

THE LIMITS OF DISCOURSE: A LECTURE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN “THEORY,” “ART” AND “BODY” IN THE XX CENTURY

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*A writer without a story*¹

I am going to try, in front of you and on my own **body**,² to mirror, index, describe and interpret the uncertain but *essential* relationship between “art” (literature, music, painting, theatre, opera, film) and “theory” here-and-now.

In fact, as “theory,”³ I am going to name different semantically aimed

¹ Jean Louis Schefer: “I’m a writer without a story – someone who chronicles, bit by bit, his own intellectual adventure, which is articulated across a collection of multifarious objects. It’s in the capriciousness of my own choices and preferences that I’ve found my universe, my procedures, my way of being – my happiness.” from “Preface,” in: Paul Smith (ed.), *The Enigmatic Body. Essays on the Arts by Jean Louis Schefer*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. xvii.

² I have to “admit” that chemicals, cells, tissue (*la chair*), physiological organisms, anatomical body, behavioral body, individuum, figures and my social appearances are not some firm consistent “entirety.” Last autumn, while lying in the hospital, I was constantly testing, from one second to another, THAT my brain, my legs or my stomach are living separate lives – that there, in the whiteness of the hospital bed, different subjects were appearing: that of the patient, of the weak, of the reading, of the rational, of one who is stuffed with medications, of one who is indulging in fantasy, of the scared, of the resentful, of the humane, of the selfish, of the sick, of the one who survived ... The notion “subject” is not the term denoting entirety in which the multiple “parts” are bound together. “The subject” is the assembly of hypothesis or texts which constitute, contextualize and represent this phenomenal and recognizable “I” in behavior, speech, writing or different arts. That is why in this discourse I am speaking about the “relationship” between art, theory and body, and not about the triangle “art,” “theory” and “subject.” What is being discussed is the subject understood, certainly, not as the speaking individual who pronounced or wrote some text by being “above” the text, but the subject/author as the “principle of grouping discourses, as the unity and source of his meaning, as the focus of his coherency” (according to Michel Foucault).

³ David Carroll (ed.), *The States of Theory: History, Art, and Critical Discourse*, Stanford, Cal., Stanford University Press, 1994. Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller, Andrzej

effects and appearances of the procedures of creating (making, manufacturing, producing) art, of delaying the effects of the work of art in speech (*parole*) and writing (*écriture*); as theory I will name the processes of constructing the jargon inside artworlds, the interpolation of voices of criticism into sensually anticipated figures of art, the bordering identities of different "speeches" within the social sciences and humanities, the exceptionalities and autonomies of the functions of theory and art and the general interpretative possibilities of the philosophy of art.

I am going to name the dramatically contradictory "return to the **body**"⁴ within classical and outside of contemporary aesthetics, as well. It is indeed a question how to identify this "big" and "difficult" problem, a *polysemantic* problem which is concerned with the relationship between: (a) "texts" about different material formulations (sound musical texts, pictorial painterly texts, audio-visual movie texts, total corporal-behavioural theatre and *performance art* texts, and texts situated within writing [*écriture*]), and (b) delaying and transferring texts on thinking, talking and writing about art. By this approach I intend to persevere in the "*diadisciplinarity*," in the crossed out or exceeded disciplinarity, which does not allow the objectification of the relationship between "art," "theory" and "body" into a firm method, but, instead, keeps that method in a **state of crisis** of heterogeneous events or incidents.⁵ The relationship between theory and art "through" **my body** is the "event" or "incident" of the located representation or presentation. What is at stake here is the "representation" or "presentation," not the literal portrayal of "theory" and "art" through **body**; the *constructs or figures* are instrumentalized or used to provoke procedures, forms and functions of theory and art. In fact, "theory" and "art" are related through the **body** which becomes "I" (body-individuum-subject) in these different, blurred, oblique and flickering momentary relationships. "Credible" images (reflections, iconic signs) of the theory "of" art or/and the art "of" theory are not created here and then; this something that is mirrored is the lack, deficit, delay, in fact, it is the "separateness" (*differAnce*) between theory and art "through" the **body** which is the "subject" only thanks to this *polysemantic* and contradictory relationship between art, theory and the body (*the body-mind relationship*).

