects being dead—actually, stillborn. The rate at which a “professional” artist is supposed to produce is out of sync with the rate at which he or she can communicate with the surrounding world. In addition, though partly related, the greater the degree of technical progress, the more difficult it becomes to get in touch with the world around one, which additionally thwarts the production of live things. In some sense, things technical cloud the real world and render it opaque.

Although I do not want to identify live things with things naïve, there is a strong connection there. If “naïve” is to mean “lay,” the opposite of

“professional,” this connection is obvious enough. By “naïve” I also mean “open to the world,” that is, “open to the forces that ultimately leave their mark on the object of art.” In this connection I obviously am a mystic—an Easterner rather than a Westerner.

*Addendum I* (May 2, 1995)

The funny thing about art is that my father’s parakeet is more alive than Leonardo’s Mona Lisa. The silly thing about art is that the parakeet costs about ten pounds sterling at today’s prices, whereas Leonardo’s painting is considered invaluable—say, seven or eight orders of magnitude above the little bird’s price. The sad thing about art is that the parakeet is not enough.

*Addendum II* (July 24, 1996)

*Nous sommes trop pressés. Que dirons-nous du semeur qui voudrait voir tout de suite lever son blé?*

From Jules Renard’s *Journal: 1906-1910*, Tome IV, Paris: Union Générale d’Éditions, 1984 , p. 1127.

*Addendum III* (April 27, 1999)

While art was yet undivided and only religious art was valued and rewarded while indiscriminate art was left unrewarded, there were no counterfeits of art or, if any existed, being exposed to the criticism of the whole people they quickly disappeared. But as soon as that division occurred and the upper classes acclaimed every kind of art as good if only it afforded them pleasure, and began to reward such art more highly than any other social activity, a large number of people immediately devoted themselves to this activity. Art assumed quite a different character and became a profession. And as soon as this occurred, the chief and most precious quality of art—its sincerity—was at once greatly weakened and eventually quite destroyed.

From Leo Tolstoy’s *What is Art?*, edited by W. Gareth Jones, London: Bristol Classical Press, 1994 (first published in 1898), p. 129.

*THANG-KA* (October 24, 1993)

This is a Tibetan term for religious images painted on fine cloth. *Thang-ka* themes include mandalas, images of the Buddha and assorted Hindu deities, etc. Ordinary *thang-ka* are painted with gouache. Fancy *thang-ka* paintings are done with oil paints, sewn onto silk backgrounds, and “mounted” on a horizontal rod like Chinese paintings, so that they can be hung on the wall. Gold is also used on fancy *thang-ka*. A sheet of very thin material is sewn on the top edge of the *thang-ka*, so that it can be unveiled only on appropriate religious occasions. The whole assemblage is designed to be rolled up, tied with two strips of material that hang in the back, and stored away or taken on

the road. Different *thang-ka* are perhaps used on different holidays. I learned much of this from Nepalese merchants along Temple Street in the Yau Ma Tei Night Bazaar in Kowloon, also known as Men's Market, who sold me a few *thang-ka* this weekend. These merchants come in the evening with a few bags and display all they have on a piece of black cloth the size of a bed-sheet, which they lay out on the sticky pavement over a sheet of tarpaulin. Much of the merchandise is of religious character and comes from Tibet. They sit cross-legged amidst their wares and appear to be the most easy-going and content of people. The Nepalese trade has to do with the Gurkha detachment of the British forces in Hong Kong. When the British army leaves on July 1, 1997, this form of trade may dry up, especially if the Chinese authorities wish to stifle the Tibet connection.

#### WHY I AM PERHAPS NOT AN ARTIST (October 27, 1993)

It is difficult to avoid some fundamental questions once it becomes impossible to hide the joy, the spiteful glee, and the most bitter merriment, upon reading an innocent note by Horkheimer:

*Artists:* They understand the shortcomings of their wives, but mankind is expected to accomplish the miracle tomorrow. Is it that they love mankind too little, or too much.[32]

Thus I remember my early complaints: "It is *you* who are making me hate this world..." But this is still too close to the surface of the emerging conservatism, however. Sooner or later one begins to understand one's own shortcomings, and then the complaints directed outward turn into rather insignificant essays in sociology. At this juncture the artists and their wives are quite unceremoniously left behind.

#### THE ANIMAL IN US (November 4, 1993)

The animal in us knows much more about the world than we do because it has been on this planet so much longer than the human species. For the same reason, we can never understand the animal in us. Simply put, there is too much there for the human mind to understand. The task is to access that knowledge directly, without understanding, which can be accomplished only by embracing the animal in us.

#### *Addendum I* (May 28, 1994)

The assumption that anyone of worth can explain himself fully and lucidly in the time allotted him by those who want to learn what he knows is either a joke or a stupidity.

From Idries Shah's *Wisdom of the Idiots*, London: The Octagon Press, 1970 (first published in 1969), p. 165.

*Addendum II* (September 21, 2017)

Over the years, I have written a great deal about the animal in us. The search for this phrase in my *magnum opus* reveals my unflagging fascination with the subject. In the end, my book about yoga centers on the animal in us (“*Who is Yoga?*” November 26, 2008). It is our guru, as it were. What amazes me in retrospect, though, is the stretch of time that has passed between this piece of writing was penned and my book about yoga was completed early last year. Twenty-four years, no less. Goodness gracious! In short, embracing the animal in us takes an enormous amount of time. In fact, eons.

MY SYMBOLS (November 7, 1993)

About ten years ago I saw a retrospective of Kandinsky’s work at the Guggenheim in New York and was transfixed by a rather unassuming print with flag-like symbols. One of these symbols struck me as especially potent, and I came back to the exhibition to see it again. Immediately upon my return to Cambridge from New York I started working on a series of symbols of my own. The retrospective induced a significant shift toward the abstract in my drawing, which had tended to be figurative for several years. In a few days I had a vocabulary of symbols which has remained unchanged ever since. The symbols quickly arrayed themselves in rigid order on the page and would not budge again from their rows and columns. Soon I started producing books with pages upon pages of text composed of my symbols. The whole experience was closer to magic than to anything I would associate with art.

Looking back at the early days of life with my symbols, I can think about them in three different ways. These different understandings strike me as meaningful at different times, but they rarely come to me at the same time. The first concerns the origin of the symbols, or, better, other things I associate them with in terms of their appearance. The second is about my own needs and my understanding of the connection between these needs and my symbols. The third is difficult to define, but it concerns my rôle in the life of my symbols. In this last case my own history is rather irrelevant.

The first and obvious source of my symbols is Kandinsky himself. My first symbol was his little flag. But this exhausts his influence on my work. It was as though I had recognized one of my symbols in his work, not the other way around. His other flag-like objects on the same print have remained uninteresting to me. The influence which I consider much deeper and much more personal is that of the Maya hieroglyphics, which have exercised me since childhood. The rigid order of my symbols and the connection of my work with book-making is clearly related to the Maya culture as a whole, not just their writing system. The third and last influence I can detect is that of Walt Disney. I generally despise his work, but several of my symbols are definitely connected in my mind with some of his characters. Thus I have a Mickey Mouse and a Donald Duck symbol, but the connections seems to be obvious only to me, as no-one else can understand my association when I point it out and when I try to explain what I see. And this is all I can say about

my own understanding of the origin of my symbols in terms of their esthetic qualities, as it were.

Concerning my understanding of how the symbols relate to my own needs, I still feel comfortable with the explanation I offered to Lauren several years ago: my symbols and my books of symbols allow me to communicate with others without having to worry about the content of what I have to say. Put differently, I feel that my need to communicate needs to be channeled in such a way that my message ultimately has no effect whatsoever. I do not want to change anything, improve anything, reach anything. Thus, my symbols are about the residual need to communicate in spite of my reluctance to communicate anything in particular. By implication, the symbols and books of symbols have no meaning. They are nothing but empty forms—my own contribution to an onanistic mode of communication and existence in general. An unwilling member of my own species, I have found a way to symbolically copulate with my fellow humans without fear of insemination and consequent propagation of my own need.

On occasion I feel rather differently about my symbols: I feel their power and I feel my innocence in relation to that power, which strikes me as foreign and invasive and all-encompassing. In other words, I feel like a medium for something I do not understand. When I arrange my symbols on a page, or when I arrange my boards with symbols on a rack, I do not follow any particular plan, just as I did not follow any particular plan when I was developing my symbols. I let things fall into place by themselves. The resulting arrangements feel soothing and appropriate and meaningful. As a good medium, I do not interfere with the force that acts through me. At times I feel that I am acting on behalf of something very, very far away, something truly distant, something very extraterrestrial. Although I refrain from naming my symbols, the term “extraterrestrial” is the only thing that makes sense to me. Put simply, I would not be surprised to learn one day that everything I have “written” or “painted” with my symbols has a clear meaning and that this meaning goes to the heart of things. I cannot reconcile my other beliefs with this sort of experience, but that is how things actually stand.

Given the latter two understandings, it is not surprising that I have been anonymously distributing my several printed books of symbols and various printed postcards with my symbols. Several art bookstores in international capitals regularly exhibit my works, which gives me great pleasure especially because of my anonymity and the fact that the sale of these artefacts brings me no personal gain. In this context, it is also not surprising that I have been quiet about my symbols in the pages of my *Residua*. Not even Lauren has yet learned about my understanding that I may be a mere instrument and that my symbols may have a meaning which I do not understand precisely because of my instrumental role.

The interesting question that remains is why do I feel that all this should be committed to paper at this particular moment? The last few days I have felt that this had to be done, and I have been eager to catch a moment to do it.

But, is this a warning? Am I in some kind of danger? If so, is there anything I can do about it?

*Addendum I* (March 24, 1997)

According to Lawson, who outlines several plausible interpretations of cave paintings, “some of the symbols of paleolithic art might be a record of the geometric patterns seen as the human mind passes into subconscious (so-called entoptic forms).”[33] This could happen to a shaman in trance who might pass into the spirit-world in the guise of a revered animal. The paintings could be illustrations of these ecstatic experiences, including also the entoptic forms, which can be experienced when a person is confined to darkness, as the shaman and his audience would have been.

Now, one of the symbols shown by Lawson is none other than Kandinsky’s little flag.[34] Although it is set in a narrow frame, the main part of the symbol is identical to the flag. The other symbols that appear in the same place are formally related to Mondrian’s neo-plastic work and to a number of my own symbols. This also holds for other paleolithic, mesolithic, and neolithic symbols I have seen elsewhere. Assorted tattoos found on the body of the so-called Iceman—who had died some 5,300 years ago and was found frozen in the Alps in 1991—are the case in point.[35] Some of his tattoos are cruciform, but most are flag-like and are composed of bundles of full or broken lines. Such bundles appear on many of my boards.

One cannot but feel elated upon discovery of connections so primordial. However, the possibility of intrinsic “realism” of abstract art at its best is even more enticing. The great masters of Modern Art—Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, and Kupka—have all insisted upon their work’s underlying realism. Cave paintings offer a clue as to why. Perhaps more important, they offer a clue as to how these works can be brought to reality again.

