Vibrations & Disruptions:

A Reading Based on Gilles Deleuze Concerning Motion in the Art Work of

Rita Letendre, Serge Lemoyne and Claude Tousignant

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the theme of motion in art, focusing on three painters from Québec and the work they produced during the 1970s. Rita Letendre paints the motion of light, the refraction of beams, and the bending of space. Light appears in her images as something that is ever-changing, both hard and soft, fast and slow, present and absent. Claude Tousignant paints the gong-like vibration of colour waves, using contrasts of colour to divide and expand space. His work breaks down traditional concepts of stability and singularity, using polyphonic rhythms and stereo images to insist on double readings and multiple reactions. Serge Lemoyne paints movement of bodies as well as movement through bodies. Accidental streams of paint betray the artist's presence, giving his images a nervous vitality and making them appear like works in progress.

Motion brings about change and change is something people try to manipulate to their advantage, either entrenching or uprooting positions. To analyze these strategic repositions, I turn to the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. Several of his concepts, such as affect, Anti-Oedipus, the Body without Organs, difference and repetition, nomads, the diagram, the refrain, and deterritorialization, help to redefine the way we think about boundaries and moving bodies. These concerns coincide with explorations along similar lines by the artists in my study, artists who push at the boundaries of their medium to create questions and to expand into areas where new discoveries can be made.

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Introduction

This thesis examines the theme of motion in art, focusing on three painters from Québec

and the work they produced during the 1970s. The artists, Rita Letendre (b. 1929), Serge

Lemoyne (1941 – 1998) and Claude Tousignant (b. 1932), have worked in different

styles and media, including print-making, performance art and sculpture. However, they

are best known as painters, using abstract motifs to express relationships of form and

colour, relationships between viewers and environments, and relationships to the culture

at large. Rita Letendre paints images of dynamic forces, using arrows of light that speed

and vibrate through space. Serge Lemoyne treats the theme of the athlete in paintings that

question the role of media in our lives. Claude Tousignant explores the effects of brightly

coloured optical patterns, and constructs complex multi-serial works. The French

philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-95), updating the ideas of Henri Bergson (1859-1941),

argued that all life is in motion and can only be understood by a theory of becoming. I

apply his ideas to the artists in my study to understand how motion in art reflects a wider

sphere of social and philosophical ideas.

What do I mean by the word "motion"? Using *Webster's New World Dictionary*

(1975), I note among the definitions for "motion," "move" and "movement," the

following:

> 1. a moving body or mechanism; a gesture or change of position 2. a
>
> suggestion; especially a proposal formally made in an assembly or
>
> meeting 3. to move from one place to another; to change one's residence

4. to direct or command; to cause (to act, do, say, etc.); to prompt; to take

action 5. to arouse the emotions, passions, etc. of 6. to cause the bowels

to evacuate 7. *commerce*: to dispose of goods by selling 8. to be active

in artistic circles 9. to make progress, advance; to hurry, to get a move

on 10. *to move in on*: to move near to and try to gain control of 11. the

act, manner or process of moving; *military*: a change in the location of

troops, ships, etc. as part of a maneuver 12. a) an organized action made

by people working together toward some goal b) those active in this way

c) a tendency, trend 13. *music*: a) any of the principle divisions of a

symphony or other extended composition b) same as tempo or rhythm

14. *prosody*: rhythmic flow

As this list indicates, motion has multiple meanings. Motion involves change, plunging

the participant, whether individual or group, in the midst of an operation whose outcome

is uncertain. Movements are rarely neutral, often functioning as strategic maneuvers in an

attempt to gain ground and secure an advantage. Societies undergo movement no less

than individuals do and are prone to trends and excitations. Motion can be invasive and

disruptive, with actions leading to conflict and disorientation. The movement of bodies

across space involves time and duration, sparking philosophical questions concerning the

reliability of the senses and the capability of the mind to interpret sense impressions.

Motion is understood differently by scientists, astronomers, economists, generals,

politicians and musicians. There are scales of motion, alternating from local to global,

micro to macro, as well as speeds, ranging from incremental and imperceptible to

frenetic and dizzying. Motion can take place inside and outside of boundaries, as well as

serving to dislodge and redefine boundaries.

Motion is central to most forms of art. A reader perceives movement in the development of a story and in the melody and timing of a piece of music. A painting also excites and activates the eye of a viewer as he or she follows the lines, patterns and colours of a composition. Movement may involve the content of an art work, the form of the work or the process involved in creating the work, as well as the viewer's perception and response to the work. These are some of the factors I consider in this thesis.

To analyze these rival impulses, I turn to the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze's methodology revolves around the generation of new concepts in order to see problems where no problems have previously existed, to see contradictions and multiplicities in places where others have only seen unidirectional, homogenous fields. Deleuze takes a fixed boundary, such as the separation between abstract and representational art, and introduces concepts that challenge the certainty of our classifications, in this way, creating movement and possibilities for new ways of thinking. In applying his method to Letendre, Lemoyne and Tousignant, I look for unresolved areas that have been overlooked in the body of criticism that exists.

What specific problems do I see? Letendre and Tousignant are considered abstract artists, but Letendre has chosen as her subject the motion of light across space, which is not necessarily an abstract subject, and Tousignant utilizes a technique of division, reflection and multiplication that suggests a mirror motif, a motif which directly raises questions about representation. As well, both artists use an "objective" mode of geometrical abstraction to produce work that is highly emotional and "subjective." They are exemplars of the Automatiste and Plasticien schools, yet they somehow exist between these schools or at their margins and outer frontiers. A detailed discussion of the aims and characteristics of these rival approaches to abstraction in Québec appears at the start

of Chapter Three. In many respects, the Automatistes and Plasticiens represent the most rigid boundaries of our thinking about art in Québec in the last fifty years. The schools correspond closely to what Deleuze calls "abstract painting," as practiced by Piet Mondrian and others, and "informel" or "action" painting, as practiced by Jackson Pollock and others. In his only book-length study of a visual artist, Deleuze situates the modern British painter Francis Bacon outside and between these tendencies. I propose to do the same with Letendre, Tousignant and Lemoyne.

Focusing my discussion on Letendre's hard-edge images of vibrating arrows and flying wedges, I trace how this motif developed from her earlier depictions of chasms and interpenetrating spaces. I ask why her style changed so dramatically in the mid-1960s and consider her experimentation with materials and the continual reinvention of her motifs. With Tousignant, I focus on his images that use a target motif, as well as the work he presented in a serial fashion, which grew out of the target images. I explore the two extremes of Tousignant's work: his hyperkinetic concentric rings, with their powerful optical effects that cause lines and colours to seem to expand and contract, and his minimal work, which approaches architecture in the monumentality of its scale and in its tendency to reconfigure space.

While there is a clearly discernable progression in Letendre and Tousignant's work, it is difficult to say the same about Lemoyne. Using a diverse range of media, his work often makes seemingly unaccountable leaps from year to year. I concentrate on Lemoyne's work as a painter, especially his work in the 1970s on his "bleu, blanc, rouge" series. I explore the dual themes of the athlete in art and sport as a form of theatre. I discuss Lemoyne's paintings in relationship to photographs from the popular press on which they were based. I look at the ways in which performance, like abstraction, is an

ambiguous term that generates many responses. Motion figures in Lemoyne's work through the manipulation of borrowed motifs, which appear in a highly idiosyncratic manner to open a dialogue on the use of media in our lives.

This thesis is written in six chapters. In Chapter One, I briefly review how motion has been treated by various artists in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on ideas and trends that relate to the artists in this study. This is followed by summaries of the careers of Rita Letendre, Serge Lemoyne and Claude Tousignant. Each summary includes a short description of the artist's background, training and exhibition history. In Chapter Two, I outline the methodology used to investigate my topic. The methodology centers on the writings of Gilles Deleuze, whose interest in motion underlines his studies on art and cinema. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I situate each artist within the debates of contemporary critical reviews. I isolate points that are relevant to my study and expand the discussion by examining individual art works, counter-pointing my observations and analysis with Deleuze's views on motion. I concentrate primarily on artworks from the 1970s because this was a period of transition from modernism to postmodernism, when the concept of speed and perception began to overlap with questions of the distribution and control of information. In the concluding chapter, I make comparisons between the different artists and their approaches.

Chapter One: Overview of Motion in Twentieth Century Art

In the early twentieth century, there was a feeling of optimism about motion. Motion was transforming the world, allowing new connections to be made, and creating, among other things, an international community of artists. The painting, *The Dance*, 1909, by Henri Matisse (1869-1954) reflects Symbolist ideas of a creative Utopia. In this image, commissioned by the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin (1854-1936), the dance is shown as an expression of community, where individuals come together through an inspired group endeavor. Formally, the dance functions as a visual pattern as Matisse's figures spread across the canvas, filling space with the synchronized elaboration of a common motif. Using repetition and variation to bring objects and patterns to life, Matisse explores the rhythmic and expressive potential of motion.

In the same year in which Matisse completed *The Dance*, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) published the *First Futurist Manifesto*. Working mainly in Italy in the years leading up to the First World War, the Futurists embraced visions of speed and violent action that represented life lived at fever pitch. Motion embodied the promise of the future, bringing with it an irresistible wave of change. Change, in whatever guise it occurred, including war or revolution, was to be encouraged and welcomed.

The Futurists were influenced by the serial photography of the French physiologist and inventor, Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) and British-born American

photographer, Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904). Marey was a doctor who initially studied blood circulation, respiration and muscle reflexes, but soon expanded his interests to include the gait of horses and the flight of insects and birds. He published two influential works that were of equal interest to the artist as to the scientist, *La Machine animale* (1873) and *Du Mouvement dans les fonctions de la vie* (1894). Marey helped bring about innovations in chronophotography, such as the placement of multiple images on a single plate, as well as utilizing slow motion and time lapse images to assist with his research. In 1881 Marey and Muybridge worked together to capture the everyday biomechanics of people and animals and both men are credited with pioneering techniques that led to the development of motion pictures. For painters, their work suggested an idea of simultaneous action that challenged previous notions of time and space. In his 1968 study, *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*, Frank Popper suggests that by the early twentieth century "photography had a double significance, since it provided a model for imitation and at the same time challenged the painter to go further."[1]

The Italian painter and sculptor Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916) took up this challenge, pursuing "not pure form, but pure plastic rhythm; not the construction of bodies, but the construction of the action of bodies."[2] Like other Futurists, Boccioni was fascinated by machines. In his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture*, 1912, he rhapsodizes over

> the rise and fall of a piston in its cylinder... the frenzy of a fly-wheel, the
>
> whirl of a propeller, all these are plastic and pictorial elements of which
>
> Futurist sculpture must make use. For example a valve opening and

closing creates a rhythm as beautiful but infinitely newer than that of a

living eyelid.[3]

Futurist ideas spread across Europe where they influenced artists as diverse as French

painter and conceptual artist, Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), whose experiments with

movable sculptures, which he called "mobiles," later influenced a kinetic art movement;

and the Russian painter, Kazimir Malevich (1878-1935).

The Futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun*, staged in St. Petersburg in 1913, with

sets designed by Malevich, concluded, like Marinetti's manifesto, with the violent

crashing of a vehicle, in this case, an airplane. As in Marinetti's manifesto, the pilot

emerged from the wreckage as a triumphant hero, laughing at the limitations of the past

and ready at last, with the help of new technology, to forge a new society. The crash

signalled a rupture from the past; it was part of the disaffected intellectual ferment in the

years just prior to the Russian Revolution. Malevich's interest in basic geometrical

shapes was derived in part from an interest in aerial photography, samples of which he

published in his book *The Non-Objective World* (1927). As critic Kirk Varnedoe writes

in *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern*, Malevich

> was thrilled by the new sensations flight could provide ... But it is the
>
> altered sense of relationship to the world within the canvas, the
>
> immediate feeling of detachment from a given hierarchy in arranging
>
> shapes on the canvas, that does more than merely illustrate this
>
> admiration. The liberation of working with shapes in all quadrants of the
>
> image, and composing without regard to axes, gave a new feeling to the
>
> basic activity of making a picture ... The size and position of things in a
>
> picture are no longer determined by our subjective viewpoint, but seem

to float equally in a space suspended in front of us; and instead of

imaginatively plummeting into the space of the picture, we feel our-

selves, without an orienting groundline, floating in space outside of it.[4]

New visual environments, influenced by machines, bring about changes in perception.

The Constructivist movement, led by Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) and Alexander

Rodchenko (1891-1956), expanded on Malevich's use of geometrical abstraction to

include photo montage and relief sculpture, as well as experimenting with the use of new

industrial materials.

Similar researches were carried out by the artists of the Bauhaus school, founded

by the German architect Walter Gropius (1883-1969) in 1919. The Bauhaus was an art,

design and architecture school which operated at different times in Weimar, Dessau and

Berlin, before being closed in 1933 by the Nazi government. The Hungarian artist and

influential Bauhaus instructor, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) briefly reopened the

school as the New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937, transplanting European ideas that

blended fine art and industrial design, to America. In his book, *The New Vision* (1939),

Moholy-Nagy states that good design involves the application of function to form, which

alone can lead to the "optimum handling of material."[5] He cites scientist Raoul Francé's

research in the field of 'biotechnics.' Francé writes:

Every process in nature has its necessary ... [and] functional forms. They

follow the law of the shortest distance between points: cooling occurs

only on surfaces exposed to cooling, pressure only on points of pressure,

tension on lines of tension; motion creates for itself forms of movement—

for each energy there is a form of energy ... The laws of least resistance

and of economy of effort make it inevitable that similar activities shall

always lead to similar forms."[6]

Moholy-Nagy believes that artists, like engineers, pursue a functional efficiency of

design. He adds that "Of course function means here not a purely mechanical service. It

also includes the psychological, social and economic components of a given time."[7] For

Moholy-Nagy, motion is a design problem spurring the ingenuity of resourceful artist-

engineers. In contrast to this approach, a group of American artists, working in the late

1940s and early 1950s, moved away from the definition of solid forms in favour of

expressive gestures using unconscious chance-driven impulses.

In 1952, American critic Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978) coined the term "action

painting" to describe the work of these artists in an article for *ARTnews*. Rosenberg

highlighted the spontaneous nature of the artist's process. Building on this idea that the

action of the painter was all important, American artist and critic Allan Kaprow (1927-

2006), originator of the art "happening" in 1958, argued that the Abstract Expressionists

created a new way of thinking about art. Art was no longer confined to a specialized

medium like painting, but could involve actions in real space and time. Kaprow writes:

"The young artist of today need no longer say, 'I am a painter' or 'a poet' or 'a dancer.'

He is simply an 'artist.' All of life will be open to him."[8]

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), famous for his dripping paint technique, is the

action painter most often discussed. Pollock's first innovation was to take the canvas off

the wall and place it on the floor while he worked, enabling him to position himself

inside the very painting that he was creating. In a similar way, Pollock's large canvases

envelop the viewer, a feeling reinforced by an interlace pattern which can be endlessly

extended in any direction. This is the aspect of Pollock's work that American critic

Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) stressed in his catalogue introduction to the exhibition, "Post Painterly Abstraction" at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1964. Greenberg argued that it was the pursuit of unbounded space, a search for the "physical openness of design"[9] that led artists from abstract expressionism to colour-field painting.

Pollock's contemporary Barnett Newman (1905-1970) exaggerated the enveloping quality of his paintings by using unbroken fields of color to overwhelm the viewer's senses. The effect was like blinding someone with flashbulbs: wherever the viewer turned, he or she was met with an unremitting wall of color. The American music producer Phil Spector (b. 1939) developed an analogous wall of sound for his pop hits of the late 1950s and early 60s. Sensory overload creates a kind of excitement and disorientation, plunging the listener inside the medium as if there were instruments coming at him or her from all directions. Op art, the term applied to the paintings of the Hungarian-French artist, Victor Vasarely (1906-1997), Israeli artist, Yaakov Agam (b. 1928), and British artist, Bridget Riley (b. 1931), created a variation on this effect, simulating a feeling of motion, vibration or oscillation by playing on a viewer's capacity to apprehend a source signal in more than one way. Op art paintings do not appear to stand still before the viewer, but force him or her to see patterns in an ever-changing set of relationships.

Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) describes technological change as a form of psychic violence and argues that the role of the artist involves "anticipating and avoiding the consequences of technological trauma ... art is precise advance knowledge of how to cope with the psychic and social consequences of the new technology."[10] McLuhan states that people are surrounded by artificial environments, in which electronic mass media is so all pervasive that we are no longer aware of the

structures that envelop us. Greenberg had insisted on the separation of avant-garde art and popular culture, but it is in this area of media environments that the two begin to come together, a point driven home by the strategies of Pop art.

Using techniques of mass reproduction, Andy Warhol (1930-1987) appropriated and transformed culturally charged images. He began his car crash series in 1963, the year of John F. Kennedy's assassination, which happened in an open motorcade. Unlike Marinetti and Malevich, Warhol's crashed vehicles are not celebrations of heroic daring or broken barriers. Warhol uses the Futurist device of serial repetition, but alters its meaning. Where the Futurists repeated forms to give a wave-like sense of progression that recalled the look of cinema, with its succession of flashing images, Warhol used repetition to imply stasis and uniformity. There is no implied motion; the reiteration of sameness underlines the conformity and homogeneity of mass culture. Seeing one image of a car crash may cause the viewer a certain pain; seeing hundreds of these images, however, can be a numbing experience. For Warhol repetition captures the banality of life, but it is not a neutral banality. It is a technique that reflects what French critic Guy Debord (1931-1994) called the "society of the spectacle." The viewer no longer identifies with a hero engaged in an individual, unique adventure; he or she joins a choreographed show, which is emblematic of the control imposed on all aspects of our lives. Debord urged artists to use unpremeditated motion to counteract this "colonization of everyday life."[11]

Motion is often lauded as a sign of progress; when people are in motion, they are doing something, going somewhere, perhaps searching for new ground or simply fulfilling a promise. Motion brings about change and change is something we invoke and attempt to manipulate to our advantage, either entrenching or uprooting positions. In art,

motion can symbolize or at times create breakthroughs, shattering old conventions,

leading to fresh experiences. However, a need for speed and action tends to lead away

from structured images; forms are replaced by processes and performances,

environments and appropriations. The pursuit of innovative forms and forces, and the

need to critique dominant patterns of thinking, are approaches adopted by the artists in

this study. In the following section, I present brief overviews of their careers.

Rita Letendre: Career Summary

Rita Letendre was born in 1928 at Drummondville, Québec. Her mother, Anne-Marie

Ledoux was French-Canadian; her father, Héliodore was of Abenaki ancestry. Neither

parent had much education. Of her father, Letendre recalled: "Il savait tout juste signer

son nom. Il était le mécanicien, le plus pauvre de Drummondville, de Saint-Majorique,

de Montréal."[12] The eldest of seven children, Letendre had a difficult early life. When

she was three years old, she broke her finger and it became infected for lack of care. She

was sent to live with her grandparents for a year on a small farm in Saint-François-du-

Lac. Years later, Letendre recalled:

> J'aimais la liberté, la solitude: elles me donnaient le sentiment profond
>
> d'être en vie—le même sentiment que j'ai encore aujourd'hui lorsque je
>
> me retrouve enfermée dans mon atelier, seule avec mes pensées, mes
>
> couleurs et mes pinceaux. C'était un sentiment si fort de mon identité
>
> que même les années tumultueuses qui ont suivi n'ont jamais réussi à
>
> l'atténuer.[13]

Her grandmother became a source of support for Letendre, during the years that

followed. Letendre enjoyed school and skipped a grade, which made her always the

smallest in her class. When the family moved to Saint-Majorique-de-Grantham in 1935,

Letendre became a victim of racial taunts and was attacked by the other children, but she

quickly learned to defend herself. Letendre recalled: "Extérieurement, je me défendais—

à la fin de l'année scolaire, je pouvais battre n'importe quel gars de quinz ans—mais,

intérieurement, je me sentais mal et je préférais être seule."[14] Her father had trouble

finding work as a mechanic in the small community, which prompted the family move to

Montreal in 1942. Here, things did not immediately improve. When she was not working

or helping with the children, Letendre escaped into a world of books and made sketches

of the things around her.

Desperate to move out of her crowded and noisy environment, Letendre set up

her own apartment in 1946. She supported herself working in a tobacco factory and

worked as a cashier in a restaurant. In her free time she tried painting with cheap

materials. After the birth of her son, Jacques in 1948, and the rapid separation from the

boy's father, Letendre looked for a new direction.[15] A friend convinced Letendre to enter

Montréal's École des beaux arts. It was scarcely a month after the publication of the

controversial manifesto *Refus global*. Letendre found that she was more intrigued by

what was happening outside the school than within it, especially after being introduced to

Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-1960), the leader of the Automatiste group of artists, in 1949.

The Automatistes gained notoriety in conservative Montreal art circles for their

exhibition of abstract paintings, surrealist in origin, which embraced a modern,

international approach to art. Spending time with Borduas and his circle of friends caused

Letendre to question the academic training she was receiving and, after a year and a half,

she abandoned her formal studies. Of Borduas, Letendre stated: "Mais quel professeur!

Personne n'a eu plus d'influence sur ma vie de peintre."[16] Borduas exerted an influence

on others, not by advocating a particular style or formula, but rather by encouraging a spirit of exploration.[17]

Working by day as a typist and later as a photographer, and painting at night, Letendre demonstrated strong work habits and a fierce will to succeed. At first she experimented with a variety of expressive marks in elaborate all-over patterns that combined elements of spontaneity and repetition. In 1954, Letendre appeared in the Automatistes' last group exhibition, "La matière chante," with all works in the show selected by Borduas. The following year Letendre was included in the exhibition, "Espace 55" at Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts. Other artists in the exhibition included: Guido Molinari (1933-2004), Ulysse Comtois (1931-1999), Paterson Ewen (1925-2002), Pierre Gauvreau (b. 1922), Fernand Leduc (b. 1916), Jean McEwen (1923-1999) and Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927-1991). The exhibition notes accompanying this show inform us that:

> Rita Letendre, having broken away from the surrealist tradition, applies
>
> herself to the creation of a purely plastic entity. With an ardent love of
>
> colour, she has organized life-like squares of light in a play of multiple
>
> planes.[18]

While Letendre exhibited with the Automatistes in Montréal in the mid-1950s, she increasingly emphasized a grid-like structure in her work over unconscious improvisations. It was an approach favored by the Plasticien group and welcomed by the Non-Figurative Artists Association of Montreal, with whom she exhibited in the latter part of the 1950s. Of the twenty founding members of this association, Letendre was the only woman. She was included in a photo story on the group, along with Ulysse Comtois, Paterson Ewen, Fernand Leduc and Jean-Paul Mousseau, that appeared in

Weekend magazine in 1956, her first national exposure.[19] Letendre was included in the Third Biennial Exhibition of Canadian Painting at the National Gallery of Canada in June 1959, an exhibition which subsequently traveled across the country. The next year Letendre was the first recipient of the Prix de Repentigny in Québec.

In 1961, she was given, along with Ulysse Comtois, a gifted fellow artist with whom she had developed a personal relationship, a two-person show at Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts (fig. 5). For this exhibition, Letendre was encouraged by Evan Turner, director of the gallery, to work on a larger scale, an idea readily embraced by the artist.[20] In 1962, Letendre had her first solo exhibition outside Montreal in the Here and Now Gallery in Toronto. She received a glowing review from critic Robert Fulford, who called her work "genuinely original ... an intense personal vision."[21] Also in 1962, Letendre was awarded a Canada Council grant allowing her to take her first trip abroad. This coincided with an exhibition of paintings by Québec artists in Italy, organized by Québec's first Ministry of Cultural Affairs, a symbolic gesture of a change in outlook by the new Premier Jean Lesage, who helped open Québec to the international community.[22] Letendre met her future husband, sculptor Kosso Eloul (1920-1995) in Italy and later visited him in Israel.

From this period, Letendre began to travel extensively. Besides extended stays in Europe and the Middle East, she worked in California from 1965-70, experimenting with new materials for creating large-scale murals.[23] One result of this trip was the creation of a 8 x 7 meter outdoor mural, *Sunforce*, 1965 (fig. 7) for the California State College at Long Beach. While working on this monumental project, Letendre abandoned her use of thick impasto and simplified her forms. At the same time, her palette became lighter and used brighter colors to reflect the light and lifestyle of Southern California.[24]

While she was rethinking ways in which to shape her work, Letendre started

working with the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Hollywood, founded in 1960 by

artist June Wayne.[25] Here Letendre was exposed to the work of the former Bauhaus

instructor Josef Albers (1888-1976), who was noted for his clean geometrical shapes and

precisely arranged fields of colour.[26] This cool, hard style, emphasizing expansive colour

fields, took root in California with the exhibition, "Post Painterly Abstraction," curated

by Clement Greenberg, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964. Letendre

explored a variety of printmaking techniques. The effect on her painting was decisive as

sharp-edged polygons collided in a series of mid-1960s work, done largely in black and

white. By the late-1960s, Letendre focused on a tapering wedge-like shape, reminiscent

of a light-beam, spanning a long horizontal or vertical canvas, as in a work like

Moonlight, 1969 (fig. 11).

Letendre and her husband settled in Toronto in 1969. She concurrently rented a

studio in New York, which she maintained for the next six years, to further her

experiments in printmaking. Letendre's work from the 1970s develops her most

recognizable motif: the arrow of light, surrounded by echoing lines of force, speeding

through an ambiguous but vast and empty space. Elegant, sleek and forceful, the work

was particularly attractive to corporations, who, in the aftermath of the success of Expo

67, competed to showcase innovative designs on public buildings. Letendre received

commissions throughout the decade from law firms in New York and Toronto, as well as

commissions from Cantel and Kenair Corporation in Toronto. A giant painting,

Irowakan, 1977 (fig. 6), was placed in the lobby of the head office of the Royal Bank in

Toronto. This was followed by a sale to a computer company in New York. Letendre

designed murals for the head office of J.C. Penney in New York, the Cadillac

Corporation in Toronto, the Good Corporation in Dallas, and The Blue Cross in Detroit.

She painted a 20 meter high mural, *Sunrise*, 1971 (fig. 8) on the exterior of a dormitory

for Ryerson University, and an even larger work, *Joy*, 1977, executed on coloured

plexiglass, was placed inside the Glencairn subway station, both in Toronto. She

designed a mural for a new train car for VIA Rail, 1980, and another work, *Tecumseth*,

1972, graced the interior of a shopping mall in Pickering, Ontario. In 1973, Letendre was

included in the exhibition, "Art in the Corporate Environment" at the Marlborough

Godard Galleries in Toronto. These sales reflected boom years in the Canadian economy

and the commissions allowed Letendre to work on an increasingly large scale.

In 1980, Letendre softened the hard-edge look for which she had become so well

known. She experimented with pastels and airbrushes to create wavering transitions

between large colour fields in contrast to her sharp tapering lines, vestiges of which

remain on the extreme bottom edge of the picture frame. In 1989, the Concordia Art

Gallery in Montreal exhibited a survey of Letendre's early work, with a catalogue essay

written by curator Sandra Paikowsky. This was followed by two major exhibitions in

1992 celebrating the achievements of the pioneers of abstraction in Montreal at the

Galerie de l'UQAM and the National Gallery of Canada; both exhibitions included

samples of Letendre's work.

In 1995, Letendre's husband, Kosso Eloul died. Letendre stopped painting for six

months and when she resumed, her style changed considerably. She abandoned the use of

the airbrush and all traces of the wedge motif, focusing instead on a jagged fire-form that

hovers across the canvas. The work was reminiscent of her paintings from the early

1960s, though with a strong suggestion of imagery drawn from the elements of fire and

twilight skies. In 1995, Letendre began an association with the Galerie Simon Blais in

Montréal, where she continues to exhibit new work. A critic asked her recently, was she still painting? She replied: "Am I still alive?"[27] In 2003, Letendre was honoured with a retrospective exhibition at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, with a catalogue and detailed chronology prepared by Anne-Marie Ninacs.

Serge Lemoyne: Career Summary

A flamboyant maverick, Serge Lemoyne is considered a pioneer of performance and Pop art in Québec. He was born at Acton Vale, Québec in 1941; he died of cancer in Montréal in 1998. His mother Annette was the daughter of Joseph Béland, a miller by trade who came to Acton Vale, Québec in 1919, with his 15 children. Lemoyne's father, Henri, a sales agent for the Acton Rubber company, died of a heart attack when Serge was two years old.[28] He left behind a twenty-room house from which rents were collected to supplement the family income. Serge's mother did not remarry and devoted her considerable energy to raising her three children and maintaining the house, which she and her children painted every year, a family ritual which Lemoyne would return to in his art. The only son in the family, Lemoyne was doted on by his mother and grandmother, who also lived in the house, and by his two significantly older sisters who considered him "notre bébé."[29] Pierrette Lemoyne told me that Serge grew up in a close and loving environment: "He didn't have a father, but he had two mothers."[30] His mother, Annette was a creative force who could make anything, including all the family's clothes, and when Lemoyne fell into financial difficulties in the late 1970s, he came back to Acton Valle and lived with her for several years. Lemoyne loved drawing as a child and never stopped drawing. His family was proud of his artistic pursuits and offered their unwavering support to all his activities throughout his life. One of

Lemoyne's two older sisters, Pierrette Lemoyne Roberge, wrote a history of the family home that conveys a sense of what it was like to grow up with a large extended family—they were known in the village as "la grosse famille"—with close ties to each other. Lemoyne's strong rural roots and unshakable sense of community would influence an approach to art which stressed collective enterprise and participatory action.

As a young man, Lemoyne left Acton Vale to study at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal from 1958 to 1960. In his obituary in *La Presse*, Joycelyn Lepage writes that Lemoyne's studies lasted only a few months before he was asked to leave because of "indiscipline."[31] Pierrette Lemoyne suggested there was a strong clashing of wills and attitudes toward art: "He was a genius so of course he was expelled."[32] As an artist, Lemoyne was essentially self-taught, gaining more from his contacts and friendships with other artists than from formal instruction. Though he exhibited at the Salon de la jeune peinture in Montréal in both 1961 and 1962, Lemoyne's presence was felt more strongly outside of official venues. At the Bar des Arts on Sainte-Catherine Street West in Montréal, not far from the famous Librairie Tranquille, the bookstore gallery that had been so supportive of the activities of the Automatistes, Lemoyne exhibited his work alongside friends and fellow artists Gilles Boisvert (b. 1940), Pierre Ayot (1943-1995) and Serge Tousignant (b. 1942).[33] Lemoyne also exhibited his work in storefront vitrines and on the hoardings of construction sites. He chose these sites almost simultaneously with exhibitions of his work at the Musée des beaux-arts in 1965 and the Musée d'art contemporain in 1966, as if to underline his independence and unconventionality.

From 1963 to 1968, Lemoyne was instrumental in organizing public art events, working with writers, dancers and musicians in collectives such as "un nouvel age," "l'Horlogue" and "Zirmate." In 1964, "La Semaine A," a week-long series of art

happenings featuring a variety of artists from different fields brought together at

l'Université de Montréal, was a resounding success. The follow-up, "La Trente A,"

appeared the following spring. It was meant to last a month and showcase the talents of

artists from every conceivable discipline; in the end it was curtailed to a week, but

featured forty different artists. These events presaged what has since become a norm in

Montreal: the periodic showcasing of art and artists before the public in a festival-like

atmosphere that stresses diversity and creative exploration.

Throughout the year 1965, Lemoyne worked with L'Horlage to stage events in

student cafés, theatres, and schools. While some members of the group wore attention-

grabbing make-up and psychedelic clothes, Lemoyne began a lifelong habit of donning

sports uniforms during performances, much as rap artists do today. He also painted

directly on the bodies of some of his collaborators in the manner of Yves Klein. It was a

blend of theatre that drew heavily on Dada and Futurist cabaret. After performing on an

outdoor stage in Parc Lafontaine before a large crowd, Lemoyne and his group were

mobbed for autographs like rock stars after the show. This popular exposure led to a

scandalous appearance on the local televison station, Radio-Canada in the summer of

1965. After the broadcast, the station was besieged with calls and angry letters. One

witness recalled:

> C'était inquiétant. C'était la guerre! tout ça, tranquillement chez vous,
>
> dans la cuisine, à l'heure du souper! C'en était trop ... ce monde-là,
>
> c'étaient des dangereux, des maniaques, des pervertisseurs de
>
> jeunesse.[34]

Lemoyne's activities did not go unnoticed by the major museums and in 1966, he and

Boisvert were asked to transform two rooms in the Musée d'art contemporain into

environmental installations for the exhibition, "Présence des jeunes." Lemoyne's room

was an interactive game room; Boisvert's made a statement about Vietnam. In 1967,

Lemoyne participated in Expo 67, appearing at the Pavillon de la jeunesse every evening

an hour before midnight to create improvised paintings before a live audience. The event

lasted two months and at the end of each night, Lemoyne gave away 10 to 15 paintings.[35]

The paintings were produced as quickly as possible, with the artist inventing new ways to

propel himself across the stage toward his painting, using go-karts and roller skates, and

splashing paint from a ladder, covering not only his work but often many of the

spectators. Lemoyne also appeared at the discothéque within the Pavillion to project

slides or an animated film, hand painted in the manner of Canadian animation pioneer,

Norman McLaren (1914-1987). Lemoyne made a second film involving a photo-montage

taken from newspaper sources, mocking politicians and sensationalist journalism. A third

short film, *Blé soufflé*, was a Warhol-esque portrait of a woman eating cereal. It showed

at Casa espagnole in 1967 and again at Cinéma Parallèle in 1968.[36]

In 1968, Lemoyne's group reformed as Le Zirmate to stage a series of events,

targeting different aspects of mass media. For "Événement zéro" in 1968, the group

conducted a press conference as an art event, turning a camera on the press and filming

them. Later that year, continuing their infiltration of media, the group requested and

received space in *La Presse* to create an interactive event with readers.[37] For "Opération

déclic," in the fall of 1968, Lemoyne and a group of artists from many disciplines, turned

the auditorium of the Bibliothèque nationale into a stage for a week-long series of

performances, demonstrations and debates in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the

publication of *Refus global.*

As a solo artist, Lemoyne staged three events in four years that conceived of art
as a game involving the active participation of the audience. In 1969, Lemoyne turned
Gallery 20-20 in London, Ontario into a hockey rink for a performance piece called
"l'Événement bleu, blanc, rouge." In 1972, after returning from a short stay in Paris and
Morocco, Lemoyne restaged and expanded his hockey event in Montréal at the Galerie
Véhicle under the title "Slap Shot." While a line of television sets broadcast live hockey
games, the audience was invited to shoot pucks toward a net guarded by a man dressed as
a goalie. In 1973, Lemoyne staged "Le Party d'étoiles" at the Galerie Média, during
which spectators competed with one another using children's tabletop hockey games.
Everyone won a prize and the winners were interviewed by Lemoyne and asked for their
autographs. It was his attempt to make everyone a star.

What was different about "l'Événement bleu, blanc, rouge," from Lemoyne's
previous group events was that many of the paintings he improvised during the
exhibition have survived. An example is *Adieu Dieu,* 1969, showing a cross, teetering on
a cupola, being swept aside by a curtain featuring the red-white-and-blue colours of the
Montréal Canadiens hockey team. Lemoyne vowed he would devote the next ten years to
a series of paintings using only the iconic tri-colours of his favorite hockey team. At the
time, it may have appeared as a showman's gesture, it actually originated as a bet with a
friend, but it indicates that Lemoyne was beginning to take himself seriously as a painter
by pursuing a theme in depth over an extended period.[38] From this point, his paintings
were all conceived in series.

Lemoyne's semi-abstract depictions of hockey figures of the mid-1970s cease to
resemble people and become more geometrical and flag-like. To announce his "bleu,
blanc, rouge" series was over in 1980, Lemoyne turned to triangles and architectural

forms in what he called his "Période supplémentaire." The triangle became a central

motif for the next fifteen years. In 1982, Lemoyne returned to his interest in theatre,

though now as a painter rather than as a performer, exhibiting two series of images,

"Theatre" and "Rideau," in the exhibition "Super-position" at the Galerie Graff in

Montreal (fig. 28).

In his 1984 exhibition, "Le triste sort des originaux" (The Sad Fate of the

Originals), Lemoyne flashed slides of his latest paintings on the walls rather than show

the actual paintings. This virtual exhibition was designed as a commentary on the

practice of curators to select works for exhibition based solely on slides. Lemoyne did

not appear at the opening of this exhibition, but instead chose to address the crowd by a

live-video feed, broadcasting from a hidden location within the gallery. This idea of

media both revealing and obscuring artwork resurfaced in the "Hommage" series,

beginning with the exhibition, "Hommage aux artistes vivants," in 1987.

In this tribute exhibition, 33 images were displayed with a kind of religious

solemnity. The works were initially hung on the wall hidden under cloth and

ritualistically unveiled at the vernissage.[39] This was followed the same year by an

exhibition, "Stations," which was part of the group event, "Cent jours d'art

contemporain." Lemoyne displayed what reporter Claire Gravel called "les icônes

pyramidales d'une nouvelle religion artistique."[40] Lemoyne's thickly padded triangles

were made up of composite pieces lashed together with rope like a crude raft with a hole

in its center. Lemoyne had intended to hang fourteen of these triangle-assemblages

together to signify the stations of the cross, but because of limited gallery space he

reduced the number to three.[41] A publicity still shows him in a Christ-like pose dragging

his symbolic burden. Combining elements of painting, sculpture and performance art,

each work referred to a different school of art, reflecting the development of abstraction

in Québec. In 1997, Lemoyne exhibited his "Hommage à Matisse," which consisted of

mosaic panels, made up of brightly painted square tiles, which could be arranged in any

manner (fig.35). Lemoyne died while preparing an exhibition, "Black Holes" for the first

Biennale de Montréal in 1998. This half-finished work had also planned to explore a

mosaic approach of multiple and interchangeable painted tiles.

In 1988, Lemoyne was honored with a retrospective at the Musée du Québec,

with a catalogue prepared by Marcel Saint-Pierre. After this exhibition, Lemoyne

continued to produce work, centered increasingly on the house in Acton Vale in which he

had grown up. The artist purchased the massive building from his brother-in-law in 1978,

though at a price that made it more of a gift than a purchase, one of the many gestures of

support he received from his family.[42] Lemoyne lived in the house for extended periods,

when not in Montréal, and used it as the headquarters of his three political campaigns; he

ran for the Rhinoceros Party twice and once for the Poet's Party for Peace. The house was

badly damaged by vandals in 1985. The artist could not afford to make the necessary

repairs; instead he tore away part of the building and repainted the rest in an eccentric

manner. This caused an outcry in the town, as the building was located across the street

from the town hall. Despite pressure from the mayor's office, Lemoyne refused to make

his house conform to "community standards" and the case went to trial. In 1993, the

Superior Court of Quebec ruled that Lemoyne's oddly painted house should be regarded

as "a work of art in progress," a ruling that was upheld by the court of appeals in 1996.

To pay for his legal costs, Lemoyne sorted through the demolished pieces of his house,

salvaging and painting scraps of walls and fixtures, which he exhibited as readymade

sculptures in the exhibition, "Morceaux choisis" in 1995. The exhibition occurred three

years before Lemoyne died. The contentious house was completely destroyed by

arsonists two years after the artist's death in 2000. Since then, a memorial to Lemoyne

has been erected on the site.

Claude Tousignant: Career Summary

Claude Tousignant was born in Montréal in 1932, the youngest of seven children. His

mother, Gilberte Hardy-Lacasse, was the daughter of a wealthy man who lost everything

in the stock market crash in 1929. Tousignant's father, Albéric worked in the prosperous

family grocery business, which included a chain of eleven retail stores, as well as a

wholesale outlet. Albéric eventually branched out as an entrepreneur dealing in real

estate and briefly ran a hotel in Berthierville until he got into trouble with the church who

objected to some of the performers who appeared in the hotel's lounge. The government

sided with the church; the hotel lost its liquor license and Albéric was forced to sell the

business.[43] This was a period of great control by the church over many aspects of

people's lives, including control of education, and as a result, Tousignant resented his

time in school and became "an atheist in a family of atheists."[44] While Tousignant grew

up in a well-off family—one of his uncles collected art—his father was something of a

gambler, which meant that the family's fortunes were anything but secure, and became

less so as Tousignant pursued his art career.[45]

Tousignant had first experimented with paints during a childhood illness and his

interest grew as he got older. From 1948 to 1952, he studied at the School of Art and

Design at the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts under the instructors Jacques de

Tonnancour (1917-2005), Marion Scott (1906-1993), Arthur Lismer (1885-1953) and

Gordon Webber (1909-1965). Webber, a former student of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy in

Chicago, had introduced the principles of Bauhaus design to the aspiring artists in his

class. Tousignant remarked that Moholy-Nagy's *Vision in Motion,* published

posthumously the year before in 1947, "was the Bible in our class."[46] Traces of this

Bauhaus influence surfaced fifty years later when Tousignant exhibited a series of "Light

Modulators" (fig. 44), a term invented by Moholy-Nagy for a type of multi-faceted

scuplture he had all his students construct to demonstrate how values of light shift as they

move across adjacent planes.[47]

Tousignant traveled to France in 1952 to further his studies at l'Académie Ranson

in Paris, but he became depressed by the work that he encountered with its emphasis on

"surface illusion, delicious colour and seductive texture."[48] Tousignant later remarked

"this whole Parisian adventure was a calamity."[49] On returning to Québec, he found a

much more congenial environment, joining Jacques Hurtubise (b. 1939), Guido Molinari

and others in exploring alternative paths for abstract art. His early experiments with

tachisme, using coloured marks to activate a field in 1955, were replaced by an interest in

hard-edged abstraction, exploring the application of flat colors and geometrical shapes in

1956. As Tousignant's uncompromising art was difficult to sell, he was forced to support

himself with a number of short-term jobs, working as a furniture designer, surveyor,

window-dresser, and fireman.[50] He also taught at the School of Art and Design, Montreal

Museum of Fine Arts from 1961-1963 and at the École des Beaux-Arts, l'Université du

Québec à Montréal in 1970.

