Art Education in an Age of Teletechnology: On the Impossibility of Portraiture

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The preText: Lacanian Moves of the Real

Art since the Renaissance has been obsessed with the portrait and defined by it as the form of representation made even more iconic through the invention of photography where the notion of the profile became established as a sign of prosperity, prestige and power (Sekula, 1986). This enlightenment tradition of portraiture is not likely to perish at any given future date; the digitalization of the image continues to make the banal snap-shot proliferate at such an incredible rate identifying the thirst for personal representation in contemporary society. The explosion of celebrity magazines, the spread of the paparazzi, and the easy access to digital printers should give us all the more reason why art educators should re-examine the representational value of portraiture as subject matter for the art classroom.

Artists and art educators have always included portraiture as part of their curriculum repertoire. It has a long venerable tradition in art education since the founding of the Florentine Academy during the Renaissance where anatomy and life drawing were first taught. The growth of portraiture, of course, reaches its height in Holland with such figures as Franz Hals, Rembrandt and Vermeer, where humanism takes command, so to speak, as the haute bourgeoisie are able to gain economic ground, setting up the first Constitution in 1588 against the interests of Church and Aristocracy. The portrait essentially was a representational technology that “stole” the light of God from the Church and power from the Aristocracy by imbuing the sitter with a “unique” subjectivity and importance, as if two subjectivities were present: the actual representation of the sitter and his or her “unique”
self perceived as the “soul” of the person, an ideal inner self that is aligned with God. Vermeer’s studio was essentially an inverted Cathedral. Hence, the artist was always judged as to whether he (it was a male dominated occupation) could capture the “essence” of the person through the skill of the hand. The technology of representation: the under-painting in grays, the grinding of colored minerals, and the glazing techniques with oil paint secularizes “revealed theology” as “natural theology” by presenting the tangibility of things.

This “double” claim of portraiture held up even stronger when the bourgeoisie came to power, establishing Nations through revolutionary means. The Impressionists readily represented the bourgeoisie frolicking along the banks of the Seine through a technology that ranged from rapid (Degas, Monet) to slow (Seurat) brush strokes, with watercolors, paintings and sketches done *en plein air* rather than necessarily confined to the studio, as empiricism reigned supreme. Again, the skill of rendering the portrait, still a fascination for tourists who watch sidewalk artists earning their keep, was retained. However, the move towards artifice, as in the developments of post-Impressionism, already meant a confrontation with photography that had begun in 1839 with Daguerre when photographic technologies eventually put into question the “essential” self as it became increasingly easier to touch up the negatives to produce ideal images, a direction which has now lead us to the complete manipulation of the digitalized image.

Since the invention of photography, it is often argued that technology of the lens apparatus and printing process changes our understanding of what portraiture “is.” In a seminal essay, the art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss (1985) argued that “[e]very photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object” (p.203). She goes on to suggest in the second part of her
the effect of the work is that its relation to its subject is that of the index, the impression, the trace. The painting is thus a sign connected to a referent along a purely physical axis. And this indexical quality is precisely the one of photography. (p.215)

Published in 1977, Krauss could not have anticipated that by the turn of the century the day of chemical-based technologies would be over (except for “purists” who complement those enthusiasts of vintage “vinyl” music and analogue synthesizers). “Technically” speaking, however, Krauss is entirely right despite this technological change. The conventional icon/index that defined duality in photography has broken down. But, of course, the iconic portrait continues to function in everyday life, otherwise the industrial complex that surrounds the reproduction of “family snaps” would collapse—not likely to happen given the thirst for “memories” that attempt to freeze time as reminders of how we thought we once “were.”