*Addendum II* (August 4, 1997)

It goes without saying that entoptic forms cannot be explained by the structure of the human brain. Whence this structure? How can something as “artificial” as geometric constructs of abstract art be lodged so deep in the meandering folds of organic matter at its most complex? The designer’s signature suggests itself readily enough, but it is conceivable that this signature contains instructions of some kind. The extraterrestrial connection thus remains far from irrelevant, no matter how much we learn about human neuropsychology and neurophysiology.

*Addendum III* (March 30, 1998)

At the opening of my second show at the Hereford Salon on November 4, 1996, I read a selection of relevant pieces from my *Residua*, but this piece demanded too much even from friends. It was not only too long, but it was also too involved and embarrassing in places. I thus skipped it, but in the discussion following my reading I did mention that I occasionally felt my

symbols were in some sense imposed upon me from without, which is why I thought of them as extraterrestrial in origin. As books with my symbols were among my offerings in connection with the show, I also mentioned that the folder with all the computer files which contain my symbols goes under the name of “ET.” Not surprisingly, several people at the opening wanted to know more about the extraterrestrial connection, outlandish as it might be. At some point they were all cut short by Lutz Becker: “This is a red herring and we should not fall for it.” He led the discussion in some other direction, which looked even wise at the time.

FRANCESCO CLEMENTE (November 21, 1993)

I do enjoy a good part of Clemente’s opus, and especially his Indian cycle, but I cannot repel a certain disappointment whenever I discover some of the original building blocks of his work, such as Tibetan religious painting. The most recent occasion for this sentiment arose yesterday evening, when Lauren bought a very poorly painted *thang-ka* from a Nepalese merchant at the Yau Ma Tei Night Bazaar in Kowloon because it reminded her of Clemente, and because she wanted to share it with Anthony d’Offay, who represents the painter in London. The only reason for my disappointment that I can fathom at present is that even the poorest among *thang-ka* are executed in good faith, which is more than I can say about some of Clemente’s pieces. In Clemente’s defense, good faith is missing from much of what nowadays passes as art.

USELESS TREE (December 11, 1993)

Once on a journey Tzu-ch’i saw a huge tree with strange knots, big enough to shelter a thousand chariots in its shade. Tzu-ch’i said, “What kind of tree is this? It must have unusual potential.” Looking up at its branches, he saw that they were too crooked to be used as beams. Looking down at its roots, he saw it was not solid enough to be used for coffins. When he tasted the leaves, his mouth became inflamed; and they had a smell that would madden a person for days. Tzu-ch’i said, “This is in fact a useless tree. That’s how it got to be this big.” Yes, this is why sages cannot be exploited.

From *Chuang Tzu* in *The Essential Tao* (translated by Thomas Cleary), New York: Harper-Collins, 1991, p. 93.

*Addendum I* (December 20, 2012)

Pray, what is all this about? Is it about Tzu-ch’i? Or is it about sages in general? No, it is about me. That is, it is about me identifying myself as a sage among sages. For the proof, only consider the size of my magnum opus. Completely useless, it has grown enormous. Nay, gigantic. Which is why I think of Chuang Tzu’s masterpiece ever more often. And ever more gleefully. By and by, I have joined the myriad sages of old. Am I feeling proud of my achievement? Not at all. I am only amused by my achievement. Inadvertent

as it is, it gives me incredible joy. And a smirk I can hardly wipe off my crumpling face.

*Addendum II* (December 24, 2015)

I keep returning to this theme again and again. The useless tree, the sages of all times, and, well, myself. On top of Chuang Tzu, now I have Aesop on my side, as well (“Can Be Made,” July 11, 2011). This time around, it is the first *addendum* that is uppermost on my mind, though. The last three years, my *magnum opus* has grown truly enormous. Its branches have spread in every which direction. Both in terms of new pieces of writing and *addenda* extending them, it has grown well beyond my own comprehension. In terms of the number of words, it has grown by about a million. And in three years only. Useless as it is, my own tree is no less than magnificent. And all I wish to do till my last breath is to enjoy its shade, its quiet seclusion, its firm and hefty trunk, and its wondrous leaves. Millions upon millions of them. My useless tree. My eternal delight.

HOMAGE TO MANZONI (December 25, 1993)

As my *Residua* and its byproducts—various selections from this rambling collection of offhand reflections—are impossible to fit into any category of writing, perhaps they can be categorized as art? For what is art today if not a residual activity?

*Addendum I* (March 11, 1994)

If art today can be defined only negatively, so as to include all activities that defy classification, then all the activities that can be classified as artistic—such as sculpting and painting, for instance—have nothing to do with art. The facile inversion notwithstanding, this proposition reflects rather well the attitude toward art of most leading artists in the second half of this century.

*Addendum II* (February 28, 2015)

Even though the world of art gives me the creeps, and ever more so, I still remember this piece with palpable relish. My homage to Manzoni only adds to it, for it was his own shit that he had packaged into so many cans. But now I have solid evidence as to the nature of my work. Thanks to Richard Appignanesi, who curated an art exhibition including my magnum opus, it is squarely art and nothing but art (“www.residua.org,” November 17, 2010). And I am always ready to brandish the exhibition catalogue as the positive proof. Concerning art, it is nothing but shit, anyway (“Art is Shit: A Generalization,” October 5, 1989). Amen.

WHOA! (January 28, 1994)

A student from one of London's art schools and a recent acquaintance was complaining about her teachers' emphasis on theory as opposed to the practice of art. She felt stifled, frustrated. I empathized with her and pointed out the link between the emphasis on theory and her teachers' desire to control the educational process. She very much agreed with me. I proceeded to explore the roots of control, including envy of those who still have a chance, and she very much appreciated everything I had to say. But when I proclaimed enthusiastically that I would go as far as to say that the only criterion of artistic worth in my own work was total absence of any idea or thought, she just nodded vaguely and we quickly changed the subject.

*Addendum I* (April 11, 1994)

So far I have received two comments—both negative—on this piece, which has appeared in the selection from the *Residua* prepared for my opening at the Hereford Salon and dedicated to Lauren. On the one hand, Rachel Inman, my hitherto un-named interlocutor in this piece, told me that I had misinterpreted and thus misrepresented her comments; on the other, Anna Cutler, who was present at the time, told me that it was, in fact, *she* who had made the comments I attributed to myself. By the way, Anna had introduced Rachel to Lauren and me. They are old friends. Lauren was also present—I should add—but she had no comment on this piece. I should also add that Rachel and Anna had nothing to say about any other piece from the selection. Anyhow, my reply to both comments is simple: this piece is about me, not about anyone else. Rachel and Anna can write about themselves, casting me in any light they find to their liking. Moreover, all are invited to misinterpret and misrepresent me, as well as to appropriate as their own, or attribute to anybody else, anything I have ever said, written, painted, or made.

*Addendum II* (May 12, 1994)

*Pourquoi vouloir que les homes me jugent sans erreur? Est-ce que je ne me trompe pas quand je les juge? Est-ce que je ne suis pas d'abord l'ennemi de ceux que j'aimerai plus tard? Est-ce que je ne dédaigne pas bientôt ceux que j'ai aimés trop vite?*

From Jules Renard's *Journal: 1887-1895*, Tome I, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1984, p. 314.

ANDREA MANTEGNA (February 3, 1994)

Rebecca Hossack was delighted by my face when we met at a London party. She boasted of her discovery to several art historians in her train: "Tell me who comes to your mind when you see this fantastic face?" She twisted my head to get better lighting, and the art historians squinted professionally. The verdict was quick and unanimous—Mantegna. "But I would aspire to an older master," I protested in jest. When Rebecca challenged me to offer an

alternative, I could not come up with a single name. Later on it flashed through my mind that the older masters with whom I would wish to be associated were all anonymous.

*Addendum I* (December 2, 1999)

Katharine called me in the office early yesterday afternoon. She was visiting someone in a Reading hospital and she wanted to know whether we could see each other for a drink. Of course, I dropped everything and went to the center to see her. After a glass of wine, she sat closer to me and we started touching each other. At one point she reached for my face: “You have always reminded me of Mantegna.” I told her that I have heard the same thing from Rebecca Hossack. “Oh,” said Katharine, “sorry!” That is how she is.

*Addendum II* (December 8, 1999)

After an hour or so in a pub just off Broad Street in Reading, I proposed that we go to my home. I wanted Katharine to see my mother, whom she had met years ago, and to see my room, which I had boasted about on a few previous occasions. She was game, and it took us about five minutes to reach Abbot’s Walk. Having chatted with my mother in French for a little while, Katharine followed me to my room. She did not say anything, but she apparently felt comfortable in my world. We both sat on the floor and started kissing and fondling each other. I pulled up her sweater. She wore a delicately shaped lace bra. I took first one and then another breast out of their cups and took each nipple into my mouth. Holding my prick in her hand, she looked on with a big smile on her face. Sucking her breasts among my carpets was so delicious that I often revisit those blissful moments in my mind. Unfortunately, she had to return to her home in London soon afterwards.

MY RÔLE IN THE WORLD OF ART (February 16, 1994)

If the museums and galleries can be associated with the church, and the activities of small and independent communities of artists can be associated with those of heretical sects, the parallel is useful in pointing at some key issues facing the world of art after the collapse of the market for so-called collectibles: proliferation of sects in spiritually turbulent times, and the concomitant inability of the church to establish and maintain a credible hierarchy of authority, etc. However, the only reason I am interested in this parallel is that it helps me define my own rôle in the world of art—that of a hermit.

*Addendum I* (December 12, 2000)

In the intervening years, the church has re-established itself in step with the improvement in economic fortunes on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. Although it is still struggling to maintain its authority, the church has successfully rebuffed the few surviving heretical sects. The story of the Tate and the Stuckists is a case in point. Only my own rôle in the world of art has

not changed an iota. Once a hermit, always a hermit. Anyhow, I am more than well prepared for the next slump of the market for collectibles.

*Addendum II* (December 10, 2013)

So many years later, this piece strikes me as perfectly obvious. Once a hermit, always a hermit. How else could it be? But my life was very different when the original piece was written. At the time, I was quite engaged in the hectic art world in London. If there was anything to my boast back then, it was conceptual to boot. In fact, I became so much more engaged in the art world in mid- and late Nineties that the life of a hermit was but an ever more distant dream. Looking back, though, I feel relieved. The concept has become reality in the meanwhile.

HOMAGE TO MONTAIGNE (February 21, 1994)

When an opportunity arises to discuss in public our life and work, most of us are appalled by the mess we discover in our own, as it were, house: a fragment here, a scrap there, an unfinished project in the attic. Expecting our guests to be just around the corner—no, just about to ring at the door—we rush hither and thither to tidy up the old home. But it is good to remember that our guests have just left their own homes in a bit of disarray, as well. *Siamo tutti fatti a mosaico*.<sup>[36]</sup>

*Addendum* (November 2, 1998)

Rather: *Siamo tutti scritti a mosaico*.