That is why as a starting thesis of this discourse I have to point to this

Warminski (eds.), *Material Events – Paul De Man and Afterlife of Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000.

⁴ Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed*, Edition selene & Springerin, Vienna, 2000.

⁵ Kate Linker, "Representation and Sexuality," in: Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism. Rethinking Representation*, New York, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986, pp. 391-415.

"lack" (to this not entire, inappropriate, overlapping, releasing). This "lack" is created between theory and art "through" my body and it is amiable, that means, constitutive and indexical (*indexing*⁶) for locating and understanding the uncertain histories⁷ of the relationships between **theories and arts of the XX century**.⁸ This lack, this delay or differentiation is not something that should be neglected or approximated within the "idealised" scientific models of "theory, art, and body," but on the contrary, this is precisely what should be posited as the problem of description, explanation, interpretation and discussion, which should be recognised as the constitutive and bordering discourse of each approach, in the first place, to art. The relationship between "theory," "art" and "body" is identified as the "discourse" and as the "discursive practice" which is established around the "lack" and the possibility of the non-coincidence of "theory" and "art" with respect to **my body**, which becomes the "subject" (the section of hypothesis⁹).

The discursive practice is, in the most generalised semiotic sense, "the act" which posits meaning in the temporal-spatial situation in which somebody for someone is producing meaning. The "temporal-spatial situation" is not the ideal, within the aesthetic contemplation constructed "context" (*ideal judgement*) for the relationship between "theory," "art" and "body," but the concrete historically and geographically located "world" of material¹⁰ institutions and social struggles.¹¹ The discourse or the discursive product determines that which, within the given configuration of relationship between "theory," "art" and "body," has to be said and which could be said, that is, that which can not be said, can not be heard or read. According to Michel Foucault, the discourse is the way in which knowledge is articulated in the con-

⁶ Charles Harrison, "Mapping and Filling" and Terry Atkinson/Michael Baldwin, "The Index," in: Anne Seymour (ed.), *The New Art*, London, Hayward Gallery, 1972, pp. 14-16, 16-19; Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1&2," in: *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge Mass., The MIT Press, 1985, pp. 196-209, 210-219.

⁷ H. Aram Vesser (ed.), *The New Historicism Reader*, Routledge, New York, 1994; Michel Foucault, "On the Ways of Writing History" and "Return to History," in: James Faubion (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, method and epistemology (vol. 2)*, Penguin Books, 1994, pp. 279-295, 419-432.

⁸ Charles Harrison, *Art in Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1993.

⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in: *Image Music Text*, Nooday Press, 1978, pp. 142-148.

¹⁰ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology*, London, London, Verso, 1995, pp. 100-140.

¹¹ "Editorial," from magazine *Razprave/Problemi* no. 3-5, Ljubljana, 1975, pp. 1-10.

crete "section" of the historic society and in the institutions of establishing, regulating, submitting and understanding "power." If the above is accepted, then it can be stated that the histories of relationships between **theory, art, and body** in the XX century, within the limits of Western culture or its hegemonic domains of influences,¹² are the discursive formations which can be and must be identified, differentiated and anticipated in a discourse which is at the same time "of," "from" and "about" theory, art, and body. That discourse, thus, is the "sample" by which is anticipated the uncertain "limited" or "limiting" **territory and interval** of individual and specific resolution of the relationship between "theory," "art" and "my body." It is not a question of some general relationship which is, "through" the universal "voice," given by a schematic (mapped, limited) ideal, whole and foreclosed all-valuable "big and undefined story." What is being discussed here are separate, often schismatic¹³ (*differend*) solutions, incomparable discursive practices. The incomparable attracts me.

