

**PIERRE HUYGHE**

**IL Y A**

Morphogenesis refers to the way that matter generates form. The morphogenesis of an egg, for example, involves a complex process by which columns of calcite stack side by side to surround a membrane. It is how skeletal remains of sea creatures aggregate in shallow warm waters, eventually forming the crystalline compounds we call limestone. Rather than the shape of a thing being imposed from the outside, there is life proper to matter itself—an immanent potential for novelty and invention.

We can only ever anticipate the spontaneous self-generation of form. It surprises us, as it grows and bubbles from within. The same may be said for what lies here in the basement at the beginning of our season with Pierre Huyghe.

FEB. 21–MAR. 30, 2014

## EVERYTHING

FEB. 20, 7:30 PM

### DANCE FOR RADIUM

When the sun sets, a dance for Marie Curie.

FEB. 21, 6:00–8:00 PM

### OPENING

Save the date for the eighth season of The Artist's Institute with Pierre Huyghe.

### PHEROMONE

The German biochemist Adolf Butenandt spent twenty years researching the female silk-worm moth, otherwise known as *Bombyx mori*. During this period he noticed that the moths emitted certain chemicals that triggered social interactions within their species. In 1959, these chemicals were given the name “pheromones.”

In the restricted space of subterranean tunnels, odor is trapped for a much longer period than in outdoor areas, making it an ideal way to mark territory. Rats, for ex-

ample, leave traces of urine in their environment. Smelling one of these marks, other rats are able to distinguish details like social status, sex, and sexual state of the individual who has effectively left its chemical calling card.

Inside The Artist's Institute, a sex pheromone from the clitoral gland of female brown rats has been applied to select areas of the walls and floor. It is an ovulation-indication chemosignal that acts as a scent mark for the male. It is a clear, colorless to light-yellow liquid with a chemical nomenclature of (2E,6E,10E,14E,18E,22E)-2,6,10,15,19,22-hexamethyl-2,6,10,14,18,22-tetracosahexaene, more commonly known as squalene. Rats are not the only creatures attracted to squalene: cockroaches are too.

### HOLE FOR RAT

In the first part of the twentieth century, there were three types of rats living in New York City: the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), which lives in burrows and

stays close to the ground; the black or ship rat (*Rattus rattus*), which prefers attics and maritime life; and the roof rat (*Rattus rattus alexandrinus*), a subspecies of the black rat. At the present time, there is only one kind. The brown rat ate or otherwise killed all its underground opponents.

This hole, which connects to an interstitial space beneath the gallery floor, is perfectly sized for a rat.

### SPIDERS

The warm crevices of basements are a veritable oasis for the Pholcidae or Cellar spider.

When it senses a visitor entering its territory, it begins to vibrate. Flexing its legs and pumping its body in a circular motion, it transforms into a blurry optical illusion that confuses predators.

Pholcidae are trompe l'oeil tricksters, too. When food is scarce, they search out the webs of their neighbors and extend their legs with a “tap, tap, tap.” In spider-language, this “tap” means “I'm trapped,” from

an insect as it struggles to escape its fate. When the web's owner comes over to retrieve its fake-prey, the cellar spider is waiting. The trap sprung, it captures and eats its fellow spider.

### FLY ELECTROCUTOR DEVICE

Fernando Ortega, *Untitled*, 2003. Fly electrocutor device, 26 x 13 x 4 inches.

Courtesy of the artist and kurimanzutto, mexico city. Every time an insect is attracted to the light and gets electrocuted, the room plunges into temporary darkness.

### DRESS FOR RADIUM DANCE

Loie Fuller (1862–1928) was well known in Paris for her dancing. One of her most famous dances *Le Papillon* earned her the nickname the Butterfly Girl, because she used a flowing gown to simulate the delicate movements of the winged creature in flight. Fuller was also well known for her pyrotechnics. A friend of Marie Curie, she was inquisitive about the

properties of radium, which she thought would give her stage costumes a special glow. Though Curie discouraged her from experimenting with the toxic substance, Fuller insisted on applying phosphorescent salts to a dress in her laboratory. To thank her chemist-host, she performed a radium dance only for her.

#### LIMESTONE

Most limestone is produced through a natural version of collecting seashells. The skeletal remains of sea creatures aggregate in shallow, warm waters forming their crystalline compound of calcium carbonate. The sedimentary rock appears in various forms: it was used to build the Great Pyramids, and its consumed as filler for toothpaste and bread as well as by birds as a nutrient for strengthening their bones and form their eggs. At the same time, it is relatively fragile and easily re-dispersed through acid erosion and biological metabolism. By virtue of its abundant and protean character, limestone

can be conceived of as a kind of medium for slowly recirculating the history of maritime life through our material and ecological landscape.