A FAMILIAR CORD (February 25, 1994)

On one of our routine visits to the Fogg Museum at Harvard, my first son, Marko, and I chanced upon an exhibition of artefacts from a Roman site recently discovered someplace in Turkey. Among other exhibits, there were several color photographs of frescoes from a Roman tomb. The frescoes, painted by the person who was buried in this tomb, were not particularly enlightening, but the Latin inscription that accompanied them struck a familiar cord. The text explained that this man was the director of a local armament factory, and that he painted in his spare time. Marko could not understand my fascination with this particular exhibit, and he kept tugging at my sleeve to show me other, much more interesting, things on display. He must have been about ten at the time.

*Addendum* (March 7, 1994)

An intending disciple said to Dhun-Nun the Egyptian: “Above everything in this world I wish to enrol in the Path of Truth.” Dhun-Nun told him: “You can accompany our caravan if you can first accept two things. One is that you will have to do things which you do not want to do. The other is that you will

not be permitted to do things which you desire to do. It is ‘wanting’ which stands between man and the Path of Truth.”

From Idries Shah’s *Thinkers of the East*, London: Arkana, 1991 (first published in 1971), p. 145.

#### THE SERPENTINE (March 1, 1994)

A few days ago Lauren and I were so annoyed by yet another debilitating exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park that we promised not to return there ever again. In a month or two we will surely forget about this promise. What vexes me above all else, though, is my inability to state clearly what annoys me about much of what goes as contemporary art. Even my complaints are vague, but a viable critique of art today would require at least a hint at an alternative. Painfully, I do not have anything coherent to say about such an alternative. Worse, I do not have anything to offer by way of pointing at an alternative in “practical” terms. My longing for a “religious feeling” or “spiritual power” in an object of art is pathetic in view of any intellectual structure worth invoking to explain, let alone justify, this longing and its potential fruits. My search for an art form which will satisfy my own “spiritual needs,” not to speak of those of others, is so ineffectual that it is almost comical. Is this why I am so annoyed whenever I enter the Serpentine or any other art gallery today?

#### Addendum I (March 1, 1994)

Well, at an opening earlier this evening at Anthony d’Offay Gallery we saw two splendid pieces: one of Anselm Kiefer’s lead bombers (Anthony told us that Kiefer had produced four or five of these, two of which we saw at the National Gallery in Berlin a couple of years ago), and one of Georg Baselitz’s chainsawed timber heads with eyes and a mouth sloppily rendered in red paint. Radiating with life and death, gigantic, primordial, the two pieces stole the show. And it was a joy to be proven so wrong, so soon.

#### Addendum II (September 4, 1997)

The Serpentine show in question was by Agnes Martin, whom I refrained from naming out of misplaced *deliceteza*. Her colorless grids boggle the mind, her spiritual longings notwithstanding. The fact that she plays a prominent part in the world of art today says much about that world and little or nothing about her and her work.

#### LESS THAN A LIFETIME (March 6, 1994)

If ever less is ever more on the true path, if ever to subtract is ever to add, than the journey through the world of art ought to take less than a lifetime.

*Addendum* (March 17, 1994)

In the pursuit of knowledge, every day something is added. In the practice of Tao, every day something is dropped. Less and less do you need to force things, until finally you arrive at non-action. When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.

From Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (translated by Stephen Mitchel), London: Kyle Cathie, 1990 (first published in 1988), no page number.

EASTER MONDAY (March 27, 1994)

Among my offerings to the Hereford Salon on Easter Monday there will be fifty copies of a selection of fifty-five pieces from my *Residua* entitled "Why I am Perhaps Not an Artist." This is also the title of one of the pieces in the selection, written last year in Hong Kong, which piece is a paraphrase of an earlier one, "Why I am Perhaps Not a Radical," written in 1981 around a short piece by Max Horkheimer. The common origin of the two pieces is interesting, but that connection can wait for another occasion.

The key to the new selection—which will be beautifully laid out and printed on heavy parchment-like paper—is my ongoing dialogue with Lauren about my refusal to see myself as a part of the world she feels I ought to wish to belong to. As I wrote in my yesterday's letter to her, sent to Los Angeles *via* the facsimile machine, I feel that she is a bit too eager to find a foothold in that world:

Just as you feel that there is something almost pitiful about my unwillingness to take a serious rôle in the world of art, or, the other way around, that there is something incoherent about my career in construction economics, so I feel that there is something slightly sad about wanting to be a part of the art market, as well as to be appreciated by your friends, relatives, and neighbors. I do not want to press this point at present, but I just want you to be aware of the symmetry in our perceptions of each other. You are perhaps not aware of it.

By the way, this paragraph was a bit of a *non sequitur* in my letter, following directly upon my congratulations on her successful talks with two key gallerists in Los Angeles. According to Lauren, both have shown considerable interest in her and her work. I hope that she is correct in this assessment and that she will soon get a show in Los Angeles. I nonetheless feel somewhat apprehensive about her desire for worldly success. Although the art world is somewhat special, in the last analysis it is still just another rat-race, just another racket. She, of all people, can afford to keep aloof from all this and dedicate herself to her work.

My new selection is therefore dedicated to Lauren, but our dialogue is not mentioned in any of the pieces that form it, nor in the preface written for this particular purpose. As always, it is the reader's task to fathom my writings, not the other way around. However, in the preface I do warn the reader that he or she is not embarking on a straightforward task:

Collectively, these pieces might help answer the question from the title of this collection, which is also the title of one of the pieces—why I am perhaps not an artist? Also, these pieces might help answer the prior question—why the question in the title is important to me? But remember, disappointment with the answers is very likely. The answers are at best suggested.

The main point I think I am making in my new selection is that the spiritual world I want to belong to is perhaps beyond the world of art, at least in terms in which Lauren seems to understand that world. More to the point, the world I aspire to may be inaccessible from the world to which Lauren aspires, and perhaps equally as inaccessible as from the world of construction economics—which is largely irrelevant to me, however. By implication, I feel that she ought to desire to belong to my world, as it were, rather than to aspire to the art world in the narrow sense of that term, as defined by gallerists, museum curators, and other intermediaries in the art market. By the same token, she ought to appreciate better my own aspirations.

The reason for putting some emphasis on all this is that I have been feeling a bit uneasy about the fact that I have accepted Lauren's offer to be a part of her salon. Even though I am still puzzled by my acceptance, that is, by the ease with which I have agreed to participate in her project, I feel that this way of furthering our own dialogue may be a good way to thank her for this opportunity to explore my work in front of others—although this opportunity is much less enticing to me than she may think. At the same time, I do not want to push her in any particular direction. I believe that she must discover everything by herself.

I wonder whether this particular theme—that is, our ongoing dialogue about our different attitudes toward the world of art—will ever come up on Easter Monday. As far as I am concerned, I do not intend to bring it up. Lauren may pick it up, but she may not understand in time that I am actually talking to her, not to the others. Besides, it seems that she has not even noticed the piece entitled “Why I am Perhaps Not an Artist,” written last year with her in mind. At least, she has never commented on it. In her letter today she had nothing to say about my yesterday's paragraph about the symmetry in our perceptions of each other. Of course, someone else may pick up this theme, but that is rather difficult to imagine. The visible part of the whole event is very likely to lead the discussion astray, or at least away from my perception of Lauren's misguided search and my wish for her to reconsider it.

## HIGH IS LOW (April 20, 1994)

I am still not sure what meditation is, that is, whether I have ever experienced it, but I know what it is to have an empty mind, to be totally free from thought. Although I cannot reach this blessed state at will, I experience it almost every time I make love to a woman. This is thus the greatest joy of love-making, much more important to me than either the reflected pleasure of my partner or my own pleasure. In my spiritual moments I equate my blank mind with the unity of the universe, and in my romantic states I equate it with love. When I am making love with Lauren, I occasionally feel both love for her and our union with the universe.

But I now realize that these ecstatic experiences may have a rather mundane root in, say, natural history. Whenever I rid myself from all thought, I also experience my entire body as one, as indivisible. In such states, I feel that a part of my body can represent me without remainder. When I make love to a woman, I feel my entire body through my penis, which becomes the focal point of my life and my probe into the world. I can imagine that animals experience their muzzles, paws, and sexual organs in a similar fashion when they probe into their environment. The unity of the body, as well as the union of the body and its environment, may be lurking behind the oft-reported “oceanic” sensations that subsequently lead to the feeling of ecstasy.

Although all this is somewhat naïve and perhaps even trite, it is new to me in terms of my understanding of my own experience. I am especially attracted by the notion that our most sublime experiences may be least human, that is, most animal and ancient in terms of our natural history. Put differently, the experiences we often associate with things on high may, in fact, be rooted in the stinky mud below. What we associate with a species of departure from the body may be nothing but a species of return. Longing for the super-natural may be a mere reflection of our revulsion from our increasingly extra-natural existence, and our subterranean dream of returning to the Garden of Eden minus the Tree of Knowledge.

## THE MAKING OF THE FIRST ICON (April 25, 1994)

Tradition has it that Agbar, King of Edessa, who was afflicted with leprosy, heard tell that Christ could restore him to health. He accordingly sent one Ananias as an ambassador to Palestine with instructions to find Our Lord and return with him to Edessa. When Ananias finally caught up with him, Christ was addressing a great throng of people. Being unable to approach nearer, Ananias began to sketch the face of Christ, although needless to say, with very little success. But Christ was aware of what Ananias was doing. When he had dismissed the crowds, he took a piece of linen; soaking it in water, he pressed it firmly to his face and then handed it to Ananias. When Ananias had taken the towel into his hands, he saw that Christ’s features were clearly imprinted upon it. Christ declined to go to Edessa but promised to send a disciple after his death. Ananias was instructed to take the towel to King Agbar, as a substitute for Christ’s presence.[37]

From John Stuart's *Ikons*, London: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 31.

*Addendum* (June 9, 2001)

In *The Forbidden Image: The Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*,[38] Alain Besançon sheds a bit more light on this story and the origin of the so-called icons of the Holy Face. According to Saint John of Damascus, Ananias, a skilled painter, failed to capture the portrait of Christ “because his face glowed with an unsustainable brilliance.”[39] In other words, even if Christ were to have sat for Ananias, as a patron would for a portrait painter, he would have failed because the divine face could not be properly seen by mortal eyes, let alone rendered. Thus Christ pressed the cloth to his face. The Orthodox church celebrates that translation of the “acheiropoetic” image (that is, the image that is not made by human hands) on August 16. Put differently, the church celebrates the very impossibility of capturing the face of Christ by means of drawing or painting. To wit, the first icon is also the last.

DAMIEN HIRST (May 17, 1994)

Having captured the attention of the general public with his pickled sharks and cows, Damien Hirst now dominates the British art scene. Everything he does is closely scrutinized by the media. His work is now bemusedly discussed even in polite society, over sherry or port, where Gainsborough and Turner still tend to be celebrated as paramount artists of all times. The exhibition he has curated in the Serpentine Gallery—which includes a lamb suspended in a formaldehyde tank and an anemic polka-dot painting of his own—has elevated him to the status of an arbiter of contemporary art, not just an artist. His place in the Pantheon of the turn-of-the-millennium art is now safe and secure. But what does this tell us about the world of art, or our world as a whole? What can we say about a world with such a hero as Damien Hirst? Among other things, this world is mesmerized by death, and especially by violent death. Our hero domesticates the horror by letting us inspect its effects at our leisure and from behind thick glass. Having become unfit to witness the heat and throb of dying, we are peevishly satisfied with its cold and wet remains. Preoccupied with conservation and preservation in all its forms, we are comforted by the expectation that the remains that stare at us distortedly from their greenish bath will forever remain in their present state—suspended between death and pitiful immortality. Vaguely aware of our foibles, we are grateful to Damien Hirst for bringing them to light in such a friendly and inoffensive manner. For we know that his pickled beasts are a far cry from real horror, real gore, which may be lurking just behind the corner. And who is to say that all this is not squarely at the heart of art?