What has to be taken into account, from the very beginning, is that the notion of "discourse" is not determined by its characteristic metaphysical opposition or adversativity to the unknowable, unpronounceable or unspeakable.¹⁴ The notion of discourse is derived from the "speakeable" or "demonstrable" or "representable" relationship between theory and art "through" body within very specific material conditions and circumstances (institutions, apparatuses or, more abstractly, contexts) of centring or decentering some public or private "power" or "sociability." In other words, "unknowable," "unpronounceable" or "unspeakable" are not the effects of some "pre-human chaos" or "all-human, purely natural existence." These are material discursive products in the specific historic and geographic conditions and circumstances of social struggle, these are the ways of regulating or deregulating the relationships between "theory," "art" and "body." Therefore, for the philosophy and aesthetics of art, and especially of literature, the fundamental question is not *that* of the "nature" or "non-nature" of the unknowable, unpronounceable, and unspeakable, but the question of under which conditions and circumstances and, of course, by what right, is *that* proclaimed as unknowable, unpronounceable and unspeakable. Foucault is not anticipating the "discourse" only as "*that* meaning" of the speech, but as the material regulation,

¹² Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetics. Cinema and Space in the World System*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995; Griselda Pollock (ed.), *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts. Feminist Readings*. London, Routledge, 1996.

¹³ Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Differend*, Paris, Minuit, 1983, p. 5.

¹⁴ Manfred Frank, *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare – Studien zur deutsche-französischen Hermeneutik und Texttheorie*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1990.

prohibition, resistance or classification within the society: *here is the hypothesis which I would like to present tonight in order to determine the battlefield – or perhaps the very temporary stage – of the work I am performing: I suppose that the production of discourses in every society is controlled, sanctioned, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to disparage its powers and dangers, to govern its incidental events, to avoid its anxious deterrent materiality.*

Discourse, as psychoanalysis has shown us, is not only that which uncovers or covers desire, it is also the object of desire: *for discourse – as history constantly teaches us – is not only that which expresses struggles and systems of reign, but precisely that which represents the reason and means by which the struggle is fought, and the power worth seizing.* In our case, it is the struggle between "theory," "art" and "body" within the concrete historical and geographical society, it is the struggle to determine who is going to reign over the "relationship" between art, theory and body. And this struggle is taking place not only in the domain of the "verbalised," but rather in that material and essential dimension of the discourse, namely, in the dimension of the event and the incident. Thus, a thesis can be advanced, that the "unspeakable," "unpronounceable" or the "unknowable" are not those which "are" outside of or in front of a discourse (discursive products, acts or institutions), but that they *are* only "through" the *performing* of the discourse. Vladimir Jankelevitch has perfectly obviously shown that to us, performing "through" the discourse the situation of the unpronounceable (*ineffable*) in music as something above, under, around or before music. More exactly, this is demonstrated to us by John Cage in his pro-Wittgensteinian and pro-Zen effort to put the "act" (*performance / behaviourality*) in the centre of attention when he says: "I have nothing to say and I am saying that."¹⁵ "Unspeakable," "unpronounceable" or "unknowable" are as such only in the field of a discourse which enables the indexing of the "absent."

Discursive practices "as" the relationship between theory, art, and body

If one pays attention to the formulations regarding the discursive relationships between theory, art, and body in the XX century, one can notice that four typical ways of indicating, describing and interpreting exist, owing to which the "truth"¹⁶ of art is accumulated in the first place:

¹⁵ John Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," in: *Silence*, Middletown Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1973, p. 109.

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *La Verite en peinture*, Paris, Flammarion Press, 1978.

- (i) a work of art precedes theory, which is mediated by the corporal response to it,
- (ii) theory constitutes the constitutive scope (*context, frames, vignettes*) of the work of art, in fact, theory is the constituent of the work of art through which the status of the “subject” for the body (creation, reception) is established,
- (iii) the relationship between theory, art and body is established postponably through “writing” (*écriture*), and
- (iv) theory is the object, “through” an unstable relationship between theory, art and body.