#### OXYGEN

Oxygen makes up approximately 20–21 percent by volume of room air. Two thirds of the human body, by mass, is oxygen, and it is essential for most organic and inorganic life. Yet the anxieties sewn into its historical descriptions are not inaccurate: alone, oxygen is highly explosive and when bonded with any number of other elements, it becomes corrosive.

#### TEXT

Excerpts from *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things* by Tristan Garcia, translated by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh University Press, 2014). Originally published as *Forme et objet: Un traité des choses* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2010).

#### *Absence and Presence*

Small or large *existent* objects

are not enough to make a universe.

They must be *present*.

One may claim that objects exist in a dead or absent universe. The fact that objects once *were* but are no more would produce an absence of objects. Objects would exist, but they would be absent. But the universe *is not* merely existent; it is *present*. Being (and comprehension) is not enough to account for the fact that things are *there*.

Objects can be by always being absent, which means that a universe where objects *are* could very well turn out to be a dead universe where objects *would be*, but would be *dead* or *absent*.

The universe as we know it is not a dead or absent universe, because objects are, but are not limited to being—they are present.

In an undead, eternal world, objects could just as easily not be *here and now*, but *eternally*. In a certain Einsteinian interpretation of time, causal connections alone would exist objectively, and past, future, and present would always be

signs of the subjective insufficiency of our specific relation to these causal connections. In this *eternal* world, objects would not have to be present, and events would be reducible to objects. They would not happen, but they would be. But the fact that things are present for me, or for us, is enough to assume that presence is in the universe. Since I am a part of the universe, the fact that presence is *for me* sufficiently demonstrates that presence is *for the universe*.

What is presence? Far from being either an intuitable or indexicable mysterious concept, presence is a relation that connects a thing to what a thing is in. More precisely, the connection between a thing's two senses, being and comprehension, constitutes its presence. Presence is a thing's being and comprehension, which in turn become *something*.

Let us get around the problem of this proposition by defining absence. If only one presence exists, two types of absence exist. Every absence

is an operation on the presence of a thing. Let there be an object A comprehended in an object B—for example, my heart in my body. Suppose that an absencing operation is carried out. Suppose that either B comprehends A and A is not in B, or A is in B and B does not comprehend A. In the first case, my heart is removed from my body. I claim that my body comprehends my heart (no body without a heart), and that my heart is not in my body. My body lacks my heart. In the second case, my heart is in my body (a heart can only develop within an organism), but my body does not comprehend my heart (it is empty). My heart lacks my body. Thus, I consider either an absence of my heart for my body, or an absence of my body for my heart. But absence is unilateral; it is the absence of something for another thing.

Absence is either comprehension without being, or being without comprehension. In the first case, absence resembles *emptiness*: something comprehends another thing that is not

there. In the second case, absence resembles *exile*: something is in another thing, but this other thing doesn't comprehend this something.

The two faces of absence, emptiness and exile, are the two possible operations on presence (either removing being from comprehension or comprehension from being). Being present, on the other hand, is being in what comprehends me and being comprehended by what I am.

I am present in this room when I am in the room and when the room comprehends me. I am absent from this room when this room comprehends me in some way (the room comprehends my memory, the fact that I was there, my footprints, the possibility that I could be there, for my thought or for that of another), though I am not inside the room. And I lack this room if I am in this space—for example, by imagining that I remain there—when the room doesn't comprehend me or is not around me.

An object is present in another object when the *being*

and *comprehension* of two objects are conjoined. Therefore, the presence of the first object in the second object is the dyadic meaning of the relationship that binds them together (being and comprehending) as a single thing.

*Presence* exists between two objects.

Every presence is bilateral: the first object is in the second object and the second object comprehends the first object. Absence is the operation through which one object does not correspond to the other object, either through emptiness or through exile.

Either an object's presence always exists for another object, or a thing's presence always exists for the world. Either an object is present in another object (and in the universe), or a thing is present in the world.

An object or a thing can *be* without being *present*. If not *present*, it is *absent*, since being is never strong enough to demonstrate or guarantee the presence of what is. Comprehension can be emptied of be-

ing, or being can be exiled from comprehension.

The presence of objects is their bilateral relation; their absence is a unilateral relation. If a person disappears from my life, then either I comprehend this person, and this person exists for me although I do not exist for this person (since the person is dead), or this person can comprehend me, although I pay no attention to her existence. By absence, I mean in every case a unilateral relation.

On the other hand, presence is a bilateral relation between two objects.

What we call presence in the world is nothing other than a relation that connects me to the world, through which I am in the world, and through which the world comprehends me and counts me among the number of objects in it.

Far from being inexplicable, the presence of things is simply their bilateral relation—the fact that they exist for each other. The presence of things is disclosed not merely in our sensible intuition of things,

but also in thought and in language. By making the presence between things and world compact, one reduces presence to an inexpressible mystery, inaccessible to thinking, or considers it possible to restrict access to presence through rational reduction. In truth, the presence of things allows one to experience *as well as* claim that presence exists, if one defines it through the conjunction of being and comprehension.