### SHOP-DROPPING (May 23, 1994)

I just returned from a round of all the places in London where my books and postcards are being sold. Dillon's Art Bookshop sells the books; the bookshops at the Institute of Contemporary Art and the Serpentine Gallery sell the postcards. When on a round, I walk down Hereford Road to Kensington Gardens and the Serpentine; then through Hyde Park and Green Park to the Mall and the ICA; and then past Piccadilly Circus to Dillon's in Covent Garden. I return to Notting Hill *via* Soho, Oxford Street and Hyde Park. An entire round takes me between two and three hours, depending on how much time I spend looking around and whether or not I stop for coffee. I check my wares every two-to-three weeks. If the stock is low at any of the three locations, I anonymously send them a new shipment by mail. If I see that the stock is dangerously low or completely depleted, I make a drop. This is an art not very different from shop-lifting, albeit less dangerous. And I have become pretty good at it. In fact, I have grown to enjoy it in its own right.

### *Addendum* (April 7, 1998)

A minute ago I returned from the Serpentine Gallery, where I went to drop a wad of my postcards. The bookshop was crowded and it took me some time to make my delivery unobserved. As I was walking home through the park, I kept shaking my head and muttering to myself: "The things one does for the sake of art!"

### MY NEW TRAVEL COMPANION (May 22, 1994)

I was surprised earlier today by my realization that I have never seen paintings or other art objects that I would rather live with than those I have made myself. This is why my boards are perched on ledges above my desk at home; this is why I often travel—and I travel often—with one of my smaller boards, which I place at a prominent place in my hotel room to keep me company. Perhaps the only exception are Miša Papić's icons based on my work.

Miša graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, where he had studied painting. He has not painted much since his arrival in London some three years ago, but he has been copying Serbian and Russian icons for pleasure and supplemental income. He follows the traditional methods of icon-painting to the extent feasible here and now. More important, he makes his icons with great love and care. Several months ago, soon after he had moved into the basement flat of our home in London, he gave Lauren and me one of his icons, which we put on a wall in our dining room.

Not long afterwards Miša and I started talking about the possibility of using the same materials and methods for his own paintings. This led me to the idea that he could copy compositions and symbols from my books, which I wanted to see in live color and on gold background. He offered to teach me how to do this by myself, but I explained that I could not imagine going beyond black,

white, and red—the colors I have been using for years. Besides, I thought it would be good for him to try his hand on something completely different. The first icon I commissioned from him was intended for my show at the Hereford Salon; the second he gave me as a gift, and I also exhibited it in association with my boards; the third I again commissioned from him, but this time I wanted something I could take with me when I traveled far from home.

Miša gave me the last icon earlier today. It is minuscule—the size of a small postcard. As I write, it rests in my pocket. I take it with me wherever I go, so that it can learn about my world. It is painted on a magnificent piece of Norwegian Pine, and it is a pleasure to hold and touch. The icon shows a composition from the most recent among my books of symbols: one of my submarine-like characters is hovering above an egg-like throne and gazing at a rack of my boards exhibited on a temple-like platform just below the dais with the throne. All the paintings on the rack were shown at the Hereford Salon. This way I will be able to travel with an entire exhibition of mine squeezed onto a very small board.

Strangely enough, I even look forward to my trip to Boston in early June on account of my new travel companion. Many more trips await me in the coming months. As things stand at this moment, before the end of the year I will return to the States two more times—to Austin, Texas, in October, and in December to Los Angeles, where I will go with Lauren and Dorian; I will go to Hong Kong twice—in late June and early September; Lauren, Dorian and I will go to Venice in late June; and in late September we will all go to Brioni Islands in Croatia. Perhaps we will go to France in July, as well. Indeed, the anticipation of so much dislocation in so short a period of time must have prompted me to commission the last icon from Miša.

*Addendum I* (April 18, 1998)

A month or two after I commissioned my portable icon from Miša, I made another one myself. It is the size of a match-box and it contains a miniature painting of mine, one of the four depicted on Miša's icon. A year or so later I added to this portable collection another miniature painting the same size. This one contains one of my symbols. Wherever I go, my collection goes with me. Whenever I go anywhere important, I take one of the two miniature icons with me. They bear witness to all the crucial moments in my life.

*Addendum II* (September 4, 2012)

Now I travel rarely. The last few years, my travel destinations are Zagreb and Motovun exclusively. But Miša Papić's icon is with me without fail. The smaller icons that I painted myself remain on a bookshelf in my study in Motovun. As I bang into my laptop on the dining table in my Motovun house, my old travel companion is within my easy reach. And I relish it still. It is always within my reach, as it were. This is how things will remain indefinitely, as well. Eighteen years! Eighteen long years over which so much has changed that it takes quite a bit of effort on my part to remember how things used to be. Reading about my travel plans sketched so many years

ago makes my head reel. Literally. Even Venice next door strikes me as improbably far away. Returning to the icon, now it is my faithful companion even when travel is but a fading memory. The way I like it, too. Travel, what travel?

*Addendum III* (December 6, 2014)

I am in Motovun at the moment. Miša's icon is on the dining table not far from my laptop. As I write, it is staring at me. I like its feel, which can be appreciated in any Orthodox church, but I love the underlying composition. It shows the extraterrestrial world that has fascinated me for years, and especially during the early years in London. In my mind, the submarine-like character hovering above an egg-like throne and gazing at a rack of my paintings is as close to me as any of my closest friends. Even more, we are like brothers. Zillions of light-years apart, we are inseparable. Although I do not understand the world depicted on the icon, its very existence offers me comfort. I do not expect anything from it, though. My superstition, if that is what it is, stops short of any wishes on my part. The very existence of the other world is perfectly sufficient for me. I understand very well that my attachment to this extraterrestrial heaven is hardly rational, but I do not resist it in any way. In fact, I nurture it by carrying the icon with me on my trips from Motovun to Zagreb and the other way around. The submarine-like character and I are always in touch, and all is well. I never feel alone.

MARINO MARINI (July 12, 1994)

Peggy Guggenheim's Collection in Venice has a wonderful terrace overlooking Canal Grande. The centerpiece of the terrace is one of Marino Marini's plump horsemen. The piece is not large—say, a third of the actual size. His arms outstretched, his chubby head lifted toward the sky, the horseman sports an erect penis of enviable proportions—in fact, the handle of a defunct studio implement. Fascinated by the horseman, Dorian kept shouting at the top of his voice: “Oh, penis!” Sensing our bemused embarrassment, he smiled victoriously. Even after we went back inside the museum Dorian kept pointing at the horseman through the window: “Oh, penis!” This pretty much sums up the piece, too.

*Addendum* (November 22, 1998)

I learned from Mary Barone last night that Marini's penis was detachable, so that Peggy Guggenheim could remove it whenever she would be visited by church dignitaries or others who might object to such obscenity. Like most libertines, she was a practical woman.

EDWARD HOPPER (September 11, 1994)

In one of my weekly letters to my parents, sent to them a month or two upon my arrival in the United States, I enclosed a page with several color

reproductions of Hopper's paintings, which I found in some glossy magazine. If I am not mistaken, this selection included his "House by the Railroad" (1925), "Early Sunday Morning" (1930), and "Nighthawks" (1942). Although I knew of Hopper before coming to the States, I became fascinated with him because he depicted something essential about my new world that I was unable to express in words. More, no other artist rendered it better than Hopper. This view I share with many others who believe that "[n]o American realist has been able to capture the vacancy and frustration of modern urban existence with more evocative pictorial means than Hopper." [40] Indeed, "[i]t is the very soul of America that appears in his art." [41] The reason for this comes to me only now, a quarter of a century later: the America he has depicted so dispassionately must have hurt him to the point of physical pain—the pain of a disappointed lover. And this is something we seem to have shared.

JOE DAVIS (September 18, 1994)

Joe Davis is a science freak, which explains why he has spent so many years at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. Perhaps he is still there, but I doubt it. Soon after Lauren and I left Cambridge someone told us about a rumor that Joe had flown the coop after yet another quarrel with the Center's director.

Space art is one of Joe's greatest flames. I once invited him to talk about this in my workshop on space architecture at MIT. He told us about several art projects to be taken up on one of the shuttles, but he admitted that he would most likely have to wait for a few more years for the shuttle flights to become a bit cheaper. He also showed us his rendering of the Mount Rushmore presidential gallery superimposed on Phobos, one of the two satellites of Mars.

One of Joe's most fascinating projects concerns communication with extraterrestrial beings. He is convinced that vaginal contractions are the best way forward in this connection because all intelligent creatures would in some way acknowledge and appreciate their sexual origins. Joe has developed a device which, once inserted into the vagina, can translate mechanical motion produced by squeezing into electronic signals, which would need to be transmitted by means of one of the gigantic antennae designed for the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. An orgasm could thus be blown up into cosmic proportions.

He told us that he had recently brought his device to another talk about space art, where a young woman in the first row showed quite a bit of interest in its workings. She asked him to pass it to her for closer inspection. Joe told us that he had proceeded by saying that he was aware that it would be a bit difficult to find a subject for an experiment involving his device, but before he had finished talking about this he noticed that the young woman from the first row had already inserted it and appeared to be ready for the experiment itself. I am not sure what had happened next, because Joe has never had the chance

to finish the story in my presence on account of the uproar it has always produced. It took some time for my students to calm down, too.

#### FRAGMENTS, SPLINTERS, TOENAILS (October 17, 1994)

I believe that today more than ever a book should be sought after even if it has only *one* great page in it: we must search for fragments, splinters, toenails, anything that has ore in it, anything that is capable of resuscitating the body and soul.

From Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, London: Flamingo, 1993 (first published in 1934), p. 258.

#### THE RENAISSANCE MAN (October 20, 1994)

I saw "The Renaissance Man" on my way from London to Chicago, whence I proceeded to Austin, Texas. This is a standard story about an unwilling teacher who turns around a bunch of unwilling pupils by attempting the impossible. It goes without saying that he is transformed by the experience, as well. A special twist in this film is that the pupils are undergoing military training in the U.S. Army, which they had joined for lack of anything better to do. The teacher is not a soldier, though. He teaches them about Shakespeare. The title of the movie comes from our hero's story about Leon Battista Alberti, a great Renaissance architect, painter, and writer. The punchline is that Alberti not only excelled in all these arts, but that he could also make a standing jump over another man. Now, I was stunned to discover that this argument felt genuine, legitimate, comprehensive, but I was mortified to find out that it was also soothing, revealing, liberating. The older I get, the younger I think.