A work of art precedes theory

Intuitively lead artistic creation, “through” the body (of the creator, manufacturer, producer), leads towards possibilities of establishing the theory of the work of art which is present here for the other body (all other recipients and consumers of the work /values/). A work of art is a “form,” it is that something which is **present**, like some stable or defined material order, which **appears** in front of the body (thanks to the specialised sense, the complex sensual body or the behavioural social and psychologically “receptive” body). The relationship between art and theory (in the first place, criticism) can be conceived of as the relationship between the production and the consumer’s response to that production, and that means to its products (of work) by which the production is determined as the sensible (meaningful) production. Theory of art work is “constituted” and called “formalism” if the theoretical response is anticipated in relation to the **presence** of a work as a form (of a material order). The theory of the work of art is “constituted” and named “phenomenological,” if the theoretical response takes place (happens) in relation to the phenomenality of the work in front of the senses, and, in addition, in relation to the anticipation of that sensual “event” in the consciousness of the beholder (auditor, reader, active participant in the event of reception). The theory of the work of art is “constituted” and called “structuralism” if the theoretical response to the work of art has been proposed to the constructed model inside some “system” (or practice) within which something that we can call “existence” or “appearance” of the work of art has been interpreted. With structuralism we are faced with the fundamental “limit” and the “becoming suspicion” in the primacy or originality of the work of art.

Formalistic, phenomenal or structuralistic approaches to the relationship between art, body and theory are explicitly modernist “voices.” In other words, we can consider as “normal,” “usual” or “dominant” the centring of

the discourse on (*the voice about*) the relationship of the autonomous presence/appearances of art, body and theory in the modernist culture, which, in order to be connected, must be introduced into some philosophical and representative relationship of aesthetics as the philosophy of art, the philosophy of the body and meta-philosophy as a discussion of the identity of theory. Precisely upon this threefold nature: (i) the primacy or originality of the work of art in relation to theory, (ii) the autonomy of the artistic in relation to the corporal or theoretical, and (iii) based upon the representative function by which philosophy and its aesthetics secure the meta-legitimacy of the relationship between "art," "body" and "theory," the formalistic-phenomenological "platform" of modernism in literature, painting, film and music is realised.

The second voice: theory is the context of art

*The second voice*¹⁷ manifests itself as the voice which the "first" (the supremacy of the intuitive, that is, the fact that art precedes theory being only the response to the work) identifies and explains as the given and imposed "voice" in the dominant modernist culture.¹⁸ In other words, the starting point is the "thesis" that the relationship between art, theory and body is not the consequence of the "special or autonomous nature of art itself" (its "unspeakable" metaphysical, formal, phenomenological or existentialist centring as being), but that the "concept of art" is a historical and geographical consequence or effect of the uncertain organising of the society, culture and worlds of art;¹⁹ therefore one can speak of some discursive environment or atmosphere which precedes and prepares the possibilities of relationships between art, theory and body. This approach can be considered as "critical" centring of the discourse on the relationship between art, body and theory in the history of art, culture and society. Art is anticipated as a historical or contextual function of culture and society, and this means that the "creative" and "critical" are not regarded as opposed, but that the "creation" (whatever that may mean) anticipates itself as acting from "interest" or critical acting (thinking,

¹⁷ Charles Harrison, "Modernism in Two Voices," in: *Essays on Art & Language*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp. 2-6.

¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Complaints of an Art Critic," in: Charles Harrison, Fred Orton (eds.), *Modernism, Criticism, Realism*, London, Harper and Row, 1984, pp. 4-8.