Since 'being' and 'comprehending' are two terms that cannot be defined separately, presence is always primary and absence must be an operation through which one artificially splits a thing in two. By accumulating the memory of my lover, which is with me, and the fact that my lover is currently elsewhere, I create the chimera of an absence, an emptiness, or a being that I comprehend within me, but which is not with me. In reality, my lover is not absent, since I must relate to her memory or to the projection that I make of her actual, distant being: her memory or

image is present for me. Strictly speaking, of course, my lover is neither her memory nor her image. But since I can identify my lover with what she is in my memory or in my imagination, I can lack her, I can artificially comprehend her, contain her inside me without her being there inside me. This is what we call emptiness.

If I have the impression of always being in my country, while my country does not comprehend me, while it is not around me, I can remain in something without this thing accommodating me. This is what we call exile.

While presence is real, absences are only subjective operations on reality. Absences exist no less than presence, although differently.

#### *Presence and Event*

Objects and events exist in the universe. Objects are things in other things. Events are presences of things or presences of objects.

A primary event is a thing's presence in the world.

While this chair is an object, like this colour green is an object, *the fact that this chair exists* is an event, and *the fact that this green exists* is also an event. *The fact that this chair is green* is a secondary event, since it is not an event of a thing, but of an object. The existence of this chair in the world makes this chair a thing. The existence of this chair among green objects makes this chair an object (a green object). On the other hand, the fact that this green chair exists in the world is again a primary event, an event of a thing, because this green chair is 'something'.

An event always concerns a thing's or an object's mode of presence. An event is in fact an object that hinges not around a thing, but a thing's *presence*. Whether things appear, disappear, change, or whether they are so or otherwise, events exist.

Some ways of thinking conceive of worlds of events, rather than worlds of objects—for example, ways of thinking about relation, flux, becoming, or states of things. They make

a derivate event of an object, an artificial division from the primacy of what happens, of the more or less intense presence of things.

But, in truth, objects and events are equal. Mutually indifferently to each other, they equally relate to things. Things exist. Things placed in relation to each other are objects, and the relations of things to other things are events. In the strict sense, objects and events are equal and belong to the same system—the objective system of accumulation and of the universe. However, objects and events are equivalent to things without belonging to the same system. Things are formal; they are solitary and in the world.

Thus, we rule out any consideration of objects and events as secondary in relation to things. Instead, by triangulating their relations, things exist formally and objects and events exist objectively. Objects are things in other things. Events are the ways in which things belong to other things. Every ontology that privileges

events over objects and things, or objects rather than things and events, or things to the detriment of objects and events, is groundless and systematically leads to compactness.

### *An Intensified Universe*

A living thing is an event that intensifies something novel in the universe. The emergence and development of living organisms is not a rupture that *introduces* something novel into the universe, nor is it the mere continuation of physico-chemical novelties which occurred when there were no existent living things anywhere in the universe. Even though living things are local events, which are mere fractions of the objective universe, living things are also events that considerably intensify the universe. Living things augment the universe more than formally (by simply adding new things). Living things *give value* to the universe (by adding things which are more than what they are).

The emergence of living things does not mark the pas-

sage to another universe, nor the perpetuation of the same universe. It consists neither in an irreducible rupture with the physical universe, a qualitative leap, nor in a pure and simple continuation, whereby living things could have been potentially comprehended in the antecedent properties of matter. The emergence of living objects is the intensification of certain structures of the material universe, that is, the local growth of certain mechanisms and properties, including the phenomenon of self-transmission. This intensification does not mean that living things were potentially contained in inanimate things, but only that what we call 'living things' corresponds to a certain degree of intensity in the relation between the being and comprehension of objects of the universe. Intensity is not *formal*—since formally everything is equal—but *objective*. Therefore, life cannot be derived from the flat world of things, which is altogether extensive and without intensity. Objectively, on the other

hand, in the universe, which is constituted by objects that more or less comprehend each other, everything is subject to variable intensities. In the universe, thoroughly objective (non-formalisable, non-derivative) conditions allow objects to self-intensify. This process of self-intensification, which includes reproduction, the maintenance of metabolism, the consumption and expending of energy, and intergenerational information transmission, constitutes a local *living* universe.

The universe of living things is not an empire within an empire, but an objectively intensified place of the universe which, like the universe (the biggest possible thing), is stratified into levels of comprehension, through the embedding of levels of objects in higher levels, themselves comprehended in even higher levels. The universe of living things reproduces the structure of the universe, the structure of comprehended and comprehending objects, but it also intensifies it by including a novel intermediary *cellular* level

between the molecular level and the bodily level.