Tousignant's first solo exhibition was in 1954 at the coffee-bar, l'Echourie in

Montreal,

followed by exhibitions in 1956 and 1957 at the Galerie L'Actuelle. With Tousignant's

help, this gallery, the first in Canada to be devoted entirely to abstract art, was

established and run by the artist Guido Molinari.[51] Though Tousignant and Molinari had

been in the same class at school, it was not until after they left school and started working

on their own that they became close. Campbell writes that "they became fast friends and

scarcely a day went by without the two bouncing ideas off one another."[52] In a 1956

exhibition, Tousignant scandalized critics as well as other artists with his large minimal

canvases that utilized Cilux car paint to produce a shiny industrial-looking surface.[53]

Critic Gary Michael Dault summed up this period by remarking that

> Like Molinari, Claude Tousignant worked his way through all the
>
> expressionist modes of painting visited upon the Montréal avant-garde
>
> of the 1950s, emerging at last from what they both considered a slough
>
> of personality and hollow, heroic taste-mongering into, in Tousignant's
>
> case, the production of monotonal panels of uninflected enamel, as
>
> clean and hard as refrigerator doors.[54]

Because of his radically reductive approach to abstraction, Tousignant became associated

with the second generation of Plasticiens. However, he did not place his allegiance with

one school or the other, remarking:

> Les Plasticiens ne sont pas allés 'contre' les Automatistes. On était des
>
> amis, on discutait ensemble; ce n'était pas une réaction violente contre
>
> nos prédécesseurs, mais une volonté d'aller plus loin."[55]

Tousignant participated in a group exhibition, "Art abstrait" in 1959 at l'École des

beaux-arts de Montréal, alongside Molinari, Jean Goguen (1927-1989), Denis Juneau (b.

1925), Louis Belzile (b. 1929), Fernand Toupin (b. 1930) and Fernand Leduc (b. 1916).

Tousignant issued a statement at this time for the catalogue in which he affirmed:

What I wish to do is to make painting objective, to bring it back to its

source—where only painting remains, emptied of all extraneous

matter—to the point at which painting is pure sensation ... where

painting is true sensation and where painting will be understandable to

everyone."[56]

This quote has been reproduced in a great deal of the writings on Tousignant, though

curiously, the last phrase, "where painting will be understandable to everyone" is often

omitted. Tousignant worked on a series of brightly painted grid-like wooden sculptures

from 1959 to 1962, which were reminiscent of Mondrian's grid-like compositions,

though borrowing from the form of the relief sculptures of the Russian constructivists.

Tousignant exhibited a series of nine of these sculptures at the Montreal Museum of Fine

Arts in 1961. However, Tousignant became "dissatisfied with the insistent formalism of

the work" and looked for a new direction.[57]

In 1962, Tousignant visited New York, where he encountered the work of Barnett

Newman. Newman's large colour field images, featuring intense areas of colour arranged

along a horizontally divided plane, left a lasting impression on Tousignant. He

determined to further his own experiments in colour and perception and he began his first

Gong series, utilizing a floating irregularly-shaped square juxtaposed with a vertical bar.

In 1962, Tousignant won first prize in the painting category of the Salon de la Jeune

Peinture in Paris. In 1963, the circle became a motif with which he began to work,

involving it in such works as *Japanese Flag*, 1963. This developed in 1965 into a series

of images using target patterns and eventually in 1966 to round shaped canvases that

became known as *Gongs* and *Chromatic Accelerators*. These experiments in color and

vibrating patterns coincided with trends in Op Art, a movement which was developing in

Britain and the United States at this time.

In 1965, Tousignant moved to New York, intending to relocate for an extended

period, but problems developed with his visa and the stay only amounted to a few

months. It was long enough however for Tousignant to gain attention, with two solo

exhibitions at the East Hampton Gallery in Manhattan. That same year, he was included

in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, "The Responsive Eye,"

curated by William Seitz. This exhibition was a survey of the leading international

figures in Op Art. Also in 1965, Tousignant was one of four artists to represent Canada

at the Sao Paulo Biennale in Brazil. Though Tousignant's work was included in many Op

Art exhibitions at this time, including "Op from Montreal" (University of Vermont), "Op

Art" (Hart House, Toronto), "1 + 1 = 3: Retinal Painting" (University of Texas), "The

Deceived Eye" (Fort Worth Art Centre, Texas), "New Dimensions in Vision" (Purdue

and Southern Illinois Universities), "Color Motion" (Brookhaven National Laboratories,

Upton, NY), "Perceptions in Op Art" (University of Southern Florida) and "Op Art"

(Fordham University, New York), the artist distanced himself from this term, as his work

crosses many boundaries including minimalism, color field painting, conceptual and

installation art. Tousignant pursued lines similar to those of his American

contemporaries, and reviewers often compare his work to that of Kenneth Noland (b.

1924), Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967), Frank Stella (b. 1936) and Donald Judd (1928-1994).

When critic Pat Fleisher suggested to Tousignant that English Canadian artists were

influenced by trends in American art, and French-Canadian artists were influenced by

trends in European art, Tousignant scoffed at the notion, declaring that New York was

the center of the art world, influencing all artists equally alike, with no divisions along

national or linguistic lines.[58]

In 1967, Tousignant took part in group exhibitions at the National Gallery of

Canada in Ottawa, "Trois cents ans de peinture canadienne," and at the Musée d'art

contemporain in Montréal, "Panorama de la peinture au Québec 1940-1966." He won

first prize in the painting category at the "Perspectives '67" exhibition at the Art Gallery

of Ontario. In 1968, Tousignant had a major exhibition at the Galerie du Siècle in

Montréal, where he exhibited more target paintings and an ambitious sculpture,

Hommage à Barnett Newman, renewing an interest in sculpture as a way to conceptually

extend his painting ideas. Later that year, he traveled to Scotland to attend the exhibition,

"Canada 101" at the Edinburgh Festival of art and theatre. Here he became romantically

engaged with Judith Terry, a curatorial assistant and translator who travelled to Scotland

with the exhibition. After touring Europe together, Terry and Tousignant returned to

Montréal, where they began to make their life together.

This change in his personal life coincided with changes in his artistic approach.

By the late 1960s, Tousignant began experimenting with canvases in various oval shapes.

In 1969, he began his first serial paintings, using double circles and multiple diagonals

that were conceived in a long "racetrack format." Going in an opposite direction from the

complexity of his large *Chromatic Accelerators,* Tousignant worked on sparse two-color

diptychs in 1971 and 1972. Each canvas in the series presented slight variations on the

neighbouring canvas to achieve subtle inter-relationships. In 1973, Tousignant was the

recipient of the Canadian Institute of Rome Award. He spent a year working in Italy,

though without a proper studio, he was forced to make smaller scale works using a water-

colour medium. The same year the National Gallery of Canada organized a mid-career

retrospective which traveled across Canada and to Paris. Tousignant's work grew

considerably in size. These were painting-sculptures that stood on the floor of the gallery

and stretched to the ceiling, twelve feet high in some cases, as with his work, *Sculpture*,

1974. This title of this work is deliberately confusing; it is not clear if the work is a

painting, a sculpture or an architectural detail, and gives some indication of Tousignant's

intention to push beyond painting into a more conceptually oriented mode.

In 1980, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal exhibited twelve of

Tousignant's diptychs, paired target images painted in the preceding two years, each

canvas measuring two meters in diameter. The following year, the same gallery

organized a travelling exhibition of the working drawings on which these canvases were

based, revealing the care and attention with which Tousignant plans his images in

advance. A very different exhibition was mounted at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

in 1982. For this event, Tousignant showed recent work, which included many

rectangular monochromes, as well as a large conceptual work that combined a wall-like

barrier, a meter high, with a painting beginning at the same height, created directly on the

gallery wall; when the show was over, the work ceased to exist.[59] *Gazette* reviewer

Lawrence Sabbath commented that "In one room, there is scarcely space to walk around

the immense-sized black slabs that reach to the ceiling. One feels Lilliputian, menaced

and fearful beside these aggressive, funeral-color shapes."[60] In this same year, in August,

a fire destroyed Tousignant's studio and damaged much of the work inside it, valued at

$500,000. Undaunted, Tousignant held a fall show, entitled, "Une Exposition" at the

Galerie Graff, consisting of a transparent painting on a large sheet of plexi-glass. The

exhibition notes call the work an "installation," suggesting a new turn in Tousignant's

approach. Tousignant's next exhibition was again at Galerie Graf in 1986,

"Polychromes." This showcased his multi-serial work done in a rectangular format. In 1987, Tousignant exhibited a twelve panel work, *Espace mnémonique* at the 49th Parallel Gallery in New York. Each panel was painted an identical shade of black on its front surface, but featured different colours on the sides of the canvases, drawing attention to the construction of the frames. The next year, in an opposite approach, Tousignant tried to entirely eliminate the thickness of his images by painting on thin aluminium plates, which were then bolted flat to the gallery walls.

When Tousignant was awarded the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas in 1989, he commented: "J'ai l'impression que les Prix du Québec sont parfois des prix de désobéissance pour d'anciens mauvais élèves."[61] In 1991, he took part in two important exhibitions in Toronto, the "Abstract Practices" group show at the Power Plant and a solo exhibition at the Drabinsky Gallery. *Globe and Mail* reviewer Kate Taylor remarked: "Claude Tousignant has returned with a vengeance. Only the chronically jaded could fail to be moved by the works on paper and the relief paintings ... [not only] the electric colours, but also their severely reduced format makes these works breathtaking."[62] He was included in the important touring exhibition "La Crise de l'abstraction au Canada: les années 1950," a critical survey of the ground-breaking figures to work in abstract art in Canada, which toured across the country in 1992. In 1994, an exhibition, "Claude Tousignant: Monochromes, 1978-1993," took place at the Musée du Québec, with a catalogue prepared by guest curator James D. Campbell. Two years later, Campbell published a book-length study reviewing all aspects of Tousignant's career, including valuable biographical information about the artist's background and early life.

Since then, Tousignant has worked increasingly in sculpture, using both aluminum and wood. Michèle Thériault curated a 2005 exhibition of Tousignant's

painting and sculpture at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallert at Concordia University that stressed the way art work can alter the environment in which it is placed. In this exhibition, Tousignant paid homage to two of his most enduring artistic inspirations, exhibiting a facsimile of Malevich's landmark painting, *Black Square*, 1913, and unveiling a sculpture, which was called a "light modulator," after Moholy-Nagy's works of this same name. In the fall of 2006, Tousignant exhibited a series of tall monochrome, multi-faceted metal sculptures, "Modulateur de lumière," at Galerie Art Mur. A major retrospective exhibition is planned for the Musée d'art contemporain in Montréal for 2008.

Notes

1. Frank Popper, *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*, trans. Stephen Bann (London: Studio Vista, 1968), 14.

2. Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Sculpture" from *Modern Artists on Art: 10 Unabridged Essays*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), 48.

3. Boccioni, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Sculpture," 55.

4. Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990), 254-255.

5. Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: fundamentals of design, painting, sculpture, architecture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), 60.

6. Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 60.

7. Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 61.

8. Allan Kaprow, "Art and Modern Life" in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood, eds. (Madden, Ma and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 717.

9. Clement Greenberg, "Introduction," *Post Painterly Abstraction* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Art Museum, April 23-June 7, 1964) www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/ppaessay.html.

10. Marshall McLuhan, "Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity" in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory, 1900-2000* (Madden, Ma. and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 756.

11. Guy Debord, "Writings from the Situationist International" in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Madden, Ma and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

12. Rita Letendre, "Rita Letendre, peintre," *Macleans*, March 1975. (He hardly knew how to sign his name. He was the poorest mechanic in Drummondville, Saint-Majorique and Montreal.)

13. Anne-Marie Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour* (Québec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2003), 73. (I liked the freedom, the solitude: I gained a profound feeling of what it meant to be alive, the same feeling that I still have today when I seclude myself in my studio, alone with my thoughts, my colours and my brushes. It was such a strong feeling that even the tumultuous years that followed could not succeed in diminishing it.)

14. Letendre, *Macleans*, March 1975. (Outwardly, I defended myself--at the end of the school year, I could take on any 15-year-old — but, on the inside, I felt sick and I preferred to be alone.)

15. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 131.

16. Letendre, *Macleans*, March 1975. (But what a teacher! No one else had such an influence on my life as a painter.)

17. Anne-Marie Ninacs, curator for Letendre's retrospective exhibition at the Musée national de beaux-arts du Québec in 2003, commented: "It is not on the surface of her paintings but at the very basis of her conception of painting that Borduas's thought is to be detected." Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 131.

18. Sandra Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years, 1953-1963/ Les années montréalaises, 1953-1963* (Montréal: Concordia Art Gallery, 1989), 11.

19. Sandra Paikowsky, "Vivre dans la cité: Québec Abstract Painting," in *Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s,* Robert McKaskell et al. (Winnipeg: Art Gallery of Winnipeg, 1993), 49.

20. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montréal Years*, 29.

21. *Toronto Star*, March 24, 1962.

22. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montréal Years*, 31.

23. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 134.

24. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 96.

25. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 96.

26. San Diego Museum of Art, "The Magician and the Mechanic: Tamarind Lithography Workshop, the Early Years," www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2003/02/10/30740.html.

27. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

28. Phone interview with Pierrette Lemoyne, conducted and translated by Aurèle Parisien, Montreal, July 9, 2007.

29. Pierrette Lemoyne interview, July 9, 2007.

30. Pierrette Lemoyne interview, July 9, 2007.

31. Jocelyne Lepage, *La Presse*, July 13, 1998.

32. Pierrette Lemoyne interview, July 9, 2007.

33. Marcel Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 1960-1987 (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1988), 26.

34. *Québec Underground 1962-1972* (Montréal: Éditions Médiart, 1973), 130. (It was disturbing. It was war! All this, while you're quietly at home, in the kitchen, at supper time! It was too much, these artists were dangerous, maniacs, perverters of youth.)

35. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 60.

36. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 61.

37. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 64-8.

38. Pierrette Lemoyne interview, July 9, 2007.

39. Saint-Pierre, 166-67.

40. Claire Gravel, *Le Devoir*, 1 août 1987. (the pyramid icons of a new artistic religion.)

41. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 172.

42. Pierrette Lemoyne interview, July 9, 2007.

43. James D. Campbell, *After geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1995), 27.

44. Campbell, *After Geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant*, 27.

45. Campbell, *After Geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant*, 28-9.

46. Interview with Claude Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

47. Interview with Claude Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

48. William Withrow, *Contemporary Canadian Painting* (Toronto: McCelland and Stewart, 1972), 139.

49. Withrow, *Contemporary Canadian Painting*, 139.

50. Withrow, *Contemporary Canadian Painting*, 139.

51. Campbell, *After geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant*, 53.

52. Campbell, *After geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant*, 53.

53. Campbell, *After geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant*, 53.

54. *Canadian Art*, Spring 1989, 75.

55. Jocelyn Lepage, *La Presse*, November 11, 1989. (The Plasticiens were not 'against' the Automatistes. We were friends, we discussed things together. It was not a violent reaction against our precursors, but a desire to push farther.)

56. Abstract Art Exhibition catalogue, (Montréal : École des beaux-arts, 1959).

57. Judith Kelly, "Inaugural text," *Claude Tousignant Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1973), 3.

58. Pat Fleisher "A Visit to Claude Tousignant's Studio," *Art Magazine* 4, no. 14 (Winter 1973), 10.

59. Interview with Claude Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

60. Lawrence Sabbath, Montreal *Gazette*, 6 fev, 1982.

61. Jocelyn Lepage, *La Presse*, November 11, 1989. (I have the impression that the Prix du Québec are sometimes prizes of disobediance for poor pupils of old.)

62. Kate Taylor, *Globe and Mail*, March 22, 1991.

Chapter Two: Deleuze and Methodology

This thesis makes use of several concepts developed by Gilles Deleuze, such as affect,

Anti-Oedipus, the Body without Organs, difference and repetition, nomads, the diagram,

the refrain, and deterritorialization. These concepts all have to do with redefining the way

people think about boundaries and moving bodies. They coincide with explorations along

similar lines made by the artists in my study, artists who push at the boundaries of their

medium to disrupt assumptions about art and vision.

The son of an engineer, Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) attended French public

schools before studying philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris from 1945-48. Deleuze

published his first book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, on David Hume, in 1953. In the

years that followed, Deleuze published novel interpretations of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant and

Bergson. In each, Deleuze set out "to provoke and disconcert" his readers, while re-

examining the history of philosophy.[1] He was particularly attracted to Nietzsche in

articulating his own "post-philosophical, anti-systematic... resolutely non-totalizing mode

of thought."[2] His study, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* appeared in 1962. In 1968, Deleuze

produced two works for his doctoral thesis, *Difference and Repetition* and *Expressionism*

in Philosophy: Spinoza. Both offer a critique of identity, while exploring the nature of

thought.

Deleuze taught in a number of French universities before accepting a post at the

University of Paris VII in 1969. This was the year he met psychotherapist and political

activist Félix Guattari (1930-1992), with whom he co-wrote the two volumes of

Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). A

former student and patient of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) in the 1950s,

Guattari was critical of Lacan's methods and explored alternative approaches while

working in the private clinic of Jean Oury (b. 1924) at La Borde at Court-Cheverny. In the

1960s, Guattari was vocal in his support of anti-colonialist struggles in Algeria and

Vietnam. In the disillusioning aftermath of the events of May 1968, Guattari approached

Deleuze, who suggested they write together. Their approach to creative collaboration

reflected a philosophy of group over individual action and led to a somewhat experimental

style, combining Deleuze's rigorous approach to the definition of concepts and Guattari's

more politically oriented critique of the institutions of capitalism and psychoanalysis.

Their collaborations included *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1975) and *What is*

Philosophy? (1991), written the year before Guattari died.

How exactly will I use Deleuze's writings in this study? He is noted for being a

writer who is not easily interpreted, perhaps because there is no single interpretation that

one is expected to make. Ian Buchanan writes in *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary* (2000):

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University of Paris VII in 1969. This was the year he met psychotherapist and political

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Writing on his own, Deleuze turned his attention to the arts, with studies on the

work of Marcel Proust (1871-1922) and the painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992). He wrote

a two-volume work on cinema, *The Movement-Image* (1986) and *The Time-Image* (1989),

as well as a study on Michel Foucault (1926-1984), whom he befriended in the early 1960s

and with whom he had a close affinity.

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writer who is not easily interpreted, perhaps because there is no single interpretation that

one is expected to make. Ian Buchanan writes in *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary* (2000):

The certainty that Deleuze is doing something radical and new in his

work has given rise, quite rightly, to a corresponding uncertainty as to

how to read his work. For one thing, his style appears a little mad, ideas

and concepts seem to fly right off the page. For another, it is quite

difficult to pin down just what his method or system is.[3]

Unconventional and elusive as he may be, Deleuze has been quite clear on his insistence

that for him the purpose of philosophy is to create concepts. As Buchanan explains,

"Concepts are not what philosophers think about, but what they think with ... our

definition of a concept must also be our definition of thinking itself as a process."[4] Todd

May adds that "For Deleuze, the project of philosophy is one of creating, arranging and

rearranging perspectives .... to engage in philosophy is to develop a perspective, by means

of concepts, within which or by means of which a world begins to appear to us."[5]

Deleuze focuses on pre-logic or sensation, a subject which he proceeds to study as

logically as possible. For instance, he calls his book on the painter Francis Bacon, *The*

Logic of Sensation. Deleuze is aware of this paradox, the logical study of pre-logic, using

paradox as a tool to pry open doors and minds that would otherwise remain closed. *Anti-*

Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1977), co-written with Guattari, introduces many

of his fundamental ideas about "desiring-machines" as an alternative to Freudian and

Marxist criticism. I use this book both for its elaboration of these ideas and to see past

Freudian and Marxist models of interpretation which have been so prevalent in modernist

art history. In *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (2001), Deleuze discusses Nietzsche's

study of tragedy, in which a theatre of ideas confronts a theatre of action. These ideas

proved useful when discussing the relationship of motion in painting as compared to

motion in performance art.

A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1980) devotes a chapter to

rhythm and the refrain in music. When Deleuze discusses visual art, he often invokes

comparisons with music and literature, with rhythm playing a particularly important role

Rhythm not only evokes sensations but it is also useful in shifting borders and reclaiming

territory. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of "nomads"

and "war machines," movements that operate at the edges of systems. Nomads are able to

elude the territorialization of dominant groups. Both concepts are useful in discussing how

ideas are contested and appropriated. *Difference and Repetition* (1994) outlines the

relationship between consciousness and perception, stillness and motion and is one of the

main concepts Deleuze uses to attack the notions of transcendence and subjectivity.

Abstract art has often been engaged in a war between subjective and objective points-of-

view. Deleuze's concepts help clarify these positions. *What Is Philosophy?* (1994)

describes art in relation to science and philosophy, and argues that art uses affect and

precept to further its ends. Affect is particularly important to the artists in my study.

The Deleuze books that I found most useful were *Francis Bacon: The Logic of*

Sensation (2003) and *Bergsonism* (1966). Deleuze's study of Francis Bacon (1902-1992)

is invaluable because it shows how Deleuze applies his ideas and methods to an important

contemporary artist. *Bergsonism* describes the methodology of the French philosopher

Henri Bergson (1859-1941), a methodology which clearly has parallels with the

procedures Deleuze himself uses. Bergson was a professor at the University of France in

Paris and developed the concept of the *élan vitale*, a force that moves between bodies, in

his studies of movement and time. His ideas were outlined in three influential books: *Time*

and Free Will (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907). Deleuze

notes:

Intuition is the method of Bergonism. Intuition is neither a feeling, an

inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method, one

of the most fully developed methods in philosophy. It has its strict rules,

constituting that which Bergson calls 'precision' in philosophy."[6]

Bergson's method of intuition involves a consideration of duration and memory. How does

one logically explain duration or memory? These may belong more to the sphere of

experience than to the field of logic. Deleuze specifies that while duration and memory

"denote lived realities and experiences, they do not give us any means of knowing them

with a precision analogous to that of science. We might say, strangely enough, that

duration would remain purely intuitive, in the ordinary sense of the word, if intuition, in

the properly Bergsonian sense, were not there as method."[7]

Bergson's method involves three aspects: state or create a problem; identify the

functioning principles or composites of the study and then break those composites down

by their differences in kind; study the problem over time or in relationship to time.

Deleuze suggests one needs to be creative in posing a problem, being careful not to choose

problems whose answers affirm the position of a vested interest group. He points out that

teachers invariably pose the problems, which students are then compelled to try to answer.

Framed in this manner, problems are used not to facilitate open research, but are used as a

means of entrenching social hierarchies. As Deleuze puts it: "In this way we are kept in a

kind of slavery. True freedom lies in a power to decide, to constitute problems

themselves."[8]

How do we ask creative questions? How do we avoid engaging in problem solving

that merely entrenches a deeper social problem? Deleuze writes that "stating the problem

is not simply uncovering, it is inventing ... already in mathematics, and still more in

metaphysics, the effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating

the terms in which it will be stated."[9] In order to ask a good question, it may be necessary

to develop special terms or concepts, which open up a new space or field of enquiry. When

Deleuze speaks of inventing terms, he clearly means terms that will activate philosophical

positions, drawing on a history of previous positions from which his terms mark a

departure or make a distinction. In order to successfully make distinctions, one must

perceive a difference in kind from the terms that one breaks away from. *Anti-Oedipus*

breaks with ideas developed by Sigmund Freud, whose ideas of the unconscious and the

internal conflicts within our minds influenced surrealism and other art movements, such as

Automatisme and Abstract Expressionism. By using Deleuze's terms, one has a chance to

escape these associations and to look for new relationships.

Though a great critic of Freud, Deleuze was clearly influenced by him and often

uses him as a foil. For instance, by ending his study on Bacon with a discussion of

Michelangelo, Deleuze offers a rebuttal to Freud's earlier study of Michelangelo. In his

essay, "The Moses of Michelangelo," first published in the psychoanalytic journal *Imago*

in 1914, Freud analyzes Michelangelo's marble statue, *Moses* (1515) in the Church of S.

Piero in Rome by focusing on details that seem inconsistent or inappropriate, yet are

revealing of unconscious impulses. In the statue *Moses*, the anomaly concerns the way the

seated Moses, who is portrayed as a larger-than-life-sized hero with a powerful muscular

body, carelessly grasps the tablets of the law. Michelangelo has depicted the mythic

lawmaker in an agitated state of mental distraction, as Moses "struggles successfully

against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself."[10]

Recoiling at myths, Deleuze discerns in Michelangelo very different principles at work:

> form [in Michelangelo's work] no longer tells a story and no longer
>
> represents anything but its own movement, and ... makes these apparently
>
> arbitrary elements coagulate in a single continuous flow. Certainly there
>
> is still an organic representation, but even more profoundly, we witness
>
> the revelation of the body beneath the organism, which makes organisms
>
> and their elements crack or swell, imposes a spasm on them, and puts
>
> them into relation with forces.[11]

It is hard to believe the two critics are describing the same artist, though admittedly they

are discussing different works. Freud stresses the psychological portrayal of a hero, in

whom intelligence prevails over emotional impulses; Deleuze stresses a state of

impersonal vitality that runs counter to that of story-telling and representation.

Why is Deleuze so opposed to representation? Representations are misleading or

corrupt forms of communication because they invariably masquerade as truths. They

suggest that there is a direct and natural correspondence between an object and its

depiction, a correspondence which stands as an indisputable fact.[12] All depictions are

culturally conditioned and facts are prone to every imaginable type of gloss, spin,

distortion and chicanery. A depiction or representation may say more about one's cultural

conditioning than it does about the object that is being depicted. This is why Deleuze

speaks of "the painting before painting."[13] We do not see the world innocently, but

through the prejudicial lenses that we have inherited. There is no such thing as a blank

canvas because, before the artist gets to the canvas, he or she is

> besieged by photographs that are illustrations, by newspapers that are
>
> narrations, by cinema-images, by television-images. There are psychic
>
> clichés just as there are physical clichés—ready-made perceptions,

> memories, phantasms ... a whole category of things that could be termed
>
> "clichés" already fills the canvas, before the beginning.[14]

My schoolteacher friends refer to this as the principle of the "virtual schoolbag." Children do not come to school as blank slates; they come with things already in their minds from their experiences and family backgrounds. The same is true with artists. For modernists in the early twentieth century, the escape from representation meant the creation of abstract art. Deleuze, however, points out that things are not so simple: abstract art can be just as culturally conditioned as more realistic forms of art.

> The situation has hardly improved since Cézanne. Not only has there
>
> been a multiplication of images of every kind, around us and in our
>
> heads, but even the reactions against clichés are creating clichés. Even
>
> abstract painting has not been the last to produce its own clichés.[15]

This is a critical point: the distinction between abstract art and art that is not abstract is a binary distinction that is ultimately not very useful. If this is so, then how does one define representation and how does one escape from it?

Deleuze answers this with one of his most important concepts: "the diagram." When the Russian constructivist Kazemir Malevich claimed he was creating a "zero point" for painting, an erasure of past assumptions so that he and others could begin afresh with an uncorrupted vocabulary, he was creating a "diagram." Deleuze believes this "zero point" is something that all artists need to do, though they may use different means to achieve it. He writes of the diagram:

> It is as if a Sahara, a zone of the Sahara, were suddenly inserted into the
>
> head ... it is as if the two halves of the head were split open by the ocean;
>
> it is as if the unit of measure were changed, and micrometric, or even

cosmic, units were substituted for the figurative unit ... it is as if, in the

midst of the figurative and problematic givens, a catastrophe overcame

the canvas.[16]

Deleuze does not ask: what does a painting or an element within a painting mean? Instead

he asks: how does that element function? "If painting has nothing to narrate and no story

to tell, something is happening all the same, something which defines the functioning of

the painting."[17] To determine this, Deleuze first considers Bacon's entire body of work and

asks how it has developed over time. He notes Bacon's interest in conveying sensations

that act directly on the nervous system and quotes the artist: "It is a very, very close and

difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and

other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain."[18] This is the same

question Deleuze is pursuing: how does a painting communicate without recourse to

stories with their socially-structured assumptions? He makes observations about painting

and sensation, using examples from Cézanne, Duchamp, Muybridge and Samuel Beckett,

and concludes that all these artists evoke sensations in their work through the use of

repetition and rhythm. Deleuze describes

> a vital power that exceeds every domain [of the senses] and traverses
>
> them all. This power is rhythm, which is more profound than vision,
>
> hearing ... This is a "logic of the senses," as Cézanne said, which is
>
> neither rational nor cerebral.[19]

To explore sensation further, Deleuze uses the concept of the "Body without Organs," a

term borrowed from French actor and theatre theorist Antonin Artaud (1895-1948). Artaud

promoted an experimental, improvised theatre without predictable boundaries; he

compared this unstructured theatre to a Body without Organs. People perceive life as

constituted and defined by so many organs and organisms, or as collections of static forms. This is a misleading way to think of life, Deleuze argues, because life operates through "dynamic tendencies in relation to which forms are contingent or accessory ... It is a whole nonorganic life, for the organism is not life, it is what imprisons life."[20] This is one of Deleuze's great paradoxes. Things that are organic are not imbued with a flexible vitality; vitality opposes permanent structure of any kind.

Deleuze compares the Body without Organs to an idea expressed by German art historian Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965). Worringer defined what he called the northern Gothic line as a resistance against the rigidity of forms.[21] Crucial characteristics of Gothic art lie outside the classical tradition, Deleuze argues, making its strategies useful for contesting the assumptions that lie behind Western representation:

> The pictorial line in Gothic painting is completely different [from lines in
>
> classical art] ... it lies at the surface, a material decoration that does not
>
> outline a form. It is a geometry no longer in the service of the essential
>
> and the eternal, but a geometry in the service of "problems" or
>
> "accidents," ablation, adjunction, projection, intersection. It is thus a line
>
> that never ceases to change direction, that is broken, split, diverted,
>
> turned in on itself, coiled up, or even extended beyond its natural limits,
>
> dying away in a "disordered convulsion" ... acting ... through violent
>
> movements.[22]

Stressing function over form, Deleuze refers to works of art as on-going events rather than as static objects with fixable properties. In her introduction to *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Claire Colebrook writes:

The event is a disruption, violence or dislocation of thinking. To read is

not to recreate oneself, using the text as a mirror or medium through

which one repeats already habitual orientations. Just as life can only be

lived by risking connections with other powers or potentials, so thinking

can only occur if there is an encounter with relations, potentials or powers

not our own.[23]

Images can function both as codes and as the breakers of code, which is to say that some

images are more unstable or open-ended than others. The artist cannot entirely escape

representation, but can only draw attention to its presence and create problems or

discussion points pertaining to the hidden motives, covert structures and supporting

networks that accompany the production of images. Attention-drawing devices are

comparable to hysteria, a condition experienced by a body that tries to break free, as "the

entire body tries to escape, to flow out of itself."[24]

Hysteria touches on questions of sanity and normality, terms that are defined and

controlled through the use of representations. To support the status quo is to be "normal";

to deviate from the status quo is to be "abnormal." However, this process of imposing

controls on images and information is rather complicated and always shifting. Deleuze is

quick to point out that the greatest code-breaking force in society is capitalism. Capitalism

initiates change in all social spheres, with no regard for values of any kind except

monetary values. To explain how people with vested interests can control a system that is

in a constant state of change, Deleuze introduces another concept, the axiomatic. The

principle of the axiomatic is that in the very act of breaking a code, a new code is

established. One deterritorializes only to reterritorialize. This is what Deleuze and Guattari

refer to as the "schizophrenia of capitalism." The only way out of this vicious cycle is through the renunciation of power.

Deleuze's question expands to something like this: how does Bacon's work critique representation, making use of the Body without Organs, hysteria and the renunciation of power? Deleuze identifies a number of factors, such as placing the figure in a ring or circle that isolates or quarantines the figure from narrative expectations; the use of the triptych form to evoke disjunctions in time; the use of intense fields of colour to provoke direct nervous sensations; the deviant use of photographic sources to undermine any ideas of stable correspondences; the deforming of bodies to evoke a sense that bodies are being acted on by invisible forces from the inside as much as the outside; and the use of rhythmic or repeating elements to create nervous vibrations in the viewer that are the same as direct body sensations. Deleuze compares Bacon to earlier artists, as well as to contemporaries. The discussion of contemporaries examines two rival tendencies within abstract painting, the organization of pure forms and the rejection of form in favour of the *informe* work.

This debate between two approaches to art in the 1950s and early 1960s is also central to artists working in Québec, so it is worth examining. Deleuze contrasts what he calls "abstract painting" with abstract expressionism as two rival approaches to order and experience. Referring to French poet, Charles Péguy (1873-1914), Deleuze writes of abstract painting that it

> is a path that reduces the abyss or chaos (as well as the manual) to a
>
> minimum: it offers us an asceticism, a spiritual salvation ... one is tempted
>
> to say of abstract painting what Péguy said of Kantian morality: it has pure
>
> hands, but it has no hands. This is because the abstract forms are part of a

new and purely optical space that no longer even needs to be subordinate

to manual or tactile elements.[25]

Deleuze goes on to argue that abstract art avoids representation, but has replaced

this reference to objects with a kind of digital code that visually organizes material in

terms of oppositions. "Thus, according to Kandinsky (1866-1944), vertical-white-activity,

horizontal-black-inertia, and so on. From this is derived a conception of binary choice that

is opposed to random choice."[26] Using Deleuze's terms, one could say that hard-edged

abstraction is an approach to painting as a kind of ascetic ordering, visual rather than

tactile, with spiritual connotations of avoiding chaos through the use of a code controlling

the deployment of abstract binary oppositions. In contrast to this,

> abstract expressionism or art *informel* offers an entirely different
>
> response, at the opposite extreme of abstraction. This time the abyss or
>
> chaos is deployed to the maximum. Somewhat like a map that is as large
>
> as the country, the diagram merges with the totality of the painting; the
>
> entire painting is diagrammatic. Optical geometry disappears in favour of
>
> a manual line, exclusively manual ... with Pollock this line trait and this
>
> colour-patch will be pushed to their functional limit: no longer the
>
> transformation of the form but a decomposition of matter, which
>
> abandons us to its lineaments and granulations. The painting thus
>
> becomes a catastrophe-painting and a diagram-painting at one and the
>
> same time.[27]

Deleuze argues that abstract art set out to avoid representation, but replaced it with

obvious digital oppositions. These oppositions codify quite readily into signs or graphic

logos, which are simply other forms of representation. The problem with abstract

expressionism is that it degenerates into a catastrophe that is as oppressive in its way as the

representation that it supplants. It is the oppression of the manual over the optical. Its

ubiquitous mark becomes a universal principle. In its single-minded insistence on a single

path or approach, it allows no other path or approach, which is oppression, or as Deleuze

says, representation.

> The diagram must not eat away at the entire painting; it must remain
>
> limited in space and time. It must remain operative and controlled. The
>
> violent methods must not be given free reign and the necessary
>
> catastrophe must not submerge the whole. The diagram is a possibility of
>
> fact—it is not the fact itself ... To emerge from the catastrophe ... rather
>
> than submerge us further.[28]

Deleuze concludes by stating that Bacon suggests a third way, avoiding the binary

opposites of an ordered system, as well as the ubiquitous chaos of a disordered system.

Bacon creates images in which one principle does not overpower another, in which there

are principles of localization rather than of universals, principles of vibration that allow

one idea to connect with another.

Deleuze's method begins with the formulation of a problem, making use of terms

that express or expand upon philosophical positions. To understand these terms, it is

necessary to uncover distinctions that have gone previously unnoticed. Deleuze makes the

distinction between Figure and figuration because he is trying to avoid the binary

opposition of figurative artists and abstract artists. He does this for two reasons: to reduce

the preconceptions we bring to these terms and also to demonstrate that what we think of

as an abstraction or a representation is much more complex than we might imagine. He

liberates the categories and niches into which the work has been confined.

A postmodern idea Deleuze borrows from Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is that language is a contested arena; knowledge systems and

power systems inevitably work together in an "inextricable power/ knowledge knot."[29]

This is, in part, why Deleuze invents so many of his own terms rather than use terms

invented by other people. This is what makes reading his work so difficult; he is using an

entire vocabulary of words and phrases that are uniquely his own. It would be impractical

if this was a method that everyone adopted. However, there is a variation of this method

that I try to use strategically and this is the use of paraphrase, rewording ideas in my own

terms and language. I find this Deleuzian principle is particular effective when applied to

Deleuze himself. In my text, while I freely quote Deleuze, I also put many of his ideas in

my own words and in language with which I am comfortable. For instance, in his study,

Bergsonism, Deleuze outlines the following three aspects of representation:

> First, there is affectivity, which assumes that the body is something other
>
> than a mathematical point and which gives it volume in space. Next, it is
>
> the recollections of memory that link the instants to each other and
>
> interpolate the past in the present. Finally, it is memory again in another
>
> form, in the form of a contraction of matter that makes the quality appear.
>
> (It is therefore memory that makes the body something other than
>
> instantaneous and gives it a duration in time.)[30]

To put this in my own language I would say that representations are physical memory-

chains capable of hypothetical visualizations extending over periods of time. My

"translation" may not capture the full sense of the original, but one cannot be too definitive

with Deleuze. If one is too narrow in the application of Deleuze's ideas, if one translates

his theories into rules and laws, one risks violating the spirit of his work, which insists that

one should not be too narrow. On this point, Simon O'Sullivan writes:

> The desire to outline a Deleuzian methodology is to my mind somewhat
>
> wrong-headed. One might be able to extract such a method or system but
>
> this would be to render Deleuze's thought inoperative, to freeze it in, and
>
> as, a particular image of thought, to capture its movement, precisely to
>
> represent it.[31]

Adrian Parr, editor of the *Deleuze Dictionary*, writes: "Concepts are intensive: they

do not gather together an already existing set of things (extension); they allow for

movement and connection ... A philosophical vocabulary such as Deleuze's gives sense or

orientation to our world, but it also allows us to produce differences and further worlds."[32]

Deleuze loved literature, especially absurdist works by Kafka and Beckett, and

often inserts a little absurdity into his own work. For instance, in his extended interview

with Claire Parnet, Deleuze was asked about his interest in tennis. He answered that he

followed the game to some extent. Deleuze then went on to say that he admired the

Swedish tennis player Bjorn Borg and decided to approach him for an autograph. He went

up to a man, but soon realized it was not Borg, the tennis player, who he had approached

but rather the king of Sweden. But no, that could not be right, Deleuze told himself, the

king of Sweden is a much older man. The man Deleuze was asking for an autograph was a

strong, young bodyguard of the king, a man with whom the king occasionally played

tennis. Now the bodyguard's job was to repulse autograph seekers like himself and so

Deleuze was unceremoniously chased away, which is how Deleuze ended his story.[33]

This anecdote might be called "the mediation of celebrity." This is not a term that

Deleuze uses, but I believe it captures the spirit of his story. The anecdote, about sports

celebrities, is important to my study because I am writing about an artist who uses celebrity sports motifs. Deleuze's anecdote is a rather far-fetched, almost dream-like incident. I suspect it is entirely invented, but to what purpose? A tennis player is confused with a king, who is confused with a bodyguard. Does this confusion of identities reflect a similar confusion of values? What could be more improbable than for a famous philosopher like Deleuze to pursue the autograph of a sports celebrity? Deleuze surely is commenting on the public obsession with celebrity. There are different degrees of celebrity. A tennis player undergoes training and demonstrates a high level of skill and fitness. A king is a figurehead whose position is inherited, not earned. The tennis player wants to be king in a sport that is called a game of kings, but only the king *is* a king. The king, however, is a symbol of power, without actually possessing power. In person, he is a frail old man, lacking the strength and quickness of the professional athlete and of the bodyguard. In some cultures, a bodyguard impersonates a ruler as a precaution against assassination attempts. In fact, the virile young bodyguard may look more like our idea of a king than the king himself. He substitutes brute strength for political power.

In Deleuze's story, we are reminded that a great philosopher walks the streets as an unknown man. He has no public or popular celebrity. Why is this? What is a philosopher's job and what does that job have to do with seeking autographs? An autograph is a signature used for special documents. We sign for special deliveries. We witness events, we corroborate evidence. One connects signatures with such things as contracts and legally-binding promises. In his essay on Nietzsche in *A Life in Immanence*, Deleuze ascribes to Nietzsche the idea that culture is an extension of memory and people developed memories in order to keep their promises.[34] The keeping of promises becomes so important that societies developed laws to enforce people's promises. Promises benefit

societies at the expense of individuals. But Nietzsche also insists that culture fosters

individuality, the growth of self-consciousness and the awareness of difference. Culture

was invented to police promises, but culture is the main tool we use to break our promises,

to void our social contracts and pursue our own ends.

Can we say that Deleuze the autograph seeker is a man in search of promises, that

he is looking for a social contract and that he asks it of one who is singled out as a

particularly unique and special personality, but who in the end is interchangeable with

others? Deleuze's story is a parody of a hero quest, a parody of Freud's use of symbolic

substitution, which in its own way is as self-deceiving as the patient's sublimation it seeks

to cure. It is a demonstration of Deleuze's fondness for absurdity, for repetition and

circularity.

Throughout this study, I ask myself: do the works of Letendre, Lemoyne and

Tousignant operate exactly as one might expect, placed as they are within well defined

niches by Canadian art historians and critics? Or are there any paradoxes or contradictions

that have not been sufficiently addressed? Can these paradoxes be used as wedges to pry

open new discussions? For instance, is it a contradiction that Letendre's work makes

reference to technology, but her paintings are also thought of as landscapes? If one

combines the two ideas into a techno-landscape, does this open up a new space for

investigation? What about Lemoyne's faceless body-celebrities or melting athletes? What

about Tousignant's abstract use of mirrors or his paradox of the contour? This is a

Deleuzian strategy, looking for the "stutter" of language, that which makes it strange.

Deleuze proceeds from disjunctions and unusual combinations, those features that go

against the grain and liberate a space for new sensations.

Notes

1. Christopher Norton, "Deleuze, Gilles," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press 2005. *Oxford Reference Online*. Concordia University Library, Montreal. 10 October 2006.

2. Norton, "Deleuze, Gilles," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*.

3. Ian Buchanan, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 40.

4. Buchanan, *Deleuzism*, 48.

5. Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.

6. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 13.

7. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 14.

8. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 15.

9. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 15.

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11. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 160-161.

12. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 288.

13. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 86.

14. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 87.

15. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 89.

16. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 100.

17. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 12.

18. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 35.

19. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 42.

20. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 44.

21. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 46.

22. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 46.

23. Claire Colebrook, "Introduction" in Adrian Parr, ed., *The Deleuze Dictionary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 4.

24. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, xii.

25. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 103.

26. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 104.

27. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 104-05.

28. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 110.

29. Hans Bertins and Joseph Natoli, eds., *Postmodernism: The Key Figures* (Malden, Mass., Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), xiii.

30. Bergson, 23-34.

31. Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (Houndsmills, UK and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 3.

32. Adrian Parr, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3.

32. Interview with Gilles Deleuze by Claire Parnet, trans. by Charles J. Stivale, "L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze," www.langlab.wayne.edu/CStivale/D-G/ABC1.html.

33. Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 71-72.

Chapter Three: Rita Letendre

In her paintings and prints, Rita Letendre uses piercing arrows and abstract wedges that have been compared to jet trails and highways stretching to infinity. Evoking rupture and the transformation of matter into energy, her work is identified with two contrasting spaces: an interior psychological mindscape and an exterior cosmic environment. One involves excavation or the uncovering of hidden forces; the other involves traveling, flying and leaving the earth altogether. Letendre has used a variety of marks and graphic strategies to convey a feeling of motion, often involving a conflict of forms across an ambiguous space. Her work suggests an energy beyond human limits, an energy that brings to mind the power of technology and the precision of scientific instruments. Just as often, Letendre's images evoke natural and mysterious forces, such as northern lights, fire and light rays traversing the solar system. One might speak of "techno-landscapes" in the artist's work. This chapter examines how Letendre explores contradictory aspects of the motion of light. I refer to Gilles Deleuze's concepts of machines and the refrain to discuss a movement away from closed systems toward more open and free-flowing models of discovery. Deleuze argues that affect is a means of disrupting assumptions and of circumventing representation in art. I explore how Letendre uses colour and vibrating patterns to shock the viewer into an experience of light. Deleuze describes how art fits into

a pattern of micro and molar activities of resistance and deterrritorialization. I argue that a central theme of Letendre's work is the breaking of barriers and a need to take risks and make discoveries.

The chapter begins with a short review of the critical literature on Letendre. This begins with the period in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Letendre used a palette knife to create thick gestural works featuring colliding colored masses. Critics wrote of volcanoes and seismic pressures waiting to explode.[1] In the mid-1960s and 1970s, Letendre developed a hard-edged style of abstraction, introducing what some see as a more scientific and mechanical element to her work. In moving from one style to the other, and later integrating the two together, I argue that Letendre bridged a gulf separating the Automatiste and Plasticien groups in Québec. In the 1950s, Letendre exhibited with both groups of artists in Montreal and her work demonstrates stylistic characteristics of each, as well as sympathy for the contrasting philosophies. In this chapter, I outline a short history of these movements and indicate the ways in which they differ. This is followed by my own analysis of Letendre's work. The questions I pursue are: what are Letendre's strategies for conveying a sense of motion? Do these strategies change over time or do they convey a sense of time? Does Letendre's work contest anything or challenge us to see our relationship to the world in a new perspective?

Critical Overview of Letendre's Work

Though most reviewers agree on the use of motion and light in Letendre's paintings, within these themes a number of dichotomies can be observed. Letendre's work captures a sense of elemental energies and raw passions; the work is also considered cerebral and objective. It is shocking, violent and confrontational; it is joyous and liberating. It depicts a

sense of place; it conveys a sense of energy that transforms a place. The work shows the

confrontation of masses; there are no masses in the work, only light. Light is substance;

light is energy. The image is a landscape; it is an abstraction. It tells us something about

science and technology; it is about religion and psychological frontiers. The work grew out

of schools and movements that are uniquely situated in Montreal; the work is influenced

by international trends in art.

Early reviewers, such as Guy Robert, writing in *Le Devoir* in 1961, describe

Letendre's paintings as violent and emotional, seeing evidence in the work of "une

spontanéité primitive ... une âme émue."[2] In a similar vein, Jean Sarrazin wrote in *Le*

Nouveau Journal in 1961:

> Elle est un des peintres de choc de sa génération. Travailleuse, labourée,
>
> véhémente, sa forme puissamment spatulée témoigne d'un
>
> expressionnisme violent autant que d'un psychisme profound, mais
>
> étonnâmment dynamique ... Rita Letendre apparait comme une
>
> tragédienne de la couleur.[3]

Twenty years later, Letendre's work is described in the *Ottawa Citizen* as "intellectual,

precise and hard-edged."[4] In an *artscanada* review in 1975, Michael Greenwood writes:

"Letendre has a passion for lucidity, both in the underlying formal structure of her

paintings and in the logical relationship of colour which affirm that structure."[5] She is

either a "violent expressionist" or a formalist with a penchant for "lucidity and logic"! Or

perhaps she is both.

In her essay written for the retrospective of Letendre's work held at the Musée

national des beaux-arts du Québec in 2003, curator Anne-Marie Ninacs identifies two

poles that Letendre has attempted to reconcile: "highly solid structure and powerful

emotion."[6] Writing in the *Ottawa Journal* in 1980, Rosalie Smith McCrea echoes this

sentiment, describing "pure colors [which] affect us retinally as well as emotionally."[7] In

1961, Charles Delloye describes work that is both 'l'interrogation d'une architecture

formelle organique et articulée et d'une spontanéité lyrique indéterminable ... dans cette

ambiguité irréductible et ce labyrinthe de tensions à la dérive."[8] These contradictions

suggest different approaches to art and there have been various attempts to place Letendre

within the context of a particular school or movement. Sandra Paikowsky framed an

exhibition around the theme, "The Montreal Years: 1953-1963," which was valuable as a

recapitulation and assessment of the early work, rooting Letendre in the crucible of

Québec's first wave of abstract artists. Paikowsky takes pains to locate Letendre within a

social context and comments on the influence of peers such as Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-

1960) and Jean Paul Riopelle (1923-2002), as well as taking note of the changing

structures and attitudes within galleries and funding agencies. Paikowsky quotes freely

from reviews to give a sense of how the work was received and interpreted by others,

placing it within an ever-shifting contest of ideas. She also analyzes several key paintings.

This is how Paikowsky describes work from 1958, exhibited in a solo exhibition at the

Galerie Artek in Montréal:

> The somewhat calligraphic forms of the previous year have become more
>
> condensed and rectangular as in *Voyage Magique, October* and *Mirage*.
>
> The tile-like figures splay across the surface with a centrifugal energy.
>
> Impasto now becomes an inherent surface element ... the colour, laid on
>
> in consecutive strips, recalls Riopelle in both shape and *facture*.
>
> Letendre's *tesserae*, however, are less densely layered and while they

suggest his "jigsaw" configurations, they have a greater simplicity of

shape and structure.[9]

Paikowsky then describes the influence of the American abstract expressionist Franz Kline

(1910-1962) on Letendre's work, suggesting that she is beginning to grow beyond local

influences, a process that is accelerated with her travels abroad, starting in 1962.

Paikowsky ends her account with a description of a work painted in Israel, positioning

Letendre on an international stage, fortified by "her commitment to abstraction, to the

expression of the idealism of art and, most importantly, to her own self-discovery."[10]

A similar exhibition, "Beginnings in Abstraction," was curated by Linda Jansa for

the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa in 2005-06. Though covering the same period

in Letendre's evolution, Jansa places the artist in a more general context of "Canadian

modernism," comparing Letendre's early work to that of the Painters Eleven group in

Toronto, though without much evidence to support her claim. Like Paikowsky, Jansa

notes the breakdown of the grid in Letendre's work of the late-1950s into "tiles of colour

that are twisted and turned, the impasto adding to the work's energy... [as] gestural forms

move vibrantly across the canvas."[11]

In her catalogue essay for Rita Letendre's retrospective exhibition at the Musée des

beaux arts du Québec in 2003, Anne-Marie Ninacs mentions the emergence of a new

theme in Letendre's work in the early 1960s: an "espace changeant," the title of a key

work by Letendre from 1964 (fig. 4). This "changing space" features "forms continually

dancing in front of one another," with "shifting masses that confront and collide."[12] From

this emerge active polygons moving toward or ricocheting off one another at unpredictable

angles, in images with titles like *Impact*, 1964 and *Choc*, 1966. These colliding forms

feature sharp protruding edges which develop into penetrating wedges and arrows, as

Letendre enters her "most emblematic period"[13] from the late-1960s to the early 1980s.

Letendre's arrows seem to travel in bunches, engaging, as one reporter said, "in myriad

vibrations."[14] Terry Kirkman and Judy Heviz, writing in *The Montreal Star* in 1971,

comment on the artist's "long-held interest in energy, speed, dynamicism and light."[15]

Evelyn Blakeman described "a vibrancy or kinetic effect at times reminiscent of the

Northern Lights."[16] The vibration effect is related to the alteration of light and darkness,

both a contest of alternating energies, as well as one of alternating moods. Light is

frequently associated with "joyous explosions" while other of Letendre's paintings feature

"anxiety-provoking grottos."[17] Ninacs comments on how the paintings feature a "duel of

black-masses brought to life by the spatula and colour-light that attempts to surge out from

it."[18]

Reviewers increasingly view Letendre's forms not as collisions of competing

forces, but as endless projections and piercing rays of light. Joan Lowndes writes in the

Vancouver Sun in 1972: "Her concern is with darting movement, the speed of light and its

brilliant focused rays."[19] A word that often appears in French-language reviews is

"faisceaux," or light beams. Jean-Claude Leblond writes in *Le Devoir* in 1978: "Ses

oeuvres recentes jouent toujours avec le faisceau chromatique oblique bien délimité qui

balaie un espace riche en dégradés."[20] Letendre commented to Normand Thériault in 1969:

Il me fallait créer l'instant dramatique en rendant le tableau lumineux.

Non pas utiliser des couleurs dites lumineuses, mais faire la lumière."[21]

Here she states her intention is not to imitate light, but to make light, pushing into ever

more abstract domains. She experiments with the many forms that light could take. This

resulted in a double vocabulary in her works of soft and hard-edged regions which

complicates how these images should be read. Did this double vocabulary reflect a dual

sense of light as substance and light as energy? In 1980, Eliane Gaudet wrote in *Le Droit*, Ottawa:

> Ces jets lumineux s'amenuisent. Ils se referment sur eux-mêmes et ils
>
> perdent ainsi la force de frappe première. On peut cependant proposer
>
> qu'ils sont tellement devenus vitesse et accéelération qu'ils se sont
>
> métamorphosés, à l'instar du supersonique, et une longue trace mince,
>
> peu représentative de leur tension interne.[22]

Lines that taper to a point can express an idea of infinity. Gaudet suggests the tapering lines increase the sense of speed and the immateriality of the image. Montreal critic Guy Fournier commented: "On cherche un nouveau langage qui permettra de communiquer avec une civilisation engagé dans une ère où les choses visuelles abolissent les frontières traditionnelles des sens."[23] This expansion of the senses into experimental new realms would be missed by many of Letendre's viewers, who insisted on reading the work in a more traditional way: as landscapes or "paysages imaginaires."[24]

In 1976 Letendre told a reporter for the *Ottawa Citizen*: "People have continually pointed out the landscape elements in my work. The sky effect. The road effect. I don't mind; as long as they react I am pleased."[25] The paintings do not evoke static landscapes however. As one reporter wrote: "It is tempting to read the hard-edged band motif as a highway running through an ambiguous region whose visual aspect is blurred by the speed of passage."[26] Writing for *The Canadian Art Investor's Guide*, in 1976, Valerie Knowles comments:

> Depending on your point of view, they can suggest highways of light, or
>
> comets streaking towards a vanishing point in the galaxy, or light rays
>
> travelling towards the planet earth from a remote star. No matter what

images they evoke, however, they always convey a sense of energy, of

rapid uninterrupted motion into the farthest reaches of the universe.[27]

Earlier works suggested "geological travail... earthquakes and fire,"[28] or an "incendie

jaune qui ravage la toile, semble la dévorer."[29] The earth is a source of elements which

inspire the motion of powerful forces. Letendre described a desire "to express the force of

living nature, the expansion of natural growth."[30] Art dealer Simon Blais writes: "The

horizon is always present in her abstract 'landscapes,' suggested by oblique lines.

Nature—or its evocation—predominates, for the artist is firmly anchored to this Earth,

surrounded by the elements that compose it and ensure its harmony."[31] These comments

were made for an exhibition fittingly entitled, "Les Éléments" at the Galerie Simon Blais

in 2001. Elements refer equally to the weather, to the parameters defining the orbit of a

planet, to a habitat, and to elements of the periodic table, the base structures of life.

Just as Letendre's works have been described as landscapes, critics also mention

technology and scientific advances. Robert Smythe of the *Ottawa Citizen* compared her

streaking rays to the trails formed by "silent mile-high jets."[32] France Morin described "la

rapidité d'un rayon laser... chaque tableau semble un coin d'espace infini comme l'image

qui nous est renvoyée par l'objectif d'une caméra."[33] One thinks of cameras relaying

images from space craft travelling deep into space. Other reporters wrote of "electric

currents" and "technicolour science fiction."[34] A reviewer for the *Globe and Mail*

described visiting a Letendre exhibition shortly after reading that scientists had bounced a

laser beam off the surface of the moon.[35] In 1972, Gary Michael Dault wrote in *The*

Toronto Star of lines that were "cool and fast... The effect of the painting, as you walk

beside it, is a bit like lifting off the runway in a Boeing 747."[36]

In 2001, Hedgwidge Asselin describes the pursuit of the outer reaches of science and sensibility: "the work of art appears not as a depiction of the world, but rather as an energetic machine built by the painter... as Jean-Paul Sartre said... 'embodying the world in objects that cannot be found in it.'"[37] Technology aids in the breakdown of old frontiers, which is in part Letendre's project, though her frontiers may be as much psychological as they are physical. Ninacs suggests that Letendre's paintings, influenced by an interest in Zen philosophy, express her invincible optimism, a way of looking at the world in which motion equals life.[38]

Letendre's critics have covered a myriad of positions. I see my task to be taking some of the more intriguing contradictions, such as the "techno-landscape," and developing them further. Is it possible that Letendre is using a "double vocabulary," combining expressionism and formalism, to communicate opposite or irreconcilable ideas? How do her ideas of motion compare with other ideas of motion? How would one interpret them using the ideas of a philosopher like Deleuze?

Letendre and Deleuze: The Motion of Light

In the 1950s, Letendre exhibited with both the Automatiste and Plasticien artists in Montreal and her work shows signs of these rival tendencies. Though the Automatistes had their first group exhibition in 1946, it was not until 1949 that Letendre met Paul-Émile Borduas and began associating with such artists as Jean-Paul Riopelle (1923-2002), Pierre Gauvreau (b. 1923), Marcelle Ferron (1924-2001), Jean-Paul Mousseau (1927-1991), Françoise Sullivan (b. 1925) and others. Letendre was at first an observer of the group's activities, but her work was chosen by Borduas to be included in the final Automatiste exhibition, "La Matière Chante" in 1954, organized by Claude Gauvreau (b. 1925) at the

Galerie Antoine. The 1955 exhibition, "Espace 55" at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts,

brought together an assortment of post-Automatiste artists, such as Fernand Leduc (b.

1916), Rita Letendre and Guido Molinari (1933-2004). When Borduas saw the paintings

on display, paintings which emphasized geometrical structure over expressive gesture, he

called the work "archaic."[39] The work demonstrated the influence of the Plasticien group,

formed earlier that year under the leadership of Rodolphe de Repentigny (1926-1959).

Comparing Montreal's two most important schools of abstract art, Sandra Paikowsky

writes of the "opposing paths offered by the emotionalism and intuition of Automatism

and the intellectual and rationalized order of the Plasticiens."[40] The Automatistes shared

with surrealism an interest in probing the unconscious, using chance and improvisation as

part of their process.[41] In contrast, the Plasticiens maintained that art was a conscious and

deliberate construction of plastic elements. The Automatistes flattened the pictorial space

by using spatulas and knives to create sensuous impasto effects. François-Marc Gagnon

comments that the forms often appeared as "objects situated in a segment of the cosmos

(the atmosphere, the ocean, or a primitive plain), but never on the theatrical stage, so to

speak, where the sky can be distinguished from the land or sea."[42] The Plasticiens

countered that the Automatistes were simply painting landscapes in disguise.[43]

This rivalry helps each group define itself in relation to the other. It is a debate that

is not unique to Québec. In his study of the British painter, Francis Bacon, Deleuze

positions Bacon between European abstraction and American abstract expressionism,

between rigidly structured painting and painting that utilizes chance and gesture.[44] Bacon

is not just between the two, but represents an strong alternative, a third approach that does

not engage in the polarities of either/ or. This is also a direction that Letendre pursues. She

once stated she feels as much a part of the legacy of "Bosch, of Cranach, of Munch" as she

does to the "school of Mondrian."[45] To see how she enables her paintings to retain their

open-ended quality, it is necessary to trace the development of her work from the late-

1950s to the mid-1970s, from her Automatiste roots to her later hard-edged style.

While working under the influence of Borduas and the Automatiste group,

Letendre's early work was noted for its bold design, clear contrasts of color, and the free

physicality of its handling of paint. Letendre often makes use of repeating tile-like marks,

what Paikowsky calls "*tesserae*,"[46] applied with thick impasto in the manner of Jean-Paul

Riopelle, as in *L'ainge de l'aigle*, 1959 (fig. 1). Unlike Riopelle's multi-colored, densely-

packed, paint-mosaics, Letendre's tiles have a meandering lightness to them. This

lightness is aided by Letendre's fluid composition, with its three horizontal bands; the

white tiles flow together with no breaks or interruptions from the other colored tiles, while

the black and green tiles interpenetrate with one another at their outer edges. Letendre has

severely limited her palette to the use of just three colours, which unifies the work and

gives it a sense of clarity and contrast.

In works from the early 1960s, such as *Victoire*, 1961 (fig. 2), shapes invade one

another through a series of striations and flame-like extensions. This interpenetration of

forms becomes the principle motif in the later arrow images. Letendre's mobile masses are

made of rectangular units. The rectangle is a relatively stable shape. By tilting its axis,

tapering its sides and distorting and elongating the corner tips, Letendre destabilizes the

form. This destabilized form is repeated in a serial pattern to give a sense of fluttering or

wavering motion as calligraphic white forms seem to dart across a chasm of larger

concentrated black shapes. Intense pools of red surround the image's mysterious inner

core, providing a fiery edge to a void-like center.

One could compare what is happening here to Deleuze and Guattari's remarks on the musical refrain in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Among the many ways that music can be used, they look at three particular scenarios in which music helps to secure a sense of place. In the first instance, a child becomes lost and is frightened by his unknown surroundings and so he sings to himself. "The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos."[47] In the second scenario, a housewife works at home, and as she works, she listens to the radio, singing to herself. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that she is building "a wall with sonic bricks in it ... radios and televisions are like sound walls around every household and mark territories (the neighbor complains when it gets too loud)."[48] In the third scenario, Deleuze and Guattari describe a song that is an improvisation, a pure creation, a song that is not meant to reassure oneself against an imagined fear or to hold back forces of chaos, but a song that is inviting to others or that allows for new discoveries.

> One opens the circle not on the side where the forces of chaos press
>
> against it, but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though
>
> the circle tended on its own to open onto a future... to join with the forces
>
> of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an
>
> improvization. But to improvize is to join with the world, or meld with it.
>
> One ventures from home on the thread of a tune."[49]

Deleuze and Guattari call this last movement a "line of drift." These three scenarios are three aspects of the refrain, which is a musical form of repetition. Music imposes structure on chaos; it reassures us and gives us courage, but at the same time, it has an ephemeral structure easily susceptible to change. We can think of Letendre's motifs as a similar kind

of repetition, often organized around a chasm placed at the heart of her images. What is

Augure, 1961 (fig. 3) but a string of music dangled across an abyss, a cosmic metronome?

Deleuze and Guattari write: "Sometimes chaos is an immense black hole ... sometimes one

organizes around that point a calm and stable 'pace' (rather than a form)."[50] People do not

need to build walls to keep chaos at bay, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, as walls are

limiting, sealing their inhabitants into constricted zones. The refrain is as reassuring as a

wall, making people feel at home, yet has the power to transform relationships and bridge

unknown spaces. Letendre creates a visual rhythm to cross the chasms of her images. It is

a refrain and a creative line of flight; not just a defence, it is also a passage of discovery.

Letendre commented: "Art is a way of discovering the universe ... I think that art is

research, searching about yourself. Through yourself to the world... I follow a feeling, a

space. I let it guide me. I follow it wherever it goes."[51] It is interesting to note the

readiness with which Letendre reports:

> I love music. If I had not been a painter, I would have been a musician. I
>
> don't have musical talent, but music is the next most important thing in
>
> my life [after painting] ... When I paint, there is always music playing.[52]

Letendre called one of her exhibitions "Vibes in Colour."[53] Her visual patterns vibrate like

music. Deleuze and Guattari make a connection between music and territory.

> The role of the refrain has often been emphasized: it is territorial, a
>
> territorial assemblage. Bird songs: the bird sings to mark its territory....
>
> the refrain may assume other functions, amorous, professional or social,
>
> liturgical or cosmic: it always carries earth with it; it has a land
>
> (sometimes a spiritual land) as its concomitant; it has an essential relation

to a Natal, a Native... Forces of chaos, terrestial forces, cosmic forces: all

of these confront each other and converge in the territorial refrain.[54]

These are the regions that Letendre confronts: nothingness, the earth and outside the earth.

One could rename Deleuze's functions of the refrain as: overcoming fear, establishing

order and security and pursuing adventure. Every painting starts with fear, what the

Automatistes call "a risk, the jump into the void."[55] Then the painter establishes patterns

which give her confidence. She gets into a rhythm, she feels at home, but this feeling is

too comfortable and so she decides to try something she has not tried before, she wants to

extend into the unknown. How does Letendre do this? I suggest she does this by

manipulating her own signs, by altering the vocabulary that she has invented. Let me give

an example.

She starts with the rectangular tile-like motif, the tesserae, in a work like *L'aîné de*

l'aigle, 1959 (fig. 1) and develops this into one of her most effective and distinctive motifs,

the tapering rectangle with convex sides that terminate in pointed tips to create wing-

shaped parabolas, as is seen in *Victoire,* 1961 (fig. 2). Letendre develops these parabolas

until they become the central focus of images like *Augure,* 1961 (fig. 3) and *Espace*

changeants, 1964 (fig. 4). In the latter painting, the parabolic line has become a great wave

curling in upon itself like a scorpion's tail. The forms are continuous and dynamic; the

restricted use of color promotes an inter-play between positive and negative space,

convexity and concavity, while the fixed and open qualities of the parabola fuel a dizzying

sense of expansion and contraction. The tapering line suggests a change in speed, while

the sharply curved mass is reminiscent of a boomerang. It is a return or echoing energy, or

an energy that is so intense that it causes a warping of space. Warped space is a concept

from science fiction, dipping into realms of experimental physics. However, parabolas are

often encountered by engineers solving real life problems, as when the trajectory of a ball, affected by a gravitational force, bends toward the earth. To describe *Espace changeants* in Deleuze's terms, it is energy that returns, a refrain, as well as energy that seeks new ground, a line of flight. It takes the motif of the chasm and puts it in motion. Letendre no longer shows something moving against a static void; she now shows the void itself in motion.

The black chasms from the organic-looking work of the late-1950s have become, by the mid-1960s, block-like wedges that appear to move. The later pictures are marked by a tremendous concentration of energy, as planes of color collide and split apart. Letendre explained that she wanted to "replace generalized conflict ... with hard shapes ... filled with directional energy."[56] This is one explanation for the change in the Letendre's approach, though there may have been other contributing factors.

The artist and her husband moved to Southern California in 1965, after he accepted a teaching position at the California State College at Long Beach. Nearby, Letendre discovered the Tamarind Lithography Workshop. The Workshop was founded in 1960 by artist June Wayne as non-profit organization, using funds from the Ford Foundation, to stimulate printmaking in America.[57] She enticed master printers from Prague and Paris to come to Los Angeles to work with American artists in extended collaborations. Both artists and printers were encouraged to experiment and expand the boundaries of what was technically possible. At this workshop, Letendre was exposed to the work of the former Bauhaus instructor Josef Albers (1888-1976), who was noted for his clean geometrical shapes and precisely arranged fields of colour. Other artists associated with the workshop include Louise Nevelson, Sam Francis and Rufino Tamayo.

For the next decade, Letendre worked on graphic prints and large-scale murals (fig. 6, 7, 8). Large works, designed to be seen at a distance, do not facilitate the subtle effects of impasto and gestural marks that were so important to Letendre's earlier canvases. Monumental designs need to be simplified and graphically enhanced, often emphasizing a central motif to which the viewer's attention can be quickly drawn. Letendre was interested in expressing ideas of power, speed, energy and motion. This led to the development of lines that were harder, sharper, more streamlined and concentrated, an approach which reflected ideas of the Bauhaus school, relating art to industrial environments. Letendre's husband, the Israeli sculptor Kosso Eloul, also worked with hard geometrical shapes. Though Letendre's geometrical style was largely in place by the time she met Eloul, the two no doubt influenced one another in a stimulating partnership of two creative artists, working in different media, but with similar motifs.

Critics stress the shift from a subjective to an objective point of view, but what does this mean exactly? In Quebéc, the Automatiste movement, led by Paul-Émile Borduas, was based on a surrealist model. The foremost historian of this Automatiste movement, François-Marc Gagnon has convincingly traced Borduas's formative ideas to André Breton (1896-1966), leader of the surrealist movement in Paris.[58] A medical student during the First World War, Breton experimented with psychoanalysis while working in a mental hospital. He later traveled to Vienna to interview Freud, an interview which appeared in the first Surrealist journal in 1924.[59] At this time, Breton and his surrealist friends experimented with automatic writing and made visual exercises that paralleled the free-association techniques used in psychoanalysis. The surrealists, like the Automatistes who they inspired, worked with uncensored impulses and spontaneous gestures in order to explore their psychic drives.

This type of abstraction was self-contained and inward-looking, an investigation into the depths of the unconscious. But what kind of an investigation is it? One could perhaps ask: is the free association of psychoanalysis really free or are there hidden strings attached? To this question, Deleuze and Guattori answer that this psychological method is a "fantastic repression" that codes as much as it decodes.[60] In their critique of psychoanalysis, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1982), Deleuze and Guattari suggest that people be thought of as "desiring-machines" or productive entities who extend beyond the self. Conceiving of societies as elaborate networks of interconnected parts, the authors write:

> Everywhere it is machines ... machines driving other machines, machines
>
> being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and
>
> connections ... all the time, flows and interruptions ... there is no such
>
> thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one
>
> within the other and couples the machines together ... the self and the
>
> non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever.[61]

Machines are not autonomous. They need operators or systems of other supporting machines to make them run. Thinking of life in terms of flows of energy or desire, channeled through factories that facilitate or impede this flow, Deleuze and Guattari offer an alternative to Freud's ego-centered system. The machine model also explains how some groups take control over others, as well as offering a suggestion for the overthrow of this control.

Rita Letendre experienced considerable prejudice throughout her life both as a native woman and as a female artist. She was sensitive to processes of control through

social over-coding. In an article she wrote for *Macleans* magazine in 1978, Letendre

complained at the way critics wrote about her art. This is what a critic wrote in the 1950s:

> Les toiles de Letendre ont quelque chose de tragique ... une oeuvre
>
> puissante, audacieuse, qui trahit le sang indien qui coule dans ses veines.
>
> Il est difficile de croire qu'une femme a pu peindre ces toiles.[62]

Letendre gives a second example:

> l'année suivante [1958], j'appris par les journaux que j'évoluais vers une
>
> 'facture géométrique,' style retenu qui convient davantage à une jeune
>
> femme. Et au début des années soixante, à les entendre j'étais devenue
>
> une femme en colère, une passionaria ... Les critiques étaient censés
>
> écrire sur l'art. Ils digressaient sur Freud![63]

What Letendre objects to here is that she is being coded as a woman-artist or as an

emotionally- high-pitched-woman artist. It is interesting how she brings Freud into the

discussion as part of the condescending treatment she receives. These are exactly the kind

of harmful codes that Deleuze and Guattari are trying to expose. One might interpret

Letendre's move into a more "objective" plastic art as an attempt to escape these personal

and psychological codes. Is there any evidence for this in the work itself?

In the mid 1960s, Letendre limited her palette to just two colours to produce stark

poster-like images, such as *Impact*, 1964, *Acceleration and Obstacle*, 1966 (fig. 9) and

Choc, 1966 (fig. 10). In each work, two polygons collide across a near-empty field,

conveying a sense of concentrated energy, confrontation and after-shock. One almost

recoils when looking at them, as if responding to a physical sensation. It strikes me as odd

that no critic has read these as political allegories during the conflicts of the civil rights

struggle in the United States. Writing of *Impact*, Anne-Marie Ninacs describes how

two bodies of black confront each other in a scarlet space ... [Letendre

has] channelled all the painting's energy into the projection through space

of one form against the other, which shatters upon impact ... only a few

months later, Letendre undertook a suite of works radically restricted to

black geometric forms in a white space that graze each other, sometimes

touching but always remaining in a tension just this side of bursting.[64]

Ninacs colourfully describes the work, without mentioning any social reference points,

such as the Vietnam War or the March on Washington or any other clash of values that

might have located the image in a period of change. François-Marc Gagnon suggests that

the confrontational quality in Letendre's work could have many interpretations: "It is the

spirit of adventure, the savouring of risk, the jump into the void. Rita Letendre calls this

jump a 'rebellion.'"[65] For one series of images, Letendre said she envisioned "prisoners

struggling to free themselves."[66] Throughout his writings, Deleuze views communication

efforts in political terms, as when he describes art as an act of resistance, "freeing life

from prisons that humans have created and that is what resistance is. That is obviously

what artists do ... There is no art that is not also a liberation of life forces; there is no art of

death."[67] Without delivering a message, art somehow conveys a sense of resistance against

boundaries and unnatural structures. The explosion of boundaries becomes one of

Letendre's principle themes, a theme she described in the following terms: "What I'm

after is a feeling of passage, of going through, of action, of limitlessness."[68]

The motif of an escape from restrictive boundaries takes a new direction in

Letendre's subsequent works. In the silkscreen, *Moonlight*, 1967 (fig. 11), lines veer

together at the vertex of a parabola, just discernable at the bottom of the image. This builds

on the familiar warped space theme that was encountered in *Espace changeant* (fig. 4)

while at the same time introducing a new theme that will occupy Letendre for the next 15

years: converging rays that form a diagonal band cutting across the entire length or height

of the image. This bridge-like span of the pictorial space is accompanied by a move to a

much more rectangular format, a format often possessing the stretched, anamorphic feeling

of a cinemascope screen, as in *Sun Song*, 1976 (fig. 12). The lines either taper to a point or

suggest a projected point of convergence. Letendre remarked: "I want to paint space that

moves, that moves to a point."[69] She also described her work as "bright bursts framed and

enclosed in masses of black ... struggling to free themselves ... to liberate the light."[70]

The titles of Letendre's paintings are full of references to suns, stars and life

beyond earth, an interest in the cosmos which coincided with the dawning of the Space

Age. To the comment that one of her paintings looked like a view of outer space, the artist

responded: "I'd like to travel there." I asked if she was serious and she said that when she

was a child, the notion of space travel was "written as science fiction."[71] Letendre's

paintings share with science fiction an interest in technology and the breaking of

boundaries.

Our identities are rooted in boundaries. It is one of the prime purposes of

governments to secure these boundaries and to delineate territory. Deleuze and Guattari

characterize this process of territorialization as a molar activity. In contrast to this, they

outline the principle of a micro-activity, which is fundamentally lawless and resistant to

structures. People engaging in micro-activities tend to upset boundaries. They

deterritorialize society and allow new relationships and new identities to form. Deleuze

and Guattari however are quick to point out that neither tendency, that of structuring or

destructuring, is superior to the other. In fact both conditions are often present together and

interact in a never ending series of give-and-take.

The value of art is no longer measured except in terms of decoded and

deterritorialized flows... It is here that art accedes to its authentic

modernity, which simply consists in liberating what was... hidden

underneath aims and objects, even if aesthetic, and underneath recodings

or axiomatics: the pure process that never ceases to reach fulfillment as it

proceeds—art is 'experimentation.'[72]

A picture from 1969, *Into the Horizon* (fig. 13), announces many of Letendre's new

interests. It uses five muted colours: black, white, pink, brown and grayish green. It is a

horizontal picture with a skewed green base, to which a series of lines, forming diagonals

to the picture plane, converge. These converging lines suggest the orthogonals of a

perspective drawing, one of the cornerstones of representational art. Using a strictly non-

representational vocabulary of form and colour, Letendre paradoxically recalls an

illusionistic three-dimensional space. The idea surely is that abstraction is prone to its own

illusions.

If *Into the Horizon* is flipped upside-down, it looks like a road receding into the

distance rather than the effect it has, right-side up, of a dark void, night perhaps,

descending rapidly upon the earth. The large dark triangle, jutting precariously from the

top of the picture frame, does not touch at the horizon as the other tangents do, but moves

beyond this point, creating an effect of downward motion. There is a strong tension

between positive and negative space. The six pink rays evoke the waning light of day, as

well as highway markings. Many roads come together or shoot off in different directions

as multiple paths and options. If one combines the ideas of nightfall and journey, it

suggests dreaming, plunging into the unknown. As night descends, it hides things that are

familiar and brings with it a sense of uncertainty and mystery into our lives. The artist

moves between a real world and an abstract world, as if to suggest that somewhere

between these worlds, between our ability to form concepts and our ability to experience

life, there is a kind of gap that it is necessary to cross. Deleuze and Guattari comment:

> Philosophy, science and art want us to tear open the firmament and
>
> plunge into chaos. We defeat it only at this price ... The philosopher, the
>
> scientist and the artist seem to return from the land of the dead ... Painters
>
> go through a catastrophe, or through a conflagration, and leave the trace
>
> of this passage on the canvas, as the leap that leads them from chaos to
>
> composition.[73]

In 1967, Letendre commented: "Ceci est mon carnet de voyage, voyage dans le temps,

l'espace, ou peut-être ce voyage où il est si difficile d'eviter de s'égarer, voyage à

l'intérieur de soi."[74] The voyage is not about going somewhere, as no actual places are

depicted, but about the process of going; for Letendre, motion is analogous to a process of

discovery.

In *Sadeh*, 1974 (fig. 14), a dark diagonal wedge cuts through brilliant areas of

surrounding colour. The wedge gives a strong sense of motion and direction and the

dramatic abruptness of its insertion contrasts with the softer handling of transitions in other

areas. The composition divides into three triangles. Cutting into the centre is what looks

like the blade of a knife, a force being answered by distant counter-forces and echoing

lines. The color scheme, of blue, green and yellow, is cool and unusual. There are no earth

tones, which makes the image seem not of the earth. Letendre told me she wanted to paint

a "form moving so fast that the air is burning around it."[75] The dark wedge echoes

Letendre's earlier use of black cavities as central motifs across which forms appeared to

move, as in *Victoire*, 1961 (fig. 2). In *Sadeh*, it is the void itself that is in motion. This

furthers the sense that what is moving is not physical. It is immaterial. It is not matter, but energy, or perhaps matter becoming energy.

Letendre's arrows connect motion with light, reminding us that light is always in motion. Light is ephemeral, but present in the oscillation from night and day, and it is these oscillations that lead us to a concept of time. Light looks different to the naked eye than it does to scientists equipped with special instruments. *Sadeh* calls to mind the technology needed to see new worlds, whether through microscopes or telescopes or by using high speed photography or laser beams. In a review for *artscanada*, in March, 1974, Michael Greenwood described Letendre's colors as "prismatic ... [as if] projected through lenses from a primary source."[76] Letendre told me that scientific photographs of unusual conditions in outer space had influenced her work.[77]

A number of questions occur to me as I look at paintings such as *Into the Horizon* (fig 11), *Sadeh* (fig. 14) and *Koumtar*, 1974 (fig. 15): am I looking at an image of something solid in a state of motion or am I looking at pure energy? Are these abstract paintings of light or are they representational images of light? Is light an abstraction or something that exists in our everyday life, and if so, is it possible to paint an abstract picture if its subject entails light and vision? These questions suggest that the definitions separating abstract and representational art are not so secure. The Plasticiens had criticized the Automatistes for painting images that were too close to nature, but Letendre demonstrates that a hard-edged abstract image can also be close to nature. Letendre's images have affinities with science fiction. The work portrays something known to us, light, but in a context that has no direct counterpart in the physical world. She blurs boundaries, using what Deleuze and Guattari call an "abstract machine ... [to] play a

piloting role. The abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality."[78]

Nomads are names Deleuze and Guattari give to forces that are capable of moving from one territory to another. They move outside boundaries and their activity, if imitated by others, can help blur boundary lines or cause lines to change altogether. Can one discern a nomadic tendency in Letendre's work? Her images evoke rupture and the transformation of matter into energy. The work suggests journeys, breakthroughs, discovery of new experiences, speed and excitement. Forces seem to be moving rapidly across a vast scale; the liberation of light from darkness suggests the birth of a new world, as well as a criss-crossing of continents in jets and airplanes.

The sense of motion in these images has an immediate joyous impact. Speed, as any child knows, can be exhilarating, a source of pleasure and a release from one's everyday limitations and lack of powers. Deleuze admired the way in which Spinoza "turned joy into a concept of resistance and life ... We live with joy in order to be at the maximum of our force, avoiding resignation, guilt, and sad affects that judges and psychoanalysts would exploit."[79] Deleuze explains that "joy is everything that consists in fulfilling a force."[80] Joy is an escape from judgment through a life charged with affect.

In their last collaborative project, *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari argue that artists express an aspect of the human condition that science and philosophy are unable to account for. "The thing or work of art," they write, "is a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects."[81] Both are pre-conscious reactions to stimulus beyond our control. Affect describes the way we react to stimulus and percept describes the stimulus itself, not its source, but its passage to us.

Letendre told me that when a baby is born the first thing the infant sees is light and this encounter with light is shocking. "What is the first thing that human beings see? Light... It's the most shocking experience you have in your life."[82] Letendre's darting forms have a similar shock value. They produce a physical sensation in the viewer like a body that vibrates in response to a vibrating sound. This is what Deleuze calls "affect," a body sensation. Letendre explained to me how our lives are regulated by seasons and cycles of light. So much so that a feeling for light "is embedded in the inner molecular being of a person. With light, we don't have to know what we are in contact with. We have a body-sense of it. We know it by osmosis [conditioned by] centuries of experience."[83]

When artists create art, they do not describe percepts and affects, as much as release them into the world. In her 2002 study on Deleuze, Claire Colebrook writes: "A poem might create the affect of fear without an object feared, a reason, or a person who is afraid."[84] Colebrook goes on to state:

> It is the task of art to dislodge affects from their recognized and expected
> origins ... affect, as presented in art, disrupts the everyday and
> opinionated links we make between words and experience ... everyday
> opinion is also limiting, Deleuze argues, because it assumes that there
> simply is a common world, there to be shared through language or
> information and communication.[85]

Letendre shocks the viewer out of lazy habits of seeing. When the child is born, the child is shocked with light. This is what the artist does for the viewer; she recreates that infant shock and allows us to experience something as commonplace as light as if for the first time. When one speaks of affect in art, the subject of colour is bound to come up. In 1976, Letendre told a reporter: "I'm known as a colourist and I gladly admit to it. Colour is

incredibly sensual. It's like a deep breath, it's enveloping."[86] Letendre reduces her number

of colours to maximize an effect of intensity and of space expanding to infinity. The

colours are clean and clear, sharply contrasting with areas of surrounding black. The artist

utilizes natural earth tones, as well as more fantastic otherworldly colours. I commented on

a black and white painting from the 1960s and suggested it was the extreme contrast that

appealed to her. Letendre said: "With so few colours there's no room for error. It increases

the element of risk."[87]

In *Burning Green*, 1981 (fig. 16) Letendre uses an airbrush technique to soften the

areas of transition between colours. The painting appears as if seen through a fog or haze

of heat. Oscillating masses with uncertain borders shift in and out of one another's space.

A razor thin dark arrow streaks across the lower third of the image, while a background of

color bands quivers or dances before the viewer's eyes. The definitive character of the

arrow plays against an uncertain oceanic or cosmic element. It suggests not a foreground

and a background so much as a simultaneous action or a double vision of what light is or

how it operates.

Letendre's paintings recall spectroscopic images, which use prisms to analyze the

light emitted by distant stars. Prisms break light into their essential spectral colours. The

most common shape of a prism is a pyramid with triangular sides that are flat and highly

polished. Many of Letendre's images, such as *Moonlight* (fig. 11) and *Sun Song* (fig. 12)

suggest both the shape of the prism, as well as the refraction of the light. As light passes

from the air to a prism, it changes speed and bends (refracts). *Sun Song* is one of a series of

paintings that treat the theme of a ray that appears to split apart. The points touch at the

bottom of the image, a common source, suggesting the rays may in fact be incarnations of

a single ray in different positions.

Burning Green (fig. 16) and After the Storm, 1982 (fig. 17) both mark a return to a

square format and a smaller more intimate dimension. Letendre had spent much of the

1970s working on large public murals for corporate clients. To her dismay, she found that

the paintings were not properly maintained. Some were damaged, others were destroyed.

She paid $1,000 to rescue one of her paintings that was being ruined by the dripping

exhaust from an overhead fan.[88] She told me: "There is such an incredible lack of respect

for art in Canada. It is shocking."[89] Gradually her monumental work came to an end,

replaced by an increased production of intimate works, using pastels on paper and smaller

canvases. The change seems to have liberated Letendre, as her work becomes more

spacious and ephemeral. The diagonal lines are no longer as pronounced as in works like

Sadeh. In After the Storm, there is hardly a trace of a diagonal. Letendre has also

abandoned her experiments with discordant colours; the works are less jarring, but they

maintain a nervous tension. There is a feeling that something is in the air, though we may

be unable to see it.