¹⁹ In Anglo-Saxon tradition: Arthur Danto, "The Artworld" (1964), in: Joseph Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (third edition), Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1987, pp. 155-167. In German tradition: Heinz Paetzold, *Neomarxistische Aesthetik I-II: Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse*, Dusseldorf, Padagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1974. In French tradition: Julia Kristeva, *La Revolution du langage poetique*, Paris, Seuil, 1974.

behaving, producing, anticipating) within society, culture and the world of art. The fact that art, very often, covers up its theoretical “positions,” does not mean that it does not have them, and that it is not, in a fundamental way, projected “through” it. Imagined in such a way, the staging of the relationship between “theory,” “art” and “body” manifests itself historically, mediated by completely different discursive formations, ranging from historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes, to critical theory and the heterogeneous post-structuralist presentations of bordering discursive relationships between art and culture.

The function of writing (écriture)

One can advance a thesis that the relationship between theory, art, and body is “possible” and that it is given only as postponed and a relationship set apart “through” writing (*écriture*), which is the tireless weaving of differences, provoking a shift and a postponement (*differance*), unlimited compensation, misplacement and supplementation of meaning. In other words, the subject of the discourse on the relationship between theory, art, and body does not exist, if by this we understand some sovereign loneliness or over-ordering of the writer (philosopher, theoretician) with respect to this relationship. The subject of this relationship between theory, art, and body is the *system* (or the practice) of relationships between the strata: “wonderful notebooks of that psychic, society, world.” The trace is the erasure of the self, of one’s own presence, and it is constructed with the help of anxiety or pleasure taken in the inevitability of disappearance. The trace appears because of the disappearance of its disappearance: the disappearance of the theory in art, of the art in the body, of the body in theory, of the art in theory. It is about the heterogeneous “map” of possible conceptions of “writing” (*écriture*), from its early²⁰ or late²¹ Barthesian displacement between “history” and “pleasure.” It is the transformation of the Bakhtinian dialectical into Julia Kristeva intertextuality,²² that is, the Derridian establishment of the “deconstruction,”²³ or the heterogeneous relativisations of modernist relationships between the centre and the margins, developed by the “new criticism” in the discussions of *The Yale School*; the latter is the turnover of the theoretical in literature which displays

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Le degré Zero de L'écriture*, Paris, Seuil, 1953.

²¹ Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, Paris, Seuil, 1973.

²² Julija Kristeva, *Lingvistični tekstovi – razprave*, Koper, Edicija Hyperion, 2001.

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

the "seducing" or "enjoying" the totally "material" and, often, figurative skeleton of theory in the narratology or the new historicism, etc... In this wide and uncertain "frame," the question is raised why the relationship between theory, art, and body so fascinatingly, so bewitchingly, so pliantly appears in literature? For, literature is writing (*écriture*) and not only exceptional and privileged writing, but in fact – as repeatedly pointed out by Jacques Derrida – it is the "threshold" which makes itself evident between "art," "theory" and "body."

The question is about the *threshold* of writing; about the creation of a new notion of writing which other "sciences" of society, man, culture or arts "through" literature have to go through in order to reach the writing inside their own medium – the medium of theory. This notion is called "gram" or "*differance*" – and according to Derrida whether it is a question of the order of the spoken or written speech, none of the elements can function as the sign without referring to some other element which, by itself, is not simply present. Because of this chaining, each "element" – phoneme or grapheme – is constructed after the trace of other elements in the chain or system within it. This chaining, this tissue, is the *text* which is produced only within the transformations of some other text(s). Nothing within the elements nor in the system, nowhere and never is simply present or absent. Everywhere there are only differences and traces of traces. In this way the new theory of "writing" after structuralism was established, and, with Jacques Derrida, it was derived from philosophical metaphysics, only to be conveyed in different ways of discourses on literature, painting, film, music, theatre, opera ...²⁴

Theory of theory

The theory of literature, but any other theory (of painting, music, opera, theatre, performance art, film) as well, could become a legitimate preoccupation of philosophy, and it has not been assimilated into it, not even theoretically. It contains a pragmatic and performative instant which weakens it as theory in the sense of consistency, but for that reason it gives it the character of unpredictability in the productions of the relationship between "theory," "art" and "body." On the other hand, precisely this unpredictability represents the reason why the "theory" begins to observe, identify, describe, ex-