Neil Campbell writes in the introduction to his textbook, *Biology*, that:

Biological organisation is based on a hierarchy of structural levels, each level building on the levels below it. Starting at the lowest level, atoms, the chemical building blocks of all matter, are ordered into complex biological molecules. Many of the molecules of life are arranged into minute structures called organelles, which are in turn the components of cells. Cells are subunits of organisms, and organisms are the units of life. Some organisms, such as amoebas, consist of single cells, but others are multicellular aggregates of many specialized types of cells [ . . . ] Multicellular organisms exhibit three major structural levels above the cell: Similar cells are grouped into tissues; specific arrangements of different tissues form organs; and organs are grouped into organ systems.

Living things can be apprehended, like every objective reality, through a system of being and comprehension in *levels*: an object comprehends other objects, and it is itself comprehended among other objects by a more important object. The objective order derives from the *differences* between levels (whereas the formal order derives from their equality, which short-circuits the objective order). ‘Properties’ or ‘characteristics’ are what allow one to differentiate the levels, to separate what is comprehended and what comprehends into distinct, hierarchical planes. Therefore, a living organism comprehends organs, which comprehend tissues, which comprehend specialised cells. The cell is the primary object of the local universe of living things. It is the object that all living things comprehend, but it comprehends nothing living. The cell is therefore the *lower* limit of life. But, Campbell writes:

In the hierarchy of biological

organisation, there are tiers beyond the individual organism. A population is a localised group of organisms belonging to the same species; populations of different species living in the same area make up a biological community; and community interactions that include nonliving features of the environment, such as soil and water form an ecosystem. [A group of different ecosystems, spread across a vast geographical expanse, makes up a biome; the latter introduces uniform climactic conditions that determine a dominant type of vegetation. Finally, the biosphere comprehends all environments where life is, in water as well as in parts of the soil and air surrounding the planet.]

In this way, living organisms are comprehended in a population, comprehended in a biological community, comprehended in an ecosystem, comprehended in a biome, comprehended in a biosphere. The biosphere is, for the time being, the *upper* limit of the local universe of

living things. Because it is a local universe, it is a limited part of the universe (the biggest possible thing), which is structured into levels like a universe. Everything between a cell and the biosphere is living. Campbell concludes: ‘Investigating biological organisation at its many levels is fundamental to the study of human life [. . .], beginning with the chemistry of life and ending with the study of ecosystems and the biosphere, the sum of all Earth’s ecosystems.’

Living things are thus places of the universe, structured like a universe. They are something novel, since they have not always existed. They correspond neither to appearances, on the grounds of nothingness or of something absolutely nonexistent before, nor to actualisations of potentiality or of something latent in the matter of the physical universe. A living thing is the objective intensification of what we have formally defined as a ‘self’, that is, of a thing’s difference between *that which is in the thing* and *that in which this thing*

*is*. The physico-chemical intensification of this relation—under objective, non-formal conditions, impossible to anticipate, derive, or formalise—is the key to the emergence of what are described as ‘properties of living things’. Campbell writes:

With each step upward in the hierarchy of biological order, novel properties emerge that were not present at the simpler levels of organisation. These *emergent properties* result from interactions between components. A molecule such as a protein has attributes not exhibited by any of its component atoms, and a cell is certainly much more than a bag of molecules. If the intricate organisation of the human brain is disrupted by a head injury, that organ will cease to function properly, even though all its parts may still be present. And an organism is a living whole greater than the sum of parts.

This trivial thesis has a formal meaning that we must clarify: an organism, like every thing,

cannot be reduced to what composes it. On this view, no differences exist between protozoa, crystal, or dust particles. *That which something is is not that which is this thing.* In contrast to what some biologists may think, the irreducibility of what forms a thing to the sum of all its components in no way accounts for the emergence of living things—in particular, since it accounts for *everything*, that is, the functioning between things and world, in general. It is certainly a condition of the novelty of living things—but it is also a condition of our galaxy's formation.

Therefore, the emergence of living things cannot restrict an organism (a macrolevel of the universe) by reducing it to what composes it (a microlevel of the universe). Instead, the emergence of living things is the *intensification* of this irreducibility. The property of irreducibility of a thing to what is in this thing, is this thing, and composes this thing accounts for the stratification of the entire material universe into lev-

els. The emergence of living things is conceivable from the fact that this irreducibility has a particular *intensity*.

When Campbell, who expresses the most widespread opinion in contemporary biology, dismisses 'vitalism' by summoning emergence as the irreducibility of certain structural properties of a macrolevel to a microlevel of material organisation, he is undoubtedly correct, but he does not see how his argument is weakened as soon as one understands that no thing has properties that are reducible to the properties of what composes it.

This theme of emergence [seems to support the theory called *vitalism*, according to which life results from a supernatural phenomenon that goes beyond the laws of physics and chemistry. But in reality it] accents the importance of structural arrangement and applies to inanimate material as well as to life. [In the inanimate world, a change in the structure of a substance also attributes emergent properties to an emergent

substance.] Diamonds and graphite are both made of carbon, but they have different properties because their carbon atoms are arranged differently. [Vital phenomena are not explained by a mysterious 'vital force', but by physical principles applied to living beings.] The emergent properties of life are not supernatural, but simply reflect a hierarchy of structural organisation without counterpart among inanimate objects.