Burning Green uses spectral colours divided into zones. Lines of variable thickness

streak across these zones. They have the quality of "red shifts," fluctuations in

electromagnetic radiation that are used to measure the velocity of stars. They also recall

the Fraunhofer lines that appear in the optical spectrum of the sun. A spectral line is a dark

or bright irregularity in an otherwise uniform or continuous spectrum. This is exactly what

we see in upper half of Burning Green. This blurred effect at the edges of the zones

contrasts sharply with the thin diagonal line at bottom, a relic of the wedge or arrow that

featured so prominently in the images of the 1970s. The top and bottom of the image

present cool colours, blue and green; in the center is a fiery orange that has a mirage-like

quality, a heat haze guessing from the title. The blue zone is channeled through two

imposing lines of black, perhaps an oscillation of night and day or smoke from the fire of

the burning green. Could we be seeing different simultaneous points of view of night, day

and twilight, as well as different interpretations of matter, smoke, haze, light and energy?

It is a depiction of light as a particle and light as a wave; light as matter, light as energy;

light as abstraction, light as representation. Or rather it represents the gap between these

poles. In its blurring of boundaries it offers a resistance to the sedentary forces that oppose

the complex fluctuations of the energy of life.

Conclusion

Letendre's subject leads the viewer into outer space, warped space or other unearthly

frontiers where he or she encounters what Deleuze calls "a foreign language in our own

language,"[90] a condition that is at once familiar and bewildering. People know what light

is, or think they do, but this knowledge is clouded with assumptions. Letendre uses light as

an endless source of invention. When looking at the development of Letendre's work, one

notes a process of simplification, a gradual reduction of colour and fewer forms. This

restriction of means opens up creative possibilities as the artist explores a genre one might

call the "techno-landscape." One is never quite sure, looking at images like *Sadeh,* 1974

(fig. 14) and *Koumtar,* 1974 (fig. 15), if one is looking at something through a microscope

or a telescope, just as earlier images like *Moonlight,* 1967 (fig. 11) and *Sun Song,* 1969

(fig. 12) could be refractions through a miniature prism or they could be mile-long beams

relayed across the universe. Are we looking at a microscopic world of subatomic particles

or a macroscopic world of inter-galactic phenomenon? Are they satellite images,

stroboscopic images or radar diagrams? Images like *Burning Green,* 1981 (fig. 16) and

After the Storm, 1982 (fig. 17) suggest red shifts and other features of the solar spectrum.

In making invisible things visible, Letendre challenges us to expand our thinking about our relationship to light, as well as our response to what may or may not be an abstract picture.

Her light is always in motion. It usually appears sharp, focused and fast. Sometimes it has a sweeping quality, as in *Sun Song,* 1969 (fig. 12); other times it appears like a rocket, as in *Moonlight,* 1967 (fig. 11). The light appears as a burning flame of gas in *Koumtar,* 1974 (fig. 15), and as quivering fields of electric charges in *Burning Green,* 1981 (fig. 16). Sometimes it is illuminating; other times it is hidden in its own heat haze. The light invariable interacts with darkness. What I find fascinating is that the light does not so much cross the darkness, but it accompanies the darkness. It is as if the two travel together in an indivisible bond. Letendre makes use of a duality, but at all times, she stresses the complexity of relationship. The light in her images is not neutral, but appears rather as a knife or arrow thrown across space, setting off waves of repercussions in its wake, as in *Sadeh,* 1974 (fig. 14).

These waves are felt by the viewer. Using Deleuze's term, Letendre uses "affect" to create a sense of shock, as well as a sense of participation. There is always a vibration to her light, a panoply of after-shocks and counter-charges. One looks at her images and sees a world that is deeply mysterious; at the same time, one feels an innate kinship, as if reacting to light is something that we were born to do and have somehow forgotten. Light is a great connector; it seems able to span any distance, to link any one person to any other person, regardless of their class or disposition. In her images, the beams work as bridges from one side of the composition to another. They are bridges into the unknown, inviting adventure, opening possibilities.

In the late-1950s, Letendre adopts Riopelle's use of mosaic or tile-like marks, as in *L'aîné de l'aigle,* 1959 (fig 1), but she un-jams the tiles, increases their size, inserts space

between and around them, and sets them in flight. This rectangular motif is stretched, curved and distorted, forming expressive winged *tesserae*, parabolas, and wedges, as in *Victoire*, 1961 (fig. 2) and *Augure*, 1961 (fig. 3). Large zones of colour are juxtaposed, but these invariably interpenetrate their neighbors at strategic points. The theme of interpenetration becomes more pronounced as Letendre inserts dark chasms into the work, as in *Espace changeant*, 1964 (fig. 4). Letendre introduces a serial rhythm to repeating forms which defy the stasis of this void. This could be compared to Deleuze's concept of the refrain, in which rhythm is used to overcome feelings of trepidation and to create a sense of territory or to assist a flight into new terrains. These same patterns of risk and the exploring of space can be seen in much of Letendre's work. She also shows a talent for transforming her own motifs, as when she fuses her parabola forms with the chasm form to create the sense of a void in motion. It is the rhythmic refrain that overcomes fear, concentrates energies and allows for exploration and discovery.

Letendre explores the division of space into forms that appear to move, *Espace changeant*, 1964 (fig. 4); into forms that come in conflict, *Choc*, 1966 (fig. 10); and into forms that border one another in such a way that the border becomes fractious or begins to waver and to move, *Burning Green*, 1982 (fig. 16). This animated border zone was at times conceived of as a void, a black hole, an interior cavity or a vanishing point, *Into the Horizon*, 1967 (fig. 13). The void served as a gap separating large areas of intense colour, but the gap was rarely a uniform shape, *Victoire*, 1961 (fig. 2). Its irregularities bled into the surrounding zones as jutting peninsulas, spikes, fire tongues and curving scorpion tails. As the artist exaggerated these penetrations, she developed tapered points either as arrows or as parabolas. The arrow developed as a kind of diagonally darting and burning void

spanning the canvas and surrounded by echoing lines sluicing and vibrating through space,

Sadeh, 1974 (fig. 14).

In 1957, prominent Montreal art critic Rodolphe de Repentigny criticized Letendre

for abandoning what he perceived as an inviolable element of the Plasticien mantra, "all-

over composition."[91] The implication was that by incorporating large central motifs into

her work, Letendre was reverting to a more representational or landscape-oriented

approach to abstraction. But if we apply Deleuze's ideas, we realize that this dichotomy of

synthetic and natural abstraction is rather artificial. de Repentigny's view of art was a

coded view of art, demanding allegiance to the principles of a school. Letendre

demonstrates that she is able to uses elements of different styles, the hard lines and flat

colours of the Plasticiens, the fondness for risk of the Automatistes, to form her own ever-

expanding style. Letendre introduced space into her images to give a sense of motion to

her figures. It is the figure-in-motion that creates a line of flight, a sense of shock and joy

that releases affect, offering an escape from restricted boundaries. Letendre resists the

over-coding of representation, whether those are abstract or realistic codes.

Notes

1. Sandra Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years, 1953-1963/ Les années Montréalaises, 1953-1963* (Montreal: Concordia Art Gallery, 1989), 29.

2. Guy Robert, *Le Devoir*, October 27, 1961. (a primitive spontaneity ... a soul full of emotion.)

3. Jean Sarrazin, *Le Nouveau Journal*, October 28, 1961. (She is one of the painters of shock of her generation. Her laboured and vehement forms, shaped with a knife, testify to a violent expressionism as much as to a deep feeling that is surprisingly dynamic ... Rita Letendre has the appearance of a tragedian of colour.)

4. Nancy Baele, *Ottawa Citizen*, November 3, 1984.

5. Michael Greenwood, "Some aspects of new painting," *artscanada*, (March 1975), 8.

6. Anne-Marie Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour* (Québec: Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2003), 133.

7. Rosalie Smith McCrea, *Ottawa Journal*, April 26, 1980.

8. Charles Delloye, exhibition notes, Galerie Deuyre Delrue, Montreal, October 23-November 11, 1961. (probing a formal architecture, an organic architecture capable of motion, entering with a lyric spontaneity and an irreducible ambiguity into this ever-shifting labyrinth of tensions.)

9. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years*, 22.

10. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years*, 32.

11. Linda Jansa, *Rita Letendre: Beginnings in Abstraction* (Oshawa, Ontario: Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 2005), 5.

12. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 133.

13. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 133.

14. Joan Lowndes, *Vancouver Sun*, August 3, 1972.

15. Terry Kirkman and Judy Heviz, *The Montreal Star*, December 8, 1971.

16. Evelyn Blakeman, *Edmonton Journal*, February 18, 1978.

17. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 133.

18. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 134.

19. Joan Lowndes, *Vancouver Sun*, August 3, 1972.

20. Jean-Claude Leblond, *Le Devoir*, May 16, 1978. (Her recent work consistently plays with sharply defined beams of colour which sweep a space rich in gradations.)

21. Normand Thériault, *La Presse*, October 11, 1969. (I was after a dramatic instant through a picture of light. Not just an image of light, but light itself.)

22. Eliane Gaudet, *Le Droit*, Ottawa, May 3, 1980. (These bright streaks narrow and close upon themselves, losing the force of their first impulse. One could speculate that they have become pure speed and acceleration; in their transformation, leaving a long thin trail like that of a supersonic jet, a ghost of their internal tension.)

23. Guy Fournier, *Perspectives* 19, May 12, 1962. (They search for a language appropriate to an era in which all our senses are expanding beyond their traditional limits.)

24. Suzanne Lamy, *Forces* 27 (1974), 46. (imaginary landscapes.)

25. Robert Smthe, *Ottawa Citizen*, November 13, 1976.

26. Anonymous review, *Calgary Herald*, October 13, 1979.

27. Valerie Knowles, *The Canadian Art Investor's Guide* 2, no. 3 (October 1976).

28. Guy Robert, *Le Devoir*, Novemer 18, 1961.

29. Jean Sarrazin, *Le Nouveau Journal*, November 6, 1961. (yellow fire which devastates the canvas and seems to devour it.)

30. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years*, 30.

31. Simon Blais, "Foreword," in *Rita Letendre: les éléments / Rita Letendre : the elements*, Hedwidge Asselin, (Montréal: Galerie Simon Blais, 2001), 6.

32. Robert Symthe, *Ottawa Citizen*, November 13, 1976.

33. France Morin, *Le Devoir*, December 10, 1971. (the rapidity of a laser beam ... every picture resembles a corner of infinite space like an image shot back to us by the lens of a distant camera.)

34. Anonymous review, *Calgary Herald*, October 13, 1979.

35. Anonymous review, *Globe and Mail*, May 15, 1976.

36. Gary Michael Dault, *Toronto Star*, October 18, 1977.

37. Hedgwidge Asselin, *Rita Letendre: les éléments / Rita Letendre : the elements* (Montréal: Galerie Simon Blais, 2001), 12.

38. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 136.

39. Sandra Paikowsky, "Vivre dans la cité: Québec Abstract Painting," in *Achieving the Modern: Canadian Abstract Painting and Design in the 1950s,* Robert McKaskell et al. (Winnipeg: Art Gallery of Winnipeg, 1993), 46.

40. Paikowsky, "Vivre dans la cité: Québec Abstract Painting," 50.

41. Borduas once praised Jackson Pollock for "taking the magnificent risk ... [relying entirely upon] accident which he multiplies to infinity." François-Marc Gagnon, *artscanada* 30, no. 176-77 (February-March 1973), 49.

42. François-Marc Gagnon, *Annual Bulletin* 4, (1980-81), 7.

43. François-Marc Gagnon, "Claude Tousignant: point de mire," *Vie des arts,* no. 69 (Hiver 1972-1973), 42.

44. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation,* trans. Daniel W. Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 21.

45. Guy Robert, *Le Devoir,* November 16, 1961.

46. Paikowsky, *Rita Letendre: The Montreal Years,* 22.

47. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 311.

48. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 311.

49. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 312.

50. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 314.

51. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

52. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

53. "Vibes in Colour by Rita Letendre" was a travelling exhibition organized by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1975-76.

54. Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader,* ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 203.

55. François-Marc Gagnon, *Rita Letendre: le feu et l'esprit* (Baie-Saint-Paul, Québec: Centre d'exposition de Baie-Saint-Paul, 2001), 5.

56. Exhibition notes, *Vibes in Colour by Rita Letendre* (Montréal: Musée des beaux arts de Montréal, travelling exhibition, 1975-76).

57. San Diego Museum of Art, "The Magician and the Mechanic: Tamarind Lithography Workshop, the Early Years," www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2003/02/10/30740.html.

58. François-Marc Gagnon, *Refus Global (1948): le manifeste du mouvement automatiste/ Manifesto of the Automatist Movement*. (Paris: Services culturels de l'Ambassade du Canada, 1996), 106.

59. Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art*, trans. Gordon Clough (New York and Washington:

Praeger Publishers, 1970), 47.

60. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 3.

61. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1-2.

62. Rita Letendre, "Rita Letendre, peintre," *Macleans*, March 1975, 51. (Letendre's paintings have a tragic quality... this powerful and audacious work betrays the Indian blood which runs in her veins. It is hard to imagine that a woman could paint these canvases.)

63. Letendre, "Rita Letendre, peintre," 51. (Next year [1958], I learned by the newspapers that I had evolved, through the use of geometric elements, a reserved style more suited to a young woman. And at the beginning of the sixties, to hear them talk, I had become a fiery and tempestuous woman ... Critics were supposed to write about art. Instead they digressed on Freud!)

64. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*, 134.

65. Gagnon, *Rita Letendre: le feu et l'esprit*, 5.

66. Rita Letendre quoted in Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour*.

67. Interview with Gilles Deleuze by Claire Parnet, trans. by Charles J. Stivale, "L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze," www.langlab.wayne.edu/CStivale/D-G/ABC1.html.

68. Linda Richardson, Sault Ste Marie Star, September 23, 1976.

69. Rafael Barreto-Rivera et al, *Contemporary Canadian Artists* Scarborough, Ont.: Gale Canada, 1997, p. 324.)

70. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

71. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

72. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 370-71.

73. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatttari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson andGraham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 202-03.

74. Ninacs, *Rita Letendre: Aux couleurs du jour,* 99. (This is my travel diary, a voyage across time and space, a voyage where it is difficult to avoid getting lost, a voyage inside myself.)

75. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

76. Michael Greenwood, "Some aspects of new painting," *artscanada,* (March 1975), 8.

77. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

78. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 142.

79. Deleuze/ Parnet Interview, "L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze."

80. Deleuze/ Parnet Interview, "L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze."

81. Deleuze and Guatttari, *What is Philosophy?,* 164.

82. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

83. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

84. Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

85. Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze,* 22.

86. Robert Smythe, *Ottawa Citizen,* November 13, 1976.

87. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

88. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

89. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007.

90. Deleuze/ Parnet Interview, "L'Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze."

91. Rodolphe de Repentigny, *La Presse,* February 23, 1957.

Chapter Four: Serge Lemoyne

In this chapter I explore the unusual treatment of the athlete in Lemoyne's "bleu, blanc,

rouge" series from the mid-1970s and the transition from this motif of athlete to the motif

of flag and triangle, with which the series ends in 1979. These paintings evolved out of

Lemoyne's performance work from the 1960s, though he increasingly focuses on themes

of transformation and dissolution, which lead him eventually to working with the fantastic

ruins of his family home. In his images of athletes, I argue that Lemoyne uses a number of

strategies to undermine classical attitudes, downplaying individual accomplishments and

dramatic struggles. His appropriation of signs accords with Deleuze's concepts of

"deterritorialization" and "assemblage." Lemoyne's truncated treatment of bodies and his

technique of dripping paint are discussed in relation to Deleuze's idea of the "Body

without Organs." This concept is traced through its origins in Antonin Artaud's theatre of

cruelty and in relation to Georges Bataille's definition of the *informe*. As Lemoyne's work

is closely tied to performance and the theatre, I refer to Deleuze's ideas of experimental

theatre as a means of freeing artists from a dependence on representation. Finally, I

conclude with a discussion of Lemoyne's work in relation to the cinema, drawing on

Deleuze's argument that post-war cinema has abandoned a movement-image in favour of a

time-image, in which multiple points-of-view lead us to consider a multiplicity of

durations.

The following section provides a summary of critical views, outlining the major

themes that have been identified in Lemoyne's work. This is followed by my own

analysis. Little has been written on Lemoyne since his death; most of his critics were

appraising a body of work in the midst of its production. While I focus my comments on

the "bleu, blanc, rouge" series, a few general comments connecting this series to

Lemoyne's overall oeuvre may be in order. Just as Deleuze singled out central motifs in

Francis Bacon's work and discussed how those motifs functioned within specific

paintings, I follow a similar approach with Lemoyne. My inquiry starts with the question:

how does Lemoyne's references to motion function within his work? Does his work alter

our awareness of time? Does it alter attitudes concerning the control and flow of

information within societies?

Critical Overview of Lemoyne's Work

As either a performance artist or as a Pop artist, Lemoyne's work is often placed in its

relationship to a public forum and to public uses of media. In an obituary written for *La*

Presse in 1998, Jocelyne Lepage refers to Lemoyne as "l'inventeur des happenings au

Québec" and further commented:

> Il y avait un petit peu d'Andy Warhol en lui dans la mesure où il avait saisi
>
> toute l'importance des médias de masse et des communications dans la
>
> société moderne et qu'il s'était inspiré de l'imagerie populaire dans une
>
> bonne partie de son oeuvre.[1]

Critics stress the artist's manipulation of icons and symbols. Lemoyne captured a popular

mythology and in time created a self-mythology. Complaining that "le fossé entre les

artistes et le public est de plus en plus grand,"[2] Lemoyne saw his work as a bridge between

popular culture and the specialized world of fine art. Critics readily point out that

Lemoyne was a dedicated explorer of the formal elements of painting, building on the

legacy of abstract art in Québec. Other themes that emerge are Lemoyne's attempt to make

culture open to everyone, to remove the fixed boundaries from what we consider art, and

to make the work of art less of a rarefied and sanctified object. In his own projects, he tried

to reconcile a need for lasting work with a drive to create spontaneous and ephemeral

work. His fascination for real objects and concrete things was tempered by a love of

abstraction and for the process of doing.

Lepage called him "farouchement indépendent, authentiquement original, ne vivant

que par et pour son art."[3] Jean Chartier noted the artist's attraction to extreme behaviour,

writing in *Le Devoir* that "Serge Lemoyne n'était pas homme du juste milieu."[4] When I

asked Lemoyne's sister, Pierrette, if there was anything about her brother that has not been

given proper weight by his many critics, she reacted very strongly and said that he was

"largely misunderstood" and what people most failed to see in him was his untamed

innocence.[5]

Marcel Saint-Pierre suggested there were three sides to Lemoyne: the activist, the

performer and the painter. He threw open the doors of culture to everyone, mixing the arts

together and blurring the boundaries between genres and categories. Saint-Pierre writes of

Lemoyne's "triple ambition relative à la démocratisation culturelle, au décloisonnement

des arts et à la démystification de l'oeuvre d'art."[6] Lisanne Nadeau described a dualism in

Lemoyne's work. "La production de Lemoyne aura ainsi été marquée d'un dualisme

constant: d'une part d'activisme culturel, d'autre part la recherche de structuration d'un

langage plastique."[7] In his catalogue essay for the exhibition, "Five Attitudes, 1963-

1980: Ayot, Boisvert, Cozic, Lemoyne and Serge Tousignant," 1981, at the Musée d'art

contemporain in Montréal, Marcel Saint-Pierre argues that in Lemoyne's "bleu-blanc-rouge" series "une thématique sociologique est réintroduite dans le champ de la peinture moderniste et du formalisme américain."[8] The hockey motif is an "anchor" or point of focus on which to base an investigation of the formal properties of painting. Saint-Pierre suggests the paint surfaces of Lemoyne's canvases echo the transparency and markings of the rink's ice surface, as well they "renvoit au sujet de la peinture."[9]

Derived from sports photos, which the artist crops so tightly as to be all but unrecognizable,[10] Lemoyne's images avoid all traces of sports anecdotes and eliminate views of individual heroics or breath-taking plays. Saint-Pierre concludes that

> par voie de réductions successives ... ce processus d'épuration de la
>
> figuration restreint leur identité à un chiffre plat, leur jeu à une surface, la
>
> force de leur gestes à des juxtapositions chromatiques, leur vitesse de
>
> déplacement à la gravitation des coulisses de couleur... bref! toute leur
>
> plasticité illusioniste à des effets de recouvrements de la toile par couches
>
> de couleurs .... la seule réalité ... admise, le seul récit autorisé étant celui de
>
> la peinture.[11]

Recognizing the inspiration of the flag paintings of Jasper Johns (b. 1930), which use recognizable subjects in an abstract manner, Saint-Pierre writes of "l'équilibre entre abstraction et figuration, ou plutôt, se situant à la frontière entre les deux."[12] Saint-Pierre distinguishes two types of hockey images, a "série des nombres" and a "série des articulations," the former showing close-ups of hockey jerseys in which numbers form central points of interest; the other do not show numbers and as a consequence are much more vague in their suggestion of a uniform, though they retain coloured markings and a point of juncture often suggesting the articulation of a limb in motion.[13]

Other critics have taken a very different approach to the hockey images, stressing

their symbolic connotations. Lemoyne told Michel Saint-Germain: "Je prends la pouls

d'une collectivité et je l'exprime."[14] Asking Lemoyne why he had chosen a sports motif to

pursue in such an obsessive manner, René Viau reported:

> Car le hockey, c'est bien le point de convergence des mythologies de
>
> l'artiste. Le jeu. Plastiquement: la vitesse, la couleur pure, le dripping sur
>
> fond magnifiquement blanc. Une sorte de danse. Coup de chapeau à
>
> Pollock. Mais aussi rejoindre les gens, manier les signes que tous
>
> connaissent. Mythologies collectives. Images de ralliement. Une portée
>
> universelle, du moins au Québec. La communion.[15]

Michel Saint-Germain argues that Lemoyne reinforces the importance of community by

celebrating the motifs found within the community: "En isolant trois couleurs comme

point de focalisation, Serge Lemoyne nous renvoie nos images, démultipliées, à travers

son miroir-prisme."[16] This was not a view shared by everyone. Georges Bogardi, writing

in the *Montreal Star* in 1976, scorns the notion that three colours can represent the inner

psychic life of a nation and calls Lemoyne's style "artificial and affected" in a sarcastic

review entitled: "Bad art and how to enjoy it."[17] Bogardi's article, while hugely unfair,

does raise concerns about the loose application of a mythological view to Lemoyne's

work. Gale Thomson phrases this debate in more appropriate terms: "In effect, Lemoyne

created a symbolic environment for the observer in which that observer came to recognize

himself/ herself as a symbol-making and symbol-made creature."[18] Thomson points out

that the "recognizable iconography" in Lemoyne's work often takes on religious

overtones, as in his exhibition, "Stations," with its three structures evoking the three

crosses of Cavalry. This symbolism may be more personal than communal however, as the

artist recycles his own images "cannibalistically in his art. These painted and reassembled fragments ... constitute an exhibition remarkable for being so compelling an exercise in self-mythologization." Thomson notes that Lemoyne's work is full of "bravado" and "risk-taking," which she translates into an "aesthetic of doing."[19] Claude Gosselin argues that even after Lemoyne stops his performance activities, his paintings continue to show the presence of a "spectacle." "L'action de Lemoyne n'est pas tant valorisée par l'oeuvre que par la qualité de sa présence dans un lieu déterminé. Ainsi pourrions-nous dire, que sa pensée n'est pas dans le tableau, mais dehors du tableau."[20] Invoking the arguments that were made in support of "action painters" in the United States, René Payant stresses the process of the artist as a sign of engagement:

> Lemoyne's recent pictures are an experiment with the materiality of
>
> painting through familiar paradigms, inviting the eye to wander, the look
>
> to venture, at its risk, rather than to any deciphering of their sense. Indeed,
>
> they show the present uselessness of making sense and the urgent need to
>
> act, to essay, in order to keep alive.[21]

The artist once commented: "Just as Lafleur was an artist on the ice, I pursued the act of painting like an athlete."[22] Painting was a physical activity for Lemoyne.

After Lemoyne's death, Marcel Saint-Pierre was contacted by a reporter from *Le Devoir* and asked to place the artist within the history of painting in Québec. Saint-Pierre answered that Lemoyne represented the last generation of avant-garde artists and the first of the generation of postmodern artists. One sign of this cross-over is Lemoyne's interest in the appropriation of images and in mass media.

Pour moi, c'est le dernier pôle d'attraction de nos avant-gardes artistiques

qui vient de disparaître. Après la premier période de Serge Lemoyne, dans

les années 70, on entre dans un esprit typiquement postmoderne.[23]

René Payant goes further, seeing Lemoyne's work as a critique of modernism. Payant

argues that modernism, which began as a liberating force within the art world, had become

just the opposite by the 1960s: a cumbersome and artificial code of rules that artists felt

obliged to follow. In Lemoyne's work, he sees an instance of how

the new figuration criticizes the limits of this modernism by attacking

abstraction right down to its minimal version ... Lemoyne's recent pictures

go right to the heart of this problem. Their development does not ignore

modernism or take place (illusory) outside of it as other pictorial forms

pretend they can. They [Lemoyne's paintings] take the terms of

modernism as an inevitable conclusion but also, and above all, as the

acknowledgement of limits. They torment the painted space circumscribed

by modernism, do violence to it with the same elements—and do so by

round-about methods, by a critique of history, in order to shake the

modernist tautology.[24]

Lemoyne reintroduces a subject into his painting as a critique of abstraction, but "torments

the surface" to show that he is not returning to a conventional form of representation. He

uses signs in a conditional and idiosyncratic way, as he tries to forge a new space for

himself, uncircumscribed by modernist rules or by a mere reaction against those rules.

Lemoyne is an artist clearly interested in how images work, whether as icons or

abstractions, as modernist signs or motifs of mass media. Relating action to performance,

he senses the promotion of art may involve turning artists into celebrities. Echoing a

position taken by Warhol, Lemoyne states: "J'avais voulu que tout le monde se sente

vedette."[25] This raises the question, was Lemoyne obsessed with celebrity the same way

that Warhol was? Are his images celebrations of celebrity or do they adopt ironic

positions? How do Lemoyne's interests in motion, in performance, in painting, in

celebrity, and in mass media come together? What connecting links pull his work

together? Does Lemoyne's interest in theatre have anything to do with the theatre that is

sports and the theatre that is media? How do they relate to Deleuze's concepts of

representation and theatre?

Lemoyne and Deleuze: The Athlete in Art

In his images of athletes, Lemoyne uses a number of strategies to undermine classical

attitudes, downplaying individual accomplishments and dramatic struggles. Instead he

creates an ambiguous body-sign that quotes and reconfigures well-known signs from

recent art history. This appropriation of signs accords with Deleuze's concept of

"assemblage" and "body-without-organs." Before discussing these ideas, it may be helpful

to consider the kind of codes that they break away from in three examples of art from

different periods that use the athlete in contrasting ways.

The athlete is a theme closely associated with classical Greek art. The Greeks

staged the first Olympic Games in 776 BCE, offering contests of physical prowess in

emulation of their robust gods. In his book *The Nude: a Study in Ideal Form*, British art

historian Kenneth Clark states that Greek religion was unique in its conception of athletic

gods who competed in open rivalry with each other.

The divinities of other early religions were static, and everything that

surrounded their worship was stiff and still; but from Homeric times the

gods and heroes of Greece proudly displayed their physical energy and demanded such display from their devotees.[26]

Instead of using animals or other natural forces, as earlier artists had done, the Greeks turned the human body into "an incarnation of energy."[27] In their sculptures and paintings on vases that were awarded as prizes, Greek artists depicted nude bodies tensed for motion, dynamic, yet balanced, as in Myron's *Discus Thrower* and Polkleitos' *Achilles*, both c. 450 BCE. In these works, there is an almost superhuman articulation and clarity to the human anatomy. The body was a microcosm and the harmonious relationship of one body part to another reflected the underlying harmony of the universe, a harmony reflected by the mathematical laws of Pythagorus (c. 569-500 BCE) and other philosophers.[28]

The Greek athlete was depicted as a closely observed, but ideal body and this idealization later led artists such as Michelangelo (1475-1564) to adopt his own "athletes of god" on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The athlete represented a spiritual self-discipline, a striving for perfection, as classical ideas were adopted to Christian themes. Michelangelo's larger-than-life figures were frequently depicted with twisting poses and strong foreshortening to add a sense of pathos and dramatic intensity. Physical convolutions suggested an internal psychic struggle. Greek figures had celebrated heroic qualities, as well as tragic or abject qualities. As he moved from the classicism of the High Renaissance to Mannerism, Michelangelo made his figures increasingly individual, making the treatment more expressive, exaggerated and individual as well.

George Bellows (1882-1925) was an American social realist who depicted basic human conflicts in crowded urban milieus. In *Dempsey and Firpo*, 1924 (fig. 18), he surrounds his semi-nude fighters with fervent spectators. The two worlds of ring and stadium, boxers and viewers, merge together as Dempsey knocks Firpo backwards through

the ropes and into the crowd. Contrasting the towering vanquisher and the sprawling victim, the action has the feel of a comic book. It is realistically drawn, but has an exaggerated Damon Runyon-esque quality that is slightly lurid like a tabloid story, revealing the cruelty and venality of the raucous, leering mob. The battle of the fighters epitomizes the uncertainty and ruthlessness of the daily struggle for existence. Boxing was used by several writers of this time, such as Jack London (1876-1916) and Bertolt Brecht (1989-1956), to portray class struggles and the corruptions of modern life. The fight is an exciting, brutal form of theatre, without intellectual pretensions. Modernity is geared toward just this kind of entertainment, overloading the senses with strong, vivid impressions, in which over-night celebrities are heralded and crowned. The athlete is king, but he depends on the caprice of the crowd for his rewards and acclaim.

Lemoyne's athletes reflect a different way of thinking. Clothed, not nude, they are animated sweaters more than they are men. These are the jerseys that any fan can wear. The jersey transforms one into a participant in the game. Anyone who ventures onto a Metro train on game night in Montréal will encounter hundreds of fans proudly sporting their ubiquitous team colours. This ritual of community has a Dionysian character of unleashed passions and merging identities. In Lemoyne's hockey images (fig. 19-24), one never sees human hands, feet or heads, except in his painting of a goaltender's mask, which I will discuss presently. In an image such as *Lafleur, Stardust*, 1975 (fig. 23), one feels close to the figure, close to the action, almost a part of the action. But this close-cropping is also disorienting. The body becomes a kind of screen that obstructs our vision like someone standing before the lens of a camera. One is never quite aware, for instance, if the figure is indoors or outdoors. The figure is presumably on a rink. The white jersey dissolves into the whiteness of the ice, as foreground and background merge together.

Even the lines on the jerseys are reminiscent of the lines on the rink. This produces a sense of being close and far away simultaneously. It is a magic disappearance act, as if the figure moved so quickly that all that registers is a flash of color.

Modern social realists like Bellows stress the role of the crowd, for whom the athletic contest shapes and clarifies broader social values, as corrupted and compromised as those values may be. In Lemoyne's work, the artist's means of portraying the athletic event is as contested as the event itself. The boxing ring and skating rink represents a symbolically disputed territory. For postmodern theorists such as Foucault and Deleuze, territory does not just refer to space. It refers to anything that constitutes a zone of power or control. Deleuze refers to Foucault's concept that "every form of power needs an accompanying form of knowledge."[29] Knowledge is accessed or packaged in codes that tend to rationalize set patterns of behavior. Deleuze and Guattari describe how

> The prime function incumbent upon the socius has always been to codify
>
> the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no
>
> flow exists that is not properly damned up, channeled, regulated.[30]

This is a contentious process; one group codes and a rival group decodes, all in a struggle to monopolize or leverage positions. Hockey, like many other professional sports, is particularly prone to codes signifying heroes and villains, loyalty and betrayal, sacrifice and accomplishment. Lemoyne was aware that, as Canada and Québec's national sport, hockey is not just a diversion, but a character-building enterprise and a populist source of pride. Though he first started working on the theme in 1969, Lemoyne began to seriously focus on hockey players in 1972, the year of the Canada-Russia hockey summit. This was not only an historic hockey event, but also served as the showdown of rival Eastern and Western philosophies toward teamwork and individuality. Lemoyne made reference to this

series in his painting, *Un joueur russe peut-être*, 1975. Unusually for Lemoyne, the image

shows the torso of a player with no indication of what team or group he represents,

suggesting that sports, while exciting intense local feelings, could also blur divisions and

boundaries.

This raises the question: how does one break a code without affirming an alternate

but equally rigid structure of power? Deleuze argues that to elude a code, one must avoid

representations and false assumptions. One must "rip the painting away from all narrative

but also from all symbolization."[31]

In his chapter "One Manifesto Less" in *Superpositions* (1979), Deleuze outlines his

thoughts on an experimental theatre that similarly challenge the need for reassuring

fictions. He begins by stating that "theatre does not proceed by addition, but by

subtraction, by an amputation."[32] Plot and representation are the two primary elements that

are excised. Deleuze writes:

> The man of the theatre is no longer an author, actor or director. He is an
>
> operator. By operation, one must understand the activity of subtraction, of
>
> amputation, but already marked by another activity which gives birth to
>
> and multiplies the unexpected.[33]

This process of subtraction works well with appropriated material. Attitudes or

assumptions are already in place that an artist must overcome. This is also what we see in

Lemoyne's paintings of athletes: there is a radical subtraction from the appropriated source

images and indeed from our assumptions of what athletes might look like as the

background, the setting, the competition and drama of the sport is entirely eliminated.

Deleuze argues that literature is excised from theatre to remove its codified structure, its

patina of power relationships, and to minimize the status of theatre as a medium of power.

"It is the elements of power, the elements that make up or represent a system of power, which are subtracted, amputated or neutralized."[34]

Sports heroes are figures of considerable power in our culture, but Lemoyne's depictions of these figures neutralize their aura of power. No recognizable faces are shown. The artist does not show opponents or team mates. There is no sense of the tactics or psychology of the game, just as there is none of the physical space. Instead Lemoyne draws attention to the way in which every jersey displays a number. The number is usually displayed on the side of the arm, as this is smaller than the number on the back and less likely to dominate the composition. The inclusion of numbers evokes the sense of a team sport, with many participants.

In sports, numbers help identity figures seen at a distance. For instance, in the 1970s, jersey number 10 of the Montréal Canadiens belonged to Guy Lafleur (fig. 23, 24). However when seen in close-up, the spectator has no way of knowing just who is wearing this particular jersey. It could be a man; it could be a woman; it could be a child. Sports jerseys are merchandising memorabilia, allowing fans to broadcast their loyalties in public. The sports uniform is occasionally worn by rappers and other performers, along with copious amounts of jewelry, as a statement about popular culture. To represent people as numbers, as Lemoyne does, has a colloquial cachet, serving as a private code for those in the know. If you follow hockey, you know who the numbers represent; if you do not follow hockey, the numbers are a mystery.

Numbers can be quite impersonal. Lemoyne's "portraits" of numbered faceless bodies is reminiscent of the dystopian novel, *We* (1921), by Yevgeny Zamyatin, in which numbers inexorably take over people's strictly regulated lives. Though Lemoyne's world is not dystopian, it is a Pop world where commodities take on the characteristics of people

and people take on the characteristics of objects. As central points of interest in Lemoyne's images, numbers function almost like animated characters. Looking at several of Lemoyne's hockey images at once, one sees a series of numbers moving from bottom to top corner, right to left, changing size and position. For instance, in *Sans titre, no. 2*, 1975 (fig. 22), number 3 pushes forward, an aggressive risk-taker, under-sized but persistent. In *Lafleur Stardust*, 1975 (fig. 23), the number 10 drops to the bottom of the picture frame, exhausted, and conserving energy as best he can. In *Cournayer*, 1975 (fig. 20), the number 12 is large and charismatic, but rather egocentric. Not at all a team player, he looks out of place among the others. In *Boom Boom*, 1975 (fig. 19), the number 5 hugs the centre of the frame. He is powerful, but not quick-witted and waits for a playmaker to pass him the puck.

Numbers may be abstractions, but they are abstractions which we can hardly live without. We put numbers on products, bank accounts and telephones. Numbers program our digital technology. Numbers measure distance, speed and time, to say nothing of costs and taxes. We put numbers on maps and road signs. We use numbers to compare ourselves with others. Numbers signify generations, whether we talk of Elizabeth II, Louis XIV, Apollo 11 or Abode Photoshop 10.2. Numbers make names reusable; as reusable as the hours and minutes, which repeat from day to day. Numbers are the cornerstones of mathematics, the language of science. But numbers can also describe relationships in music and design. According to one of the pioneers of abstract art, Wassily Kandinsky, "The final abstract expression of every art is number."[35] Numbers are used to give a systematic form and shape to images.

Using numbers as a graphic element, Lemoyne's paintings use the grammar of modernist abstraction, exemplified by simplified forms and a preoccupation with process,

but they are not entirely abstract as emblematic figures from pop culture intrude. Marcel

Saint-Pierre commented on

> Une gamme de signes manifestant la présence obsessive d'une imagerie
>
> on ne peut plus reconnaissable, mais dont Lemoyne parvenait à
>
> contrecarrer les effects illusionnistes en insistant fortement sur leurs
>
> propriétés sémiotiques et leur qualités matérielles. Maintenant ainsi
>
> l'équilibre entre abstraction et figuration, ou plutôt, se situant à la frontière
>
> entre les deux...[36]

Lemoyne presents hockey as a form of theatre that is close in spirit to the happenings of

the 1960s. Happenings and performance art were not altogether new, growing out of Dada

and the futurist cabarets of 1918, as well as being influenced by the "theatre of cruelty"

advocated by actor and theorist Antonin Artaud (1895-1948).

Artaud fought against the Western tradition of the theatre, which he described as

"that art which states a problem at the beginning of a play, and solves it by the end."[37] The

theatre of cruelty abandons mimicry, as well as narrative. This emphasis away from story-

telling is clearly related to abstract painting and its rejection of representation. Aiming for

"the whole of nature to re-enter the theatre," Artaud urges the artist to find "an analogy

between a gesture made in painting or the theatre, and a gesture made by lava in a volcanic

explosion."[38] Artaud advocates an aesthetics of shock to break down the divisions

separating the stage from the audience.

In Lemoyne's hockey images (fig. 19-24), there are no heads, no hands, no feet,

only the torso, as consciousness is replaced by pure body sensation. These open bodies

show no boundaries separating the self from the world, an outlook that recalls Deleuze's

notion of the Body without Organs. Artaud invented the phrase the "Body without

Organs" for a radio play, *To have done with the judgment of god*, (1947), written the year after his release from a mental hospital and the year before his death. The play takes the form of a visionary's rant, combining paranoiac rage with Utopian longing, as the author describes his physical and mental torment. The cause of this pain is Artaud's refusal to accept the limitations of a restricted body. Artaud suggests that

> man is sick because he is badly constructed. We must make up our minds
> to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him
> mortally, god, and with god his organs. For you can tie me up if you wish,
> but there is nothing more useless than an organ. When you will have made
> him [a person] a body without organs, then you will have delivered him
> from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his full freedom. Then
> you will teach him again to dance wrong side out as in the frenzy of dance
> halls and this wrong side out will be his real place.[39]

Artaud mixes surrealist imagery of autopsy tables and reconstructed hybrid bodies with Biblical imagery of God-created bodies, of covenants and deliverance from evil, as well as the Medieval image of the dance of life and death. Deleuze develops Artaud's poetic metaphor into a more elaborate concept, applying the term to social bodies as well as to human bodies, a change which gives the concept a much more political orientation. Deleuze characterizes the Body without Organs as "permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles."[40] Deleuze later explained that "It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices ... You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it."[41] The Body without Organs refers to an individual or a group in a state that is open-ended, ever-changing and admits of multiple possibilities,

though as often as not Deleuze uses the phrase to refer to a virtual or potential approach to life.

Lemoyne's athletes suggest Bodies without Organs. In *Sans titre, no. 2*, 1975 (fig. 22), a torso is depicted as hollow and weightless, with no circumscribing outline. A free flowing bleed of interior and exterior space gives a feeling of unlimited mobility, as uniforms of ice accommodate floating lines and numbers. If the lines, which are invariably paired, were still, they would be parallel, but the lines twist and bend, crack and snag and unexpectedly disappear. They are lines of energy, as well as lines of erosion and fatigue. They are stylized ribs, waist bands tracing the circumference of missing limbs and the torque paths of invisible bodies. They are vestiges of past actions and anticipations of future actions, indicating where a body has been and where it is going. What Deleuze writes of Bacon is equally true of Lemoyne:

> What fascinates him are the invisible force that model flesh or shake it.
>
> This is the relationship not of form and matter, but of materials and forces
>
> ... [the artist] makes forces visible and all the interior forces that climb
>
> through the flesh.[42]

Elsewhere Deleuze writes of "the entire body trying to escape, to flow out of itself."[43] Lemoyne has a strategy to indicate a "body flowing out of itself" and that strategy involves running drips of paint. The running drips of paint are Lemoyne's signature motif; it is the one motif that runs through all his work, whether he is painting sports figures, flags, curtains, triangles, numbers or letters. When the drips are applied to a subject that can be identified as a body, one thinks inevitably of sweat, bile, urine and blood.

Lemoyne's signature paint drips have been interpreted in various ways: as blood and sweat, reinforcing the notion of the figure as a sacrificial entity. Stéphane Aquin asks:

"Are those paint drippings the result of the performance-painter's energetic gesturality? Or do they represent the sweat of the goalie in the very heat of the action?"[44] Bodies which ooze fluids offer a disturbing reminder that the hard solidity of the exterior is a rather fragile casing for the hidden substances that reside inside. Like bodies, paint has a similar dual state of liquid and solid, wet and dry. We consider dry paintings to be finished and wet paintings to be unfinished; in images like *Sans titre, no. 2*, 1975 (fig. 22) and *Le 50ème but de Lafleur*, 1980 (fig. 24), Lemoyne challenges these distinctions, as it is not the finished state that intrigues him. A finished product is quickly assimilated into a codified system. Normalized and fixed in its meaning, the finished work takes on the characteristics of what Deleuze calls a representation. In Lemoyne's work, process is extended and exaggerated. Running drips of paint suggest the painting remains unfinished, it will never be finished. It is not a fixed object, but exists in a state of becoming and as a result dodges classification.