²⁴ Peter Brunette, David Wills, *Screen /Play. Derrida and Film Theory*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1989; Peter Brunette, David Wills (ed.), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts. Art, Media, Architecture*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994; David J. Levin (ed.), *Opera Through Other Eyes*, Stanford Cal., Stanford University Press, 1994.

plain, interpret and discuss, first of all, the “theory itself” with the help of “speech” (*parole*) “from” or “about” or “through” the relationships between theory, art and body. These are the situations in which theory appears in the double function of “observing” and “reflecting.” This can be regarded as the “auto-theoretical” launching of the discourse about “theory,” mediated by different, unstable and altering relationships between art, body and theory within a hypothetical or real moment of history or geographical place, “through” the practice (situation, event) of “reading.” Therefore, totally different examples of expressed interest in theory in the triadic relationship between “art,” “body” and “theory,” have been noticed :

(i) it is some sort of developed hermeneutic question about interpretation around which theory through body (*body – mind*) with respect to art has been constituted, but, in order to ask the question about “theory” itself (its theoreticity in the pragmatic literary-theoretical, non-post-or-ante-philosophical, and philosophical sense);

(ii) it is indeed the establishment of a Wittgensteinian position, according to which theory has to be subjected to “therapy” analysis and that, in this way, aesthetics is not seen as “discourse” on art and body, but as the “meta” analysis and criticism of any “possible” speech and writing on art, in fact, as the meta-criticism;

(iii) it is the confrontation of limits of discourse on science and theory which happened with the “fissure” within structuralism in the process of “walking” towards theories after structuralism (theories of intertextuality, narratology, Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis, deconstruction, schizo-analysis of Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard’s theory of simulacrum, theory of culture/*cultural studies*/ – it is about the gesture or attempt to locate, identify, describe, explain and interpret the limits of science or, more dramatically, its **inversion (reverse, lining) in theory** as the pragmatic and material production of meaning and sense;

(iv) it is the establishment of the concept of “anti-theoretical” as the theoretical problem within the transformation (mirrored multiplication, mutations or metastasis) of the theoretical writing, as the literary writing which manifests its horizon of functional-narrative intergenre productions, and the shift of any discourse towards the figural sight of narrations set in motion,²⁵ and

(v) it is the confrontation with the out-of-textual, which leads to the body itself (bio-political, behavioural-social or figural) that enters the “game” (*game or play*) of the performative performing of the theoretical on the “stage;” of

²⁵ Kathy Acker, *Bodies of Work – Essays*, Serpent’s Tail, London, 1997.

theatricalization as the "second stage" with respect to the sciences of literature, during their long history from Aristotle to Derrida.²⁶

Conclusion

Respected ladies and gentleman, indeed, I could not miss this opportunity, I could not miss the possibility to, here-and-now, in front of you, on my own **body**, mirror, index, describe and interpret the uncertain but essential relationships between "art" (literature, music, painting, theatre, opera, film) and "theory" (of speech, writing, science, discourse) of the XX century. I could not resist that fascinating challenge, that almost insurmountable, lascivious and irresistible *love triangle* of "art," "theory" and "body." This is my confrontation with the discourse, since, really, the "*dis-course*," is, originally, the act, the here-and-there wondering, the comings and goings, the "fulfilment," the "intrigues." In this *love triangle* of "theory," "body" and "art," the *lover* really never stops wondering in his mind, trying new declarations, and constructing plots against himself.²⁷ In the field of "ideology," in the field of the transmittance and flow of notions and ideas whose *strength* is precisely in that they are not perfectly addressed and that they are not clearly and harmoniously situated in some, even hypothetical centre.

²⁶ Gregory Ulmer, "The Objects of Post-Criticism," in: Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*, London, Pluto Press, 1983.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Lover's Discourse/Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1979.