Emergence is not connected to living things, but rather to the irreducibility of a material level of organisation to a microlevel. Moreover, it is connected to the irreducibility—otherwise a thing becomes compact—of *that which is a thing to that which this thing is*. But the radical difference of living things, their novelty, their events, does not therefore derive from emergent properties, from a structural organisation 'without counterpart' among inanimate objects, since Campbell just showed that diamonds and graphite have different properties that emerge from

different arrangements of carbon atoms. One cannot maintain both that the emergence of living things is no different from the emergence of novel properties in the material world, from one level of organisation to another, and that the emergence of living things is due to a novel structural organisation of living matter 'without counterpart' in the inanimate universe. The emergence of living things is connected to a structural organisation of matter *comparable to* that of inanimate things, since there is nothing in living things that is not also in inanimate things (including structures)—with the exception that the organisation of living things is *intensified*.

#### *Life and Self*

How does one define the intensified form of matter that we call living things—all levels of living things, from cells to the biosphere?

Several modern definitions of living things employ a set of concepts whose only commonality appears to be

the 'self': reproduction, nutrition (and other metabolic functions), growth and development, energy transformation, adaptation to environmental constraints, transmission of genetic information, the capacity to fulfil these functions in an autonomous manner (a requirement which poses problems, and risks limiting the definition to autotrophs, but aims at avoiding the struggle against viruses or parasitoids), and so on. What cuts across all definitions of living things, from Antiquity to their renewal in the evolutionist undertaking, is a definition of *selfhood*.

Formally, we have seen that 'everything has a self', in the sense that every thing, anything, is the difference between *that which is the thing* and *that which the thing is*. For every thing, the self is nothing other than the difference between what this thing comprehends and what comprehends this thing. Now, however one looks at the problem, it seems that a living thing is a thing that *intensifies* its self, the dif-

ference between that which is in the thing and that in which the thing is. On this view, reproduction is an object's possibility of beginning in another object. If reproduction is asexual, the self repeats and undergoes a change. If reproduction is sexual, the self becomes another through another. Whereas every temporally existent, non-living object loses its novelty as it endures, a living object retains something of its novelty as it endures: the possibility of reproducing. This possibility does not consist in beginning exactly as it was, but rather in beginning something different from its identical possibility (although affected by mutations).

The novelty of the event of an organism is thus retained as an object inside this same object. This object, which can expand and grow, is living insofar as it temporally intensifies and supports its self. Metabolism, in the end, refers to the set of functions that organise the relation between what is in the organism (the living object) and what the organism is

in (its environment). What is living is what supports, accentuates, and maintains this difference, until constituting the self not as the formal difference between what is comprehended and what comprehends, but as an objective limit between inside and outside.

A stone's self marks the difference between what composes the stone and what this stone is in. An organism's self is the greater or lesser intensification, through physico-chemical processes, of the relation between what composes the organism and what this organism is in. Energy transfers between what is embedded in the environment and what is inside the organism maintaining this organism correspond to a self-activation particular to living things. Every living organism uses energy as a means of self-preservation, through the degradation of organic matter, photosynthesis, nutrition, and the ingestion and digestion of vegetable or animal organisms. What maintains *itself* and supports *itself* lives.

The cell was discovered in the seventeenth century, but only considered as a primary component of living things by Matthias Jakob Schleiden and Theodor Schwann in the nineteenth century. The cell is the primary object of living things and the object par excellence which functions as an intensification of self-difference, that is, as an intensification, through energy exchange, of the difference between what is in the cell and what the cell is in.

At each level of living things, all the objective definitions that we can give to living things are traversed by formal self-determinations: homeostasis, the internal regulation that maintains an internal milieu within vital limits, despite the fluctuations and influence of the external environment (for temperature in particular); self-regulation; the adaptive characteristics of living things (the taking into account of *that in which it is* for the evolution of *that which it comprehends*).

*Artefactuality Relieves Humanity of Animality, Animality Relieves Humanity of Artefactuality* Humans exist only *between the two*. Humanity not only has an environment, like all other animals, it *is* an environment. What is humanity, that is, a certain animal species which evolved, like all others, determines what humanity is in an unpredictable, and sometimes errant, way. Humanity may be formal, substantial, or objective.

However, the decision to consider living things in an evolutionary representation led us to consider humanity as a specific event enclosed within itself. In this view, humanity is one particular evolved species, different from others, but, like others, a particular evolved species. Thus, humanity took itself to be less an object (a creature) *between* beast and god than an event *between* animal and machine. It is naïve to enthusiastically or fearfully believe that in doing so humanity changes and changes itself. Humanity only ever changes by being the same humanity. For a long

time, at the very least in Western thought, humanity distinguished itself between beast and god as *creature* and *creator*. Then humanity distinguished and identified itself between animal and machine. Then it identified itself with animality to distinguish itself from machines, and identified itself with machines to distinguish itself from animality. Therefore, modern-day humanity does not reduce itself to animality; it only ever did so to avoid reducing itself to a machine. Nor does modern-day humanity reduce itself to a machine, other than to avoid reducing itself to animality.