The drips violate boundaries, contaminating nearby forms and spaces. One is tempted to read the sports figure as a foreground motif placed on top of the white canvas, which serves as background. However, the white ground frequently spills or drips into the figure, just as the figure dissolves into the ground. The drips have a blurring effect, disturbing the placid rigidity of contours. As they course from one end of the painting to the other, the drips bring to mind what Deleuze wrote of the English artist Francis Bacon: "He did not paint things; he painted between things."[45] Critic Claude Gosslein comments:

> On aura noté les charactéristiques permanentes de la peinture de Lemoyne:
> Une peinture dynamique qui maintient le rapport illusionniste de l'avant et
> de l'arrière, de la forme sur un fond. Toutefois, et c'est là que Lemoyne
> surprend encore, son fond joue d'illusion, car, si à première vue le triangle

[le sujet] semble peint sur celui-ci, à suivre les coulées de peinture qui

rencontrent la partie supérieure du triangle, on se rend compte que le fond

coule sur le triangle, le faisant ainsi basculer à l'arrière-plan.[46]

In art, if one stresses the solidity or monumental nature of a body, one risks diminishing

the sense of speed or the ephemeral quality of a body in motion. Lemoyne uses his

inundating paint spills and drips to give his figures a nervous energy and to counter any

suggestion of solid form. René Viau suggests the drips further a sense of motion within the

painting, attesting to the speed of the execution of the picture. He quotes Lemoyne: "J'ai

fait de la peinture en patins à roulettes, en 'go-kart.' J'aimais l'élément vitesse."[47] Deleuze

and Guattari write:

> The subordination of form to speed, to variation in speed, the
>
> subordination of the subject to intensity or affect, to the intensive
>
> variations of affects: these are, it seems to us, two essential goals to
>
> achieve in the arts."[48]

How is this achieved? According to Deleuze and Guattari, the artist stresses "the

continuity of variation ... and identifies the grace in the movement of disgrace (the idiot

saints whom he loves) ... to subordinate the designated forms to the deformity of

movement."[49]

In paintings such as *Dryden*, 1975 (fig. 25), the drips of paint ("les coulées de

peinture") symbolically "disfigure" the works, giving them a vandalized quality, as if

marred by an unwanted accident. The messy-looking drips give an image the appearance

of being hastily and carelessly executed, though on close examination, it is clear some

drips have been painted over and erased, giving just the right amount of calculated

sloppiness. Graphic designers frequently use dripping letters on posters for horror movies

and for punk rock bands. Drips provide an apocalyptic flourish in counterpoint to the

solidity of a letter. A decorative serif that plunges to hell, the drip creates an effect of

elongation, an exclamatory vibrato. It is as if we are hearing a letter scream or cry for help.

As a deviation from good taste, it is attention-grabbing and unconventional.

This rejection of solid form in favour of a more transitory state relates to the ideas

of the French writer, Georges Bataille (1897-1962). From the 1930s to the 1960s, Bataille

developed theories involving formlessness and abjection, which embraced the repellent

and excessive characteristics of physical bodies. Working against the current of idealism

he perceived in Surrealism, Bataille's ideas invert hierarchies of value. His aim was to

destabilize philosophical oppositions of sacred and profane, filth and beauty, pleasure and

pain, eroticism and depravity. A materialist, Bataille relies on direct observations, but he

does not see life as something stable or concrete; rather he sees life in the process of

decaying and dissolving. In books such as *The Accursed Share*, 1949 and *Literature and

Evil*, 1957, Bataille referred to the energy of evil, which pushes pursuits to their limit and

beyond, regardless of consequences. Bataille writes:

> Communication cannot proceed from one full and intact individual to
>
> another. It requires individuals whose separate existence in themselves is
>
> risked, placed at the limit of death and nothingness; the moral summit is
>
> the moment of risk taking, it is being suspended in the beyond of oneself,
>
> at the limit of nothingness.[50]

Several important French philosophers, such as Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, who

challenged hierarchies through the deconstruction of language and the critique of social

institutions, were drawn to Bataille's theories, as were many artists working in the postwar

period.

In Lemoyne's work, one notes how hockey team colours evolve progressively into flags (fig. 27) and theatre curtains (fig. 28). The team colours and flags also shape themselves into pennant-shaped triangles (fig. 29, 32), which eventually take on the characteristics of rockets (fig. 30) and shooting stars (fig. 31). In each case, Lemoyne's interest in form is matched by an equal interest in disintegration and form-defying motion, often signalled by his use of drips. Just as the drip violates the contours of bodies and contests their solidity, Lemoyne's flags occasionally look as if they were melting or disintegrating before our eyes (fig. 27). The technique has connotations of body wounds and ruptured organs, chemical spills, leaking wastes and polluted environments. The drips function literally as wet paint, or more symbolically as unravelling curtains, speeding rockets and falling stars. In *Point d'étoile bleu* (fig. 29), Lemoyne shows fields of colour aligned in parallel rows. The colours are the same as in the British, American and French flags, though Lemoyne uses a strong diagonal composition that abstracts the image.

Lemoyne started his career working with a team and one sees traces of this communal interest in his choice of subjects, hockey being a team sport and flags being emblematic of companies and countries. Lemoyne's family home, fragments of which feature in the works *Fenêtre à la balustrade*, 1995 (fig. 34) and *Maternité à la maison*, 1995, represents the extended family group. The house did not stand for Lemoyne alone; it is rather a relic of his past, an ancestral ruin. In an interview with Claire Gravel of *Le Devoir* in 1988, Lemoyne said:

> Le bleu, blanc, rouge, théoriquement, c'est l'origine de nos origines, c'est
>
> le drapeau français, le drapeau anglais, le drapeau américain. Je ne suis pas
>
> plus nationaliste qu'Andy Warhol.[51]

The tri-colours represent origins, not of one nation, but of many nations. This search for multiple origins continues in the "Hommage" series, in which Lemoyne retraces the history of abstract art in Québec. But the search for origins is counter-posed with a statement of ruins. Lemoyne knows from his own experience how teams can fall apart. He alludes to the solidarity of a group, but is conscious of its inevitable dissolution. This is not always easy to see in his choice of motifs. For instance, why do the contour-less hockey bodies, which he painted in 1975, take on the rigid structure of the triangles and stars, which he painted in 1976? If Lemoyne is really interested in motion and the disintegration of form, why would he adopt such a stable form as a triangle? Is it a kind of foil that he works against?

A triangle is among other things a dynamic wedge that cuts across the picture plane. Sometimes these cutting wedges can look like rockets, especially when streams of paint trail behind them. The rocket is a visual pun on the nickname of Maurice "Rocket" Richard, Québec's best known hockey player. In Lemoyne's *La vitesse, Rocket*, 1974, the paint drips reflect the swoosh-like vector of the moving puck and stick. The device is repeated with the triangles, from which drips cascade to suggest the after-trail or momentum of a moving figure (fig. 30, 31).

Lemoyne sometimes associates his triangles with stars, as his title *Point d'étoile bleu*, 1977 (29), indicates. Stars are common motifs on flags. In *Point d'étoile bleu*, the French flag at the bottom of the image transforms into star points at the side and top of the image. One star point reverses the colours of the flag; the other stretches the flag into tall tapering rays. The stars give the static flag a sense of motion, while truncating it into another form. By cropping the star, Lemoyne turns a common icon into a local sign, whose impact is open to interpretation, reinforcing Deleuze's comment that "the image no longer

refers to a situation which is globalizing or synthetic, but rather to one which is dispersive."[52]

The dripping triangle star, such as *Triangulation noire et or*, 1982 (fig. 31) could be interpreted as a less-than-perfect star, falling out of heaven, burning itself into extinction. The star is a universal constant that suddenly becomes, in Lemoyne's image, a momentary event. The stars have literally fallen off the flag, which melts before our eyes. Lemoyne was no doubt aware of Borduas's famous *Étoile noir*, 1957, which pictured a star not as a source of light, but as an estranged fragment in black, a star that has burned out, the death of a star. Lemoyne's final unfinished work was a series on *Black Holes*. A Black Hole is the ultimate *étoile noir*. At the time he was painting these works, Lemoyne was dying of cancer, (he died with the series unfinished), so I suspect the *Black Holes* may have referred as much to the disease inside his body as to an out-of-body condition. In either case, the star is seen in a slightly ominous light. A black hole is a paradoxical condition of anti-matter; it is both form and formless, which may have appealed to an artist who created forms only to work against them.

I turn now to Lemoyne's use of appropriated photographs and the strategies he applies to them. First one might ask, why was he attracted to this source material? If it was something in the subject of hockey that interested him, then why did he strip out of his images everything that we usually associate with hockey? In his study on Francis Bacon, Deleuze writes:

> Modern painting is invaded and besieged by photographs and clichés that
> are already lodged on the canvas before the painter ever begins to work. In
> fact, it would be a mistake to think that the painter works on a white and
> virgin surface. The entire surface is already invested virtually with all

kinds of clichés, which the painter will have to break with ... it [the mass

media image] is dangerous not simply because it is figurative, but because

it claims to reign over vision, and thus to reign over painting.[53]

How does an artist avoid this tyranny of representation? To challenge a code, the artist

begins by recognizing it and working against it. This is why Deleuze begins his discussion

of Bacon with Bacon's use of appropriated images. Bacon isolates and distorts his source

images, placing them in an arena in which they are charged with a sense of conflict.

Lemoyne does something similar, giving the viewer enough information to guess at the

subject, but not enough information to successfully recreate a stock image in his or her

mind. The viewer senses that something has been withheld; an image that might have been

easily recognized has become something of a puzzle. The artist has substituted a difficult

piece of abstract art for a consumable image of a legendary sports star.

Artists who appropriate images from mass media, as Lemoyne did, are invariably

linked to Pop art. One is not quite sure, with this style of art, if the artist is celebrating the

values of popular culture or parodying these values. In an image such as *Dryden*, 1975

(fig. 25), Lemoyne refers to goalie Ken Dryden's familiar mask, replicas of which were

sold in stores across the country. According to Lemoyne:

> Déjà, en 1963, j'intégrais des images de jouers de hockey à mes tableaux
>
> de l'epoque, sorte de montage pop. Un peu plus tard, en 1968-69,
>
> j'utilisais des symboles en bleu, blanc et rouge; je portais des vêtements
>
> tricolores; je crois que je pensais même en bleu-blanc-rouge. L'année
>
> suivante, le Canadien remportait la coupe Stanley, coincidence
>
> intéressante.[54]

Though Lemoyne clearly immersed himself in pop culture, one notes how his source material has been stripped of all the elements that would make them outstanding press photos. He omits the drama, the pre-codified conflicts that fuel the commercial sports industry. What I find fascinating is Lemoyne's manner of subtraction. Marcel Saint-Pierre described a technique of "zoom-in."[55] To me, a "zoom" implies something that happens before the picture is taken. The term I would use is "blow-up," which happens after the picture is taken. In fact, *Blow-up* is the title of one of Lemoyne's paintings from 1975 (fig. 33). The term brings several things to mind. I think of the explosion of a bomb, the expansion of a balloon through the addition of air, the enlargement of the detail of a photograph, and the famous film from 1966 directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007), based on the short story by Julio Cortàzar (1914-1984), *Las Babas del Diablo (The Devil's Drool)*, 1959. In this film, a brash young photographer takes candid pictures of lovers in a park. Later, when he develops the pictures, he realizes he has unwittingly witnessed a murder. In an attempt to learn more, he blows up his photographs, searching for details, but as the director commented: "The photographer, who is not a philosopher, wants to see things close-up. But it so happens that, by enlarging too far, the object itself decomposes and disappears. Hence, there's a moment when we grasp reality, but then the moment passes."[56] The blow-up is an attempt at understanding that will prove to be elusive. The photographer's own experience is suspect. His experience needs to be mediated by a camera in order for him to understand it. But the camera can only do so much and then it ceases to be a tool of clarity and precision, but just the opposite.

Deleuze opens the second volume of his study on the cinema, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, with a comment on Antonioni. What strikes Deleuze most about the Italian director's work is that his characters are not motivated, as the figures of Hollywood

cinema are, by strong feelings of fear, anger or outrage that impel them to action. In

Antonioni's films, the characters no longer understand their feelings or know what to

make of the things that they perceive. Their actions are arbitrary, dissociated from their

senses. Deleuze writes:

> What tends to collapse, or at least to lose its position, is the sensory-motor
>
> schema which constituted the action-image of the old cinema [pre-WW II].
>
> And thanks to this loosening of the sensory-motor linkage, it is time ...
>
> which rises up to the surface of the screen. Time ceases to be derived from
>
> movement, it appears in itself and itself gives rise to false movements ...
>
> Even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subjects of movement or
>
> the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer [révélateur] of
>
> time, it shows time through its tiredness and waitings [as in the films of]
>
> Antonioni.[57]

Antonioni's characters wander about like sleepwalkers in a maze. They are bored pleasure

seekers who have lost the ability to feel pleasure or anything else. Their movements lack a

clear sense of motivation. While they keep moving, and are often quite busy, even frantic,

it seems as though they are waiting for something to happen, waiting for something to be

revealed. They are catatonic exemplars of the passage of time. This behaviour is not

unique to Antonioni's films. Deleuze traces actions that are arbitrary and random in

cinema to the Italian Neo-realists, a group of filmmakers working in the aftermath of the

Second World War who included Roberto Rossellini (1906-1977), Vittorio de Sica (1901-

1974) and Federico Fellini (1920-1993). Inspired by efforts to rebuild their country,

filmmakers shot on location, using non-actors to capture the immediacy of everyday

events. It was a brand of realism that refused to scorn the banality of life with its repetitive

and seemingly purposeless events, though initially, in these troubled times, small actions

carried momentous symbolic weight. However viewers and other filmmakers were not so

much impressed by the films' symbolism as by their audacity to show what seemed like

random actions on the screen. By introducing wildly impulsive characters who were

unpredictable, yet true to life, filmmakers were able to tell stories or non-stories in quite a

different way. This led directly to the French New Wave and the New German Cinema in

the 1960s. With the advent of these random actions on the screen, Deleuze argues, time

becomes arbitrary as well, with jump cuts, unaccountable shifts in action, and multiple

characters criss-crossing each other's paths, meandering forward and backwards in time.

As time becomes arbitrary, it begins to shape the action, as in the famous ending of

Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*), 1962 which dispenses with characters in order to

show the changing face of the city with the encroachment of the night.

Lemoyne was fascinated by cinema and in 1967 he made three short films, each

under ten minutes in length. Two of them were animations influenced by Norman

McLaren (1914-1987) and Arthur Lipsett (1936-1986), both experimental filmmakers

working at the National Film Board in Montreal at the time. Lemoyne's first film, an

untitled test more than a finished film, utilized hand painted frames on clear emulsion.

These painted frames turned film into a moving painting. Lemoyne's other film was a

collage of photographs taken from various news sources, a project which satirized politics

and media. The final film, *Blé soufflé*, heavily influenced by Andy Warhol (1928-1987),

was a portrait of a woman eating breakfast cereal.[58] It is easy to see how Lemoyne's

interests in film spill over to his paintings: the animation of abstract elements, turning

geometric motifs into animistic cartoons; the appropriation of images from popular media;

and a fascination with the banality of life.

This last point returns me to Deleuze's comments on Antonioni and the Italian Neo-realists. One notes a similar kind of random action in Lemoyne's hockey paintings as Deleuze identifies in the cinema of this time. In Lemoyne's paintings (fig. 17-24), the bodies appear to be in motion, but what is eliminated from the image is any apparent motivation for them to move. As we do not see the figures' feet, we can only guess that they are on skates due to the unusual posture of the bodies, their uniforms and to a quality of weightlessness, of being not weighted to the earth. Are these bodies chasing a puck, are they skating to the bench, are they skating forward or backward or bending over to tie the laces on their skates? There is no way to know. They are cut adrift from the "sensory-motor impetus," from the urgency of the game. The bodies are floating, suspended in time. Time, in turn, is liberated from a linear causality. The press photo freezes time. One way to discern time in a photograph is by locating a moving body, such as a player, against a fixed background, such as the rink. Motion is measured in the relationship of one point to another, foreground to background. By blowing-up his figures, Lemoyne eliminates the background. The body can be compared only to itself. Instead of showing a body moving against and through a background, Lemoyne shows the body moving against and through itself. This motion within a body, unmotivated by external rules or sensory impulses, establishes a different sense of time. The paint drips reinforce this awareness of time out of the ordinary, a delayed time after the painter has made his mark, but before the paint has set and dried. Deleuze writes of the "co-existence of distinct durations."[59] In Lemoyne's work, there is the time when the press photo was taken, the time when the image was painted, the time involved with the purposeless motion of the active figures, the time evoked by the movement implied by the juxtaposition of abstract graphic elements, the time of the movement of a body within a body.

I would like to end this discussion by returning to the theme of the athlete. Earlier I remarked that the athlete in art reflected a connection to the energy of competing gods. The body was ideal in its proportions—a microcosm of a rationally designed universe. The body represented exalted god-like qualities or suffering tragic qualities. Later cultures, stressing the expressive potential of bodies, introduced more distortion and a greater sense of individuality. In the twentieth century, the athlete was placed in a milieu of contested and at times corrupt social values. However, the athlete in art remains unblemished, heroic, invariably representing determination and the self-mastery of one racing toward a decisive outcome, a telltale finish. Lemoyne's athlete represents the opposite: the loss of self and a suspended, indeterminate outcome.

Deleuze suggests that a literature of power, a "major" literature composed of canonical works, frequently has a characteristic of being of its time, of being representative of the era in which it appears.[60] The assumptions that surround how people think of certain eras colours the way that certain artworks are interpretted. As the artwork is normalized through fixed historical associations, it impedes further investigations that would uncover alternative ways of thinking. Is there a reverse process, Deleuze asks, to extricate an artist from history and from normalization? Deleuze suggests the movement from "major" to "minor" may do just this. A minor literature is a work that is out-of-history, untimely, local and idiosyncratic, and may involve an element of marginalization or disgrace. Lemoyne pulls his sports stars out of history by making no reference to specific games or seminal moments. He shifts from major to minor by using popular source material, twisted in an idiosyncratic way and infused with a carnivalesque flavour, as in the painting, *Dryden*, 1975 (fig. 25).

Roughly the size of a billboard (224 x 346 cm.), Lemoyne's *Dryden* has a looming

presence, a Big Brother-esque quality of looking out at the viewer. Though the image

refers to Ken Dryden's mask from the 1970s, one recalls the place of the goalie mask in

hockey history. The invention of the slapshot by Bernie "Boom Boom" Geoffrion in the

mid 1950s changed equipment requirements for hard-hitting players using a rocket-like

projectile. Geoffrion himself had his nose broken nine times. The much-scarred and

battered goalie, Jacques Plante wore the first mask in a professional hockey game in 1959.

As TV coverage of the sport allowed viewers to see players' faces up close, the mask

separated the goalie from others; it made him seem mysterious and different. Inevitably,

some goalies began to personalize their masks, adding team logos and other identifying

marks that were meant to be fearful and intimidating to opponents.

Ken Dryden's first "pretzel" mask (fig. 36) worn in college competitions, was

particularly skull-like. Dryden's better known target-style mask (fig. 37), painted in the

red, white and blue colours of the Montréal Canadiens, worn from 1975-1979, taunts

opponents by giving them something to shoot at. Dryden chose this design, a variation on

the Montréal team logo, for its graphic simplicity and ability to be seen by fans at a

distance.[61] Dryden's mask forms the basis of Lemoyne's giant painting, though the artist

has exaggerated the white shape inside the target to make it look like a Venetian carnival

mask—a mask inside the mask.

Lemoyne's mask refers to hockey, but it also refers to a theatrical or carnivalesque

impulse to wear disguises, to change faces. In a carnival, the masked character, liberated

from his usual restraints, is allowed to play the king or the fool or both at the same time.

Russian critic Mikhail Bahktin (1891-1975) describes a political undercurrent in this class-

oriented reversal. The carnivalesque, he argues, serves as a covert "voice of the people ...

a vehicle of self-expression for the suppressed and regulated proletariat."[62] This subversive use of a disguise accords with Lemoyne's own self-description in a manifesto he wrote in 1964, in which he referred to himself as

> un vagabond de la cervelle, un homme à 2 têtes, une araignée géante, un
>
> peinture de l'évasion, un inventeur confus, un homme jeune et absolut, un
>
> veston réversible, un fantôme vu, une statue qui marche, un sang, une
>
> main, un noir, un rogue, un affreux-sublime, un muet qui parle, un
>
> prestigitateur, un peintre-nageur, un indécis résolu, un fumiste honnête ...
>
> il peint parce que ça l'amuse, l'angoisse, lui donne confiance, le fait douter.
>
> Il peint pour rire pour critiquer la société.[63]

Lemoyne refers to himself in the third person, calling himself "a vagabond of the brain, a man with two heads, a giant spider... a visible ghost, a statue that moves... a mute who talks, a conjurer... and an honest phoney." His descriptions are paradoxical and fantastic; they are amusing equivocations. When Lemoyne states that he uses humour to criticize society, he sets himself up as a modern court jester. It is an unusual manifesto in that it does not point fingers at alleged wrongs or describe changes that urgently need to be made. Instead, the text is personal and playful, a gleeful act of self-imagining. Lemoyne promotes the contradictions within himself as a possible model for others, to keep possibilities alive.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to Artaud's character Heliogabalus-the-Anarchist, who represents the "image of all human contradiction, and of contradiction in principle."[64] This personified contradiction is a life-force, a rude counterpart to the gentrified phonies around him. Lemoyne uses contradiction in a similar way: to clear the air of inhibitions. He mixes hockey and theatre masks to scramble messages about the

competitive nature of sports and the non-competitive nature of carnival. An alternate

version of the *Dryden* painting was called *Le fantôme du forum*, 1975, a humorous

reference to the masked protagonist of *The Phantom of the Opera*. Theatre offers Lemoyne

a chance to be something other than himself. Deleuze and Guattari comment on children's

games that "a child never confines himself to playing house, to playing only at being

daddy-and-mommy. He also plays at being a magician, a cowboy, a cop or a robber, a

train, a little car."[65] Lemoyne, the Pop artist, has the same dedication to transforming the

forms and figures of everyday life into a theatre of the fantastic. Dryden, shown in an

extreme close-up, becomes something other than a hockey goalie. The work is radically

unlike the popular and much-reproduced painting of a goalie, *At the Crease*, 1973 (fig.

38), painted by Ken Danby (b. 1940) two years earlier. The Danby painting captures a

mood and sense of place in the way that a good magazine illustration might. As a portrait

of a modern-day hero, the image clearly evokes anxiety, with its tensed and lonely figure

caught in a frozen and somewhat precarious space. In the painting of *Dryden*, Lemoyne

has dispensed with narrative references and elevated the level of iconic concentration to a

startling degree. The mask is a prosthetic face that sweats and bleeds, defaced and

animated by streams of dripping paint, half-machine and half-man. The mask is in-

between theatre and reality, the everyday and the hyperreal. Deleuze and Guattari regard

all forms in a similar way, as non-permanent manifestations of a virtually infinite field of

manifestations. A thing, write Deleuze and Guattari,

> in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and to
>
> slip into states of forces that serve it as masks ... underneath the mask and
>
> by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher
>
> states whose integrity it will subsequently establish.[66]

Deleuze regards form as a kind of mask. It is a temporary disguise which life assumes in order to achieve its ends. Deleuze does not advocate the prohibition of forms because that is just another censorship, another closure. Instead he suggests creating situations that encourage a variety of actions and a multiplicity of forms, allowing people to pursue many creative possibilities.

Conclusion

The treatment of the athlete in Lemoyne's "bleu, blanc, rouge" series from the mid-1970s uses a blow-up technique to eliminate details and backgrounds from appropriated photographs. This strategy is a means to overcome what Deleuze calls "the painting before the painting," that is, all the preconceptions which we bring to the subject before we even begin to look at it. These preconceptions are heavily coded. Lemoyne strips away these codes, eliminating narrative and any sense of a heroic action. Instead, a body in its uniform is all that remains. The body could belong to anyone: it is faceless and without hands or feet. It suggests Deleuze's Body without Organs: a free-flowing state, unbounded by structures, rules or rigid contours. In his images of athletes, Lemoyne's figures are open-ended. Their body marking are suggestive of the markings on the ice; the whiteness of their jerseys blends with the whiteness of the rink so that the two become indistinguishable.

The artist undermines classical attitudes toward the athlete, downplaying individual accomplishments and dramatic struggles. The struggle he highlights is the contesting of media, the reconfiguration of the image from mass culture into a new ambiguous image. Lemoyne's figures are related to Georges Bataille's theories of *informe* bodies and disruption of hierarchies of high and low. In the hockey paintings, the bodies are subjected

to two strategies: to the elimination of personalizing details and defining boundaries and to the use of dripping paint to defy solid contours. The paint drip is Lemoyne's signature motif. He uses it to evoke body fluids, blood and sweat, and to draw attention to the process of painting. As bodies begin to "flow out of themselves," the divisions between inside and outside became less secure. These drips violate the finished quality of the painting and make it look unfinished, a work still in progress. The drips are also used with flags and theatre curtains to make them look like they are unravelling, melting or even bleeding. The drips are applied to triangles to make them look like rocket ships and falling stars. The drips evoke movement, often of an unstable nature, perhaps even of disintegration. Lemoyne's paintings play and comment on our obsession with heroic bodies, whether they are the bodies of athletes, countries, patriotic flags, or numbered groups. He is attracted by groups, but has a strong sense of their dissolution and vulnerability.

Lemoyne's work frequently alludes to public uses of media. The artist manipulates icons and symbols; this appropriation of signs accords with Deleuze's concepts of "deterritorialization." Lemoyne's work is closely tied to performance and the theatre, a need for action and immediacy. Deleuze describes a passage from major to minor literature, an embracing of local, idiosyncratic characters that may involve marginalization and disgrace. Lemoyne uses the hockey goalie as a marginalized, carnivalesque character, his mask separating him from normal appearances.

Lemoyne's work bears comparison to cinema's non-linear depictions of time. Deleuze argues that film in the period after the Second World War abandoned a movement-image in favour of a time-image, in which random actions and multiple points-of-view lead us to consider a multiplicity of durations. Lemoyne's work captures a variety

of durations: the time the original sports photo was taken, the time when the painting was made, the time after the painting started and the paint began to drip, the time implied by the graphic marks, the time of bodies that are cut off from a reliable environment. There is a great sense of metamorphosis in his work, though this is often linked with the theme of disintegration, which is another allusion to time. Bodies and of houses disintegrate as the past recedes from memory. Even the stars in the sky disintegrate, as they make themselves available to be reused in another form.

Notes

1. Jocelyne Lepage, *La Presse*, July 13, 1998. (He had a little Andy Warhol in him, especially in his grasp of the important place of media and mass communication in our society. This can be seen in the popular imagery that recurs throughout his work.)

2. Jocelyne Lepage, *La Presse*, December 3, 1988. (The gap between artists and the public is getting larger and larger.)

3. Jocelyne Lepage, *La Presse,* July 13, 1998. (fiercely independent, truly original, living only by and for his art.)

4. Jean Chartier, *Le Devoir*, July 13, 1998. (Serge Lemoyne was not a man of half-measures.)

5. Phone interview with Pierrette Lemoyne, assisted and translated by Aurèle Parisien, Montreal, July 9, 2007.

6. Marcel Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective, 1960-1987* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1988), 83. (triple ambition relative to the democratization of culture, to removing boundaries separating the arts and to the demystification of the work of art.)

7. Lisanne Nadeau, *Le Soleil*, November 5, 1988. (The production of Lemoyne is marked with a constant dualism: one part cultural activism, another part visual research into the structure of a plastic language.)

8. Marcel Saint-Pierre, "Extraits d'inventaire de Serge Lemoyne" in *Five Attitudes, 1963-1980: Ayot, Boisvert, Cozic, Lemoyne, Serge Tousignant* (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain, 1981), 78. (Sociological themes are reintroduced in a field of modernist painting and American formalism.)

9. Saint-Pierre, "Extraits d'inventaire de Serge Lemoyne," 78. (The hockey motif allows for a reflection on the nature of painting.)

10. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 79.

11. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 110. (By means of successive reductions, this process purged the figures, reducing identity to a flat number, their game to a surface, the force of their gestures to the juxtaposition of colours, their speed of displacement to the gravitation of running paint. In short, all their plastic illusion is reduced to layers of colours; the only accepted reality, the only allowable tale being that of painting.)

12. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 118.

13. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 108.

14. Michel Saint-Germain, *Perspective-Dimanche-Matin*, June 8, 1975. (I take the pulse of a collective and I express it.)

15. René Viau, *Le Devoir*, September 13, 1980. (Because hockey is truly the point of convergence of the mythologies of the artist. It's a game. It's visual: the speed, pure colour, the marking of a magnificent white ground. A kind of dance. Hats off to Pollock. But also it brings people together, handles signs which everyone knows. Collective mythologies. Rallies. A broad impact, at least in Quebec. Communion.)

16. Michel Saint-Germain, *Perspective-Dimanche-Matin*, June 8, 1975. (By isolating three colours as a point of focus, Serge Lemoyne reflects for us our pictures, reduced, across his mirror-prism.)

17. Georges Bogardi, *Montréal Star*, April 24, 1976.

18. Gale Thomson, CPI.Q, "Canadian Periodicals," 1998.

19. Gale Thomson, CPI.Q, "Canadian Periodicals," 1998.

20. Claude Gosselin, "Serge Lemoyne et la part du spectacle dans la peinture," *Vie des Arts* 27, no. 108 (Automne 1982), 55. (The merit of Lemoyne's work is not necessarily located in the work. One could say, that his thought is not in the picture, but lies outside of the picture.)

21. René Payant, "Pictorial Generosity: Serge Lemoyne." *Vanguard* 12, no. 4 (May 1983), 28.

22. Gilles Marcotte, *La Presse*, March 30, 1976.

23. Stéphane Baillargeon, *Le Devoir*, July 18, 1998. (For me, the last stronghold of our avant-garde has disappeared. With the work of Serge Lemoyne, in the seventies, we encounter a postmodern spirit.)

24. Payant, "Pictorial Generosity: Serge Lemoyne," 28.

25. Michel Saint-Germain, *Perspective-Dimanche-Matin*, June 8, 1975. (I wanted everyone to feel like a star.)

26. Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: a Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 173.

27. Clark, *The Nude*, 173.

28. François-Marc Gagnon lecture, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, May 23, 2007.

29. Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 111.

30. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (New York: Viking, 1977), 33.

31. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), xiv.

32. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 204.

33. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 205.

34. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 205.

35. quoted in Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1975), 252.

36. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 118. (A range of signs demonstrating the obsessive presence of popular imagery that is no longer recognizable as such. Lemoyne frustrates realistic effects by emphasizing their semiotic properties and their material qualities, maintaining in this way an equilibrium between abstraction and figuration, or rather, situating himself on the border between the two...)

37. Wallace Fowlie, *Dionysus in Paris: a guide to contemporary French theatre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 204.

38. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 86, 80.

39. Antonin Artaud, *To have done with the judgment of God*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. H. Weaver (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 570-571.

40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 40.

41. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 150.

42. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, x-xi.

43. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, xii.

44. Stéphane Aquin, *Collage*, (Fall 2000), 18.

45. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 52.

46. Claude Gosselin, "Serge Lemoyne et la part du spectacle dans la peinture," *Vie des Arts* 27, no. 108 (Automne 1982), 57. (To note the predominant characteristics of

Lemoyne's painting: A dynamic image supports an illusionist relationship of a foreground and background, of a form on a ground. But at times, and it is here that Lemoyne is still surprising, his ground plays with this illusion. At first glance the triangle [the subject] seems painted on a ground, however drips of background paint run across the subject, upsetting our expectations.)

47. René Viau, *Le Devoir*, September 13, 1980. (I made paintings while on skates and rollerskates, even in a go-kart. I liked the element of speed.)

48. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 215.

49. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 215.

50. Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*. eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford, Uk and Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 92.

51. Claire Gravel, *Le Devoir,* November 8, 1988. (The red, white and blue, theoretically, it is the origin of our origins, it is the French flag, the English flag, the American flag. I am not as much of a nationalist as Andy Warhol is.)

52. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 207.

53. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 11.

54. Denis Tremblay, *Montréal Matin*, Oct. 13, 1972. (Already, in 1963, I inserted references to hockey players into my pictures, a kind of pop montage. Slightly later, in 1968-69, I used symbols in red, white and blue; I wore tricolour clothes; I think that I even began to think in red, white and blue. Next year, the Montréal Canadiens won the Stanley Cup, interesting coincidence.)

55. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective*, 109.

56. "On *Blow-up*," Michelangelo Antonioni Archive, www.littlerabbit.com/antonioni/mafeatures.php?id=66.

57. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989 (1985)), xi.

58. For a more detailed description of the films, see Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoyne: une rétrospective,* 61.

59. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xii.

60. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 208.

61. "Masks from the Past," www.hockeymasks.com/.

62. Frances S. Connelly, "Introduction" in *Modern Art and the Grotesque* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

63. Serge Lemoyne, *Temoignage de Serge Lemoyne*, pamphlet written and distributed by Lemoyne during *La Semaine A*. (Montreal: Centre social de l'université de Montréal. 20-26 avril 1964. (A vagabond brain, a man with two heads, a giant spider, a painting of escape, a confused creator, an uncompromising youth, a reversible jacket, a visible ghost, a statue which walks, a blood, a hand, a black, a red, an ugly--sublime, a mute who speaks, a conjurer, a painter-swimmer, an uncertain detective, a honest joker... he paints because it entertains him, worries him, gives him confidence, makes him doubt. He paints to laugh, and laughing, to criticize society...)

64. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 278.

65. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 46.

66. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 91.

Chapter Five: Claude Tousignant

Claude Tousignant has painted some of the busiest, most psychedelic images in Canadian art, using an explosive multi-colored palette, and he has also created some particularly stark and minimal monochrome paintings in black, white and grey. His work generates an intense sensation of swirling motion, but his work also displays unchanging stationary fields. He is thought of as an abstract painter, yet his ideas are closely linked to minimalist sculpture and conceptual art. He has made lasting monumental works as well as temporary installation pieces. Commentators tend to concentrate on paintings from Tousignant's Op art period, 1956-69, or they single out his monochrome canvases, created throughout his career, but most prevalent from 1956-64 and from 1978-95. I take a different orientation, focusing on the ovals, diptychs and other serial works, which began to appear in 1969 and to disappear around 1980, when Tousignant abandons the circular format. I refer to a few works outside this range. Obviously the circle diptychs grew out of the target paintings of the 1960s, as well out of the bi-partition colour-field paintings, first presented in 1956.

Running throughout Tousignant's work are radiating patterns, the serial repetition of forms, complex colour harmonies and contrasting rhythms and colour shapes. One could say that Tousignant likes to extend and stretch ideas and then to turn them inside out. This interest corresponds to the motion of cycles and repeating patterns, an interest in

mathematics and colour relationships. For Tousignant, motion begins with the division of

form through colour, setting up internal and external correspondences of related fields. To

explore this work, I turn to Deleuze's concept of psychology, in which life rechannels

itself through a process of difference and repetition. I also make use of Deleuze's notion of

affect and his ideas on music. Tousignant compares his own work to music, as will be

discussed.

I begin the chapter with a summary of critical attitudes toward Tousignant's work.

This is my followed by my own analysis. The questions I pursue are: how does Tousignant

use motion in his work and what is it about motion that interests him? Does his use of

motion differ from that of other artists? Is his work strictly art about art, or can it be

extended to other interests?

Critical Overview of Tousignant's Work

In notes accompanying an exhibition at the Galerie du Siècle in 1968, Tousignant remarks:

> My main concern is for the painting to become an immense field of
>
> chromatic vibrations, allowing the rhythm of the colour to speak. I use
>
> optical effects but only for expressive ends: to express the different
>
> qualities of chromatic vibrations so that each painting has its own
>
> respiration.[1]

In this statement, Tousignant stresses the importance of rhythm, colour and expression in

his work, interests that one might expect to be at heart of any discussion of his work.

Critics add to this a number of variations. For instance, Tousignant is viewed as a

calculating scientist, an icy intellectual, and as a sensuous colorist, appealing directly to

body sensations. Curator Danielle Corbeil stresses the artist's "rigorous method based on

precise calculations."[2] Writing in *La Presse* in 1968, Yves Robillard describes Tousignant as a mathematician whose investigations into visual perception are laudable, but leave him rather cold.[3] Reviewer Michel Dupuy comments in *Le Droit* in 1973: "Les tableaux de Tousignant nous révèlent une évolution systématique et rigoureuse; sa progression est rationnelle; ses thèmes sont exploités impitoyablement."[4] Dupuy also notes a paradoxical counter-impression when he describes the shock of colours. "Tousignant pourtant si rationnel, nous amène par un étrange paradoxe ... à la pure sensation. Ses jeux de l'esprit sont la joie des sens."[5] Writing in *La Presse* in 1976, Gilles Toupin writes of "oeuvres fort séduisantes."[6] In his book, *Contemporary Canadian Painting*, William Withrow notes:

> Tousignant's has been a virtuoso performance: every work stuns with its
>
> hypnotic optical force. But beneath the optics lies an intriguing paradox:
>
> rational means of particularly Gallic intensity have been employed to
>
> transfix the viewer.[7]

Tousignant himself commented that scientists continually stretch their discipline by exploring new fields, and like artists, they share an interest in experiment: "I guess you could say that we became more scientific in our approach. But the science wasn't the sum of the known... [but one of] inventing new formulae. We became fascinated by colour at that time."[8]

France Gascon contends that Tousignant creates objects devoid of any meaning other than the fact that they are objects. In a 1984 essay in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*, Gascon writes:

> The monochrome sculptures created by Claude Tousignant since 1974
>
> have the quality of objects. Standing on the ground rather than hanging
>
> on a wall, these "paintings" enter into the space of objects. In this way

they sever, even more radically, any possible anecdotal link ...

deliberately voided of any predetermined meaning, these works are left to

reveal their "presence," that is to say, their physical characteristics.[9]

Stressing that the artist's work has no representational qualities, Gascon argues that

Tousignant's strategy is the opposite of Marcel Duchamp's in his invention of the

readymade. Where Duchamp turns an ordinary object into a mysterious artwork,

Tousignant takes the mystery out of the artwork as he turns it into an irreducible object

that is nothing other than itself. Gascon notes that these are not quite ordinary objects

however, as Tousignant has "ce goût des formes parfaites."[10] Echoing this sentiment,

Yves Robillard mentions Tousignant's attraction to "Primary Structures," an allusion to

the landmark exhibition of Minimalist art at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966.[11]

François-Marc Gagnon calls Tousignant a "peintre Québécois minimalist,"[12] while John

Bentley Mays referred to the "Trappist silences" in his austere and unadorned canvases.[13]

Catherine Bates writes: "the paintings ... become increasingly more proficient, evolving as

technical masterpieces done on an increasingly imposing scale. They are perfect,

complete, flawless, and one cannot avoid admiring them."[14] Taking an opposite stance to

that of Gascon, Danielle Corbeil, believes the serial works question the direct materiality

of the art object: "By organizing his paintings in a series, he [Tousignant] makes us

perceive the indeterminate nature of the individual element."[15] Writing in the Montreal

Star in 1976, Henry Lehmann perceives a kind of energy passing between the double discs

as "the two targets interact like electric currents whose powerful currents overlap and

fuse."[16]

On the occasion of Tousignant's mid-carrer retrospective at the National Gallery in

Ottawa in 1973, Judith Kelly observed that Tousignant's work became "structurally

simplified, but conceptually more complex ... [as the artist explores] the relationships of

colour to colour, form to form, colour and form to format and, more recently, format to

format."[17] James D. Campbell, curator of Tousignant's exhibition, "Monochrome

Paintings" at the Musée du Québec in 1994, writes how Tousignant's pursuit of the

> autonomy of painting as a worthy object in its own right ... has pushed to
>
> a logical conclusion ... [research] which does not lead to the cul-de-sac of
>
> modernism but has led Tousignant beyond painting ... into a form of
>
> environmental sculpture.[18]

In her catalogue for the 2005 exhibition, "3 Paintings, 1 Sculpture, 3 Spaces: Claude

Tousignant: Black, Grey, White," at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery in Montréal,

curator Michèle Thériault reproduces photographs of the gallery before and after the

installation of Tousignant's work. It is a strong demonstration of how an artwork can

change our sense of space. Thériault describes Tousignant's work as self-reflexive, asking

questions about its own materials and viewing conditions:

> Without any doubt the white cube has been indispensable to the
>
> canonization and success of abstract practices such as Claude
>
> Tousignant's. As far as its public framing is concerned, it has been its
>
> preferred place; abstract art and the white cube have had a symbiotic
>
> relationship. It is a context that elicits from the viewer a deep state of
>
> contemplation, that isolates him or her and the work from the exterior
>
> world and everyday life and that reinforces values (autonomy,

authenticity, uniqueness, objecthood) which have been the subject of a

sustained critique throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.[19]

Thériault goes on to add that Tousignant's recent works make the "skin of the gallery very

visible ... undermining its claim of neutrality and invisibility."[20] In 2006, Henry Lehman

writes in the Montreal *Gazette*: "No matter what the medium, Tousignant strives for what

might be described as a process of visual dematerialization ... alternating solid form and

form as mere mirage."[21] This recalls a comment made by Kelly for Tousignant's mid-

career retrospective at the National Gallery: "The work ... by a brilliant use and

combination of pure vibrating colour, seems almost to be non-existent ... a vast system of

spatial and chromatic relationships."[22]

Tousignant and Deleuze: Vibrations and Variations

I would like to go back to a comment made by James D. Campbell. He writes of

Tousignant that his "painting is to be understood as an object in its own right rather than as

a representation of something else ... it is an object in the first degree."[23] I start with this

statement because it expresses an idea contrary to the argument that I pursue in this

chapter. For starters, Tousignant is not interested in objects, but in motion and the

oscillating spaces and relationships between things. The artist once stated that he "worked

incessantly to abolish the image."[24] Concerning his serial work, I asked the artist where the

artwork began and where it ended; could it be defined? Tousignant answered: "Perhaps

the art lies between the two objects. Maybe that's the art."[25]

Using Deleuze's terms, Tousignant invents "vibrations, rotations, whirlings,

gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind."[26] The artist explores an

aspect of motion that we often take for granted. Motion never happens in isolation. Motion

always involves a relationship of one plane or point or wave of energy to another plane or point of wave of energy. When I spoke with Tousignant, the word that came up most often was "rapport." In reference to his serial works, Tousignant stated:

> The idea was to have a *rapport* of the tone or feeling of one colour to
>
> another. What you see is not several paintings; it is one painting. The idea
>
> was to have between two different canvases a feeling of belonging even if
>
> they are in contrast or if they don't seem to fit together. It is a visual
>
> feeling.[27]

In 1985, Deleuze published an essay, "Zones of Immanence," outlining the thought of Maurice de Gandillac, his former professor and the supervisor for his dissertation, "Difference and Repetition."[28] In this essay, Deleuze makes a distinction between two opposing philosophical concepts: transcendence and immanence. Transcendence refers to a quality that surpasses the limits of tangible things; transcendence jettisons one into the world of Platonic ideals. Immanence refers to a quality that permeates and enlivens base matter and whose presence is felt everywhere in everything. Deleuze writes:

> A whole Platonic, neo-Platonic and Medieval tradition is behind the idea
>
> of the universe... a universe suspended from the One as transcendent
>
> principle, unfolding in a series of emanations and hierarchical conversions.
>
> Entities have more or less being, more or less reality, according to their
>
> distance from, or proximity to the transcendent principle. At the same
>
> time, however, a whole other inspiration traverses this cosmos. Zones of
>
> immanence seemingly proliferate at the various stages or levels, even
>
> establishing connections between levels. In these zones, Being is univocal,

equal... The distant cause is no more: rocks, flowers, animals and humans

equally celebrate the glory of God in a kind of sovereign an-archy.[29]

In a transcendent system, an all-powerful force rules from on high and emits energy or

favours to all that exists apart from it, some things being more favoured than others. In an

immanent system, there is no power outside of things; or rather, there are no things outside

of powers. Deleuze considers what force can be discerned or located in immanence. He

declares that it has two aspects or movements: "complication and explication."[30]

I propose to look at the complications Tousignant introduces into his work. One of

the major themes in the criticism of Tousignant's work is that he consistently purifies his

work through a process of simplification and reduction of detail. For instance, James D.