The family “snap” at first glance, seems to preserve the claim that, like the former technologies of painting, the “essence” of the person photographed is being “caught.” The paparazzi photo functions in this way as well: the celebrity is “caught” in his or her “natural” state of just being “human.” Often, this means being caught unaware, undressed or in some unflattering pose, just the opposite of the artifice or role as a celebrity’s mask. Somehow, this is perceived as being the “authentic” self. In this way the paparazzi “steal” a celebrity’s jouissance (libidinal vitality) so it can be consumed by a voyeuristic public—a rather vampirish act. However, the photographic archive that each family or individual member possesses, oddly enough, has little do with representation per se. What is this “essence” that seems to fade in an age of simulacra? The photographic archive seems to point to its “outside,” to what cannot be retrieved, to what cannot be represented—to the impossibility of time itself. It is this impossible “trace” that Marianne Hirsch (1997) is able to articulate so well in
her *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. As she notes in her opening discussion of Roland Barthes celebrated study on photography, *Camera Lucida* (1981), the one photograph that he cherishes and discusses in detail, where he finds not only his mother but the qualities of their relationship—a congruence between “my mother’s being and my grief at her death” (p.70)—is *not reproduced in his book*. For us, as viewers, it would just be another generic family photograph from a long time ago. We cannot see the photograph like he sees it. It is impossible. Yet, this picture of his mother provoked in him a moment of self-recognition. In his reading process, it opened up a corridor of time enabling a process of self-discovery, a discovery of a self-in-relation to his mother—as his loss and his mourning. The photograph “moved” him as it released its frozen moment of time down a corridor that seems faster than the speed of light. The referent (his mother) haunts him like a ghost, evoking what has now become the mainstay of our understanding of what he meant by the sting, prick, cut or puncture of the *punctum* of the photograph. So, while there is no doubt that technology changes the way we “see” the world through an “inhuman” eye made possible by the machinic lenses of the cinematic apparatus, the fundamental question of the “impossibility” of representation remains open to question.

The first part of this essay draws a *preText*. It draws on psychoanalytic theory of Lacan to question the very “possibility” of portraiture and to rethink its practice along non-representational lines; that is, as a practice of “impossibility” where the failure of representation is already presupposed. The second part, which I call the text, extends this discussion to Deleuze and his notions of the time-image to further the question of grappling with an art practice that *ruins* representation.

What Barthes' *Camera Lucida* teaches us (from the spectator side in this case) is that the object must “look” back at us if we are to meet its gaze. It looks back at us not from its immediate physical
location—after all, Barthes came across this particular photograph amongst many. But only this one made him hesitate. It shocked him immediately. Contemplation occurred only after this initial “punch” took place. Rather, the photograph looked back at him from a site that cannot be articulated through the cite of language, nor can it be seen (sighted). We have to posit a bodily register that exceeds both language and representation. For Lacan this is the psychic register of the Real, the unconscious, and if we were to give this claim a Deleuzean twist, we can call it the brain, a site that can never know itself, that can never be entirely transparent to itself, no matter what the context is. Some aspect of the brain’s functioning will always remain mysterious and unknown no matter how sophisticated neuroscience might become. And, so it is with the unconscious. There is a negativity that pervades all of life—an unknown dimension that remains opaque.

We can now add to this yet another aspect—the virtuality of time as a past that always presses on the present, on the actual “now.” Such a time dimension—in the form of memories, traumas, dreams, hallucinations, and above all desire, haunts the register of the Real and the affected body. From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, when the object “looks” back desire has been created in the register of fantasy and impossibility. It was, after all, Barthes loss of his mother that prompted his hesitation. Simply put, the object of desire is caught up in an unfulfillable (impossible) search for an eternally “lost” pleasure—a pleasure referred to as jouissance—when, as infants, we become civilized as our bodies become “shaped” by cultural discourses and image formations as we slowly enculturate to become law biding citizens. Psychoanalytically speaking, aphanisis or a fading of the full possibility of the polymorphous sexual subject takes place as the infant realizes that the Other (parents and society at large) demands and expects certain behaviors of him or her that have to be followed. The infant can no longer expect to get every
little thing s/he wants. Some pleasure has to be given up—it becomes lost in this sense, retrievable only through imaginary fantasy. In a phallogocentric society such as ours, to become a speaking subject this means the infant must take up either a masculine or feminine position usually along biological lines. One must (mistakenly) assume that one has the phallus (active) as the abstract symbol of power, or one must assume that one is (passive) the phallus. This latter position associated with the feminine position, stands in for what masculinity desires to feel complete. For Barthes, an openly outed gay who strove not to be so positioned by the symbolic order, the desire to recall his mother to help restore this lost jouissance was therefore especially acute.

Exploring the Psychic Real

Let us now look on the painter’s side of things rather than that of the spectator, to flesh out the claims when exploring the intricacies between desire, jouissance, memory, time, and the psychic register of the Real. In her magnificent study of Rembrandt, whose prolific output of self-portraits constitutes and exemplifies the artist striving to assert self-reflective individuality so that he might improve his status as a miller’s son in seventeenth century Holland, a country where both Church and Royalty had been displaced by an early constitutional government formulated by a moneyed haute bourgeoisie, Mieke Bal (1991) writes:

The self-portrait can become self-reflexive, not because it shows us the face we know to belong to the painter, but because it stands for the study—for the practice of painting and its difficulties...[T]he self-portrait gains in self-reflexivity when the reflection on painting is not signified in the study, in the exaltation of the self but in the detail that demonstrates the danger to the self....The body at risk is the representation of the threat to subjective wholeness that self-reflection poses. (pp.
Bal fingers something like Barthes' *punctum*, but now placed on the artist's side. Of the hundreds (should we say thousands?) of portraits (paintings and sketches) that Rembrandt did, several stand out that mark the trace of this bodily “risk” she identifies. Despite his wealth, Rembrandt's life of ostentatious living led to bankruptcy and his life was filled with great personal tragedy (only one of his four children survived birth and his wife died at the young age of 30). Despite this, his artistic output increased, which seems contradictory. Yet, it is through artistic work that an artist's symptom separates itself from *jouissance*. The symptoms of Rembrandt's suffering brought on by the loss of his three children, wife and fortune, fueled his desire as he fell into subjective destitution. “[T]he symptom is *jouissance* as sense enjoyed by a subject, while a piece of [art] work offers a sense to be enjoyed by whoever wants to enjoy it ... the condition of creation is that the subject realizes that the Other does not exist” (p. 43), by which Miller (1998), Lacan's brother-in-law and the author of this sentence, means that through art the suffering associated with *jouissance* is sublimated. “The Other does not exist” refers to a pushing back of the expectations of the symbolic order that position and mortify the body in a particular way. There is a certain freeing of the self by facing the very void that is the empty center of the self, formed by the evacuation or loss of polymorphous sexuality—of *jouissance*. Only when Rembrandt dared to face this abyss within himself, brought on by the utter devastation of his psyche through those losses—his children, his wife and then his fortune, was he most successful in capturing that “danger to the self” which Bal writes about. Portraiture no longer is just simply a question of representing “subjective wholeness.” The representation of such “wholeness” is precisely what Lacan meant by his notion that the ego misrecognizes (*méconnaissance*) itself. It is when artists paint or snap portraits representationally that they avoid the “work” of being an artist. This
"work," as I will come to show at the end of this essay, refers to the struggle with non-representation, with the attempt to open up realms of the unthought. So, for instance, Rembrandt's reworking of the Bible along more secular grounds is yet another indicator of his struggle with this "big" Other as represented by the power of the Church. His secularization of biblical themes raised questions concerning official interpretations. Some have argued (Hayes, 1999) that the self-portraits of Bernini, Rembrandt's contemporary, equally exhibit gazes that are always querulous and indecisive—no longer self assured and confident autonomous subjects was the case in their predecessors: Alberti, Botticelli, Leonardo, Michelangelo.

Let me develop a more, perhaps obvious example in the well-trodden iconography of Modernism that every art teacher knows, but now can be read with a twist of Deleuzean-Lacanian theory—the "expressionist" artistic output of Edvard Munch, the same Munch who could not part (easily) with his portraits, who worked continuously on some canvases for more than ten years, still feeling dissatisfied that the image was finished. Slavoj Zizek (1991) has done an excellent exposé of how Munch's work embodies the Real, but it is Lacan in Seminar XII (1964-65), known as "Crucial Problems for Psychoanalysis" who took the time to analyze in Seminar 12: Wednesday 17, March 1965, Munch's celebrated self-portrait The Scream. What Lacan demonstrates is usually the very opposite of what "seems" representationally to be the case by this 'portrait' of Munch in a state of incomprehensible psychic turmoil. It is the scream that brings on silence and not the other way around says Lacan. The scream he says, "abolishes itself in silence... The scream is traversed by the space of the silence without dwelling in it; they are not linked either by being together or succeeding one another, the scream creates the abyss into which silence rushes." This has "already happened," he says, "when we see Munch's image." In other words, the silence of the scream pierces us right away. Its frozen moment of
time is instantaneously released. What remains "stuck in Munch's throat," the signification that he is unable to speak, that turns his larynx into a pipe, exposing the inherent point of failure (the very limit) of subjectivity, is the very ontological gap of Being itself—the gaping abyss that forms his mouth in the painting. This, properly speaking, is the "work" of portraiture. The subject is the subject of representation—of the signifier—precisely because of the status of this fundamental void of impossibility, the kernel of the Real that lies at the heart of subjectivity itself. This impossible void, nevertheless, enables the very condition of possibility for infinitude of possible significations to emerge. As Lacan and Zizek, his best contemporary translator show, Munch's Scream makes accessible the impact of traumatic experience where we (in Hegelian terms) experience a "night of the world"—the "true" condition of the subject where the lived coherence and cohesion of the ego in control of reality becomes ruptured. The point is that this rupture happens more often than we think if we stay tuned to it and "work" through it. This is not "therapy" in the traditional sense, but recognition that the work of art sublimates the Real, and that there is a certain ethics to both viewing and doing such work. In the Freudian tradition working through one's aggression, anxiety, angry, envy and so on, creatively, provide a distance from these uncontrollable emotional responses. Hence, the "ethics of the Real" that is involved requires sensitivity to the way we approach such a volatile and potentially destructive state of being.

Text: Deleuzean Moves of the Time-Image

The enigma of such portraiture, like that of the Mona Lisa's smile, rests in this time dimension of the Real. It is this dimension of virtual time, a Deleuzean development, and the psychic register of the Real, a Lacanian development, which can help art educators rethink portraiture in an age of teletechnology where the mediated world of
lens technology and the ubiquity of the image seems to promote an overlooking of time as memory and the unconscious desire of the Real. This is what the next section attempts to do: provide an insight to such a possibility.

In an age of the image society where teletechnological media attempt to construct our societal consciousness, this part of the essay attempts to help rethink representation’s “outside” by drawing now on the work of Giles Deleuze to further Lacan by focusing on the “portraiture” of Francis Bacon and the “living” monumentalism of Jochen Gertz. This move might help us grasp the necessity of ruining representation by introducing a much-needed re-conceptualization of time and sensation that remains wedded to objects and their movements through narration, illustration, and representation. The attempt in this part of the essay is to grasp thinking of an art education that no longer goes from image to thought, that is from percept to concept—such a direction is overwhelming present in elementary art education where story telling narratives through images is perhaps the quintessential practice in all its possible myriad of forms—nor from concept to affect; that is from thought to image, which is the polar opposite practice that governs much of junior and high school art where self-expressionism still by and large reigns supreme and supported by various forms of arts based research where the researcher’s subjectivity still remains a central concern. Exceptions to this set of generalities can always be found—but this legacy of modernism continues to linger in our schools despite the rhetoric that there are inroads being made towards teaching more contemporary art forms like performance art, installation, and conceptualism—all three of which, provide a way to surpass the above stated bifurcated dialectic.

Performance art, installation and conceptual art are three forms that begin to deconstruct representation as such. In these forms, time has been pulled away from an action-image dominated by movement
(gesture) and explored as an entity in itself, and not attached to an object as famously developed in the early modernism by cubists and futurists. Performance art gives us time taken away from movement, often disembodying the voice and repeating movement through various forms of automation; conceptual art gives us thought immanent to the image, while installation art gives us conceptual time-space in which the body must relate to in new ways. In all three art forms, the event as a problematic comes to us from the “outside” – not in our comprehension or control.

To go beyond this stated bifurcation, we take the Deleuzean path where concept and image are one. As Deleuze (1989) puts it, “The concept is in itself in the image, and the image is for itself the concept. This is no longer organic and pathetic but dramatic, pragmatic, praxis, or action thought” (p. 161). To state this proposed trajectory as succinctly and forcefully as possible, an art education that is “fit” for contemporary society must move away from its emphasis on the “still” image and the action narrative, even that of journalistic photography where time is still governed by movement and space, and begin to identify the way time itself, in the current forms of the moving image of the new media, is being explored through “new lines of flight” that encompass virtual forms of presentation. This is where Nietzschean necessity of entertaining the “powers of the false,” a positive sense of lying (see Deleuze, 1989, chapter 5) becomes important since we no longer live in a society where fact and fiction can be distinguished from one another. Simulacra and the decentering of the faith and belief in the documentary (especially the factual claims of news) as just another form of construction necessitates that art educators rethink our teaching positions, which generally remain fixated by the “-isms” of modernism because they are easily categorized and can be taught as distinct movements, and especially because they appeal to the school curricula structures with their well-ordered buzzer blocked times of so many minutes. A different order
of understanding of the body, offered by some forms of time-cinema, installation art and performance, provide a change in perception that identifies a body of dispersed sensations that is being technologized and targeted as separate organs. The tension between the cyborgian body of technology and what William Gibson and sci-fi fans call “meat” is part of this identifiable gap—the gap between living “flesh” and dead “meat” which refuses to become entirely absorbed into the machine.

From a Deleuzian perspective a very different notion of the subject emerges, a subject not so much in control of its environment as an agent, but also not a subject who is entirely controlled by the institutional agencies (i.e., by Foucault’s understanding of governmentalities). His is not a body in the usual phenomenological sense as theorized by Husserl and then entertained by a long line of aestheticians starting from Merleau-Ponty and Mikel Dufrenne, but a body “before discourse, before words, before the naming of things” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 38), which reiterates a similar distinction Lyotard (1971) makes between the figure and the figural.

This view disrupts the usual seamless narratological arts based research and self-expressionistic works that are the order of the day. In this view, the image is unhinged from the body as well as reality. The subject to the body is reversed where the synthetic apperception of I-Me-present-to-itself becomes undone. Especially with cinema “the image no longer derives from perceiving (sleeping, memorizing ...) body, nor from a rain-archive of data; the image sets the subject adrift, sucking it into a transperceptive and ‘falsifying world.’ Thought becomes immanent to the image (Deleuze, 1989, p. 173). “Depth of field is no longer understood in relation to obstacles and the concealment of things...as in Euclidian perspective....but in relation to a light which makes us see beings and objects according to their opacity” (Deleuze 1989, p. 176). Thought becomes immanent
to the image. And, of course, this is one of the foundational ideas of conceptual art. We can apply this to the three art forms mentioned earlier. With installation art, the viewer is forced to piece a disjointed narrative together by him or herself, as the installation holds the “secret” of what is trying to be “shown” by not revealing nor reveling in its obviousness. Performance, which is just the opposite of conceptual art, attempts to introduce the body “Real” into movement by staging its event in such a way that its perception by spectators is duly “hesitated,” in the sense of time as *duree*, forcing estrangement and thus reflexion. Finally, with Conceptual Art, the force is to recognize art as an Idea where an anti-aesthetic approach requires that the witness (or artist) explicate to him or herself what the work is about. Time here is “hesitated” as well since, with some conceptual pieces, the viewer may never “get” it. The anti-narrative may never emerge.

Although these remarks may appear enigmatic because of the complexity of the contemporary shifts by artists to grasp anti-humanist notions of the self, I will begin by discussing *one* work of Francis Bacon as an artist who stood on the threshold between movement image and the time-image... still working with a “still” image but making it move, and *one* work by the Jochen Gertz, a conceptual artist whose “work” does away with representation, certainly not meant as a mere drift into abstraction or its variants. These two arts should help to articulate these somewhat troublesome theoretical musings.

**Francis Bacon: Nowhere Space and Time (Non-Euclidian Space)**

Bacon can be considered as *the* exemplary portrait artist in terms of emphasizing the psychic register of the Real as theorized by Lacan and exemplifying the time-image as contemplated by Deleuze. Deleuze (2004) has written a very important book exemplifying Bacon’s attempt to explore the body of the “flesh,” that is, the body of
sensation, what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) named (after Antonin Artaud) the “body without organs” (BwO). Sensation is no longer thought representationally—as the sense of stirring the emotions of the viewer—but in the sense of the consciousness of perceiving itself. This is not phenomenological for there is no “intent” by the consciousness for an object, which would plunge us back again into representation. While much can be said about Bacon, the approach here is to discuss his theory of affective embodiment by examining just one of his many works: *Triptych May-June 1973*. Since copyright laws are always problematic there is an excellent Bacon online site (http://www.francis-bacon.cx/) that lists his works chronologically. I encourage the reader to look up this particular work before reading ahead.

The first thing to note about Bacon is that many of his paintings are composed as triptychs, which seem to lend themselves immediately to narrative representation. It is precisely such narrative representation of the movement image that is being deconstructed and the time of the gaps existing in the Real between the three frames that are being engaged, implicating the viewer to “figure” it out this “other” space-time dimension. Sometimes two or more characters (figures) are placed in the same space, which suggests an interaction between them as if they are caught in the middle of an act, even when this act seems stilled (sleeping, sitting, lying around, waiting). Time is introduced into his paintings through a “rough” style of paint application to the figures (especially the heads and bodies). Heads and bodies appear to be in constant motion, as if the body is constantly flowing and shifting. This movement, however, is non-narratological. Something always “seems” to be going on, but the viewer is unable to piece together some coherent story between the three frames. Further, the figures are often enclosed in a translucent surround by means of circles, parallelepipeds, or frames within the canvas—as if there is a proximal distance between inside and outside
of the body that is constantly being imperceptibly exchanged.

*Triptych May-June 1973* shows a single subject performing a sequence of actions in a bathroom. Two doorways on opposite walls frame the figure. In western perception, text is read left to right. It appears at first glance that Bacon attempts often to consciously reverse this taken-for-granted perception by forcing the viewer to read right to left. The right panel depicts a naked man vomiting into a bathroom sink. He then crosses the room (middle panel) and sits on a toilet (left panel), as if he is dead or keeled over. His face is buried in his hands. Hands and face form one big mass. Such would be a “normative” reading of the work. On closer inspection however, such a reading is put into serious doubt. When one focuses on the *details* another more striking problematic emerges. The light switch on the left panel is repeated on the right panel, but is has now “moved” to the other door! The doorjamb that frames the figure is depicted frontally in the center panel but the angle of the doorjamb on the left panel is painted from a slight movement to the right showing a bit of the left door, while in the right panel the doorjamb have been painted from a slightly left perspective showing slightly the perspective of the right door. So the left and right panel seems to be mirror opposites. The viewer now cannot read the narrative from right to left nor left to right, but is positioned on the center panel.

Bacon is not illustrating an action sequence, a movement image. He is conceptualizing something more profound by the implication of time that is being introduced. A light bulb appears in the central panel, which is obviously missing in the left and right panels. The light-switch is also absent in the central panel. In this new subject position, the viewer must begin to read these panels as to their symmetry or comparability. On both the left and right panels the body is clearly in pain—excreting abject bodily fluids: shit and vomit. As reversals these panels present us with two holes—the asshole and the mouth hole; the ass-mouth connection form a “desiring machine” in Deleuze
and Guattari's (1983) terms. The central panel adds to the clue. What is striking in this panel is the shadow that is coming out of the doorway. Clearly, this is not a “naturalistic” shadow, a representation of the figure, but “the night of the world” to use Hegel’s phrase again. It is amorphous, having vampire-bat like qualities—what Deleuze and Guattari would name as “becoming-animal.” As a body fluid, this shadow seems more viscose—thicker and more substantial than the figure who seems rather insubstantial. As if the shadow that flows from his body is more overwhelming, draining him so that he only appears as a corpse, making him the ghost of the shadow, reversing the usual understanding of shadow and its object. Something in the body is afflicting the subject. The body Real—the suffering of physic pain is being juxtaposed to its externalization as abjected bodily fluids made possible through the ass-mouth assemblage machine. The physical excesses of the body are compared to the shadow-Thing that is overwhelming him. Hence, there is a similarity between all three events, held in the way Bacon has presented us with the body of sensation through representation that has reversed substantiality and its void, the kernel of our unconscious Real.

**Jochen Gertz: The Disappearance of the Object**

Jochen Gertz is an artist, but an artist who does not draw, paint or sculpt! Further, he does not create objects in the usual sense of the term, nor is there anything to “see” in the usual way art education has treated sight. He might be called a portrait artist since the “work” of his art grapples with memory, namely monuments as “time that is out of joint.” The idea of a monument is perhaps the apotheosis of what it means to remain in the realm of representation. The traditional purposes of a monument is to function like a stele, a beacon, to etch the memory into the most permanent and durable of materials—marble, stone, steel, bronze. Monuments are meant to center a community to a memory. All such commemoration leads to,
more or less, religious communion. It endorses an official memory to perpetuate a past recollection. Monuments act like banks—time and memory are locked into a social space like a vault, trapped as it were, into a permanent reminder.

Gertz is interested in the “other” of such memorializing, to awaken the forgetting that haunts every memorial of its permanency as it rusts, decays or is simply forgotten. His invisible monuments have a peculiar force to exhibiting what you are not supposed to see—the haunt of the Real. They make the spectator “see” what cannot be seen. They make the “visible” arise where it is lacking—to exhibit the time of absence of bodies and the memory gaps that are kept out of the perceptual space of representation. Their character is not “to say,” but to assert what cannot be said, the absent in the field of the visible. Like *The Scream*, these monuments plant a “bone in the throat,” so that their silence pierces that which is not being heard nor recollected. It forces the spectator to become a witness to that which is anamorphic to the monument itself. Gertz’s works initiate a transfer of memory into the viewer’s living memory, conveying the dead recollections of the monuments that usually mortify memory. Gertz by doing the “proper” work of art, once again releases time.

Although there are many examples in his oeuvre that continually demonstrate this uncanniness, let me take one: The Anti-Fascist Memorial in Hamburg (*Das Hamburger Mahnmal gegen Faschismus*), collaborated with his wife Esther Shavlev, and unveiled in Oct. 1986. (Again, I encourage the reader to google him—http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jochen_Gerz). The monument is a square column—40 feet high by three feet on each of its 4 sides. It was entirely wrapped with sheets of black lead. A sign in eight different languages was fixed to a nearby wall where spectators could read and then leave their signatures and thoughts on the monument by carving in the lead with the help of stilettos provided. (Some blasted the column with their shotguns, leaving their pellet marks of hate!) This phallic
column was meant to sink into the ground about six feet per year enabling inscribers to access its very peak. By Nov. 1993, five years later, it had completely vanished into the ground, becoming invisible. Only its flat top appeared at street level as a pavement stone covered by a glass plate as if to say that this is Germany's foundation. The sign for the instructions had appropriately ended with: "Since nothing can stand up for us against injustice." Gertz's conceptual monument changed its identity with the time of its movement to the point of its de-erection. No longer a souvenir, it became a memorial to the holes in memory, a memorial to oblivion, loss, absence and to the actual facts - all aspects of the Real. His "work" addresses the problem of representation by creating a screen to the effects of the Real. It is a non-specular resemblance, meta-mimetic in the way representation is erased through the time of its disappearance.

The "Work" of Art

The notion of "work" has emerged "time and time" again throughout this essay to suggest that the "work" of self-portraiture tackles the void of the Self in the register of the Real. This is the place of "becoming," as the consciousness of perceiving itself. This is where the difficulty of art lies, the difficulty that emerges when working in a world of the aestheticized image that surrounds us through the screen images of telematic technologies. Representation is not life. Representation cannot preserve life. It can only expose its undoing, not as the essence of life, but as death. Death, like the inevitable butterfly that is chloroformed and pinned in order to be studied through the microscope. If life is not to be shown to be just representation, as so many structuralist theories tend to do, then the dimension of virtual time in the psychic register of the Real has to be engaged in as in the "works" of artists like Gertz, Munch, Bacon. They reveal a dimension of becoming that forms the gaps of the seamless narrative we tell ourselves, the narrative of representation
that forgets the *unthought*—the "work" of creativity.

This to suggest that art education much engage the affective body (BwO) at the level, paradoxically that is "beyond" representation, not a easy task in a designer capitalist world where it is the business of the neo-capitalist enterprise to reproduce an aestheticized world of consumerable images. I recall seeing Alfredo Jaar's installation called *Geography=War*, 1990, I believe it was at the Venice Biennale but I am not sure, where the "secret" of the work was revealed to me only after I entered the darkened room and tried to figure out just what *was* being shown—it was like a rebus puzzle. The installation consisted of a series of photograph-bearing light boxes that hung over six water-filled oil drums tightly packed together 3X3, the photos reflecting on the surface. I could blow on the water and make each one quiver, and also see my silhouette as a reflection when I peered over to look at the photos. One of the images that quivered in the water showed several people in hazmat suits investigating what looked like a dumpsite. Another image that reflected on the floating pool was a man holding his hands to his face. I soon realized that this was about corporate exploitation and expropriation not only of Nigeria's natural exports, such as oil, but also the use of Nigeria as a dumpling ground for toxic industrial waste by US and Europe. Jaar's light boxes reverse the usual advertised goods by projecting Nigerian people suffering from this capitalist exploitation, and we the viewers are potentially implicated, symbolically shown when we stare into the barrel to see the sights of devastation.

This essay points to the task at hand if a political and ethical engagement of the world by our art students is to be maintained, but does not offer some sort of definitive curriculum. It suggests a change to installation, performance, time-based imagery, and conceptual art, which offers the possibility of such a direction. I believe these arts offer the power of a self-reflexion, where the core of the self as BwO is disturbed as an affective neurological level as marked by
the “X.” In the past, the field of art education has tended to follow (albeit belatedly) the trends of contemporary art—theoretically and stylistically. There are no guarantees that the field of education, which is continually seduced by representational images, will engage such a possibility. Is it even possible in overcrowded schools that are perhaps structured to prevent such awareness? “Time” will tell.1

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References