When we feel that we are nothing but machines, we remember that we are animals. When we think that we are nothing but animals, we remember the artefacts that we produce in our image. We have no other identity and we cannot refer to a transcendent human identity. This would be a mistake. We only exist as humans *between*. We can cure ourselves of animality only through artificiality, and of artificiality only

through animality.

Humans no longer think they are the centre of the world, but they remain a milieu. Humanity only makes sense *between*.

So, the human animal species acquired the capacity to handle objects of its environment as forms, and to grasp objects in order to make of them the form of another either present or absent thing. This twofold capacity to present and represent places the human animal species in an environment of present and represented objects, through which it continually intensifies the living universe. Amidst these presences and representations, the human animal species is itself something. It lives between the animality that constitutes it and the representations that it constitutes.

Humanity is a representation-producing animal species which more or less coexists with the representations that it produces in the form of artefacts.

*Presentation and Representation*  
But a gap clearly exists between

a piece of clothing and a Gustav Klimt painting. It is not a problem of knowing whether or not these objects are useful or purposeful, which would make them non-artistic. What we must understand is that a piece of clothing gives form to an *existent* body, while a painting gives form to a *nonexistent* body.

The difference, then, is that a representation is an object that a form will always lack—which makes it open to an original kind of interpretation: the search for what fills this emptiness. We may certainly know that Dora was the model for some Picasso canvas, that Dora is not in the canvas, and that the painting is a form, a container, whose content remains absent. We can therefore fill this absence with something else, project ourselves in it, interpret it in other ways, and so forth.

The presentation of some nonexistent thing should absolutely not be confused with figuration. For example, an Yves Klein blue monochrome and a Pierre Soulage black are

also presentations of something absent, quite simply because they are the absenting of something present. Indeed, a painting—the monochrome—this three-dimensional object, this canvas mounted by a stretcher bar, is not a three-dimensional object whose sides are all equivalent, but rather a coloured surface contemplated as such. For example, to see the monochrome—which figures nothing—is to not consider the painting as an object whose front and back are equivalent, to not dwell upon the edges of the painting. Rather, to see the monochrome is to contemplate its surface, to reduce this three-dimensional thing to two dimensions: a surface of a single colour. Although a painting figures nothing and does not copy an existent object in the world, it nevertheless represents by absenting one dimension, the third dimension, in order to create a surface effect. By absenting one dimension of the object, we recognise the pictorial form of this work. It is because a spatial dimension

is absented from the present object that something absent, whatever it is, is presented on the canvas.

Through a law of exchange, which is the very definition of representation, the absenting of something present entails the presentation of something absent.

Therefore, unlike a presentation, a representation consists in some relation between *absence* and *presence*: a present object (an image, sound, material, and so on) absents itself by becoming a form (an object's negative) such that something (anything) absent becomes present.

Whether it is pictorial, poetic, musical, graphic, or cinematographic, a representation has this price to pay: to make present something absent, one must make absent something present.

In photography, the fixed light on a surface, this plentitudinous and solid material thing, appears as a hole, like a void, which gives form to faces, streets, and landscapes which

we know are absent. This exchange is not altogether contractual (it is not *primarily* a cultural rule). Rather, it is the possibility, which humanity inscribes in things, that this thing may not be a thing, but the form of another thing.

#### *To Absent A Presence in order to Present an Absence*

We must at all costs distinguish this concept of representation from the classical idea of *mimesis*—or substitutable representation (what is represented duplicates something which could be present)—and also from the modern idea of 'signification'.

Unlike in *mimetic* theories, representation cannot be reduced to producing a duplicate. A work can represent something absent, which is not necessarily present 'elsewhere' and does not necessarily exist prior to the work representing it.

Unlike in *semiotic* theories, representation cannot be reduced to a triadic relation. The difference between a sign and a representation is that a sign can

always vary without affecting what it signifies, whereas a representation cannot be affected without affecting what it represents. *To signify* is to attribute a sign to an object through one or several other signs. *To represent* is to attribute a presence to an absence and vice versa. In the sign, presence withdraws from the relation. In the representation, nothing other than some relation exists between presence and absence. Of course, every representation is open to interpretation, and can thus be used as a sign. But this is precisely because a representation as a signification is equivalent to a representation that is *not* a signification. This is the difference between a notice signifying a ban on smoking and a painting representing a cigarette.

The notice that signifies the ban on smoking can be affected without affecting what it signifies. We can cross out the cigarette with a red or black line, add smoke to the cigarette, break off its filter, replace it with a pipe, frame it in a circle or a square, and so on.