Campbell writes: "Tousignant's extraordinarily tenacious reductive process ensures, above

all, that extraneous detail is always removed."[31] While there is some truth to this, it ignores

Tousignant's fondness for pattern and repetition. One could argue that Tousignant dissects

forms, as in his bi-partition works of 1956, his target paintings of the 1960s and his

diptychs and serial works of the 1970s and 1980s, not to reduce their number of elements

but to multiply them.

Deleuze argues that there is a tendency in life to work toward complexity and

multiplicity, on the one hand, and, on the other, to be coherent or to be able to express

ideas of consistency and harmony among the apparent differences. In an effort to find

order in the world, people impose systems on things from outside, but the systems are

inevitably artificial and unsatisfying. Deleuze comments: "Something in the proliferation

of immanence tends to overtake the vertical world, to reverse it, as if the hierarchy bred a

particular anarchy, and the love of God, an internal atheism proper to it."[32]

How do these ideas relate to Tousignant? He too is opposed to hierarchal systems imposed from outside onto an artwork. One of these systems is the system of representation. Tousignant criticised the Automatiste painters because their abstract pictures continued to make references to landscapes. In 1973, Tousignant commented to a reporter from *La Presse*:

> C'était aussi une réaction à l'automatisme, dans le sens que les
>
> automatistes en étaient arrivés à faire une peinture qui ressemblait
>
> beaucoup, en tant qu'espace pictural, à un paysage, quoi. C'était ...
>
> anecdotique, l'espace peint était comme un paysage; t'avais des taches,
>
> mais entre les taches, t'avais un espace visuel.[33]

François-Marc Gagnon argues that Tousignant avoided the use of brushstrokes that would add texture to the canvas, as this texture could betray sensations of depth. As well, tonal values were eliminated from the colours, to avoid any sense of atmospheric perspective. What Tousignant was left with was pure saturated colour, with which to divide and define the pictorial space, at the same time infusing it with a sense of energy and emotion. As Gagnon writes:

> Avec le primat donné à la couleur, c'est tout le lyrisme dionysiaque, qu'on
>
> serait tenté de ne pas voir dans cette peinture rigoureusement définie
>
> structuralement, qui est réinvesti de ses pleins pouvoirs.[34]

To see how Tousignant distances himself from the Automatistes, it is necessary to compare two early paintings. In *Les Taches*, 1955 (fig. 39) Tousignant presents an all-over pattern of vibrant dots, strokes and swathes of colour, each mark reflecting different attributes of what a brush can do with paint. Scratches made by the brush hairs are evident in many of the colours. The swift, mop-like contours also indicate the action of a brush.

The marks congeal in the center and spread out toward the edges of the picture frame to suggest expansion; this is a strategy commonly used in perspective drawing. The feeling of some elements being closer than other elements is reinforced by the neutral background on top of which the marks are situated. Just one year later, one sees a change in the artist's approach. In *Oscillation*, 1956 (fig. 40), the colour is applied in a uniform manner so that no one area of the image looks any different in treatment than any other area. There is no foreground or background, no trace of a painterly mark. Both paintings have abstained from using half-tones of any kind, though juxtaposing the starkness of the black with the luminosity of the neighboring colour creates an extreme contrast that could be interpreted as a play of light and shadow. In his subsequent target images, Tousignant completely rids his paintings of black. With few exceptions, the colours black and gray do not come back into Tousignant's paintings until 1978, in works which I will discuss shortly.

Returning to *Les Taches* and *Oscillation*, the paintings show two conflicting tendencies in Tousignant's work: he is attracted to busy interweaving patterns that create a feeling of intense activity, as in *Les Taches*; he is also attracted to simple geometrical forms, arranged with the utmost clarity to separate and demarcate uniform fields, as in *Oscillation*. It should be noted that motion is equally important in both approaches, one using a superimposition of patterns in a polyphonic approach, the other juxtaposing colour contrasts in a rigid partition of forms. In both cases, the viewer intuits motion, whether it is a random careening throughout the image or a flashing alternation of points of view. Both approaches place an element of instability within a stable pictorial space.

Oscillation, was first shown at a solo exhibition at the Galarie l'Actuelle in 1956. Another painting in this exhibition, *Paranoid*, 1956 (fig. 41), used a similar composition: a square format, divided down the middle. In *Oscillation*, the divide creates vertical halves;

in *Paranoid*, the divide creates horizontal halves. Intense contrasting colours fill the two sides. The title, *Oscillation* suggests that our attention may be skewed or conflicted, as the viewer looks first at one colour and then at the other colour. The colours do not blend together, but function more like lights, flashing off and on, in a steady alteration. As critic France Gascon writes in the catalogue essay for the exhibition, "Diptychs, 1978-1980," at the Musée d'art contemporain in 1980:

> la bipartition parfaite... n'est pas un principe de composition mais un
>
> principe de divorce; elle est comme une image qui n'aurait pas été
>
> intégrée ou comme une stéréoscopie défectueuse qui refuserait de
>
> fusionner deux images.[35]

The bilateral symmetry of the composition is offset by the startling difference in colour. This remains one of Tousignant's most persistent interests: creating work that is at once symmetrical and non-symmetrical, stable yet unpredictable. Like Tousignant's compositions, the human body is also bilaterally symmetrical, which helps us to engage physically with the human-scaled works.

The title, *Oscillation* refers not to the painting itself so much as to the way the viewer apprehends the colours in the painting. Colour has traditionally been associated with moods and temperaments. In the theory of the humors in ancient Greece, moods were linked to organs in the body. These organs produced substances such as black and yellow bile, phlegm and blood; each substance had its own distinctive colour. In Greek medicine, colour was symbolic of one's fluctuating mental health. Could Tousignant's oscillation of colours refer to an oscillation of emotions or moods? What does the second title, *Paranoid*, suggest? Paranoia is a mental state. If we combine the two ideas of oscillation and mental states, it seems that the intense contrasts of colour may well represent a kind of

uncontrollable mood swing. An extreme shift from one mental state to another can signal

bipolar or manic-depressive behavior. In fact, paranoia may well be a symptom of a

bipolar disposition. Creative people are often bipolar. Tousignant commented about this

exhibition:

> The overall response to my show at L'Actuelle was so negative that it put
>
> me in a position of almost complete isolation ... The emotional
>
> implications of such an approach seemed, at the time, truly a threat to
>
> one's sanity.[36]

It is interesting that Tousignant mentions isolation and threats to sanity. Over the next

twenty years, the psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1927-1989) and philosophers Michel Foucault

(1926-1984), and Deleuze and Guattari all write important books critiquing the treatment

and diagnosis of madness. Laing's *The Divided Self* could almost serve as an alternate title

for Tousignant's *Oscillation* painting; the book appeared in 1959; *Madness and*

Civilization, by Foucault, appeared in 1962 and *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and*

Schizophrenia, by Deleuze and Guattari, appeared in 1972. Each proffered a psycho-social

critique that has become embedded in the counter culture. In their study, Deleuze and

Guattari object to the notion that so-called normal people conform to the existing social

system and so-called abnormal people do not conform. The implication of this is that

anyone who does not conform is to some degree insane. They ask: what if the system is

not worth conforming to? Who has the right to define normality? The control of this

definition, what Deleuze and Guattari call "normalization," permeates all aspects of our

lives and gives an inordinate power to those with a vested interest in the status quo. They

quote Laing, who writes:

If the human race survives, future men will, I suspect, look back on our

enlightened epoch as a veritable age of darkness ... they will see that what

we call 'schizophrenia' was one of the forms in which, often through

quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our

all-too closed minds ... Madness need no be all breakdown. It may also be

breakthrough ... everything is equivocal. Our sanity is not true sanity.

Their madness is not true madness. The madness of our patients is an

artefact of the destruction wrecked on them by us and by them on

themselves. Let no one suppose that we meet 'true' madness any more

than that we are truly sane. The madness that we encounter in 'patients' is

a gross travesty, a mockery, a grotesque caricature of what the natural

healing of that estranged integration we call sanity might be. True sanity

entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego.[37]

Sanity is a social construction, as well as a code that is imprinted on everything we touch.

When we see something in the world, chances are we are receiving data which has been

interpreted and coded long before it ever reaches us; we think we are seeing something for

ourselves, but we may only be affirming a preprogrammed pattern of reception. Codes are

most effective when we are unconscious of their operation.

Art is one way of disturbing the unconscious mechanism of perception. Critics

often use the phrase "aggressive" when describing Tousignant's work. To give just two

examples, curator Pierre Théberge writes in notes for an exhibition of Tousignant's work

at the Galerie du Siècle in 1968: "His recent canvasses of the 'Gong' series are, on the

whole, oriented towards the violence of the sensory impact."[38] In a text prepared for the

mid-career Tousignant retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada in 1973, Judith

Kelly describes how Tousignant's paintings "shock the viewer out of his habitual apathy and force him to question the very fundamentals of aesthetic standards."[39]

Tousignant's early works seemed to trigger a psychological reaction in the viewer. This active engagement of the viewer took place along a fault line of double visions and double sensations, an interest which pushed Tousignant toward experiments with kinetic and Op art. In 1961, Tousignant exhibited a series of nine brightly painted grid-like relief-sculptures at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (fig. 42, 43). The relief format recalled Tatlin's Constructivist works of 1915-1917, which were heavily influenced by Picasso's cubist relief-sculptures of the same period. However, the composition of Tousignant's work recalled Mondrian's grid paintings that have a Utopian design element entirely absent from Picasso's vision. The wooden spars composing the grid in Tousignant's works were painted different colours on their different faces so that the appearance of the work changed as one walked before it. Seen from one side a bar might look red; seen from the other side, the bar changed to blue. The more bars, the more pronounced is the effect of chromatic shift.

This is one of the central concerns of kinetic art: to make art change before one's eyes, either using or invoking motion. This kinetic approach was first explored by Marcel Duchamp, building on his early interest in Futurism, and by the Constructivist sculptors, Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. In the 1950s, a new generation, led by the Hungarian-French artist, Victor Vasarely (1906-1997), Israeli artist, Yaakov Agam (b. 1928), and British artist, Bridget Riley (b. 1931), pushed Constructivist ideas in a more kinetic design direction, which eventually led to Op art. The phrase Op Art was coined by a *Time* magazine reporter in 1964[40] to describe a type of geometrical abstraction that used moiré patterns and conflicting areas of pattern and colour to cause

vibrating optical effects. In a review in *Art Magazine* in 1975, Bill Auchterlonie links

Tousignant to Riley and Vasarely, though he also notes that "Tousignant does not consider

himself an op artist."[41] The similarity I see between these artists is that each divides a

specific, clearly defined space into a multiplicity of units that cannot be reassembled in a

single, coherent way in the mind of the viewer. This dissonant division of space is also a

central interest for Tousignant. However, it did create a problem.

According to François-Marc Gagnon, the challenge which Tousignant set himself

was creating an image that employed all areas of the canvas equally and did not privileged

right or left, top or bottom. In Tousignant's work,

> Un à un, ce que Matthew Baigell a appelé les "indices de profondeur"
>
> (depth clues) disparaissent. La superposition d'un élément sur un autre,
>
> qui suggère si clairement la profondeur, est évitée, les plans étant
>
> simplement juxtaposés les uns aux autres. Les impressions de gravitation,
>
> de distance ou même d'orientation (champ gauche et champ droit), à
>
> cause des références qu'elles font à l'espace naturaliste, sont
>
> empêchées.[42]

The uniform division of space may explain why the circle motif was adopted by

Tousignant, as Gagnon suggests, though it skips the intervening steps. The motif of a

"gong" first appeared in an artwork, entitled, *Le Gong chinois*, 1962 (fig. 45), which

contrasts a floating and a fixed element. The bar to the left is reminiscent of the "zip"

motif in Barnett Newman's work, which Tousignant had just discovered, while the square

floating inside a rectangle beside it may be a reference to Malevich's *Black Square*, 1913.

This latter reference becomes much more explicit in the painting, *Honni soit...*, 1962 (fig.

46). Tousignant experiments with making the square softer and rounder in a series of

works in 1963 before replacing it with a circle, as in *First Circle*, 1963. The works were becoming increasingly formalized and flag-like, as Tousignant returned to a fully symmetrical composition, though, as he liked to do, upsetting this symmetry with an asymmetrical play of colours. In 1965, the target motif, with which he is so closely associated, was adopted.

At first he painted expanding concentric circles on square-shaped canvases (fig. 48, 49), but soon adapted the motif to circle-shaped canvases (fig. 50, 51). In Tousignant's *Gong* and *Accelerateur Chromatique* series, which stretch from the mid-1960s to the early 70s, circular patterns reiterate the round frame within which they appear; placed inside the picture of a circle is another circle and so on like an endless series of mirrors inside of mirrors that reflect only themselves (fig. 49).

Accelerateur Chromatique, 1971 (fig. 50) is an experiment in vivid colour. A series of circles radiate outward in a hypnotic array of colored bands, all the same width. Tousignant's brightly coloured discs suggest the sun and the impact with the eye that bright light produces. However the mechanical nature of his image, its perfect regularity and industrial slickness, is at odds with imagery from nature. Tousignant's cool intellectual approach to art would seem to distance him from popular taste. However, one of the fascinating contradictions to Tousignant's work is how in the 1960s, his swirling discs compete with the psychedelic motifs then current in popular culture and his Op Art patterns are the very patterns one finds adorning the fashion models of the era. An advertisement for the Givenchy collection at the Bay appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1973; it shows a fashion model posing in front of a large target painting by Tousignant.[43] Writing in Montreal's art weekly, *Mirror* in 1994, Henry Lehmann comments on the topicality of "Tousignant's targets, with their unintended evocation of

the hopeful, flashy, curiously uptight '60s."[44] While Lehmann will only grudgingly admit

it, Tousignant's targets do covey something of the spirit of the time. I think it is a moot

point whether it is intentional or not. He was part of what one reporter called an "op art

explosion" in the 1960s.[45]   The excitement of understanding and defining a new social

trend can be discerned in the reviews for the "The Responsive Eye" exhibition at the

Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1965, an exhibition that surveyed the leading

international figures working in Op Art, including Claude Tousignant. In Vincent

Canaday's review, he wrote of "art competing with launching pads."[46] Another reviewer,

Thomas Hess, speculated that just as Pop Art drew its inspiration from print media, so Op

Art was inspired by television's "quivering glare of light" and its tendency to turn its

audience into "peripatetic zombies."[47] Art critic Frances Follin expressed the trend in these

terms: "the future was already happening."[48] People no longer felt that technology was

something that happened invisibly in a remote laboratory; instead it had brazenly made its

way into the streams of everyday life.

In 1967, Marshall McLuhan argued that just as the printing press altered society by

creating what he called "the public," so too electric circuitry had changed society into "the

mass," which he defined as "an environment of information that involves everybody in

everybody."[49] Deleuze mentions McLuhan in many of his books and shares his interest in

technology and media environments. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari

> make no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of
>
> nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the
>
> form of production ... man and nature are not like two opposite terms
>
> confronting each other ... rather they are one and the same essential
>
> reality, the producer-product.[50]

Deleuze and Guattari ask:

> What does the machine produce? What is produced by means of it? The
> answer would seem to be: intensive quantities ... These are often
> described as hallucinations and delirium, but the basic phenomenon of
> hallucination (*I see, I hear*) and the basic phenomenon of delirium (*I
> think...*) presuppose an *I feel* at an even deeper level ... delirium and
> hallucination are only secondary in relation to the really primary emotion,
> which in the beginning only experiences intensities, becomings,
> transitions.[51]

Looking at one of Tousignant's target images produces intense sensations. In one of the

earliest reviews of Tousignant's circular paintings, a reviewer for the Montreal *Gazette*

describes "a flood of colour vibration. Op is not so much the representation, nor the

presentation, but the invention of experience."[52] In just what way do we experience

Tousignant's target paintings? Kay Kritzwiser, writing in the *Globe and Mail* in 1968,

describes the "explosive effect of Tousignant's whirling colours."[53] In his essay, "La jeune

peinture au Québec," François-Marc Gagnon writes of the deployment of colour in a series

of overlapping waves: "le *Gong* de Tousignant, à l'instar de son homonyme musical,

diffuse à l'extérieur de l'aire picturale, en ondes concentriques virtelles, les énergies

accumulées au centre de la surface."[54] Jean-Paul Brousseau describes the motion not of a

colour, but between two colours: "le champ de vibration entre deux couleurs."[55] Brousseau

also noted Tousignant's tendency to contrast two patterns, one regular and one irregular,

"un rythme d'ensemble balayé par des rythmes secondaires aléatoires et parfois

contradictoires."[56] Tousignant commented: "Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de permettre le plus

grand nombre de relations rythmiques possibles à l'intérieur d'un rythme chromatique

d'ensemble."[57] This polyphonic overlapping of rhythmic vibrations, as well as the title,

Gongs, makes for inevitable analogies with music. In an interview in *La Presse* in 1966,

Tousignant explained:

> Dans la rythmique des vibrations, entre mes bandes, je faisais des
>
> recherches un peu dans le même sens que la stochastique du musicien
>
> Xénakis ... La stochastique précise mon interlocuteur, implique pour moi
>
> un certain aléatoire dans les vibrations, mais une continuité dans la
>
> rythmique et c'est pourquoi, j'ai appelé mes tableau circulaires, des
>
> 'gongs': en arriver, malgré l'aléatoire à une constante vibratoire, à un
>
> même rythme vibratoire, un peu comme un gong que l'on frappe.[58]

The viewer interprets these rhythms of vibration as sensations or pre-logical affects. The

rhythms create a virtual movement across space and time that is analogous to Deleuze's

notion of the refrain. The refrain, Deleuze and Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*,

> acts upon that which surrounds it, sound or light, extracting from it
>
> various vibrations, or decompositions, projections or transformations. The
>
> refrain also has a catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the
>
> exchanges and the reactions in that which surrounds it, but also to assure
>
> indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural
>
> affinity.[59]

Tousignant uses complex rhythms that "interweave" with one another. Only his

interweave is not musical, as in the refrain, nor linear as we often see in visual art, but

chromatic. He interweaves colours. One might also say he interweaves numbers, as his

serial progressions can be translated into mathematical formulas. One serial pattern fits

inside another serial pattern; they move together like alternating currents. For example, in

Chromatic Accelerator, 1971 (fig. 50), the cool colours, blue and green, consistently repeat every four rings; the hot colours, red and green, appear every six rings, though to complicate things, the red appears as a double ring set. We could call the hot colours A_1, A_2, A_3 and the cold colours B_1, B_2 and state the pattern as A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2, A_3, B_1, A_1, B_2, A_2, B_1, A_3... If plotted on a graph, one would see the superimposition of waves. Waves form in peaks (compression) and lows (rarefaction), which means there are always spaces between the peaks. These spaces can be filled by other waves. In an interview with Jean-Paul Brousseau in *La Presse* in 1973, Tousignant says he was inspired by

> la stochastique du compositeur Xenakis: un rythme d'ensemble balayé
>
> par des rythmes secondaires aléatoires et parfois contradictoires. « Ce qui
>
> m'intéresse, c'est de permettre le plus grand nombre de relations
>
> rythmiques possibles à l'intérieur d'un rythme (chromatique)
>
> d'ensemble. »[60]

We perceive motion in Tousignant's work as the visual equivalent of polyphonic rhythms, employing both predictable and unpredictable patterns. These rhythms are generated by a repetition of interior rings or contours, which hypothetically extend beyond the enclosure of the outer form. One might call this the paradox of the contour. Displaying both fixed and movable properties, his target paintings depict circles as boundaries that contain other circles, yet the circles generate a wave-like oscillation, an expansive energy that defies contours and boundaries. When Deleuze writes of Bacon's work that the "circle is not a place, but an event,"[61] he could be describing Tousignant's gongs, with their sense of optical vibration.

In 1968, Tousignant introduced a new motif: the oval. Like the target paintings, these works also utilize concentric interior rings that follow the contour of the outer frame.

In a variation, such as *Ovale*, 1969 (fig. 52, 53), the oval rings seem to get squashed as they move toward the center. The rings lose their roundness, taking on a pointed almond shape. The top and bottom of the composition mirror one another along a longitudinal axis; it is an example of bilateral symmetry. There is a strong sense of transformation, of one shape turning into another, in the process, creating a dialogue between the two forms, one round and one pointed.

In his target images, Tousignant "cut" his circles, dividing the interior surface area into smaller units, without disturbing the overall circular form. In *Ovale*, the cut is a little more disruptive, setting up a discrepancy between the outer rounded oval form and the interior pointed motif. We think of round shapes as soft, pointed shapes as sharp and hard. One is a threat to the other, yet in *Ovale,* they are able to merge together into a new hybrid shape. The oval can be derived from a circle that is crushed and stretched; the pointed oval is derived from a circle that has been cut or folded in on itself. Both types of ovals refer to an absent form, the circle, the presence of which we are able to infer, just as we are able to infer that there is a piece missing from the pointed oval. Tousignant cuts his circle to vary the rhythm of the interior pattern, making it more unpredictable. It is his way of violating the circle, of disturbing the equanimity of the circle and setting up an internal relationship of balanced but unequal parts.

The year after he began working with oval shapes, Tousignant turned his strategy of bipartition into a strategy of serial extension, at first using double canvases to contrast one target image with another. The diptychs appear like stereoscopic viewing machines or giant traffic lights alternating signals of stop and go. From Danielle Corbeil we learn that "Tousignant says of his diptychs that they must be 'seen in stereo': 'It is the movement from one circle to another that is important.'"[62]

In *Gong 64*, 1966 (fig. 51), the repetitions are hypnotic; in later diptych works,

such as *Sulfo-Sélénide*, 1973 (fig. 58), the effect is more puzzling as a viewer

unconsciously tries to make the two facing circles equate. The former work is self-

contained, a single canvas, though composed of many internal bands of different colours.

The latter work is a diptych, and uses just two coloured bands per canvas. Within the two

facing canvases of the *Sulfo-Sélénide diptych*, no colour repeats itself and yet one is able to

discern a set of relationships: the two inner sections are the same size; the two outer

sections are the same size. Both canvases contain hot colours surrounded by zones in

which colour is absent, one zone being black, the other white. Comparing the two

canvases, one could say that the outer zones undergo an extreme change in value; while

the inner zones undergo a subtle change in hue. One is the property of light and dark, the

other is the property of color. The artist explores correspondences rather than replications,

as well as variations on internal and external patterns. Why is Tousignant so interested in

these patterns and correspondences? Deleuze suggests an answer when he writes:

"Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind

which contemplates it."[63]

Tousignant's serial work of the mid-1970s, such as *Ultra Quinacridone*, 1973 (fig.

54), attacks the notion of an artwork as a self-contained unit. In this painting, Tousignant

opposes a pair of hot colors with a pair of warm colours, though the circles lock together

as colour complements. There is less motion in this paired set than in the work of the

1960s, as fields of color replace the multiplicity of rings. When I asked Tousignant why he

moved in this direction, he answered that when standing in a room full of his vibrating

paintings, as at an exhibition he had in 1968, it got to be too much. "It was overkill." Why

did he use fewer colours? "I just fell in love with the shape of the canvas and these are

more of a circle [than a vibrating source]; it keeps the quality of the circle more."[64] In the 1960s, Tousignant create an excited simulation of motion; in the 1970s, he was ready to explore relationships within motion, the contexts of motion.

In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Deleuze describes how "the cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world. This is why, very early on, it looked for bigger and bigger circuits."[65] By world or circuit, I believe Deleuze means context or milieu. However, Deleuze sees a problem with this quest for gigantism and suggests this need for infinite expansion, this immanent drive within life to iterate difference and complexity, could be described as a virtual or latent quality. It is not then a question of depicting a vaster milieu, but of depicting potential and multiple views within that milieu.

> Should not the opposite direction have been pursued? Contracting the
> image instead of dilating it. Searching for the smallest circuit that
> functions as internal limit for all the others and that puts the actual image
> beside a kind of immediate, symmetrical, consecutive or even
> simultaneous double. If we take this direction to its limit, we can say that
> the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a
> double or a reflection. In Bergsonian terms ... there is a formation of an
> image with two sides, actual and virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a
> photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into
> the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the
> mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double
> movement of liberation and capture.[66]

Deleuze suggests any object, any event, has an actual circumstance and a virtual circumstance that serves it as a kind of double or mirror. This is especially so when one

considers time. Does the past presuppose the present or does the present presuppose the past? Which emerges out of which, or is it more correct to say, as Bergson does, "The past would never be constituted if it did not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist."[67] The past then is a kind of virtual event that mirrors the present.

In Tousignant's double target, *Le Jaune et le rouge*, 1971 (fig. 56), the facing canvases display an inversion of values analogous to the reversing of form that happens in a mirror. Mirrors are often circular, especially handheld mirrors; by placing two circles of identical size and shape side-by-side, Tousignant invites this association. It is an audacious move because mirrors are symbolic of representation—critics speak of art being the mirror to nature—the very thing that Tousignant is resisting. But if the discs function as mirrors, they are trick mirrors. They are mirrors which invite questions and generate problems for the viewer.

In a work called *Bleu-rouge-vert-violet*, 1980 (fig. 59), Tousignant created a paired set of identical black discs.[68] I read the two discs as blacked out mirrors; they are the negation of mirrors, and yet, because there are two of them, they mirror one another. One marks a point of origin and the other marks a continuation, an extension. I could call one an object and the other its representation, though the disc I just called a representation is an object in its own right. It then functions as both a representation and an object and the object which it represents could in turn represent it like two mirrors facing one another. They are themselves as well as the reflection of the other. All of this is to say that the distinction we make between a representation and an object is somewhat tenuous. They represent the black hole of representation, in which it is impossible to be either unique or entirely self-defined.

In his study of Francis Bacon, Deleuze describes how the artist uses the triptych format to disrupt surface continuity and to introduce elements of time and rhythmic progression. A similar effect is observable in Tousignant's use of diptychs and other serial works. Deleuze writes of Bacon's use of a mirror motif: "Bacon's mirrors can be anything you like, except a reflecting surface. The mirror is an opaque and black thickness."[69] Like Bacon, Tousignant also uses the mirror motif to foil representation. Deleuze expands his thoughts on mirrors by referring to scenes from cinema in which mirrors are used. As always with Deleuze, he questions not what mirrors mean, but how they function:

> mirrors are inseparable from a circuit ... This circuit itself is an exchange:
> the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the
> mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the
> character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field ... When
> virtual images proliferate like this ... the character [becomes] no more
> than one virtuality among others. This situation was prefigured in
> Welles's *Citizen Kane*, when Kane passes between two facing mirrors;
> but it comes to the fore in its pure state in the famous palace of mirrors in
> *The Lady from Shanghai*, where the principle of indiscernibility reaches
> its peak: a perfect crystal-image where the multiple mirrors have assumed
> the actuality of the two characters who will only be able to win it back by
> smashing them all, finding themselves side by side and each killing the
> other.[70]

In both of Deleuze's examples, the mirror is used to fracture and challenge the idea of a stable, self-embodied person. One could say this is also what the multi-narrative structure of *Citizen Kane* achieves. The absence of a single point-of-view, so characteristic of this

film, is what most attracts Deleuze to cinema generally. In real life, subjects perceive a

world of flux, but they imagine themselves as interpreters, as something other than flux.

The world changes, but the subject's point-of-view remains relatively constant within a

ground of ego, consciousness, personality and social codes that have been internalized.

What Deleuze likes about cinema is that it gives us a chance to see the world as a

composite of multiple viewpoints, through the eyes of a machine, the camera.

One could compare the multiple narratives, the multiple points-of-view, the

multiple ideas of character that we encounter in the cinema with the multiple rhythms that

Tousignant sets up in the diptychs which are developed throughout the 1970s (fig. 54-60).

In these works, there is both an internal and external correspondence between the

paintings. In *Ultra Noir*, 1977 (fig. 60), a black circle placed inside a larger white circle is

a paraphrase of the composition of Malevich's *Black Square*, 1913, though Tousignant

complicates matters by adding a second circular canvas, identical in size to the first, but

with its tones inversed, substituting gray for white. The diptych strongly suggests an

oscillation from day to night, with inevitable references to planetary orbits and eclipses. It

also suggests a pattern mold and that which is produced by a mold, commenting on the

nature of reproduction, whether mechanical or natural. It also seems to comment on how

we form new ideas; where does movement come from except in relation to something

else? It is as if Tousignant were asking himself: if I set up a pattern, how can I use that

pattern to generate another pattern? This is also one of Deleuze's central interests. How are

new thoughts generated? Do they depend on other thoughts? He came to the conclusion

that all of life is a repetition of non-identical particles, a process he called "difference and

repetition."

According to Deleuze, there are two kinds of repetition, repetitions that are coded and those that are uncoded. To illustrate the difference between these, Deleuze commentator Claire Colebrook suggested an experiment to restage the French Revolution.[71] One could dress up in historical costume and repeat period speeches word for word, but this would hardly bring about a revolution. In order to spark a revolution, one would need to plug into current conditions of political dissatisfaction. The reenactment of the French Revolution is a representation; it reduces an event to a series of codes. The result is that no revolution or change occurs. However, if one does not merely imitate the original events, but proceeds in one's own way to activate a situation of nascent unrest, something more closely resembling a revolution might occur. Repetition requires a degree of vitality that is found only in difference.

Deleuze extends this idea of repetition to the manner in which thoughts come to us. We can repeat the model of someone else's thought, thinking in a codified form, in order to suppress change, or we can try to discover and articulate differences, which will lead to the repetitions that facilitate change. These differences are not easy to discover because everything is coded, including thought and the idea of subjectivity and selfhood. This may be the greatest obstacle, though to "make something new of repetition," Deleuze states, is the beginning of "the dissolution of the self."[72] Deleuze resists boundaries such as the dualism between an individual's perceptions and a world of things which are perceived. To correct this model, Deleuze introduces the concept of "the other." He defines "the Other" as "all possible worlds."[73] As an example, he cites how Proust had commented that the character Albertine represented for him the beach and the crashing of waves. She could as easily represent the city or music or death. The point is that the Other represents

possibilities. The Other activates the field of perception. Without Others, there could be no perception and no distribution of possibilities.[74]

Deleuze goes on to argue that it is easy to imagine oneself at another time or in another state. One sees oneself frightened; one sees oneself happy. The possibilities are limitless, which is to say, a person can function as an "Other" to oneself. The Other is both within and without us, a virtual force of alternatives and possibilities. "The Other is the tribunal of all reality," Deleuze writes, "to debate, falsify or verify that which I think I see."[75] The Other is a machine with no independent existence.

Tousignant's diptychs are statements of otherness and alternative beings. They function not like individuals, but as interconnected machines, as machines of other machines. In 1987, Tousignant commented about Mondrian that he turned painting into an "object of perception or, more precisely, into a perceptible mechanism."[76] Tousignant's machines repeat themselves through the enunciation of a difference that is also a repetition, a variation on a self that has no closure and no determinacy. It could be contrasted to stratified and self-contained bodies, such as the ego, the mind, the state. The State-form, Deleuze and Guattari write,

> has a tendency to reproduce itself, remaining identical to itself ... easily
> recognizable within the limits of its poles ... [In contrast, the machine]
> exists only in its own metamorphoses; it exists in an industrial innovation
> as well as in a technological invention ... It [proceeds] in terms not of
> independence, but of co-existence and competition in a perpetual field of
> interaction ... [it is] a machine of metamorphosis."[77]

Just as Tousignant's bilateral compositions draw comparison to the symmetry of the human body, his stereo images refer to the stereoscopic nature of our vision. We see with

two eyes, but our brain interprets one image. Our integrated vision suggests we are

integrated beings. With Tousignant's diptychs, the melding process, bringing right and left

halves together into a composite whole, may not be possible. It is a statement of non-

integration that defies a single viewpoint, as well as giving a sense of virtual possibilities,

as we combine different ring combinations together between circles, or multiple points of

views.

Tousignant creates paintings that look like sculpture and sculpture that looks like

painting. He began to blur this line in a flat work painted on canvas that he called

Sculpture, 1973-4 (fig. 61) The work consists of three large identical canvases, each

painted black, and each featuring a rectangular base and a rounded arch-shaped top. The

canvases look like gateways; when pressed against a wall, they make it seem as though the

wall has a series of holes in it. The three dark arches create the effect of an arcade or a

triumphal arch. Tousignant conceived the work during a year-long in Italy so this was a

deliberate reference.[78] He also had in mind Matisse's *Dance* mural, 1932-3 (fig. 62) in the

Barnes Foundation in Merion, Pennsylvania. The Matisse work was designed to suit the

architecture of a particular room, fitting on three lunettes above three windows of a central

exhibition hall. Rising and falling dancers appear within the lunettes. The dancers mirror

one another and their rounded body shapes reinforce the rounded arches within which they

appear. The body forms are large and are boldly cropped by the picture frame, which

serves to hide as much as it reveals. Matisse's work is a Depression-era picture and public

murals were often used at this time to bolster a sense of community. The dance troupe is a

particularly synchronized form of coordinated motion. Matisse's explicit reference was to

his own earlier dance mural commissioned by his Russian patron Sergei Shchukin to

commemorate the importance of dance companies like the Ballet russe as a cultural

export.[79] The ballet russe functioned as an international point of connection for many different art forms, such as dance, music, writing, painting and theatre. Matisse's mural fuses dance, painting and architecture, all revolving around the notion of a creative community in harmonious motion.

Tousignant has removed the dancers to focus attention on the arches which mirror one another. Their dark shape contrasts with the gallery's white wall, turning it visually into an arcade, which immediately creates classical allusions. It is hard not to think of viaducts, triumphal arches and coliseums. However, Tousignant does not paint these monumental structures; rather he paints the holes between the arches. He paints nothingness, the in-between spaces where all things are in transition. Tousignant's *Sculpture* has the look of a temporary installation, at odds with the enduring qualities of classical art. It anticipates the black mirror theme of the *Bleu-rouge-vert-violet* diptych of 1980 (fig. 59). The form repudiates representation or identification, yet it duplicates and mirrors itself.

While Matisse's dance mural integrates with the design of the room, Tousignant's work challenges the room in which it is placed. Tousignant's dark canvases blast imaginary holes in the imperturbable walls of the National Gallery, opening up the space in a fantastic way. By using solid black forms in an entirely white-walled setting, Tousignant engages the gallery itself in a play of reversible forms. The black arches can be read either as foreground or background, but this is true also of the walls behind them, which oscillate between backdrop and active agent, dropping their institutional look to temporarily impersonate architecture from another historical period. The viewer however is keenly aware that the minute the sculpture moves, as it surely will, this illusion disappears. Matisse celebrates a subject that is symbolic of community; Tousignant tries to

free himself of a subject. Matisse creates a work about motion; Tousignant creates a work which moves. Tousignant stated:

> The most interesting factor in sculpture, and that which is peculiar to it, is
>
> space. In all my attempts at sculpture ... I was attempting to create a sort of
>
> drawing in space, a drawing composed of chromatic vibrations. I believe
>
> that when one gets involved in this sculpture one gets the impression of the
>
> immaterial nature of the object. The sculpture becomes almost pure space.[80]

How does Tousignant achieve this immateriality? He creates a vibration of foreground and background, reversing not only the formal values, but the symbolic values as well. I think of his arches as the negation of the triumphal arch, the celebration not of the great event that fixes itself in our memory, but of a micro-species of "imperceptible happenings" that are incalculable. Deleuze writes: "Underneath the large noisy events lie the small events of silence, just as underneath the natural light there are the little glimmers of the Idea."[81] It is the difference between a controlled version of history and the unlimited variations that go unrecorded.

If *Sculpture* brings together painting, sculpture and architecture, it is a slightly more troubling synthesis than that proposed by Matisse's mural. It is a synthesis that stresses the instability of forms. I tend to think of it as a movable wall, similar to the *Modulateur de lumière* series from 2005 (fig. 44). These recent works take the shaped canvas completely off the wall to form free standing structures that appear like screens, divides and absurdly convoluted walls. They are parodies of cubicles, more like puzzles, labyrinths and mazes than functional spaces. They reflect the idea that our walls are too fixed; a building may need to change its function or the way in which it divides and allocates space. Suggesting the same may be true of the divisions in the art world,

Tousignant uses the motif of the movable wall, the shaped canvas that has become sculpture and threatens to become architecture, to create a virtual space that is both problematic and liberating.

Conclusion

Tousignant's work is a critique of the idea that art is a copy of something that exists outside of art, something tangible and reliable, having a form and substance and to which art can only refer symbolically or as an imitation. This does not mean that art is an autonomous object, as some critics suggest. What exists outside of art is, using Deleuze's terms, a process of motion, of difference, repetition and change, though art itself partakes of this process. Impeding this process are the codes we overlay on experience. One of these codes is the code of representation, which holds that there are stable correspondences, distinct objects and discriminating observers. Tousignant questions these assumptions, disturbing the neutrality of vision.

For Tousignant, motion is primarily a vibration, creating relationships of internal and external correspondence between neighboring forms. The artist divides objects internally to create motion and contradiction within seemingly static, balanced and ordered forms. He opposes hierarchies, stressing what Deleuze calls immanence over transcendence. In traditional paintings, a hierarchal scheme serves to privilege one area of an image over another. Tousignant uses flat unmodulated colours to equally activate all areas of his image. The forms inside the painting reflect the shape of the canvas. Tousignant uses multiple interweaving patterns like polyphony in music, using what Deleuze calls sensation to override assumptions about the reliability of perception. Some patterns are predictable; others are random. Tousignant's work relates to Deleuze's

concept of difference and repetition, challenging the notion of a fixed identity. Things can only be defined in relationship to other things and all things can serve as virtual Others to themselves.

Tousignant's early work radiates away from the center, creating optical vibrations that seem to extend beyond the image. The serial work of the mid-1970s attacks the notion of an artwork as a self-contained unit. A doubling or mirror motif sets up intricate reciprocal relationships that charge and activate the spaces between the forms. Tousignant has said that he wanted to do away with images and this is apparent as he draws the viewer's attention to this space between things. His circles are essential forms that project themselves in series in a virtual shadow form. They demonstrate what Deleuze calls a "particularity that is" and an "indetermination [and] newness which creates itself. This double aspect of difference is what we understand as its repetition."[82] Tousignant uses repetition, not to create a new form in space, but to create a new space in the mind of the viewer.

Notes

1. Exhibition notes, Galerie du Siècle, 5-31 mars 1968.

2. Danielle Corbeil, *Claude Tousignant Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1973), 15.

3. Yves Robillard, *La Presse*, March 9, 1968.

4. Michel Dupuy , *Le Droit*, January 13, 1973. (The pictures of Tousignant reveal us a systematic and strict evolution; his progress is rational; his topics are relentlessly exploited.)

5. Michel Dupuy , *Le Droit*, January 13, 1973. (Despite Tousignant's intensely rational works, they brings us by a strange paradox to pure feeling. His mind games are the joy of senses.)

6. Giles Toupin, *La Presse*, May 29, 1976. (works that are strongly appealing)

7. William Withrow, *Contemporary Canadian Painting* (Toronto: McCelland and Stewart, 1972), 140.

8. Michael White, *Gazette,* May 26, 1973.

9. France Gascon, "Claude Tousignant: sculpter pour peindre" in *The Journal of Canadian Art History* 7, no 2 (1984), 179.

10. Gascon, "Claude Tousignant: sculpter pour peindre," 158.

11. Yves Robillard, *La Presse*, March 9, 1968.

12. François-Marc Gagnon, "Claude Tousignant: point de mire" in *Vie des arts,* no. 69 (Hiver 1972-1973), 38.

13. John Bentley Mays, *Globe and Mail*, 13 mar 93.

14. Catherine Bates Montreal Star, 20 Jan. 1973.

15. Corbeil, *Claude Tousignant Retrospective*, 15.

16. Henry Lehmann *Montreal Star*, 22 May 1976.

17. Judith Kelly, "Inaugural text," *Claude Tousignant Retrospective* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1973), 15.

18. James D. Campbell, *Claude Tousignant: Monochromes, 1978-1993* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1994), 74.

19. Michèle Thériault, "3 Paintings, 1 Sculpture, 3 Spaces: Claude Tousignant: Black, Grey, White," (Montreal: Galerie Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 26 May- 9 July, 2005), 20.

20. Thériault, "3 Paintings, 1 Sculpture, 3 Spaces," 21.

21. Henry Lehman, Montreal *Gazette*, November 25, 2006.

22. Kelly, "Inaugural text," 6.

23. James D. Campbell, *After geometry: The Abstract Art of Claude Tousignant* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1995), 13.