#### YUENDUMU (November 24, 1994)

Jean and Donald Kahn came over for dinner. We asked Donald about the origins of his collection of Aboriginal paintings. He told us that he went to Australia soon after he started his collection. In Sydney he stumbled upon a batch of yet-unexhibited paintings from Yuendumu in Western Australia. Donald was delighted by his find. He even visited this remote place—a bunch of rickety shacks in the windswept desert, and all manner of rubbish rolling in the red dust.

Donald proceeded to tell us about a famous painter from Yuendumu who had spent some time in Paris during an exhibition of Aboriginal art that had been travelling around the world. When he was asked by the journalists about his impressions of Paris, he grinned: "Paris is nice, but it isn't Yuendumu." We laughed, of course.

The next morning Donald sent us a catalogue dedicated to his collection of Aboriginal paintings.[42] Lauren is not a great fan of Aboriginal art, but Donald's collection is quite exceptional. Beside wonderful reproductions of the thirty-six pieces in his collection, the catalogue contains many pages of text about the artists and their paintings. One page is dedicated to a photograph of a group of men in a painting camp in Papunya, just south from Yuendumu, where the acrylic-painting tradition has been inaugurated in the 1970s. Judging from Donald's description, Papunya and Yuendumu have much in common. The men in the picture are crouching around several paintings laid out in the dust. The bare drum of an automobile wheel and a few empty beer cans are in the foreground. A miserable sun-shelter and gnarled shrubs are in the background. And yet, I knew exactly what the painter from Yuendumu had in mind when he favored his place to Paris.

#### TOWARD AN ART POLICY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM: A MODEST PROPOSAL (February 15, 1995)

The best way to promote art is to make it illegal. The harsher the measures against artists, teachers of art, merchants in art materials and supplies, as well as all manner of intermediaries in the world of art, the better. To enforce the law, a special branch of the police needs to be established. The officers of the art police ought to be trained to discover and thwart even the subtlest forms of artistic activity. Then and only then will art flourish to its full potential once again.

#### *Addendum I* (October 9, 1995)

This was written in response to Stuart Brisley's inaugural lecture at the Slade, which could be described as a litany of complaints about art institutions, including the Slade itself. Stuart appreciated receiving this piece, which I sent him glued onto a postcard the morning after his lecture. As it turned out, he got much grief from his colleagues, many of whom were incensed because of his subversive performance.

#### *Addendum II* (March 23, 2001)

The art policy for the new millennium just put forward by the Labor Art Minister shows that he has not a clue about what makes artists tick. The same holds for the ruling party, of course. It also shows that he is ignorant of my modest proposal, although he has had ample time to familiarize himself with it. What a pity. I will now have to offer the above for the fourth millennium.

#### WHY I AM PERHAPS A SUFI (April 17, 1995)

Sufism has gained an oriental flavor from having been so long protected by Islam, but the natural Sufi may be as common in the West as in the East, and may come dressed as a general, a peasant, a merchant, a lawyer, a schoolmaster, a housewife, anything. To be "in the world, but not of it," free

from ambition, greed, intellectual pride, blind obedience to custom, or awe of persons higher in rank—that is the Sufi’s ideal.

From Robert Graves’ Introduction to Idries Shah’s *The Sufis*,  
London: Jonathan Cape, 1969 (first published in 1964), p. x.

QUITE THICK (June 1, 1995)

A few weeks ago I sent Anthony d’Offay a proposal for a show. He responded very quickly, saying that he had no idea what I was talking about. “We art dealers or often quite thick,” he confessed nonchalantly. Yesterday we talked to him at the opening of Gerhard Richter’s show in his gallery on Dering Street in London. He said he hoped I was not offended by his letter. He was very friendly: “I wrote down the first thing that came to my mind.” I was in a jolly mood, too: “It’s okay, Anthony, you will understand my work when I become rich and famous.” His face crumpled: “Oh, that one was below the belt!” I laughed innocently and hugged him. When we took our leave, Lauren was red in her face: “This was too embarrassing.” But after a few minutes she giggled with me on account of Anthony’s discomfiture.

ARS GRATIA ARTIFICIS: TOWARD A MANIFESTO (June 20, 1995)

The trouble with the old dictum about the aim of art, *ars gratia artis*, is that the notion of art itself is ever more abstract. How are we to judge what is art and what is not? Whose judgment about art are we to adopt? But the notion of artist is ever more concrete. How are we to judge who is an artist and who is not but by his or her own wish? That wish marks the beginning of a journey. As the work of art which does not enlighten the artist only impoverishes the world, the new dictum, *ars gratia artificis*, is far from narcissistic and selfish. For in the end we should all begin from within. Others will join us on our journey. And the community of artists is the ultimate work of art.

Addendum (September 1, 2017)

My *Residua* is a work of art that fits the bill no less than perfectly (“www.residua.org,” November 17, 2010). Consequently, it is a lasting monument to my liberation, as well (“No-Bullshit Enlightenment,” January 18, 2016). Thus, it enriches the world beyond any doubt. The only thing conspicuously missing is the community of artists. All things considered, it will be missing in perpetuity. Alas, no manifesto is perfect! Whence the new and improved dictum: *ars gratia artifex*. Indeed, the artist is the ultimate work of art. Phew!

*BRANCUSI VERSUS THE UNITED STATES* (July 1, 1995)

A bronze version of Brancusi's *Bird in Space*, imported by the photographer Edward Steichen to the United States in 1926, occasioned a comedy of manners in the United States Customs Court. At a trial recorded as *Brancusi versus the United States*, the American authorities vainly attempted to demonstrate that the work was *not* art and should therefore be subject to duty payment as industrial metal. *Bird in Space* was so original and abstract in conception that it fell outside the popular definition of art, as witnessed by the stenographic record from court proceedings.[43] Justice Young: "If you saw it in the forest, you would not take a shot at it?" Mr. Steichen: "No, your Honor."

From Roger Lipsey's *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art*, Boston & Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 1989, p. 235.

AD REINHARDT'S ADMONISHMENT (July 16, 1995)

The fine artist need not sit cross-legged.

From Ad Reinhardt's *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, Barbara Rose, ed., New York, 1975, p. 70.

WHAT DO LÉGER AND MONDRIAN HAVE IN COMMON? (July 18, 1995)

The first time Lauren's grandfather saw my boards, he winked at me confidentially: "Léger!" That was three years ago, in Reading. The second time he saw them, a few days ago in London, he winked at me again: "Mondrian!" So far, so good.

A FRIENDLY WARNING (August 22, 1995)

Marko told me this summer that an art teacher of his from the Rhode Island School of Design—which is Brown University's next-door neighbor in Providence, Rhode Island—had shown in class a couple of photographs of a holy man in India who had been standing at the same spot on a bridge crowded with passers-by for a couple of decades. The remarkable thing about this fellow is that he has not only maintained a steady erection, but that a brick tied to his penis has been dangling between his ankles for the entire period. Marko also told me that his teacher had shown in class a few photographs of the holy man's several imitators, none of whom could lift their brick off the ground, let alone keep it up. Marko did not tell me what the art teacher had in mind with this story, but I can surmise that it was intended as a friendly warning to those still unaware of the untold hardships of an art career.

A HAPPY GHOST (September 8, 1995)

I would like to have a house every room of which would be covered with my boards. My black and white and red boards. From floor to ceiling, every room would be covered with rows upon rows upon rows of my boards. My bloodstained boards. There would be no furniture in my house. Except for my boards, my two-sided boards, my house would be empty. Everything would be stowed away. Hundreds, thousands of my boards would be my sole companions. And I would roam from room to room to room, like a ghost. Like a happy ghost, I would sit alone among my boards.

*L'ART, C'EST MOI* (September 21, 1995)

The only meaningful object of art is the artist oneself. Works of art are only traces of the process of self-realization. They are but remnants discarded on the way. In this sense, paintings and pieces of sculpture are conventional material traces of the artists' progress. By the same token, my book is a written trace of my own progress toward myself as an object of art. It, too, is an object of art only in this, reflected sense. As a book, it is an object of art only insofar as it is a reflection of my intention as an artist, which is true of paintings and pieces of sculpture, as well. Just like books, most paintings and pieces of sculpture have nothing to do with art, because the objects underlying their creation were not the artists themselves. Whether or not an object is an object of art depends on the artist's intention, not on intrinsic qualities of the object itself. The sincerity of that intention cannot be tested directly, but it can be gleaned from the would-be-artist's life as a whole. Parenthetically, my book, which contains nothing but text, is the first book to be recognized as an object of art, rather than a conventional book, by myself as an artist, rather than a writer. A new art form is born out of this recognition. The sincerity of my intention can be gleaned from the book itself, which is seldom the case with conventional objects of art.

*Addendum I* (December 4, 1995)

If the artist be priest of beauty, nevertheless this beauty is to be sought only according to the principle of the inner need, and can be measured only according to the size and intensity of that need. That is beautiful which is produced by the inner need, which springs from the soul.

From Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*,  
New York: Dover, 1977 (first published in 1911), p. 55.

*Addendum II* (December 22, 1998)

Keeping its title, I sent the original piece as my statement for the 1999 EAST International competition together with six slides of thirteen copies of my book perched on a shelf above the Hereford Salon mantelpiece. By the way, there is no symbolism in this number of copies; they just ended up fitting snugly on the shelf I found for the purpose. The likelihood of getting into the

selection for the second time is pretty slim, but I am eager to promote my book as an object of art. If this attempt fails, as it almost certainly will, I will look for a gallery that would be interested in the project. By the time the next edition of the book appears, in 2000 or maybe 2001, I should be ready to push this idea with all my might.

*Addendum III* (April 27, 1999)

About a month ago—on March 23—I received the expected rejection letter from EAST International together with my proposal and slides. The same day I sent the entire package, together with the original rejection letter, to Maureen Paley and proposed that my book be shown in the Interim Art Gallery, which she runs. This is what I said by way of introduction:

You already know about me. Years ago, Stuart and Maya Brisley suggested that my work would appeal to Joshua Compston and/or you. I believe they had mentioned me to you back then. I got in touch with Joshua first, but he left for good soon afterwards. Perhaps Giles Prince mentioned me to you, too, in the context of the Hereford Salon, which my wife, Lauren, and I have been running since 1993. Anyway, since a year ago or so, I have been sending you my postcards. The pieces pasted on them are from my book. They will appear in the next edition, either in 2000 or 2001.

I offered to send her a copy of my book, and I concluded my letter with a suggestion for a meeting. The letter was friendly, open, light. In it, I demanded but an audience. So far, not a peep from old Maureen. Most likely, she will never respond. No matter how much I know about the world of art, it never ceases to amaze me how callous it is.

*Addendum IV* (November 8, 2000)

The new edition of my book is finally out. However, it is not a book of flesh and blood, like the 1996 edition, but an ethereal one, published on the Internet. It is now available on my website ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)), designed by Simon Rae-Scott. The connection with the previous edition is made visible through a link to the Hereford Salon site ([www.herefordsalon.org](http://www.herefordsalon.org)). At this moment, only Book XXV for the current year is actually available. Other books will be appearing one by one, in the reverse order of years. In a month or so I expect my *Residua* to be available in full.

Each of my notes and the *addenda* extending it are now an element of a complex database. There are close to four-thousand such elements. The database is fully searchable. The site is still a bit of a prototype and there are a few remaining glitches to iron out. Nevertheless, it looks pretty good and it is time to announce it to the chosen few, my “Let’s Make Art!” electronic-mail list. Going back to the original piece, the sincerity of my intentions is now open for inspection. My book is now even more open than it ever has been.

As for Maureen Paley, I have never heard from her. Not a peep, indeed. After a while, one becomes accustomed to such callousness in the art world, but it still took me a few months to accept her silence. Anyway, Phoebe Tait is now my gallerist and agent, and my postcards are currently on show in her art space, Made to Measure, on Princelet Street in Spitalfields, only a few minutes from Liverpool Street Station. My book is now alive, alive, alive!

AUGUSTE RODIN (October 1, 1995)

As far as I am concerned, cunts are among the most beautiful and invigorating things around. Ubiquitous as they are, they are not often seen in full bloom, and then only for a fleeting moment. The sprawling pornography only accentuates the rarity of genuine throb and sparkle and swell. On occasion I feel an urge to paint or draw, and it is cunts that immediately come up as the only worthwhile and sustainable subject. As of late, however, my intermittent artistic urge is dampened by the greatest cunt artist of all times: Auguste Rodin. The more I learn about his “erotic” opus, the more difficult it is for me to try my luck in this domain. His bronze *Iris* (1890), for example, as well as his pencil drawings, exemplified by the *Recumbent Female Nude* (c. 1905) from the Witt Collection at the Courtould Institute Gallery in London, are simply disarming, if not outright discouraging. What could I add to Rodin’s surging gashes and flailing limbs? What could I possibly add to his virile passion and his prowess? But I am suddenly reassured by my questions. For these are still questions, and questions long for answers not yet glimpsed...

*Addendum* (December 18, 1995)

The female figure whispering into the creator’s ear had haunted Rodin’s imagination for years. The most extraordinary example of the theme is *The Sculptor and His Muse*, in which a seated sculptor is enveloped by the voluptuous pile of his muse’s hair. In a paroxysm of contortion, the muse nuzzles the side of his jaw with her nose, while placing her right hand and left foot securely on his penis. *The Sculptor and His Muse*, so close to the *Monument to Victor Hugo*, highlights another aspect of Rodin’s concept of genius: that sexual impulse is at the very center of its energy. No-one had believed that more thoroughly than Hugo, and it had not been lost on Rodin that women did not dare show up at dinners at the writer’s home in gowns that were not décolleté. The sight of a breast or, in private, of a thigh—better still, of what Hugo called *la forêt*—was a constant source of inspiration for the poet.[44] Rodin made the idea explicit in his maquette for the Panthéon *Hugo* when he splayed wide the legs of *Iris*, messenger of the Gods, to reveal her crotch, which he positioned directly over the poet’s head. The orgiastic display of raw sexuality and mental energy added up to a metaphor of creation.[45]

From Ruth Buttler’s *Rodin: The Shape of Genius*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 310-311.

FEDERICO FELLINI (October 3, 1995)

I think I am not exaggerating when I say that Federico Fellini is my contemporary I respect and appreciate most. The only reason for my hesitation is that I feel uneasy about the very notion of choosing the best and the most wonderful among my contemporaries. However, this preposterous choice occasionally forms spontaneously in my mind, without any conscious decision or guidance on my part. In fact, I am presented with a *fait accompli* that remains to be justified. Why Fellini? All I can say is that he is the only man who has managed to present the human species with all its warts and wrinkles, but without the slightest trace of bitterness or disgust or malice—even shame! More, he has managed to love the human species without the slightest trace of sentimentality. This is at the very root of humor, good humor. And this is what I would wish to emulate if I only could. To wit, my unwelcome choice bears a trace of envy, the cold shadow of all superlatives.

*Addendum I* (February 15, 1997)

A letter from a dear friend arrived today from Belgrade thanking me for a copy of my book. She swore she compared me with Fellini long before she chanced upon this particular piece. I immediately wrote back that I was enchanted by the compliment. Nevertheless, I wonder if I will ever live up to it.

*Addendum II* (November 19, 2016)

I remember Fellini on almost every visit to Zagreb, the capital of caricatures. He would love the city of my birth, I am quite sure. And especially around noon on a balmy Saturday, like today, when everyone is out and about the pedestrian area in the center to see and to be seen. Nowadays, Fellini would have a load of technology on his side. It would be pretty easy with cameras on offer to capture many a caricature without much ado. At the same time, he would also have many a lawyer lined up against him. Now caricatures know their rights, and in quite a bit of detail. Which is perhaps why Fellini will remain but a pipedream in these parts.

But I have hard time not remembering a woman in her mid- to late fifties I saw a short while ago. In spite of the balmy weather, she wore a thick gray woolen sweater and a woolen hat to match with a huge pompon on top. Wearing a pair of enormous sunglasses, which hid most of her wrinkled face, she also wore tight black pants and a pair of black boots with heels so high she could barely walk. Indeed, she tottered. Her lipstick was as red as red can be. I saw her twice, and I turned around and stared at her both times. “Fellini,” it crossed my mind, “Fellini!” Alas, my supposed contemporary was nowhere around. Born in 1920, he died in 1993, two years before this piece was written.

By the way, my dear friend from Belgrade was Maša Malešević, Goran Djordjević’s partner, and the mother of their daughter, Luna. Nearly two decades ago, her letter made me most happy. I was over the moon, no less. To

begin with, Maša was very close to my heart. A clever woman, she knew what she was talking about. Most important, comparing me with Fellini gave me quite a jolt at the time. I realized that the best I could ever do with my fellow humans was poke fun at them without the slightest trace of bitterness or disgust or malice. Not even shame, I hasten to add. And this is where Jesus occasionally comes to my help, as well. *Nesciunt quid faciunt*, I keep repeating to myself with a smile on my face.

#### AFRICA, AFRICA (October 31, 1995)

The first time we went to see the Africa Show at the Royal Academy of Art, Maya was still in Lauren's belly. Today she was in our arms, where she at times attracted more attention than the exhibits. The show was as overwhelming the second time as it was the first. Today I broke into tears at the very same spot as the last time, but I am still puzzled by my emotions. Is it the beauty and power of African objects that had induced the tears, or is it the feeling of our unspeakable loss? Are these emotions inseparable? And is this why Maya stole the show?

#### *Addendum* (September 24, 1996)

At the Guggenheim Museum in New York, today I saw this show for the third time. Although most of the exhibits shown in London were here, as well, the exhibition did not affect me as strongly as before. Perhaps Frank Lloyd Wright's masterpiece is better suited for objects closer to our own time—that is, objects of less presence and power? But not all was lost today. On many a female statue I noticed a wondrous cunt, beefy with juices and leafy with labia. The bulging pricks on male statues, which I have noticed long before, were in good company in New York today. That gave me a measure of comfort.

#### WHIFF OF PUMPKIN IN STEEL (October 31, 1995)

##### *Ingredients*

100 gallons of molten steel  
1 large pumpkin

##### *Utensils*

100-gallon fire-proof ceramic pot  
Collection of 3-yard-long half-inch-in-diameter steel pipes  
Asbestos clothing and gloves

##### *Method*

Pour 100 gallons of molten steel into a fire-proof ceramic pot. Wearing asbestos clothing and gloves, throw a large pumpkin into the pot. As a wisp

of vapor emerges from the pot, sniff it through the steel pipe before it dissipates. Serves as many as there are steel pipes.

From Sue-Ellen Polini's *Futuro-Conceptualist Cookbook*,  
Third Edition, Milano: Cucinare Edizioni, 1967 (first published  
in 1963), p. 344.

To Lutz Becker

#### BUILDING AND POWER (November 20, 1995)

Perhaps it takes a building economist to notice that the Art and Power exhibition at the Hayward Gallery bristles with images of scaffoldings, cranes, wheelbarrows, buckets, and other paraphernalia of building sites. Now as ever, dictators are good for the building industry.

#### FACTUAL NONSENSE (December 3, 1995)

Months ago Joshua Compston told me that Channel Three would screen a show on him and Factual Nonsense—his art, entertainment, media, and real estate company—at two o'clock today. I promised to watch it, and I put the time and date into my calendar. There is no television set at Hereford Road, so I asked some friends whether I could see the show at their home. They told me I would be more than welcome, but they could not check for me whether or not the show would be screened at the time I had gotten from Joshua because they did not have today's newspapers. I went to the nearby café and ferreted through several newspapers in search for the television schedule, but I quickly gave up in disgust of so many moronic things that appear in Sunday editions. The combination of the two media I despise most—television and newspapers—was too much for me. Unexpectedly, I felt vindicated in spite of my broken promise. So much for Factual Nonsense, it crossed my mind.

#### *Addendum I* (March 18, 1996)

I felt something was amiss when I received Joshua's last letter, dated January 26, 1996: the letter was open, giving, almost warm. Thus, I was not surprised when I learned that he had committed suicide on March 5, after attending the opening of the Jean-Michel Basquiat show at the Serpentine.

#### *Addendum II* (April 13, 1998)

My thoughts often stray toward Joshua. He was an aloof and almost hostile man, and it was difficult to imagine liking him pure and simple, but I have nevertheless had a soft spot for him from the first time we met. That was at Maya and Stuart Brisley's house in Whitechapel, where they organized a meeting between us because they thought Joshua might be interested in showing my work. Nothing came of it, but we did have good talks on several occasions. I went to see him at Factual Nonsense headquarters close to

Hoxton Square, the center of his majestic dreams, and he came to the Hereford Salon for several events, including one of the conversations about art institutions and their future, which we recorded with publication in view. Unfortunately, that very talk was not properly recorded because of my incompetence with the equipment. I think this was the second conversation we organized, and in the subsequent two I often mentioned Joshua's ideas because I felt it was not very likely we would entice him to come to another conversation on this subject. In his mid-twenties, he took his life only a few months later. The world was too cramped for his imperial projects.

LUCY LE FEUVRE (December 3, 1995)

As she was unwrapping her pieces of sculpture, which will be exhibited in the Hereford Salon until the end of January, Lucy Le Feuvre cut herself pretty badly. Lauren bandaged her finger as tightly as she could to stop the bleeding, and Lucy continued unwrapping her pieces and repairing a few that were damaged in transport. Made from curved strips of plywood glued together, her elongated vessels with thin necks are easy to repair. At some point Lucy looked up from her work and smiled: "It is amazing to think that the power saw I use to cut the plywood can go through my body like through butter!"

TWENTY-YEARS' WORTH (December 8, 1995)

Lauren and I visited Steven Ames, one of Lauren's many cousins, and his wife, Ann, at Claridges a day after he had bought a large painting by Kiefer at an auction at Christie's in London. He had paid more than he had hoped for, and he was miserable. "A collection of German Expressionist paintings is not complete without a Kiefer," he explained with a pained expression, his hands spread wide. He had been looking for a suitable painting for many a year. Art dealers had been offering him all kinds of things, including a collection of books covered with Kiefer's sperm accumulated over two busy decades. At this point pain cut deeper into Steven's face: "Imagine—twenty-years' worth of ejaculations!"

*Addendum* (April 1, 1997)

I can almost see a leering Monty Python character: "Twenty years, eh? Wink-wink, nudge-nudge. Eh?" Yes, yes. At the time, twenty-years' worth of writing!

"GOODNIGHT MR. DORSKY" (December 24, 1995)

Last night we were invited by Maurice Tuchman to a party in his new house overlooking Los Angeles from the Hollywood hills. As guests of honor, we arrived an hour before others so that Maurice could show us his splendid home and the art in it. Just before the other guests were due to arrive, he started telling us a story about Neil Armstrong, which Maurice considered

extraordinary. All he managed to tell us before he was interrupted by the arrival of the guests was that everyone was puzzled when Neil Armstrong returned to his spacecraft from the Moon and said, "Goodnight Mr. Dorsky." Nobody had ever heard of Mr. Dorsky. In the hubbub that ensued, Maurice forgot to complete his story. This morning we called to thank him for a wonderful party and to ask him about Mr. Dorsky. Recently, some thirty-five years after the event, Neil Armstrong revealed that Mr. and Mrs. Dorsky had moved next door to his family home when he was seven. One night he overheard Mrs. Dorsky: "Harry, not until the boy next door walks on the Moon will you get oral sex." Maurice claims this is a true story.

ANDY WARHOL (December 25, 1995)

The more I learn about Andy Warhol, the more I am convinced that he has done more than anyone else to kill art in the eye. This is his claim to glory, as he would most likely boastfully agree. If this is true, our own hero is not hard to conceive: Anti-Warhol.

*Addendum I* (November 25, 1996)

A month or two ago I sent a draft of my lecture on the history and future of the salon to Marko and asked him for his thoughts. Not long afterwards he responded with several critical remarks and a fine story:

Along the direction you have established I have a wonderful Warhol quote which you could easily incorporate into your lecture. In a filmed interview with him you see him staring off characteristically, with that pasty face, amid a swarm of people. From off camera a female voice asks: "What is art?" He pauses a bit and answers in a mild voice: "Well, umm, 'art' is short for 'artist'..."

It is time to reconsider my verdict.

*Addendum II* (January 8, 2018)

Warhol crosses my mind every now and then. If making oneself is the ultimate purpose of art, then each artist is an art world entire ("Making an Art World," October 17, 2013). And if so many art worlds coexist at the same time, there is no reason for them to come together ever again. For they cannot but be worlds apart.

A PARABLE ABOUT SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION (January 3, 1996)

If you sit on the beach and watch the incoming waves against the afternoon sun, you will notice that some break farther from the shore than others. Soon you will notice a cycle: the waves that break farther out are lofty and limpid, but they stir up the sand underneath; the waves that follow have to carry more

and more sand, and thus muddied they come ever closer to the shore, where they arrive ever more stocky. Once the sand farther out settles down, the waves become tall and limpid once again, and the cycle repeats itself. But each wave carries the same burden of so much water and so much sand.

*Addendum* (September 20, 2015)

The sand always gets in the way, of course. And it is always the same old sand, cycle after cycle. In terms of the spiritual evolution, it is the animistic world that shamans knew so well. And over so many millennia. Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all eventually got tangled up in the churning sand. And this is how the waves that break farther from shore will end up time and again, no matter how tall and limpid they ever get. Shamanism eventually overpowers each and every cycle of spiritual evolution. Until the human species evolves, but not only spiritually. A million years, perhaps? And for real...

DAVID WILSON (January 4, 1996)

I was talking to David Wilson in the back room of the Museum of Jurassic Technology one afternoon on one of my most recent visits to L.A. I mentioned the Talmudic story of the Thirty-Six Just Men—how at any given moment there are thirty-six ethically just men in the world, unknown perhaps even to themselves, but for whose sake God desists from utterly destroying the shambles we have made of His creation. Maybe, I suggested, there are thirty-six *aesthetically* just men, as well. David looked at me, authentically noncomprehending. “I don’t understand the difference,” he said.

From Lawrence Weschler’s *Mr. Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder*,  
New York: Pantheon Books, 1995, p. 62.

HOWLING AND BARKING (January 5, 1996)

The most magical thing I saw yesterday at the Museum of Jurassic Technology is an exhibit tucked into a remote, narrow, and dark niche. One is led to it by continuous howling and barking that reverberates throughout the museum. The exhibit is in a narrow and long vitrine covered with sand, small pebbles and shells, pieces of wood, and twigs. The head and neck of a small coyote is attached to one side. A viewing device attached to the front of the vitrine invites one to take a peek. The view is astounding: a fat man sitting on a stool is doing all the howling and barking. Jurassic technology, indeed. The free-floating video loop is projected via prisms and mirrors onto the coyote’s cranium. When I told David Wilson, the museum founder and director, that I was most enchanted by the coyote exhibit, he thanked me with a smile and added: “By the way, that is a North American fox.”

#### ALTHOUGH ENGLISH (January 12, 1996)

After a summer in Normandy as guests of several wealthy clients, Renoir and his wife Aline Charigot spent September 1883 in Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands between England and France. Renoir was charmed by the island's beaches and rocky coves, and even more so by the uninhibited behavior of the young English holidaymakers, whose freedom and naturalness he found particularly appealing. "Here one bathes by the rocks, which also serve as changing rooms, because there is nowhere else to go," he wrote to Paul Durand-Ruel on September 27, 1883. "And you cannot imagine how pretty it all looks, with men and women lying together on the rocks. It's more like a Watteau landscape than the real world." The unexpected informality of the bathers there—as opposed to the elegance of the Normandy resorts—provided him with "a source of real motifs" that he could use "later on." He would leave Guernsey at the beginning of October, he continued, "with a few canvases and some documents from which to make paintings in Paris." He concluded this letter by recounting the pleasure he had taken in "surprising a group of young girls changing into their bathing costumes, who, although English, did not seem at all alarmed."

From Colin B. Bailey, Joseph J. Rishel, and Mark Rosenthal's *Masterpieces of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism: The Annenberg Collection*, Catalog of the Exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 21-September 17, 1989, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1989, p. 41.

#### DAVID HOCKNEY (January 12, 1996)

Whenever I see a swimming pool, I think of David Hockney; whenever I see a Hockney, I think of a pool. I am not sure which curse is more annoying.

#### THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN IMAGERY (January 14, 1996)

I first realized the power of Christian imagery when I took Dorian to the New Wing of the National Gallery in London some two years ago. He must have been around one-and-a-half, and I carried him in my arms from painting to painting. As soon as we entered the exhibition space I was struck by the number of paintings showing infants in their mothers' arms. It goes without saying that Dorian immediately focused on the infants.

#### TO LIGHTEN UP (January 14, 1996)

According to Lauren's brother Charles, who is close to Deepak Chopra, the erstwhile medical doctor and now a medicine man teaches that to be enlightened is to lighten up—take things less seriously. By this reckoning I must have become enlightened in 1989 or 1990.

THE PRINCE OF BELIEVERS *VERSUS* THE COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL (March 25, 1996)

I have always been enchanted by Harun al-Rashid's two titles—the Prince of Believers and the Commander of the Faithful. Both appear to suit me well. A while ago I decided to adopt one of the two if and when the need for a lofty title arose. One should be enough, I reckoned. I have been weighing the two titles in my mind, but I have not been able to make the final choice until today. And the Prince of Believers it is. The Commander of the Faithful now strikes me as a shade too ... well, demanding.

A LITTLE IDEAL (March 29, 1996)

And how many new *ideals* are, at bottom, still possible! Here is a little ideal I stumble upon once every five weeks on a wild and lonely walk, in an azure moment of sinful happiness. To spend one's life amid delicate and absurd things; a stranger to reality; half an artist, half a bird and metaphysician; with no care for reality, except now and then to acknowledge it in the manner of a good dancer with the tips of one's toes; always tickled by some sunray of happiness; exuberant and encouraged even by misery—for misery *preserves* the happy man; fixing a little humorous tail even to the holiest of things: this, as is obvious, is the ideal of a heavy, hundredweight spirit—a spirit of gravity.

From Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Will to Power*, New York: Vintage Books, 1968, p. 535.

LIKE A TRAIN (March 31, 1996)

Some of my boards are perched on a long ledge in our bedroom. Dorian is lying next to me in bed. "What do you say about my paintings?" I ask him. "They look like a train," he responds. He is very fond of trains. "Is that a compliment?" I ask. "No, a train," he says.

"YES, SYMMETRY" (April 14, 1996)

Lauren's brother Charles is so close to Deepak Chopra that the medicine man has invited him to join him on his tour of Europe. They started in Amsterdam and are ending the tour in Hamburg. Two days ago they came to London, where Deepak has a three-day workshop. When Charles came over to see us, he was interested in the five *thang-ka* I bought in Hong Kong because his friend had told him a lot about this art form. Having heard about the paintings from Charles, Deepak wanted to see them, too. I took him to our bedroom, where the *thang-ka* had been displayed since we moved to Hereford Road. When he saw my boards on their ledge on the opposite wall, Deepak asked me what they were. "These are my own *thang-ka*," I smiled. He nodded seriously: "Yes, symmetry."

*Addendum I* (October 29, 1996)

In Lutz Becker's collection of stills from Sergei Eisenstein's unfinished film, *Que viva Mexico*, which Lutz longs to finish, many are as carefully arrayed as *fin-de-siècle tableaux vivants*, and some are rigidly symmetrical. Several of the latter are extraordinary. In the first scene two men are standing on each side of an open coffin with the remains of their fallen comrade. In the second two pairs of priests standing in front of four peasant boys holding a cross are standing behind a rack of skulls. In the third scene two priests are kneeling in front of a pillar bristling with ecclesiastic symbols flanked by painted statues of the Madonna and a bearded saint. In the last a pre-Columbian pyramid is resting pristine under a huge sky crawling with luminous clouds. Indeed, all the symmetrical *tableaux* I have seen are about the strict equilibrium between life and death.

*Addendum II* (January 21, 2001)

Years ago at MIT—between 1972 and 1973, I guess—I conducted a series of simple experiments on what people considered beautiful. This was a part of an attempt to endow computers with an esthetic understanding of the world. A few people close to Marvin Minsky, one of the forerunners of artificial intelligence, were interested in my experiments. Patrick Winston, whose course in artificial intelligence I was taking at the time, was among them. And so was Rudolph Arnheim, an authority in the psychology of art, whom I met at Harvard a bit earlier. It was actually Arnheim who had suggested that I conduct a few simple experiments before conceptualizing the problem and committing it to computer code. I remember one of these experiments quite well. I asked a number of people—mostly my fellow students and a few sympathetic teachers—to arrange a bunch of cubes in an esthetically pleasing way on a “chessboard” with ten rows and columns. The cubes themselves came from an earlier experiment in Nicholas Negroponte's laboratory, the Architecture Machine, where I had worked as a research assistant for a semester or maybe two. I recorded the sequence in which my subjects placed the cubes onto the grid, and I taped their comments as they were moving along. For some reason, which escapes me now, I never completed these experiments, but I still remember a couple of my surprises. First, a good proportion of my subjects produced symmetrical arrangements of cubes, some of which were symmetrical with respect to two axes rather than one. In their minds, beauty and symmetry were directly related. Second, the more culturally “sophisticated” my subjects tended to be, the more aware they were that there was something funny about symmetry, and the more they avoided it. In some cases, they would “spoil” it as soon as they would discover it in their own arrangements. For some reason, symmetry was out of fashion with those aware of art and culture in general. I remember feeling that symmetry was still there, in the background, even with the sophisticates, but that it was something to be avoided at all costs. Returning to Deepak Chopra and Sergei Eisenstein, perhaps my subjects instinctively felt that symmetry was one of the last vestiges of the religious.

*Addendum III* (August 24, 2015)

According to Frank Wilczek, a Nobel laureate in physics, the universe is exceedingly beautiful. “The world is a piece of art, produced according to a very peculiar style,” he said in an interview for *Der Spiegel* a few days ago. “What I find particularly striking is the outstanding rôle of symmetry.” His new book, *A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature’s Deep Design* (London: Penguin, 2015), is all about it. God is mentioned in the interview, but only at the end and in passing. Apparently, Wilczek is open to all explanations of symmetry. Anyhow, Deepak Chopra came to my mind at once. He would be delighted by Wilczek’s argument, no doubt. Judging by Chopra’s recent books, symmetry in nature must strike him as an indubitable sign of divine intervention, too. Which perhaps explains why the more culturally “sophisticated” subjects in my experiments at MIT tended to avoid it. By and large, they eschewed religion at the time. In the early Seventies, it was out of fashion, as it were, and especially among the highly educated ones. Only try to explain any of this to a computer, though.

*Addendum IV* (October 25, 2017)

Sitting alone in my livingroom in Motovun and looking at my paintings, which are gracing all the walls around me, I am amazed by the number of compositions that are symmetrical to boot. Not a trace of sophistication in them, as it were. Perhaps the only trick I have used over and over again is that symmetry in some of the compositions is vertical while it is horizontal in others. Peekaboo! The realization almost made me laugh. But I am smiling from ear to ear as I am writing this *addendum*, hopefully the last this piece will ever see. The brute!

STRAY ERECTION (April 22, 1996)

Ken Brecher recently organized a drawing class for patrons of American art institutions, so that they could better appreciate art from the vantage point of the artist. Many patrons came to the class. One of the models was a gorgeous black man. Halfway through one of his poses he got an unbelievable erection. Everyone present behaved as though nothing had happened, but they were all simply blown away. If not the art experience, the stray erection will certainly change the lives of those who had witnessed it.

LASCAUX (April 23, 1996)

When Geoffrey Powis visited Lascaux, he first went to see the excavations further up the hill. Were his girlfriend not from the region, he would not have known of this site, nor how to locate it. They found a very deep hole close to the top of the hill. It plummets some hundred-fifty meters below the surface. Geoffrey and his girlfriend also met the man who had dug it with his own hands. He was in his eighties. Hoping to match or surpass the discoveries on the properties of his fellow farmers in the neighborhood, the old man has been

digging for some forty years. He is still at it. Geoffrey says the serenity of the old farmer suggests that his life has been well lived, even though, or perhaps because, he has never found anything of great value. The old man opened a bottle of wine, and the three of them had a nice chat. The replicas of cave paintings down the hill were a bit of a letdown after this encounter.

*Addendum* (October 1, 2017)

Two decades ago or so, the old man from this story touched me deeply. Even more, he was like a brother to me. My writing project reminded me of his excavation project, it goes without saying. Although neither of us had found anything worth boasting about, our serenity was our just reward. Or so it seemed to me back then. Things have changed, though. And how. As of my liberation early last year, my serenity has doubled, as it were. At long last, I have found what I was looking for. Abandoning thought at will and for as long as I wish matches Lascaux rather well, I dare say (“No-Bullshit Enlightenment,” January 18, 2016). It took me more than forty years of relentless digging, but it was well worth it. Alleluia!

## ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Horkheimer, M., and T.W. Adorno, *Dialectics and Enlightenment*, “Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment,” pp. 43-80, New York: Seabury Press, 1972 (first published in 1944).
2. Adorno, T.W., *Negative Dialectics*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973 (first published in 1966), p. 141.
3. *Op. cit.*, p. 106.
4. *Op. cit.*, p. 85.
5. Marcuse, H., *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971 (first published in 1958), p. 197.
6. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
7. *Op. cit.*, p. 280.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 362.
9. Camus, A., *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, New York: Vintage Books, 1956 (first published in 1951), p. 301.
10. Cf. V.S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 61:

I listened, and at the end he said with a smile, “*Semper aliquid novi*.” He had used the lycée motto to make a joke. The words were old, he told me, two thousand years old, and referred to Africa. An ancient Roman writer had written that out of Africa there was “always something new”—*semper aliquid novi*. And when it came to masks and carvings, the words were still literally true. Every carving, every mask, served a specific religious purpose, and could only be made once. Copies were copies; there was no magical feeling of power in them; and in such copies Father Huismans was not interested. He looked in masks and carvings for a religious quality; without that quality the things were dead and without beauty.

11. Cf. T.W. Adorno, *Prisms*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981, p. 257, quoting Kafka: "To believe in progress is to believe that there has not yet been any."
12. Horkheimer, M., *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, New York: Seabury Press, 1972 (?) (first published in 1968 (?)), pp. 273-290.
13. Dewey, J., *Art as Experience*, New York, 1934, p. 270.
14. *Op. cit.*, p. 244.
15. *Loc. cit.*
16. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
17. Dewey, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
18. *Loc. cit.*
19. Horkheimer, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
20. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (first published in 1994).
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.
22. London: Phoenix, 2008.
23. *Op. cit.*, pp. 285-286.
24. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.
25. "The Lenten Time of Music: On the Music of Arvo Pärt," ECM Records, 1991, no page numbers.
26. See, e.g., *A History of Venice* by John J. Norwich, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983 (first published in 1982), pp. 12-13.
27. See, e.g., Mary McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence* and *Venice Observed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972 (first published in 1956), p. 85.
28. *Loc. cit.*
29. *An Outline Dictionary of Maya Glyphs*, New York: Dover, 1978 (first published in 1931), p. 47.
30. *Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1992 (first published in 1986), pp. 141-142.

31. See, e.g., S. Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984, pp. 209-11.

32. Horkheimer, M., *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1931 and 1950-1969*, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, p. 115.

33. Lawson, A.J., *Cave Art*, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire: Shire Archeology, 1991, p. 59.

34. *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

35. See, e.g., K. Spindler, *The Man in the Ice*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994 (first published in 1993), pp. 167-173 and color plates.

36. Michel de Montaigne quoted by Marguerite Yourcenar, “*Archivi del Nord*,” *Opere: Saggi e memorie*, Milano: Bompiani, 1992 (first published in 1991), p. 1327.

37. Quoted by Ouskensky (Uspensky), *Essai sur la Théologie de l’icône dans l’Eglise Orthodoxe*, Paris, 1960, p. 60. According to John Stuart (*Ikon*, London: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 31), “[t]he ikon is deeply immersed in the Christian consciousness and, indeed, tradition associates the making of the first ikon with Christ himself.” He continues (*loc. cit.*):

[...] the ikon consists of a synthesis of art and idea, and [its] form is derived from a spiritual vision or understanding of the universe. But the ikon is also a synthesis of matter transformed by spirit—a vehicle for the transmission of spiritual energy. This is graphically suggested by the legend [...] of Christ’s image “not made with hands.” Brought to King Abgar as a proxy for Christ’s divine presence, the image was created by direct contact with Our Lord, and thereby became infused with his spiritual aura. The image presupposes the imaged just as a shadow denotes the presence of the figure that casts it. The ikon not only represents the shape (*morphé*) and the idea (*idea*) but it also participates in the nature of the imaged.

The icon is thus not only live, as all living creatures are live, but it is live spiritually—that is, it is life-giving, healing. The association between healing and this particular art form goes to its very origin, as demonstrated by this story about the first icon.

38. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (first published in 1994), p. 111.

39. *Loc. cit.*, quoting from John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, 4.16.

40. *The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The History and the Collection*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984, p. 173.

41. Ferrier, J.-L., Editor-in-Chief, *Art of Our Century: The Chronicle of Western Art, 1990 to the Present*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1989 (first published in 1988), p. 323.
42. Birnie Danzker, J.-A., ed., *Dreamings—Tjukurrpa: Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich and New York: Prestel, 1994.
43. U.S. Treasury Department, Customs court, 3rd Division, Protest 209109-G, *C. Brancusi v. U.S.*, New York, October 21, 1927-March 23, 1928 (stenographic minutes in the library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York).
44. Jean Savant, who has written six books on Hugo and sexuality, was kind enough to discuss this material with me. These are basically his words.
45. Photographs that make this clear are almost impossible to find. The best source of images to understand the unfinished Panthéon *Hugo* are in Jane Roos's article "Rodin's Monument to Victor Hugo," *Art Bulletin* 68 (December 1986), p. 655. It was Roos who first made it clear that the highly sexualized Iris is the figure on the top of the monument Rodin planned for the Panthéon. No-one had put the two together before.

## SHORT BIO

Ranko Bon writes and paints. He has published several collections from his *Residua*, the Mother of All Blogs ([www.residua.org](http://www.residua.org)): *Residua I-XX: Selections* (London: The Hereford Salon, 1996), *Belgrade Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski Breg, 2002), *Istrian Postcards* (Belgrade: Vračarski Breg, 2003), *Toward a Short History of Motovun* (Munich: Elisabeth Sandmann Verlag, 2010), and *What is to Be Done? Climate Change for Beginners* (Belgrade: HESPERIAedu, 2014). In addition, he has published in several art and literary journals: *Inventory* (1996-1997), *Flash Art* (1998-1999), *Butterfly* (1999), *Statement Art* (1999), *Tank* (2000), *Another Magazine* (2001), *The Jackdaw* (2001-2010), and *Gazet* (2002-2003).

He has exhibited at the Hereford Salon in London (1994-1999), Norwich Gallery in Norwich, England (1998), Made to Measure Gallery in London (2000-2001), Abbot's Walk Gallery in Reading, England (2001-2003), Ca' Bon Gallery in Motovun, Croatia (2003-present), Five Towers Gallery in Motovun (2004-2005), Open Space, *Zentrum für Kunstprojekte* in Vienna (2010), and Calvert 22 Gallery in London (2011).

He holds a Diplomat Engineer in Architecture degree from Belgrade University (1969), a Master's in City Planning from Harvard (1972), and a Ph.D. in Urban Studies and Planning from MIT (1975). He has worked in the Urban Planning Institute of Slovenia in Ljubljana (1975-1979) before teaching at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1979), the University of Massachusetts in Boston (1979-1980), Northeastern University (1980-1983), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1983-1990), and the University of Reading (1990-2003), where he is professor emeritus. He lives in Motovun since leaving teaching and research in 2003.