The meaning will be the same: it is forbidden to smoke here. On the other hand, as a pictorial image or representation, if I change the painted or drawn cigarette's colour, if I modify its form, it will not at all represent the same thing.

A visual or sonorous sign is understood only within a triadic relationship, between the sign, its object, and a series of interpretants, that is, with other signs that attribute the sign to its object. By affecting a sign, I can very well not affect its object, if the series of interpretants continues to connect this sign to this object (a pipe can replace the cigarette while continuing to signify the act of smoking).

On the other hand, a pictorial, musical, poetic, narrative, architectural, or scenic representation is limited to a two-term relation between *presence* and *absence*. If I affect the present and absented object, I also affect the absent and presented, and thus represented, object.

Every representation can make us a sign, neither more nor less than a present object:

a melody can signify as much as a cry; a drawing can signify as much as a trail of tracks in the snow; a dance can signify as much as a threatening gesture, and so on. Signification is a much more extensive system than representation, and goes beyond much of the latter.

A black flag can signify for a traumatised woman the death of her mother, or, on the contrary, for another, the pirate ship of his childhood, constructed with friends. Any phenomenon, when it is connected to different interpretants, can refer to a different object.

#### *Between Nature and Universality: Culture*

Culture is the *milieu* between nature and universality for naturally constituted animals who attempt to constitute the universe by presenting and representing things. In this way, culture is not essentially connected to humanity. Other primates who discover new, more universal behaviours, understand more things, transmit these behaviours, and represent

and present things, also possess a culture. Take the famous and controversial example reported by the schoolteacher Satsue Mito. On the Japanese island of Koshima, Imo, a macaque, discovered how to wash sweet potatoes in a freshwater stream, removing soil from them before eating them. This behaviour did not exist in the neighbouring colonies, and yet, after its discovery, was transmitted from generation to generation and became widespread among local macaque groups; eight out of ten macaques acquired this technique. One may rationally think that this behaviour is in some weak and unrestricted sense 'cultural'. Feeding was natural for these macaques. The transmitted desire to eat the best possible tasting potato indicates a search for a universal, that is, for a 'possible maximum'. Between the two, the possibility of an individual act, then transmitted and inherited, connecting nature and universality, produced culture.

Many animal species have 'presentational' cultures.

The human species has, in addition, a 'representational' culture, which expresses itself via rule-bound or deregulated arts.

Therefore, every set of rules that holds *between* nature and universality, through presentation or representation, is cultural. A cultural rule is the determination either of 'possible *possibilia*' (such as every prohibition, which recommends not doing what one can, however, do—in games, languages, bans on incest, kinship systems, strategies of alliance and counter-alliance). It is clear that all animal behaviours which presuppose orders of precedence, of prohibition, and of dominance are cultural. Human culture, in the strict sense, is thus not something specific, but the intensification of the cultural animal, in the broadest sense. Its development is marked by new systems of rules and representational regulation: rule-bound languages, conceptual knowledge, artistic disciplines, and normative groups.

The cultural animal is clearly not opposed to nature,

as early ethnologists claimed. Nor is the cultural animal opposed to universality, as relativists claimed who counted on the differential intensity between human sets of rules from one group to another, thus dissolving the possibility of a common universe. The cultural animal stands, in truth, equidistant from nature and universality.

Nature constitutes every animal. All animals aim to collectively comprehend a universe through presentation or representation, that is, to make their behaviour superlative, to direct it towards the most unrestricted possible comprehension of possibilities. All animals must construct rules. In order to separate nature from the universe, they must determine possible *possibilia* and impossible *possibilia*. And each culture is precisely what separates nature from the universe.

Nature is the objective universe. Nature constitutes the universe. But the objective universe is not natural. If it were natural, it would be compact. When animals attempt to

distinguish the universe from nature, they show how culture derives from nature and universality. But only *some* cultures are between nature and the universe. The plurality of cultures is necessary for two reasons. First, de-compacting nature and universality requires passing through a cultural intermediary. According to our logic, nature and universality cannot be obtained in a single culture, since a single culture would directly fuse nature and universe. Second, each culture is an arbitrary and contingent set of rules, of possible and impossible *possibilia*. Each culture denies certain possibilities and accepts others, such that one cultural combination can always be contrasted with another.

The diversity of cultures intensified in the human species while being neutralised in many other animal species. In order to distinguish nature ('what is in all objects') and the universe ('what all objects are'), this diversity differentiates necessity from contingency, the determination of some rules

at the expense of others. All prohibitions, uses, customs, systems of alliance, and representational genres double the possibility of some relations between humans by establishing these relations as either possible or impossible. Nature is not universal. Therefore, an order of objects and events exists, but the objective universe is irreducible to the flat and undifferentiated formal world.