24. Normand Thériault, *Claude Tousignant: Sculptures* (Montreal: Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, 15 janvier-21 février 1982), 23.

25. Interview with Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

26. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 8.

27. Interview with Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

28. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews, 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade. trans. Ames Hodges and Michael Taormina (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 406.

29. Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 261.

30. Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 261.

31. Campbell, *After Geometry*, 14.

32. Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*, 262.

33. *La Presse*, 26 mai 73. (It was also a reaction to automatism, in sense that automatistes had succeeded in making a painting which strikingly resembled, in its treatment of pictorial space, a landscape. It was anecdotal, space was painted like a landscape; you had some marks, but between marks, had you a visual space.)

34. Gagnon, *Vie des Arts*, no. 69 (Hiver 1969), 43. (With the primacy given to colour, it is all Dionysian lyricism; in this way, a painting defined structurally is reinvested of its full powers.)

35. France Gascon, *Claude Tousignant: Diptyques 1978-1980* (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain, 1980), 10. (The perfect bipartition is not a principle of composition but a

principle of divorce; it is like a picture which cannot be integrated or like a faulty stereoscope which refuses to merge two images together.)

36. Campbell, *After Geometry*, 56.

37. R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience*, 129-44, quoted in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, (New York: Viking, 1977), 131-132.

38. Pierre Théberge, exhibition notes, Galerie du Siècle, 5-31 mi, 1968.

39. Kelly, "Inaugural text," 9.

40. Frances Follin, *Embodied Visions: Bridget Riley, Op Art and the Sixties* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 10.

41. Bill Auchterlonie, *Art Magazine* 6, no. 21 (Spring 1975), 30.

42. François-Marc Gagnon, "Point de mire," 43. (One after another, what Matthew Baigell called depth clues disappears. Superimposing one element on top of another, a strategy which readily suggests depth, is avoided. Grounds were simply juxtaposed or aligned one against the others. The impressions of gravitation, distance or even orientation (left field and right field), because of the references which they make in the naturalistic space, were minimized.)

43. Bay ad, *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 5, 1973.

44. Henry Lehmann, *Mirror*, July 7, 1994.

45. Follin, *Embodied Visions*, 128.

46. Follin, *Embodied Visions*, 28.

47. Follin, *Embodied Visions*, 28.

48. Follin, *Embodied Visions*, 183.

49. McLuhan, 7.

50. Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 4-5.

51. Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19.

52. anonymous review, Montreal *Gazette*, November 12, 1966.

53. Kay Kritzwiser, *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1968.

54. François-Marc Gagnon, "La jeune peinture au Québec" in *Revue d'Esthétique* 22, no. 3, (1969), 267. (Tousignant's images of Gongs, following the example of the ringing

sound from which they are named, diffuse outside the pictorial space, in virtual concentric waves, an energy collected in the centre of the surface.)

55. Jean-Paul Brousseau, *La Presse*, May 26, 73. (the field of vibrations between two colours.)

56. Jean-Paul Brousseau, *La Presse*, May 26, 73. (An overall rhythm swept by a random secondary rhythm that at times contradicts the first.)

57. Jean-Paul Brousseau, *La Presse*, May 26, 73. (What interests me is to allow the greatest number of possible rhythmic relations within a group of colours.)

58. *La Presse*, November 19, 1966. (In the vibrating rhythm, between my bands, I experimented along similar lines as those of the musician Xénakisas, who is noted for his random patterns ... His method clarifies my own approach. It encourages a certain unpredictability in the pattern of vibrations, but an overall continuity in the rhythm and that's why, I called my circular pictures "gongs." Despite unpredictable minor changes, there's a vibratory constant, underlying the sound; it is a bit like a gong which one hits.)

59. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 348.

60. Jean-Paul Brousseau, *La Presse*, May 26, 73.

61. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 15.

62. Corbeil, *Claude Tousignant Retrospective*, 15.

63. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 70.

64. Interview with Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

65. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1989 (1985)), 68.

66. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 68.

67. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*. trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 59.

68. For the sake of this discussion, I refer to the colour of the paintings as black, as it appears to the naked eye. Tousignant told me that the colour is not black but is in fact a composite of different colours. This is a common practice in more traditional forms of painting, mixing black from composite colours, which is why I do not explore this point

further in the main text. The reason Tousignant brings up this point, I suspect, is it allows him to create many near-identical paintings in black, all of which remain unique at a level that may be indiscernible to the viewer.

69. Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 18.

70. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 70.

71. Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 120.

72. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 11.

73. Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 61.

74. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 61.

75. Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, 62.

76. Campbell, *After Geometry*, 50.

77. Deleuze and Guatttari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 360-61.

78. Interview with Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

79. Gilles Néret, *Matisse* (Koln and New York : Taschen, 1999), 143-163.

80. Corbeil, *Claude Tousignant Retrospective*, 15.

81. Stivale, Charles J, ed. *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 49.

82. Stivale, *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, 51.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Rita Letendre, Serge Lemoyne and Claude Tousignant all explore elements of abstract art

as well as ideas of motion. These two interests are often inseparable and both foster a

number of intriguing questions. Rita Letendre paints the motion of light. She paints the

refraction of beams, the bending of space, and light as a multi-coloured prism. She paints

light encased in darkness and she reveals twilight regions posed between light and dark.

She captures the burning heat of light, the haze of light, the sharpness of light, as well as

its oscillating instability. She paints light as a field of electric currents. She depicts light

stretching to infinity, light narrowing to a point, light travelling in waves, setting off

repercussive counter waves. She paints light as a source of shock and light as a natural and

technological sublime. She paints light as evidence of invisible, undiscovered regions and

unnamed particles of matter. She conceives of light as a bridge spanning huge distances,

light as a source of connection. Light appears in her images as something that is ever-

changing, both hard and soft, fast and slow, present and absent.

Tousignant is also interested in oscillation, as indicated by a painting from 1956,

called *Oscillation*. This painting explores the bi-partition of a form, using colour to create

motion in a stable form. Tousignant also paints the gong-like vibration of colour waves. Consistent throughout his work is the use of colour as a means of establishing rhythms to divide and expand space. The subject has disappeared and what we are left with is a space that itself begins to move. His work focuses on relationships that break down our concepts of stability and singularity in art and life, as his polyphonic rhythms and stereo images insist on double readings and multiple reactions.

Lemoyne paints the movement of bodies as well as a movement through bodies. His bodies are not self-contained. They spill into their backgrounds and are turned into flags, numbers, rockets and disintegrating stars and houses. He depicts people as signs operating in a world of signs. His work makes reference to the motion of paint and to the process of painting. Accidental spills flow across his images, upsetting the pristine surface; the accident represents a motion that is a kind of self-confession of the artist's presence. An undisturbed image, Lemoyne seems to be saying, would give a false sense of stability. Instead Lemoyne's drips give his hockey images a nervous vitality that makes the work appear like it is still in process.

Throughout his writings, Deleuze uses two key metaphors: one is the rhizome, the other is the machine. The first term derives from biology, the second suggests technology, though in Deleuze's view they are not dichotomous. Both utilize networks of cooperation and interdependence with other species and other machine operators. Neither is a hierarchal system, as they instead encourage diversity and multiplicity, and favour local actions over universal centralized control. When applied to politics or social organizations, the rhizome and machine reflect a widespread grass-roots activity. The presence of biology and technology underlies the work of the artists in my study and they also challenge the

traditional oppositions of culture and nature. With Letendre, light is apprehended through telescopes, satellites, prisms, and by other scientific means. Our understanding of light informs us of the composition of colours, the elements contained in stars, as well as the speed at which stars travel. But our response to light is not confined to science. Light produces a physical body shock that even a baby can feel. Furthermore, the way we perceive light and the ideas we form about light contribute to ideas about ourselves and our societies. Letendre conceives of light as something that is fluid, restless, always in motion, always seeking to escape from its confines. It is made of both waves and particles that produce rhythms of which we are a part and which connect everybody to everything.

Tousignant's work also combines technology and biology. He uses geometry and mathematics to create perfectly regular forms; the precision and industrial slickness of these forms make us think of machines. Tousignant underlined this association early in his career by using industrial car paint and other synthetic materials. However, as precise and mechanical as the work is, it produces a kind of shock to the viewer's nervous system. Like Letendre, Tousignant works with colours and rhythms to produce strong feelings of affect in the viewer. Though Tousignant, like Letendre, is an abstract artist, his references to biology are unavoidable. Not only do critics compare his sun-shaped discs to solar energy, they also compare his human-scaled bi-partition works to the bilateral symmetry of the human body. His double discs have been compared to binoculars and to the stereo nature of our vision. One of Tousignant's central concerns is: when one divides a form, how do the interior parts relate to one another? In a similar spirit, he asks: when a form is replicated or multiplied, how do these serial parts relate? The replication process is further complicated when the repeating form is itself a composite or the site of internal sub-

divisions. The repeated form is not so much a perfect copy as the variation of a prototype. This recombination of elements to produce variety is much like the replication of the genetic code in living cells, a point that is suggested when reviewers write of mutations in Tousignant's serial works. Tousignant stresses how, in his paintings and sculpture, divisions and serial projections produce motion and complexity. Societies try to impose order on complexity through a hierarchy of values and through the establishment of stable symmetrical forms. Tousignant refutes hierarchy entirely, as no area of his image is privileged over any other area. He also shows how within rigidly symmetry compositions there can be random and contradictory actions and rhythms. In other words, we can perceive balance without needing to reduce multiplicity to uniformity.

Lemoyne also refers to biology and technology. He made use of photography, slide projection and computers to comment on mass media. He shows bodies in motion, but what intrigues him seem to be the markings on the body, as if he were painting the stripes on wasps and the spots on leopards. We think of wild animals in terms of their markings, both of their bodies and of their territories. Lemoyne insists that people are no different. We too operate according to a loyalty to colours and a sense of place, though with people this process is somewhat arbitrary and capable of adjustment. This is why his flag motives are conceived of as collages, part French, part British, part American, and continually shifting their properties. Lemoyne also suggests that bodies are fluid entities. They bleed, sweat and breathe, in-taking and out-taking material, burning energy like a machine.

Deleuze proposed that music can be used to project a pattern across space, infusing order or a feeling of belonging to a territory. This was useful in demarcating three movements: overcoming fear in hostile or strange areas; allowing for concentrated activity

in a secure home environment; and finally inviting others to participate or introducing a spirit of exploration. All this was done through a repetition that is marked by difference. Artists activate this rhythm, as we see with Letendre, with her repeating motifs, her winged *tesserae* and vibrating arrows, and her fluctuating northern lights. Lemoyne repeats recognizable bands of colours. Tousignant elaborates a polyphonic structure through colours and concentric circles, leading to the complex inter-relationships of his many serial works.

Letendre, Lemoyne and Tousignant all use affect to provoke strong instinctive reactions in the viewer. Deleuze asks how does affect work? How does it overcome the painting that is already there before the painting has even begun? How does it overcome the cultural coding that preconditions us to react in certain ways? How does affect break through these invisible structures of control? Every artist has a different solution. We get a feeling of shock from the intensity of light in Letendre's work. In our daily activities, light so utterly permeates our lives that we become unconscious of it and take it for granted; Letendre does not allow us to do this, jolting us out of our complacency and encouraging us to see light as a complex and dynamic force about which we have much to learn. Lemoyne appropriates photographs from popular media and through a process of extreme blow-up annuls their representational norms, ridding us of heroes and villains, as he turns athletes into semi-abstract graphic images. He then disintegrates his forms through random paint spills and self-effacing drips. Lemoyne removes the neutral ground between active and inactive, catapulting the viewer into the midst of a process that unfolds before our eyes. With Tousignant, he makes us question what a work of art is. Is it an object or a hypothetical space that is activated by an object? What role does the viewer play in this

activation process? Tousignant's work is not so much fixed on the wall, but exists in an in-between space that depends on the viewer's ability to perceive and project patterns and relationships among divided and serial forms.

Each artist explores how a viewer responds to a work, often focusing on the nature of perception. With Letendre, light is the key to vision. Light is not uniform or predictable and takes many forms. One could extend this idea by arguing that there is not a single way to see anything, but a multiplicity of ways. Tousignant's optical paintings explicitly refer to perception, as do his stereo diptychs. A central notion of Op and kinetic art is that some patterns bear an inherent instability that viewers are not able to freeze in their minds or to make a unified synthesis out of. As the title of one exhibition put it: "1 + 1 = 3." Lemoyne's work suggests that we see the world through our loyalties, through our team colours, and through media and the processes of art. One expects the blow-up or enlargement of a photograph to increase our knowledge, to bring us closer to truth, but this is not the case. We live in the midst of media environments, which it is not possible to step outside; this influences what and how we see.

In comparing the artists in this study, one has to consider the manner in which they worked. Tousignant and Letendre both use the word evolution when talking of their process.[1] By this they mean that they make slow, imperceptible variations from one painting to the next. The variations are so slight they are hardly apparent from day to day, yet over an extended period of time, the changes can appear quite substantial and dramatic. Lemoyne had a different temperament. He was less methodical and logical than Letendre and Tousignant, yet he too worked in series. In 1988, Lemoyne commented to *Le Devoir* reporter Claire Gravel that when he was starting as an artist,

J'avais peur de ça, du style... en 62-63-64, je changeais de style à tous les

deux jours. À l'époque, je ne pouvais pas comprendre qu'un artiste puisse

faire toujours le même tableau.[2]

Lemoyne wanted every work to look and be different. Then in 1969, he publicly declared

he would restrict his work to the colours red, white and blue for the next ten years. In

making this resolution, he forced himself to work in a more systematic way and the

dividends became immediately apparent. Limiting his means seemed to free his

imagination. Letendre is also noted for her disciplined use of a colour and Tousignant

limits himself to the point of minimalism. One could say, it is a modernistic way of

working, reducing works to their essential components, but this is a misleading

generalisation.

To illustrate this point, one could mention that each artist is initially linked to

particular era and school of art that they subsequently grow beyond. For instance, Letendre

is closely linked to post-Automatiste developments in Montreal in the late 1950s and early

1960s. Lemoyne is connected to the happenings and Pop art of the 1960s. Tousignant is

called a Plasticien in the late 1960s, an Op artist in the 1960s and a minimalist in the

1970s. What is remarkable however is how each of these artists is able to escape these

labels and narrow associations. How do they do this? All three artists adopt motifs, which

become recognizably their own: arrows for Letendre; hockey colours and drips of paint for

Lemoyne; targets and circle-shaped diptychs for Tousignant. The artists then ingeniously

manipulate these motifs, inverting, deforming, transforming and shifting their shape.

Letendre turns a relatively stable tile-like unit and twists it into a tapering oblong with

parabolic-shaped sides and pointed tips. The parabolas reincarnate as interpenetrating

"changing spaces," colliding forms, vibrating arrows and oscillating mists. By mid-career, it is not even clear if Letendre is an abstract artist, let alone the adherent of a particular school, as she seems to invent her own genre of the techno-landscape.

Lemoyne blows up images to an unrecognizable degree, shifts the axis of his flags and crops stars into points. His rectangular canvas itself turns into a pennant. His flags and pennants turn into rockets and into stars; his stars burn themselves into extinction like a factory that has run its course. When he is not fragmenting his own signs, Lemoyne collects fragments from the world around him, such as the fragments of his vandalized house and grafts them into a new creative assemblage. This interest in fragmentation and collage combines a wide range of styles and media in a fantastic hybrid that seems uniquely his own.

With Tousignant critics are dumbfounded whether he represents the last bastion of the essential art object or whether he is the arch enemy of this school in his conceptual dematerialization of form. In his early work, Tousignant implanted asymmetrical features on a square-shaped format; in his images of concentric circles within a square-shaped format, the rings explode at the edges, causing anomalies to occur. He transforms his targets into ovals, fully exploiting the degeneration experienced by the interior shape as it diminishes in size. In his paired circles, Tousignant explores the idea of an anomalous mirror: the two halves share many elements that invite a feeling of equivalence, though a number of inexplicable differences remain. Throughout their careers, each artist continually revitalizes their motifs, in the process, stretching the media and genres within which they work. Their work opens up for each artist what Deleuze calls a "line of flight" which they then pursue.

The artists all left Montreal at various times to further their artistic development. Letendre spent time in Europe and Israel before moving to Los Angeles, New York and Toronto. Tousignant and Lemoyne also spent time in Europe and New York. All three recognized New York as a crucial artistic centre where international trends take shape in an on-going series of departures and innovations. A turning point in Letendre's career happened when she was a student and attended an exhibition, "Les Rebelles," organized by Jean Paul Mousseau and Marcelle Ferron, in a converted dance studio in Montreal in 1950. Letendre soon joined the ranks of these rebels. She commented: "I was convinced that I was going to revolutionize the universe, and all my friends thought the same about themselves."[3] In time, this sense of daring and freshness caught the attention and the respect of critics. A sign of this is that by 1962, both Letendre and Tousignant were sent to Italy to represent Québec in an international art exhibition.

However, the intervening years were not without struggle. Tousignant exhibited with the Plasticiens in the latter 1950s. They were what one might call the rebels against the rebel Automatistes. The work of the Plasticiens was so extreme that few galleries in Montreal would touch them at the time, so Tousignant and Molinari started their own exhibition space, Galerie l'Actuelle in 1955, a gallery not for the ghosts of old masters but for current work reflecting the latest developments in the art world. Lemoyne went even further, bringing his art out of the gallery into the street, and painting images directly before the public. There was no mystery about how he worked; rather, how he worked was integral to the meaning of the work. Lemoyne created art on outdoor stages and on public television, afterwards signing autographs like a rock star. The word star enters his vocabulary, as it does the consciousness of a culture obsessed with celebrity. In this world

of press agents and manipulated information, the artists find themselves increasingly working in media environments and, in turn, their work becomes more environmental. Letendre works on giant public murals that engulf the viewer. Tousignant also begins working on an epic scale in works that blur boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture, works which critics refer to as installations. Lemoyne conceived of his work in terms of a public ritual, hockey was such a ritual, but the key to this ritual was participation. The irony Lemoyne seemed to recognize was that he needed media to create an environment for ritual, but media is also an impediment to participation.

Critics bring up the word "trademark" when writing of their work. This suggests the commercial world we operate in, like it or not. How the most difficult abstract art can function like logos, identifying their creators. It also suggests a peddling of wares and a self-protection against the theft of ideas. Lemoyne engages with this, as he tries to engage with the banalities of everyday life. For instance, he was angered that a retrospective of Borduas's work would not be touring across the country or to other parts of the world. When the same situation occurred with his own retrospective at the Musée des beaux arts du Québec, he decided to take action in the only way he knew how, by organizing his own travelling show. He had no funds so he printed his works on T-shirts, which he distributed among his friends. He may have had in mind Duchamp's *Valise*, but it pointedly references the commercialization of museums, which sell merchandize of their masterpieces in tourist souvenir form.

This returns me to my central point: each artist participates in a process of deterritorization, upsetting viewer's assumptions by infusing motion across boundaries and space in their work. In doing this, the artists follow a principle that Deleuze assigns to

Bergson: "the mind must strive to sense a world behind appearances, a world in perpetual motion and change, without anchorage, without assignable points of reference, and without solid bodies or rigid lines."[4] Letendre, Lemoyne and Tousignant all share a need to make an art that is not static; they do this by energizing the picture space, as well as actively engaging the response of the viewer. As Letendre states: "It's about energy. Painting is a purely visual experience and that is energy too."[5] Tousignant commented: "The effects of my painting are in the realm of the non-verbal. Painting is a process... a matter of experience."[6] In a manifesto for La Semaine A in 1965, Lemoyne wrote: "Lemoyne est un médium, fil qui conduit l'Energie à la matière... Lemoyne est insaisissable et absurde. L'Univers n'a aucun sens: il en a des milliers."[7] Each artist use affect and rhythm to evoke a sense of risk and instability. No force seems to act on its own or in isolation, but rather is part of a larger vibration and oscillation that creates a multiplicity of views. At times this produced a hypnotic optical effect in the mind of the viewer to extend the boundaries of their images and of their media, while freeing them of traditional representation ties. Letendre, Lemoyne and Tousignant each creates a new sense of space by these disruptions and invite to viewer to share in the on-going process of a work.

Notes:

1. Interview with Rita Letendre, Toronto, May 16, 2007 and interview with Claude Tousignant, Montreal, April 17, 2007.

2. Claire Gravel, *Le Devoir*, Novembre 8, 1988. (I was afraid of style... in 1962-63-64, I changed my painting style every other day. At that time, I couldn't understand that an artist will always make or remake the same picture.)

3. "Art and Acrobatics... Rita Letendre," *Montrealer*, January 1962.

4. Gilles Deleuze, *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 6.

5. Robert Smythe, *Ottawa Citizen*, November 13, 1976.

6. Michael White, *Gazette* May 26, 1973

7. Serge Lemoyne, *Temoignage de Serge Lemoyne*, pamphlet written and distributed by Lemoyne during *La Semaine A* (Centre social de l'université de Montréal, April 20-26, 1964). (Lemoyne is a medium, a wire which conducts energy to material... The world has no particular sense, just thousands of possibilities.)

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curator.