Philippe Descola has shown that the limit between nature and culture is cultural, precisely because nature is not an object or a set of objects and events comparable and opposable to a culture. Nature constitutes objects together—namely, living objects. Culture is a given order of these objects, bound by identifiable rules. Nature is unidirectional: it *is* things, but it *comprehends* nothing. Nature therefore does not have qualities, particulars, or limits. On the other hand, a culture has two senses. Nature constitutes each culture, while each culture constitutes a universal. A culture both *is*

and *comprehends*. Universality comprehends the maximum of possible objects and events, but is not, on its own, an object or an event.

FEB. 21–MAR, 8

99.5 DEGREES

A constant 99.5 degrees must be kept for the embryo to reach full maturity. The incubator regulates itself with a digital thermostat and a built-in fan. In addition to maintaining the internal temperature of the device, it is crucial that the external temperature of The Artist's Institute stays relatively constant throughout the incubation period. A room temperature of 70–80 degrees is ideal, and fresh air without drafts is necessary. No direct sunlight should strike the incubator.

The Artist's Institute is at the bottom of a four-story apartment building and can get quite cold. New York City landlords are only obligated by law to provide heat to residential tenants, leaving commercial rent-

ers the responsibility to warm their spaces by whatever means available. As a basement, The Artist's Institute has few options. It currently uses the free heat emanating off the pipes running along its walls and ceilings, though it is hardly reliable. New York is experiencing record-low temperatures this winter. On January 7 it was a mere 4 degrees Fahrenheit in Central Park, the coldest the city had been since 1896.

MAR. 8, 11:00 AM–  
5:00 PM

·  
SYMPOSIUM

A compressed history of Pierre Huyghe will unfold as a series of case studies presented by his interlocutors, each of whom have developed thinking around particular works. It will be held at The Artist's Institute, whose diminutive scale will allow for a more intimate exchange of ideas than is usually possible in this format. Seating is first-come, first-served. A recording will be available online in mid March.

11:00 AM

Session One: Tom McDonough (*Snow White Lucie, The Third Memory, No Ghost Just a Shell*); Julieta Aranda (*Mobile and The Castle of Turing*); Sinziana Ravini (*The Host and the Cloud*)

Discussion, moderated by Alex Kitnick

2:30 PM

Session Two: Liam Gillick (*The Association of Freed Time*); Lynne Cooke (*Streamside Day*); Dorothea von Hantelmann (*Untilled*)

Discussion, moderated by Jenny Jaskey

CV

Pierre Joseph, *CV*, 1999, A4 inkjet print on photo paper, Courtesy Air de Paris and Pierre Joseph.

A fittingly non-comprehensive and unreasonably modest CV for the quietly influential French artist Pierre Joseph. Using a kind of elliptical recursion, the single page print-out is an experiment in biography that manages to simultaneously tell us nearly nothing and almost everything about Joseph and his practice. That is, his

most obvious successes as an artist are denied any priority over a list of quotidian jobs working on conveyer belts and telecommunications systems that nonetheless may do more to explain the prototypical forms of his art than any exhaustive list of exhibitions might hope to do. The themes of transmission, personal presentation, and exposure, central to Joseph's work are all here, though recoded as much at the level of form as content.

MAR. 9

·  
HATCH DAY

MAR. 14, 7:00 PM

·  
TALK

In 1899, the body of a man was discovered at Chuquicamata, Chile, the largest open pit copper mine in the world. It was an especially startling discovery, because his dessicated body appeared to include copper ions that had migrated from the

copper to his system, providing somewhat of an antifungal effect and thus leaving the body well preserved—a hybrid of human flesh and metal. Through carbon-14 analysis, researchers believe he lived in 550 CE.

The industrialist J. P. Morgan purchased the Copper Man and brought it to New York, to the American Museum of Natural History, in 1905, where it has rested ever since. In 2006, Dr. Angelique Corthals, a renowned forensic anthropologist who conducted research on the Copper Man, will come to The Artist's Institute to share more about its social and natural histories, as well as the fossilization process.

MAR. 19–30

·  
FILM

Camille Henrot, *Deep Inside*, 2007. Video, felt tip on film, 7 min., music by Benjamin Morando, song written by Nicolas Ker & Camille Henrot. Courtesy of the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris. Heads

and hearts and hands fill the frames of Camille Henrot's video *Deep Inside*. Taking an old reel of 35 mm film and a thick black marker, the artist draws her sentimental pictures frame by frame on the celluloid. The film stock is of classic 1970s porn, and so her innocent drawings are re-animated through their juxtaposition with hot sex. The artist's Frankenstein-like manipulations lend a strange effect to the images that waver between absence and presence, where the pleasure of looking is both deep inside and from without.

## DRAWINGS

Camille Henrot, *Tropics of Love*, 2011. India ink on paper, variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris.

Over the course of ten days, Camille Henrot's drawings of exotic landscapes and polymorphous figures will change in and out.