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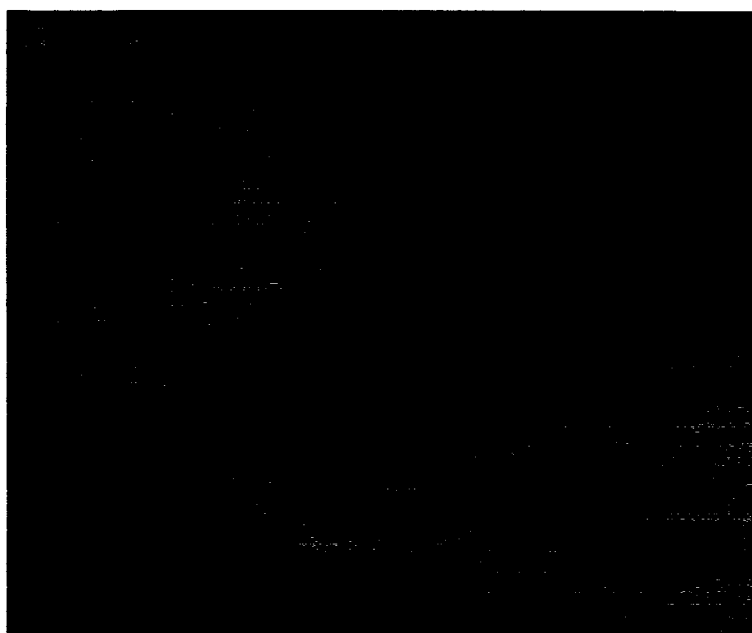
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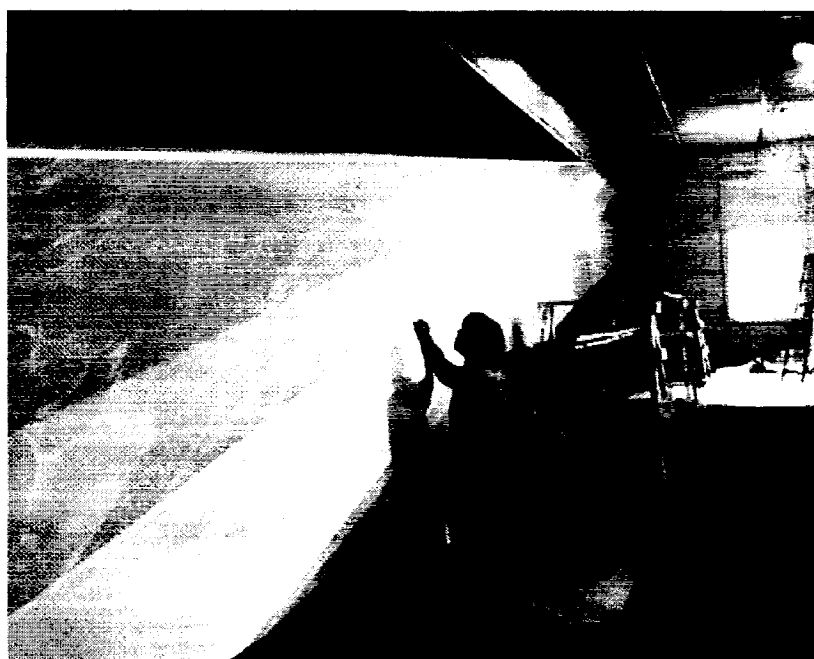
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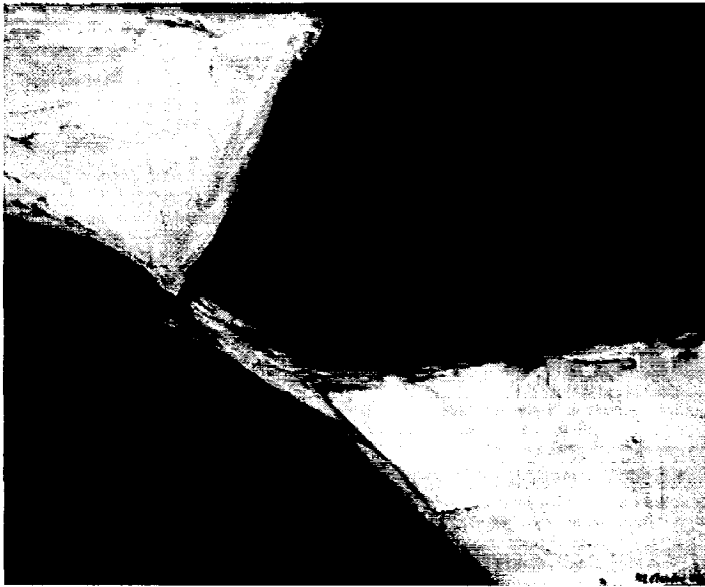
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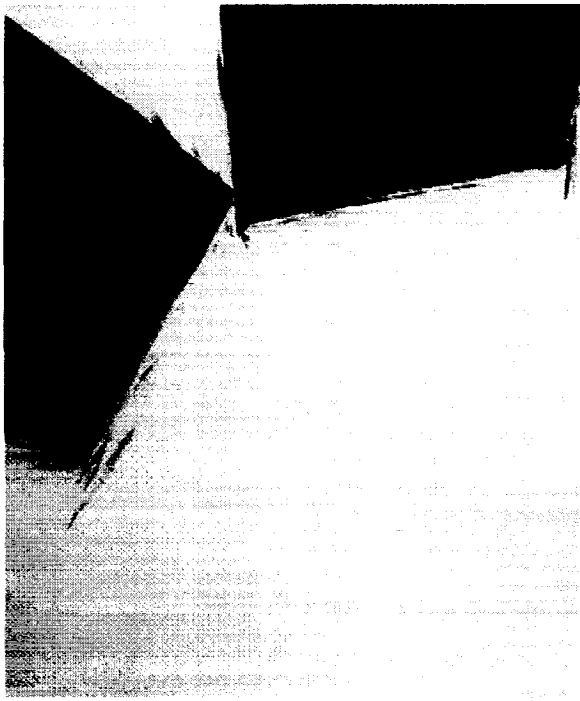
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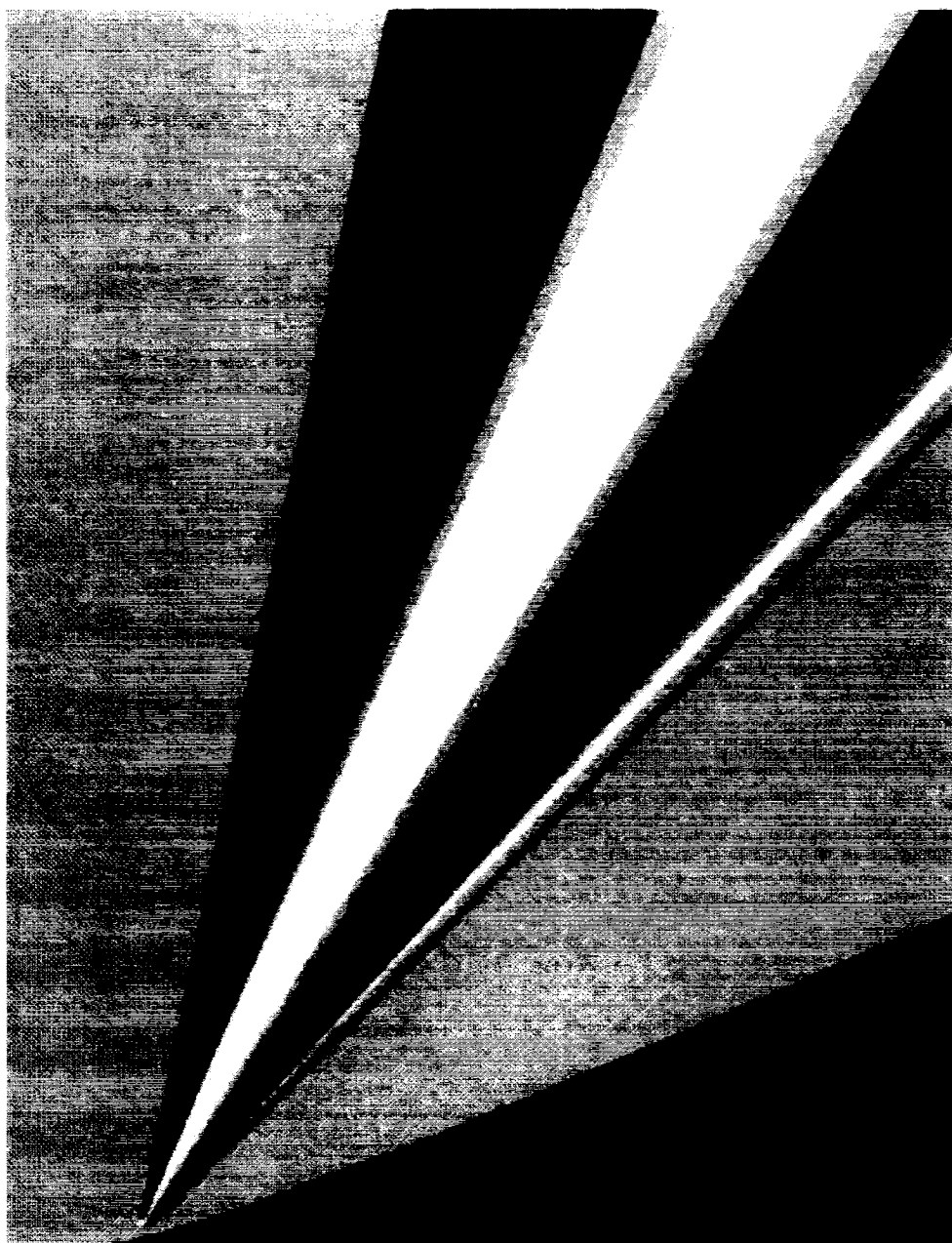
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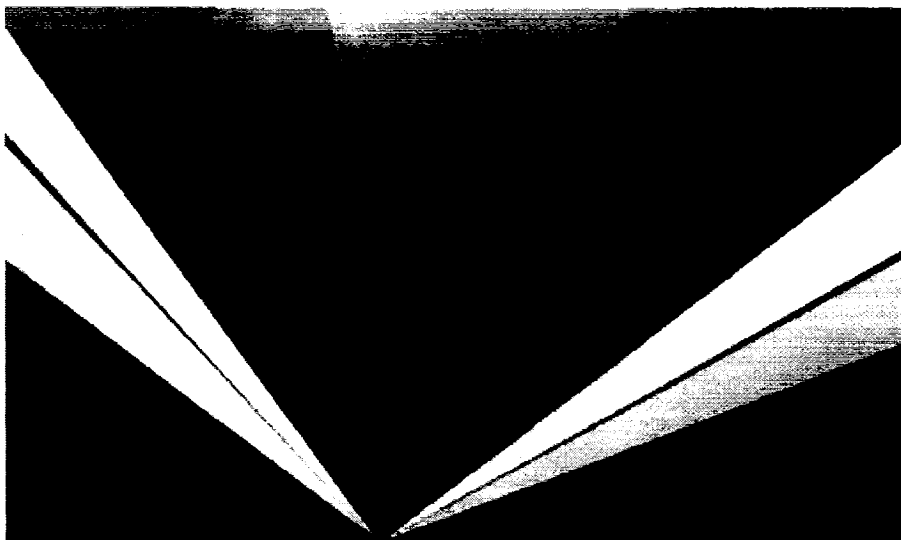
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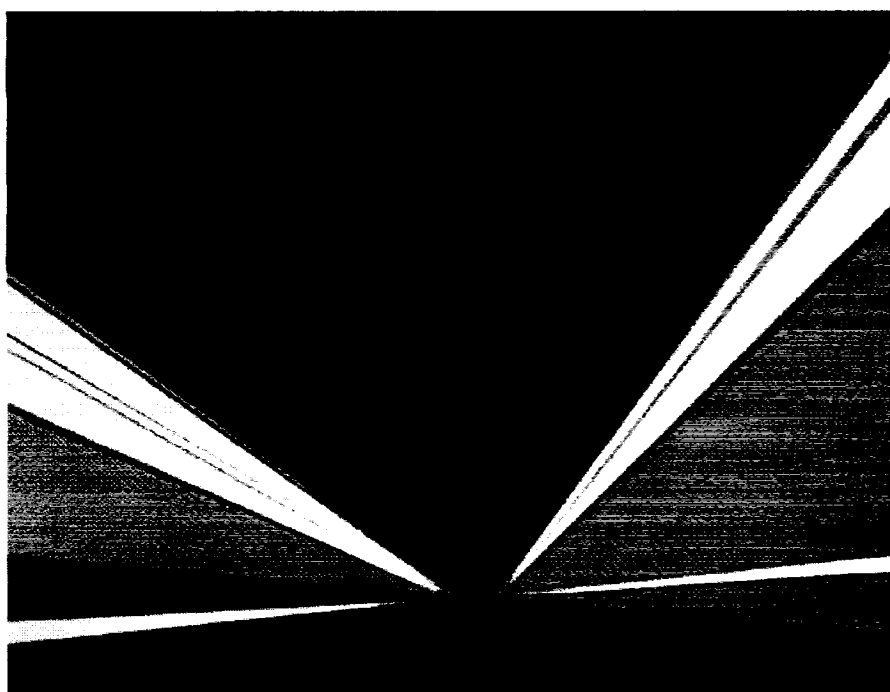
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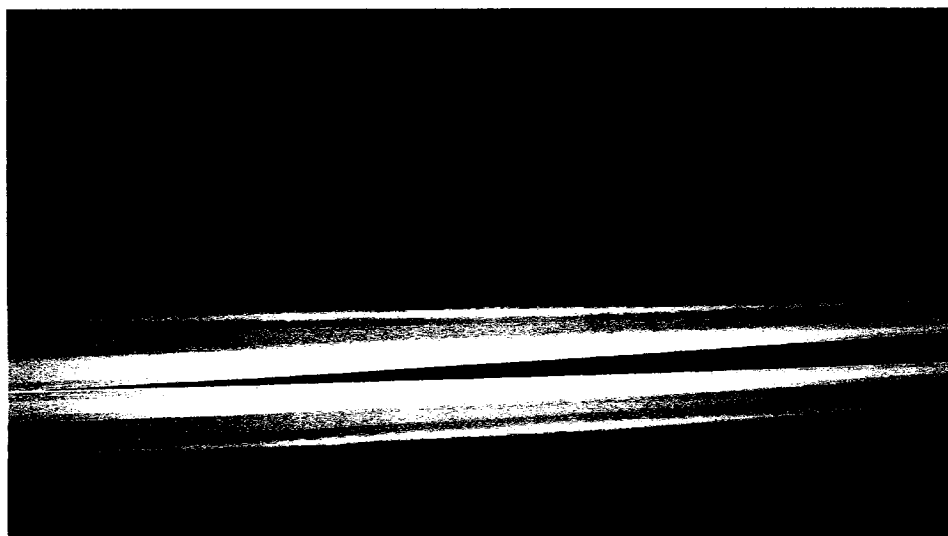
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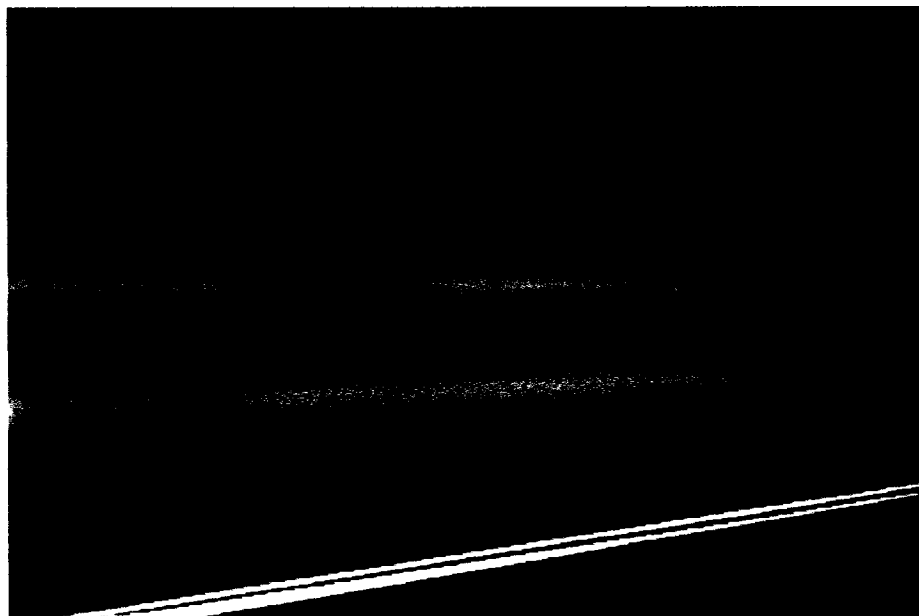
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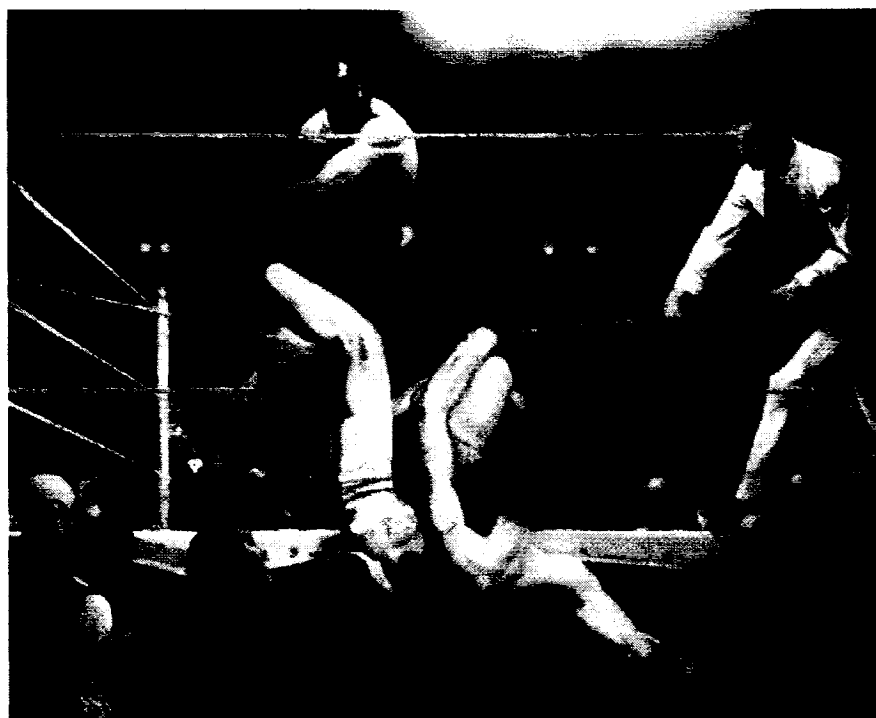
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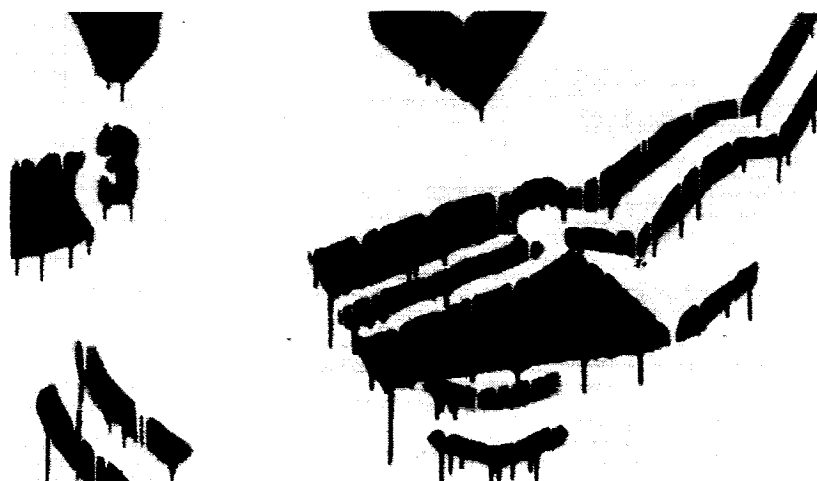
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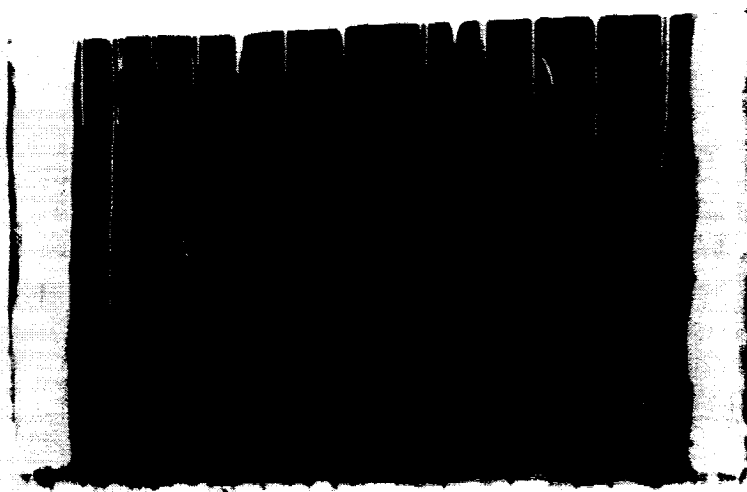
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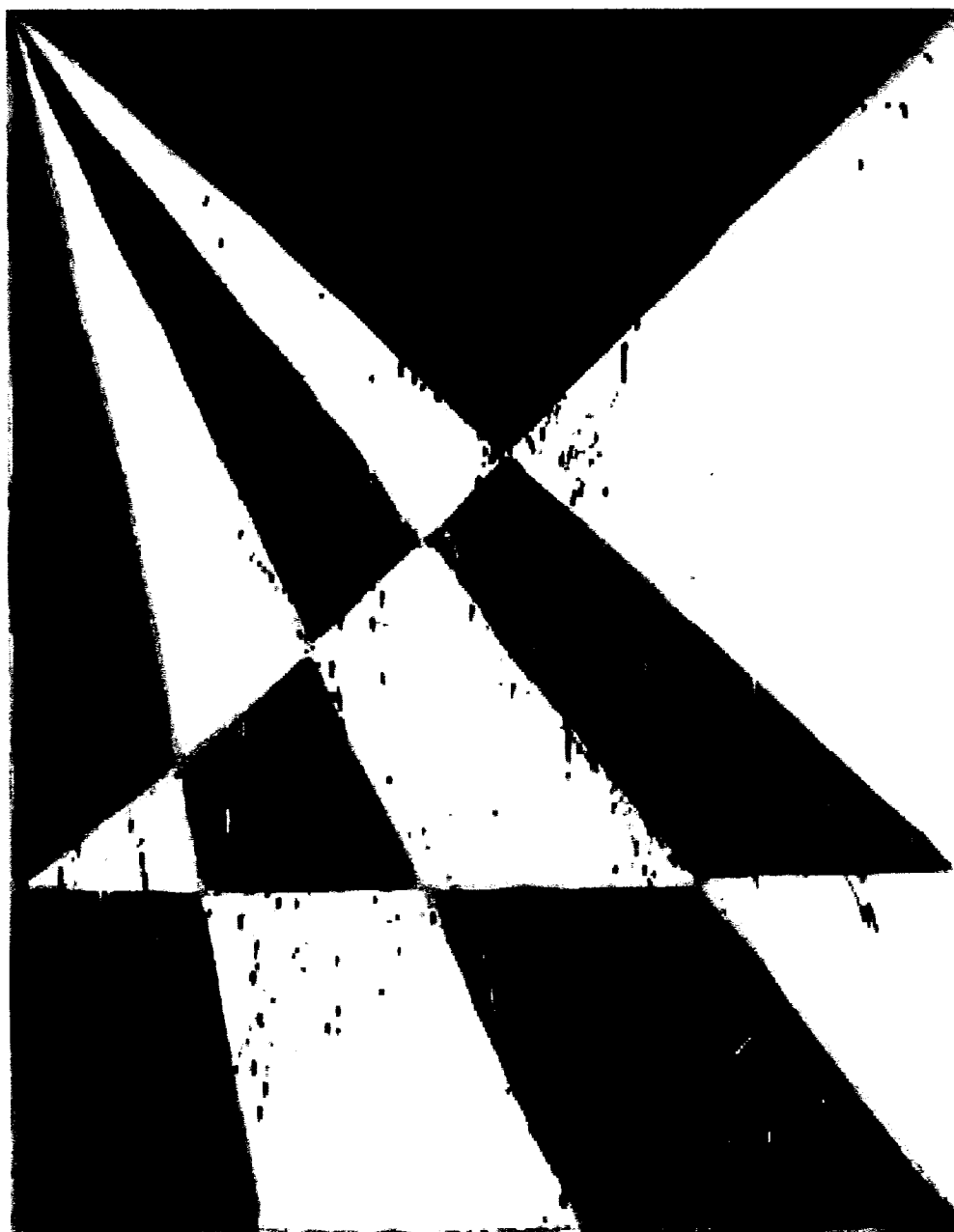
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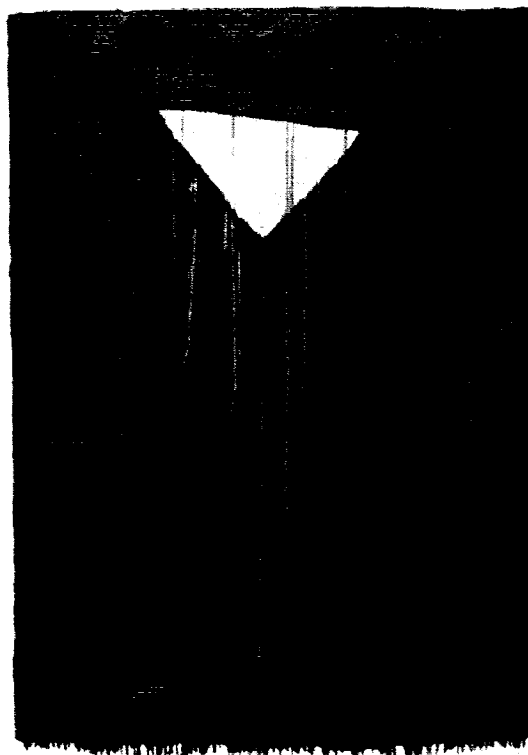
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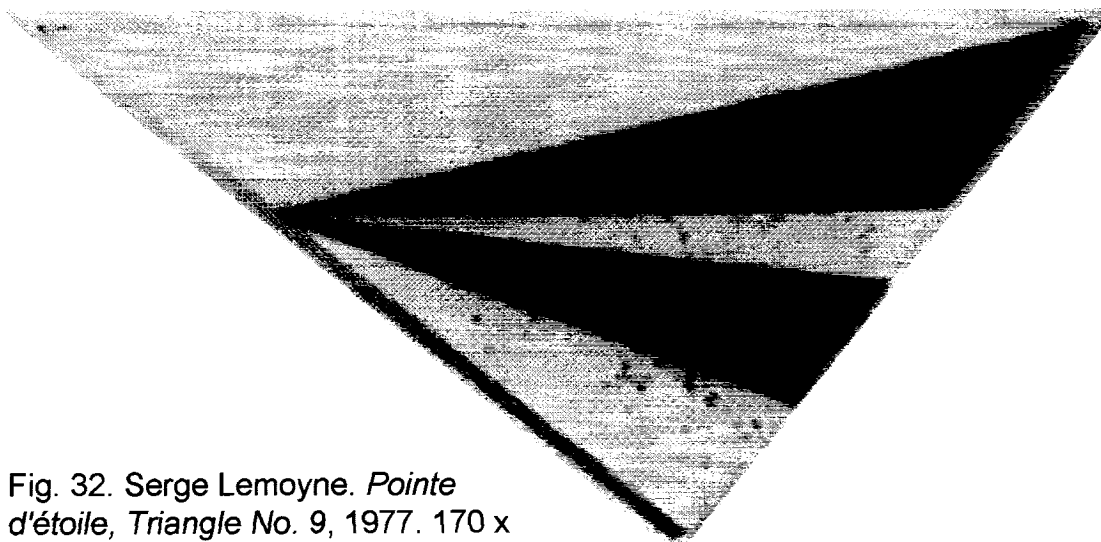
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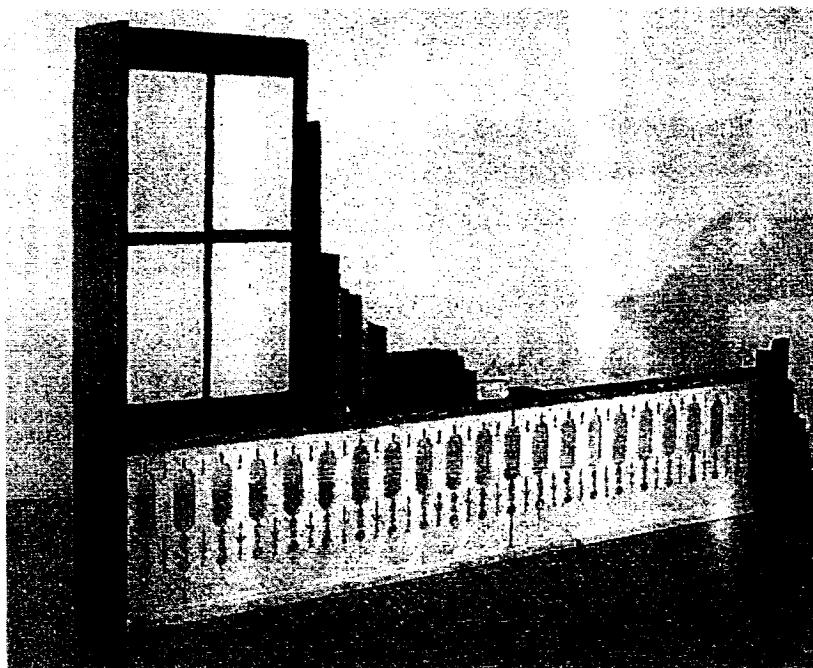
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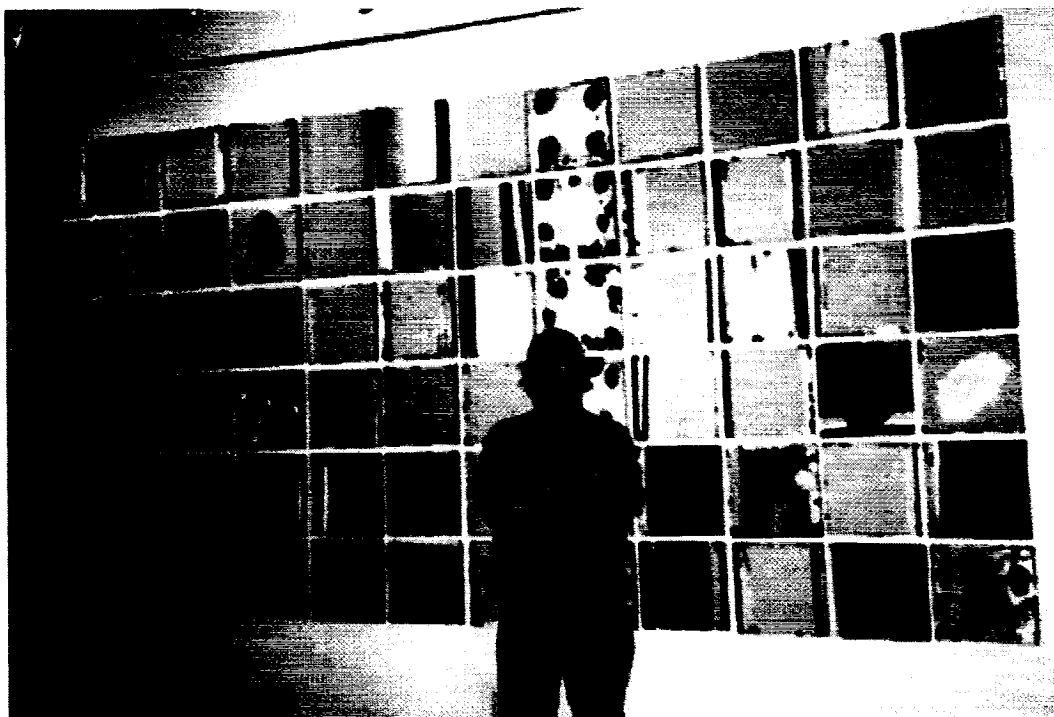
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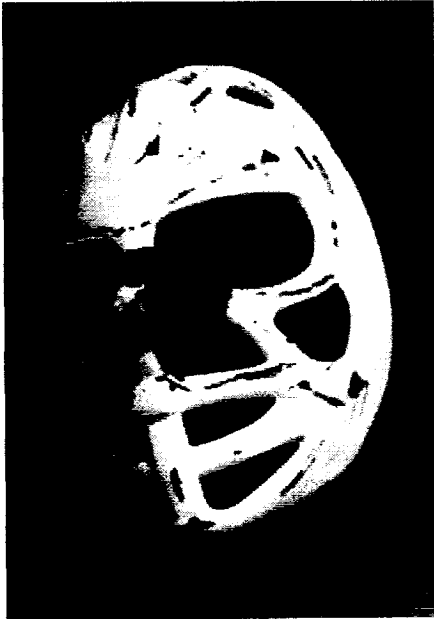
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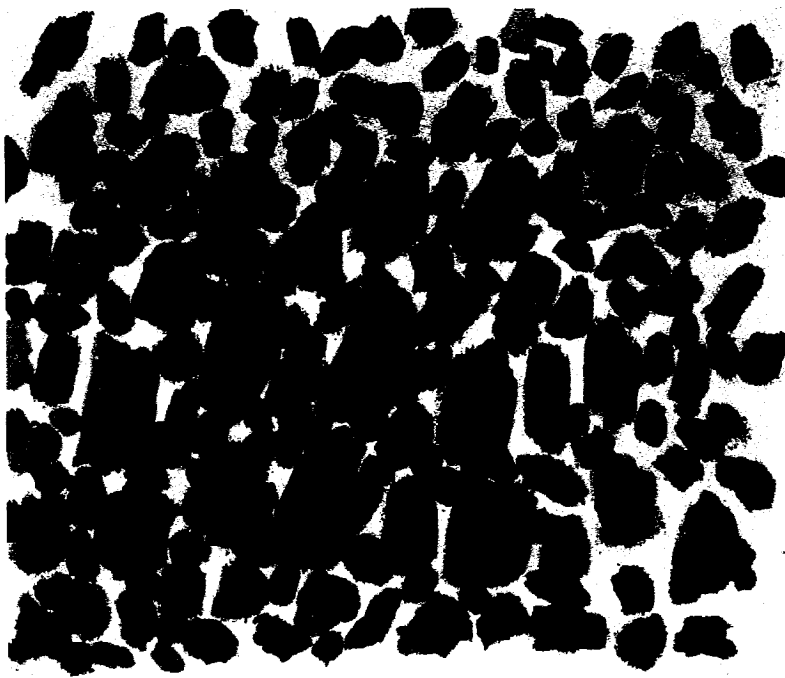
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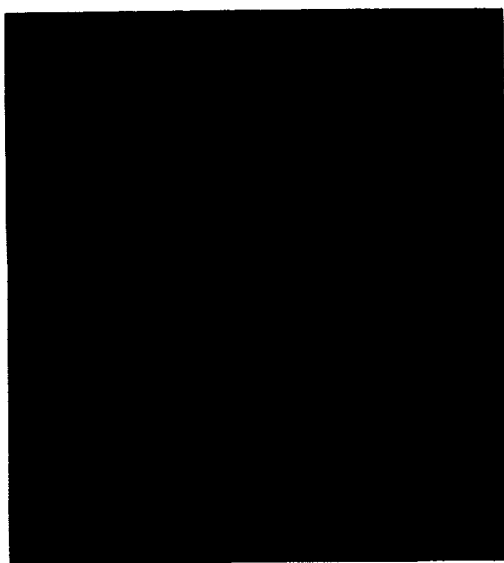
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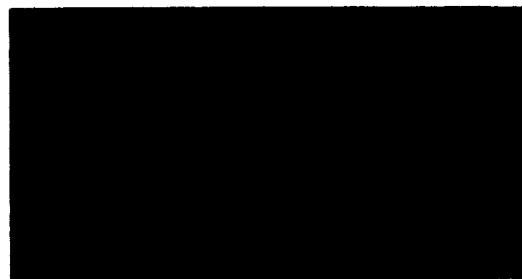
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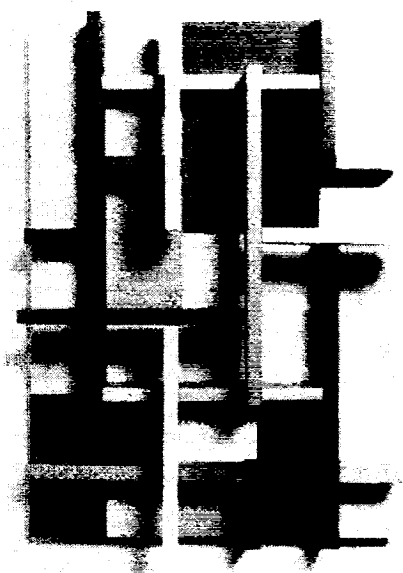
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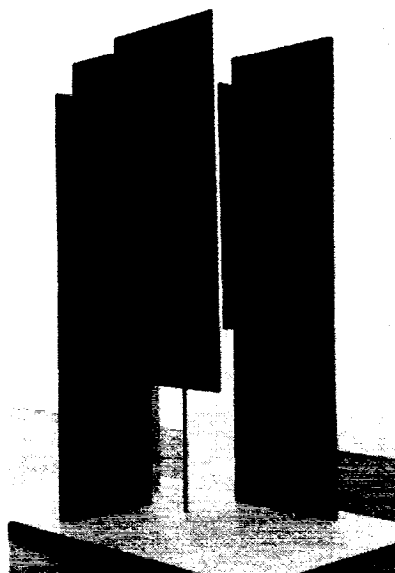
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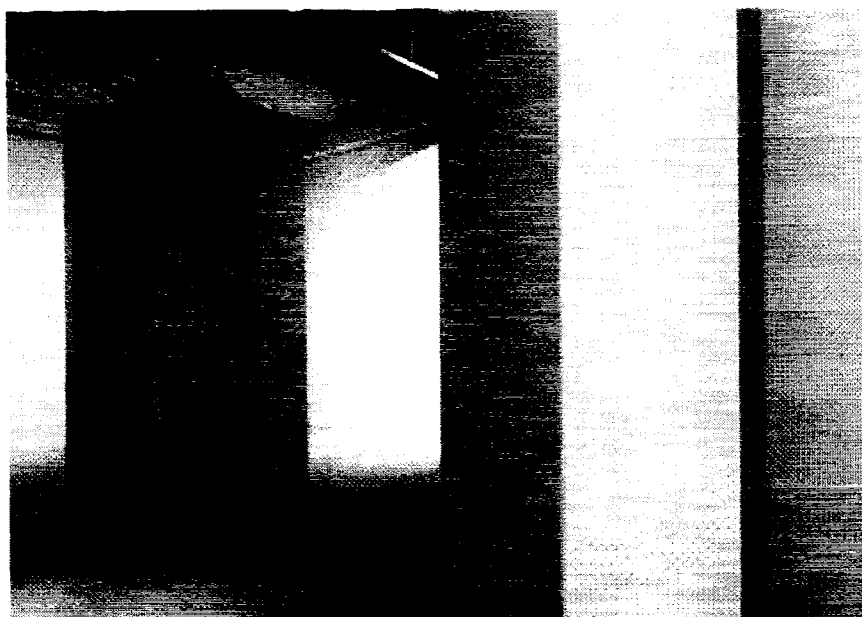
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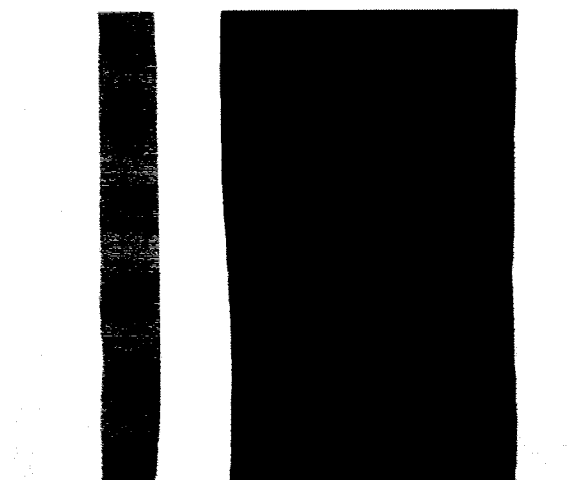
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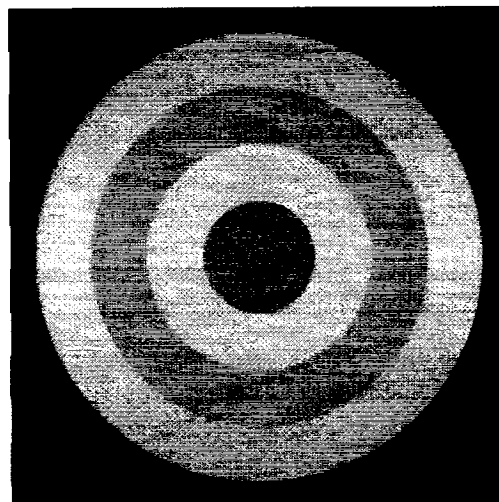
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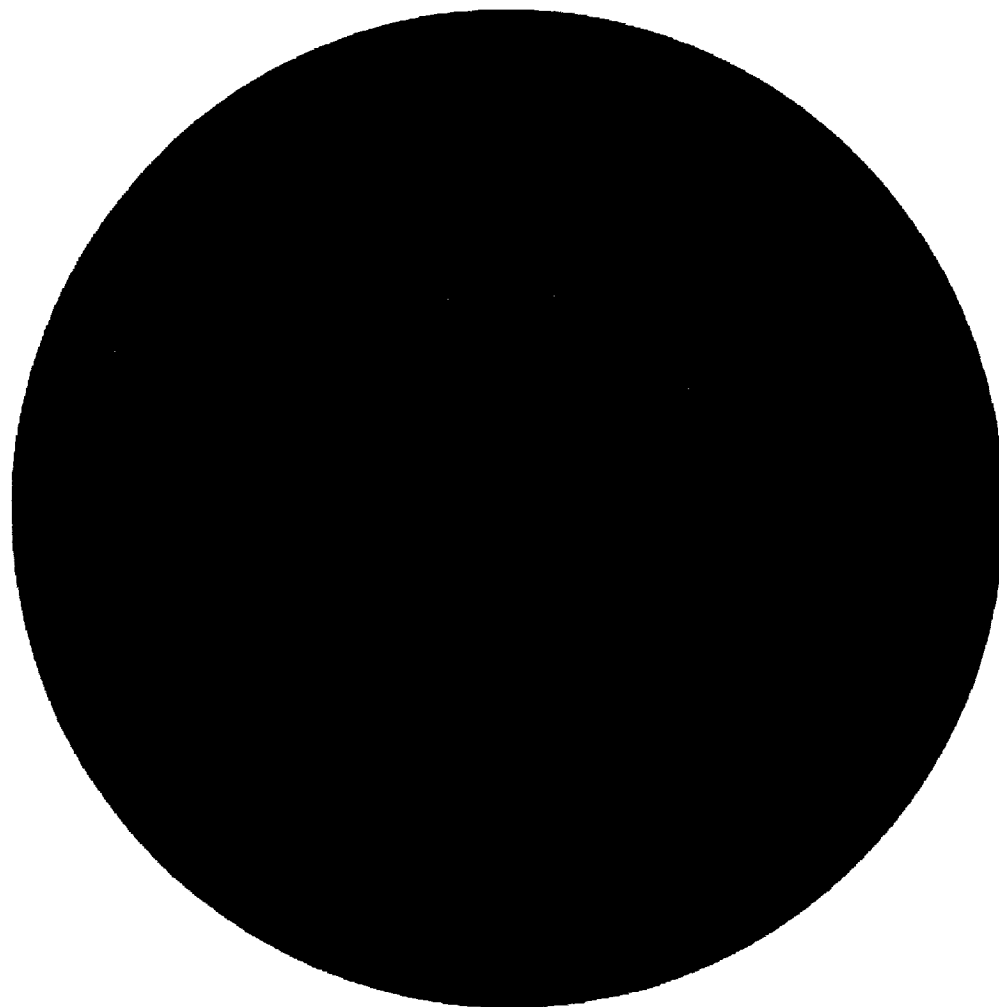
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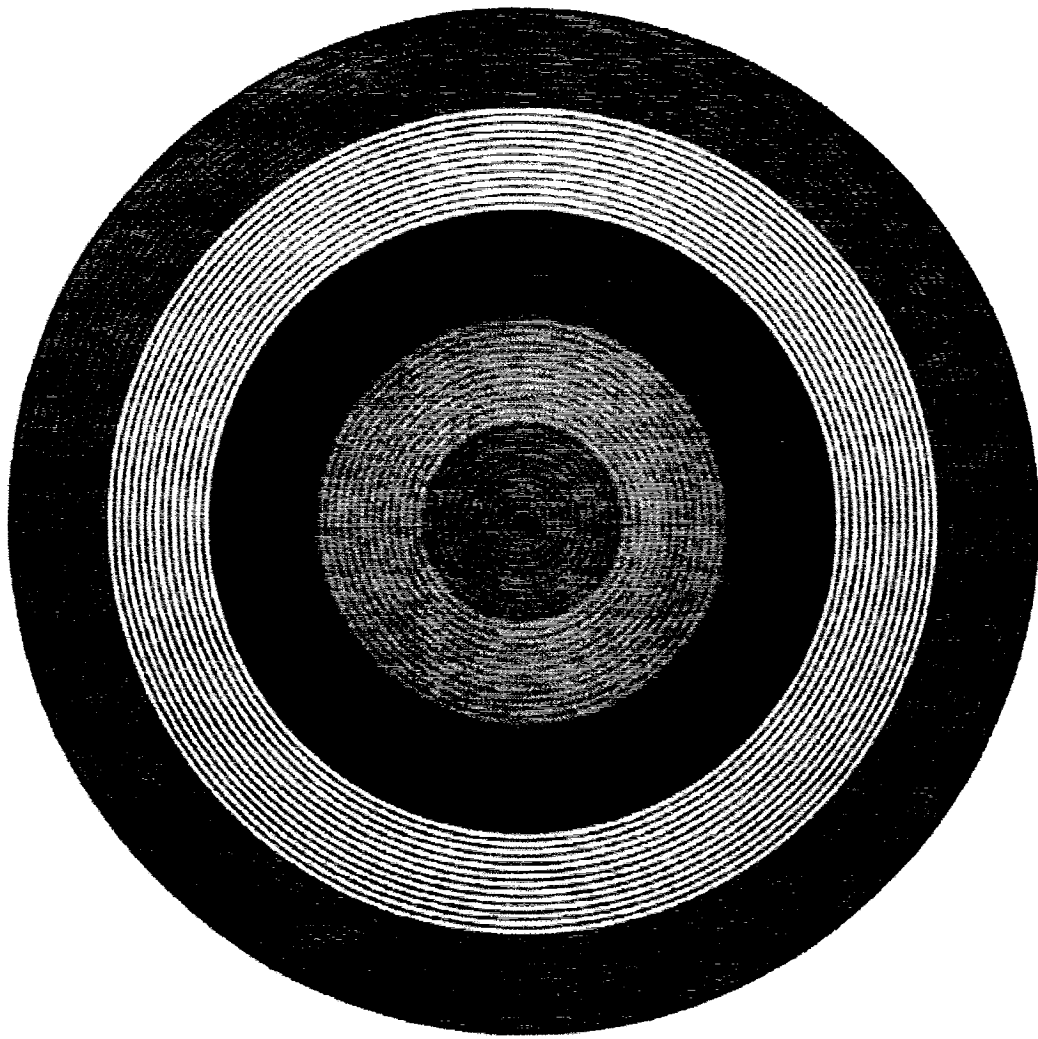
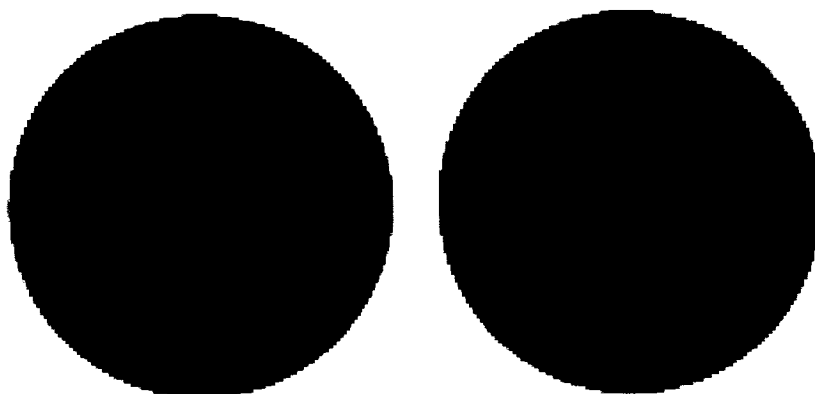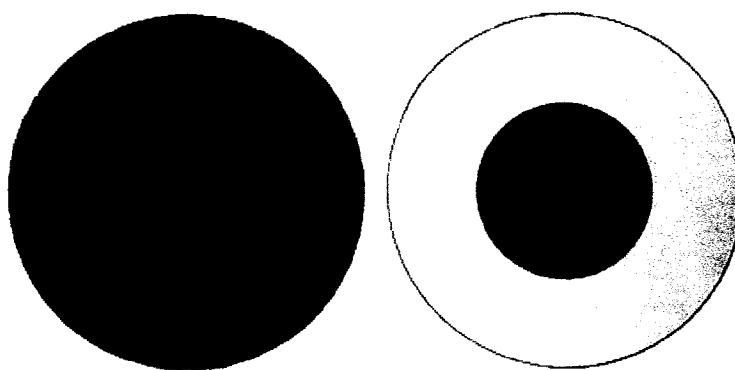Fig. 51 Claude Tousignant. *Gong 64, 1966. Acrylic on canvas.
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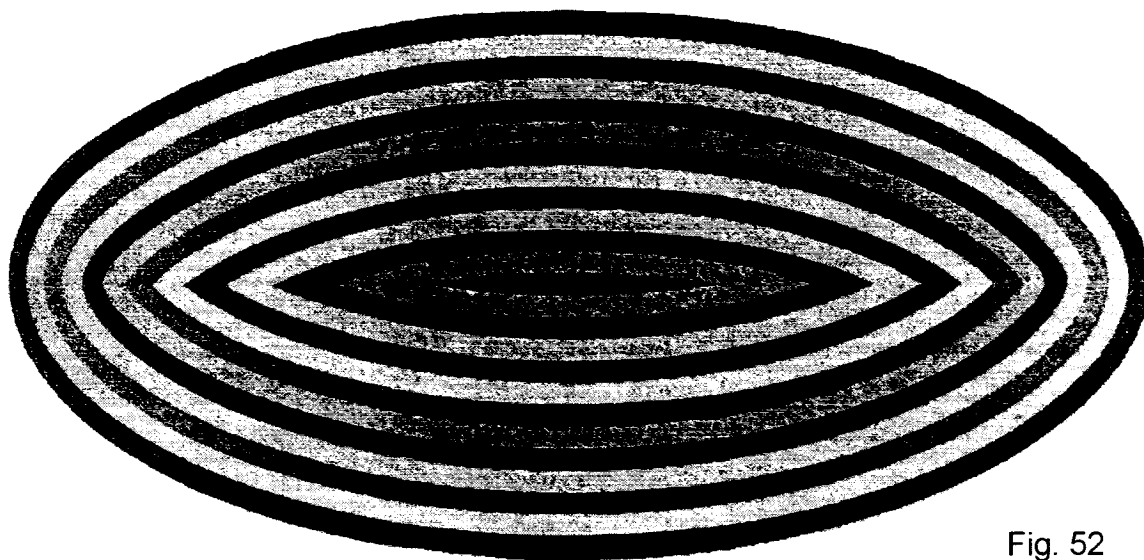
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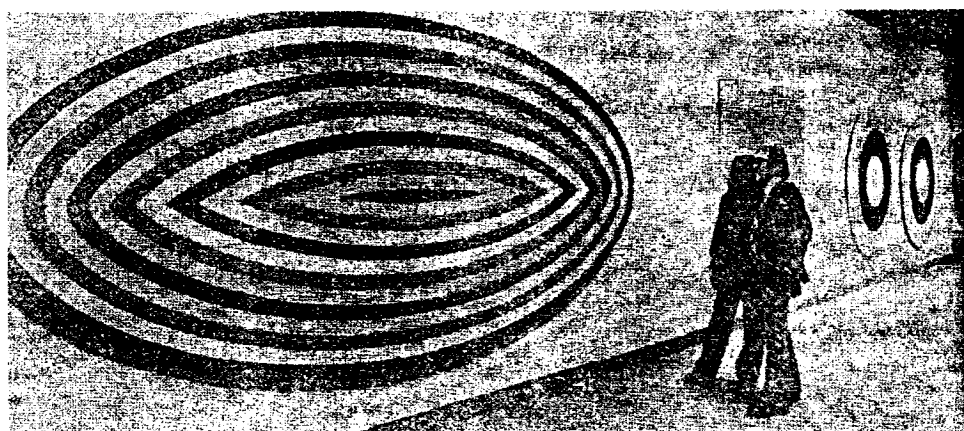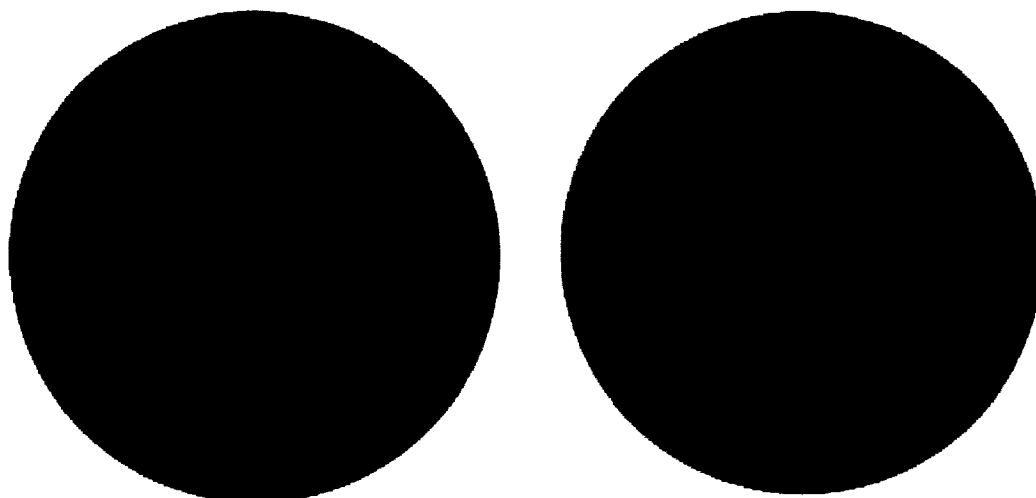
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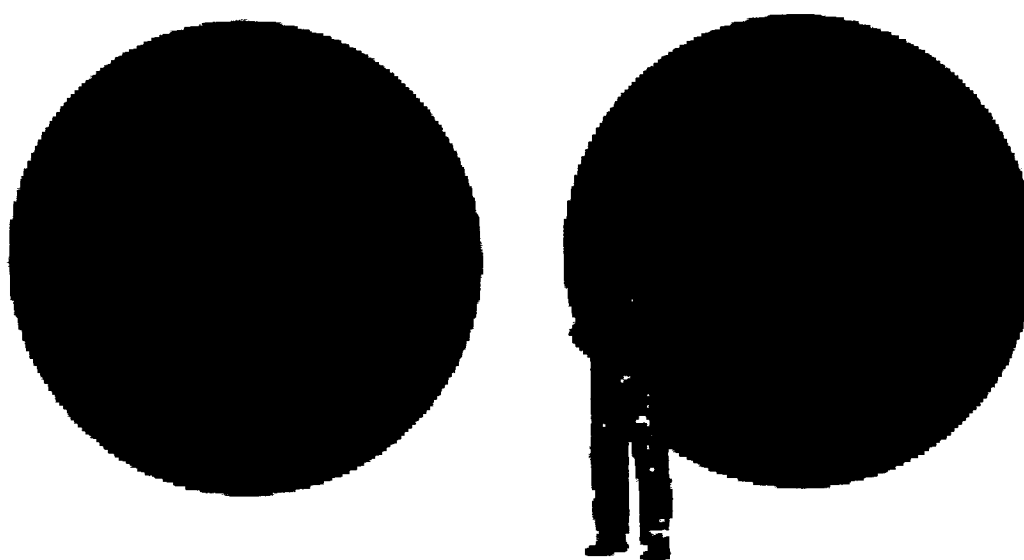
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Photo : Yvan Boulerice.
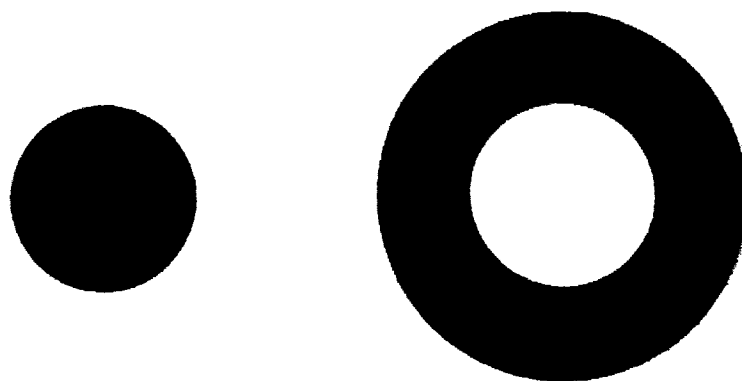
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Fig. 58 Claude Tousignant. *Sulfo-Sélénide*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas.
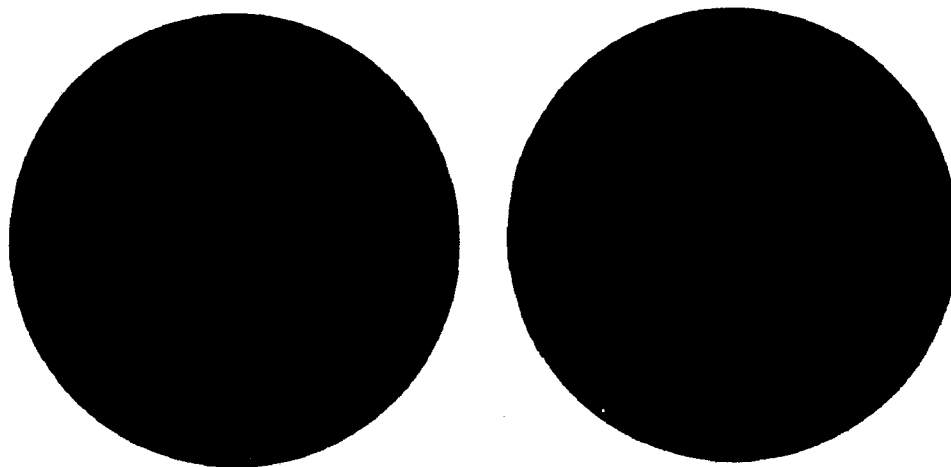Two elelments, each 30.6 cm. in diameter. Musée d'art contemporain
de Montréal.

Fig. 59 Claude Tousignant. *Bleu-rouge-vert-violet.* 1980. Acrylic on canvas. Two elements, each 113 cm. In diameter. Collection of the artist.
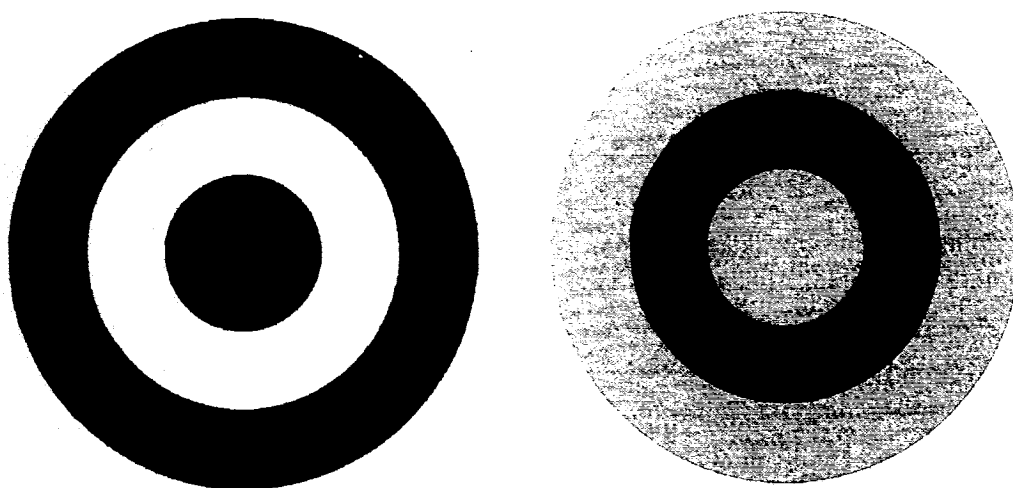

Fig. 60 Claude Tousignant. *Ultra-noir.* 1977. Acrylic on canvas. Two elements, each 259 cm. In diameter. Collection of the artist.
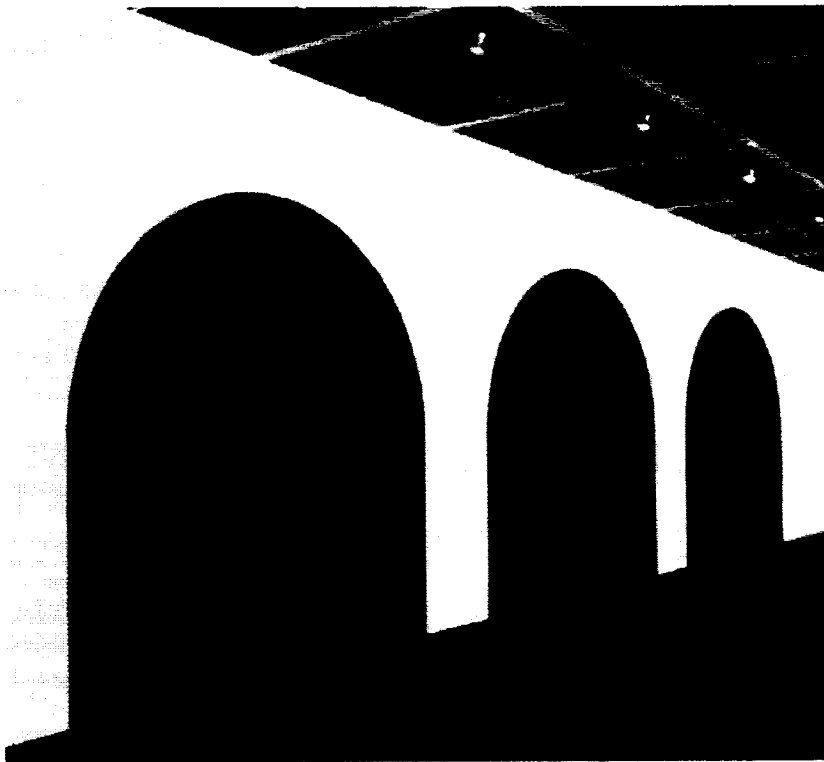
Fig. 61 Claude Tousignant. *Sculpture.* 1973-74. Acrylic
on canvas. Three elements, each: 289 x 289 cm.
National Gallery of Canada.

Fig. 62 Henri Matisse. *Dance II*, 1932. Three elements: 340 x 387,
355 x 496, 335 x 391 cm. Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia.