form less

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Formless profiles a group of artists who work most typically in installation mode. A collapse of form with regard to earlier paradigms of art-making coincides with this spilling out of the frame of other formats into more malleable modes of display. The works in *Formless* do not necessarily proceed to total deliquescence or the condition of the 'informe' as evoked by Krauss and others [1], but they do proceed to a fluidity and a provisional state of being which lends them a delicacy and a tenuousness – this might also augment my sense of valuing the work, because it will not endure forever.

What is also more malleable, but simultaneously and oddly, more definite in installation is the significance of the receiver's role in the work. In entering an installation I also enter the work of art, and installation is choreographed not only in terms of the maker's own movements and gestures, but also in terms of the eventual and virtual movements and gestures of the receivers of the work. If minimalist artists acknowledged the mobility of the body of their receivers, makers of installation address their work to moving, but even more fragmented, provisional and complex ideas of receivers, where the potential for movement and flux has been intensified. The corporeal activity of installation is performed by the maker of the work and re-performed as variations by the body of the receiver, as the completion and counter-signature of the work. Installation work remains forever unperformed without the corollary of the receiving body.

Recognizing the role of the body in installation extends to a more overt address to the senses of the body - all of the senses - but especially tactile knowing which is ultra-privileged in this format. The pulses and rhythms of installation - with its careful positioning of tangible elements and blanks - are experienced by the body of the receiver in a tactile, a proprioceptive and possibly an auditory way. These factors combine to render installation an art format which is potentially more impacting upon the body of the receiver than other art modes; Lyotard recognizes that installation disturbs and disorients the receiving body by a cleaving and a cutting into this body [2], and Deleuze/Guattari also discern the power of the rhythmic over the corporeal as being more persuasive than the power of elements of light and colour [3].

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Patterns are incised into cloth screens through the action of cutting in the work of Barbara Penrose; here is the realization of a skin surface (rhythmically) interrupted and a temporality, a counting which is the metre of these repetitions. Penrose's work has long been pulsed according to a body's pacing and marching and counting out of spatial dimensions and time periods, as well as constituting a theatre of longing for a fusion of the bodies of mother and son, after the writing of Jean Genet. In the current installation the employ of the circle serves as a manner of disintegrating the sway of geometry in earlier work, as a kind of 'de-forming' device. The work of Danielle Wood also attests to a skin surface which cannot hold itself within its bounds, and in terms of these employs of cloth, the work of both artists allows points of entry or penetration into their patterned gaps. As with all cloth works there is a strong appeal to the tactile reception of the work and to the ideas of bodies positioning themselves in relation to other elements.

Nameer Davis enacts a play of tonal modifications into wood, and the resultant installation is not too distant from his earlier origami letters and musical instruments such as harps. A listening to the qualities of the wood on his part guides his attitude to the handling of the wood and the decision to treat each piece of wood according to its intrinsic features. This attention to the wood is perhaps a result of recent work with architectural screens. The current installation consists of relief formations placed on the wall, which function as if to loosen up the eye and break the eye out of its fixity, this strategy being harmonious with the bodies-in-movement dimension of installation. The flicker in front or behind or the play of spatial relations in the relief, the slivers of wood glued together and the painted ribbons of tone in Davis's reliefs animate the work and draw the receiver in and along the work/ push her away/ move her around and so on.

Sebastian Di Mauro's piece displays a 'collapse' of materials onto the floor. Olive oil is worked on tracing paper/drafting film with a pertinent sense of the liquid's qualities of nourishment, healing and balm emerging; a reference is established to the omnipresence of olive oil in the culinary and domestic practices of Italian communities, with the artist citing his own childhood here. Beyond the golden, almost alchemic colour of the oil and the visual patterns of the work, its dominant olfactory qualities exemplify installation's appeal to the bodily participation of the receiver. One is reminded of Freud's assertion of the sense of smell as a potent trigger for memory and his distaste for the repression of smell in modern society. Text collected around such of themes as 'Death', 'Infinity', "identity' etc. on the drafting film forms the surface for the 'drawing' with oil. Through the very materials and delicacy of the work, Di Mauro sets up a dialogue with the work of Jacinta Bennink, working in wax and paper. The pathways through Di Mauro's installation are multiple and fluid, with the artist denying that the form and meaning of an artwork need be concrete and definitive, but rather that matters are more provisional and that the receiver is open to a number of potential meanderings through the work.

Bennink's chosen format displays a mood similar to Di Mauro's in that both installations are on the edge of dissolving, but are here held, for a tenuous moment. Her paper, dipped in beeswax and folded, is arranged in five stacks, but there is a clear sense in which this 'organisation' could easily have been disrupted or de-formed into another or another. The receiver of the work is not very far from the body that 'suffers in being organized in no way at all' [4]. The stacks of paper and wax are suspended above Di Mauro's work; most typically Bennink suspends these stacks at mouth level, implying an eventual oral consumption of the work, with taste, texture and smell being dominant elements in the receiver's response to the work. The work also connotes oral language or lack of it, and silence is a trope that the artist cites in this connection.

Susan Ostling's *Starry Night* is a choreography of humble potato sproutings, dipped into casting plaster, and attached to the walls. The potato is associable with the baseness that so fascinates Bataille [5], with its tube-like growth underfoot and its possibility to be trodden upon. Ostling recuperates the horizontality of the potato field into a horizontal astral field, where the conditions of being low and high are associable by virtue of their mutual share in otherness. It was from Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* that the artist proceeded to an evocation of *Starry Night* as an instance of the transformative possibilities of matter. As with Di Mauro's installation, *Starry Night* is a highly olfactory work, albeit the former is as fragrant as the latter is pungent...

Ostling's work is in effective dialogue with Stephen Roberts's field of glazed clay vessels installed on the floor in the same space. Such installing is an obvious refutation of the holding and functional capacities of these bowls, although, as with Bennink's work, there is a reference to taste; here is a fluid, dissolving

approach to the utility of the bowls. Roberts arranges the three hundred bowls in spiral formations, employing a Japanese cloud design to allude to heaven or the cosmos, with one dimension this work seeking to indicate humanity as merely a speck in the universe. Roberts's installation, like Ostling's, recuperates the lowly (floor-based arrangement) into a 'higher' horizontality.

In installation I apprehend that the moving body has come centre stage to assume its role in the acts of visual arts making, although it is certainly possible to argue that the body has always been omnipresent in such acts and that installation is merely an art genre more wont to illustrate the connection than others. It is significant that installation is the art genre which most demonstrates the insufficiency of a language of reception that presupposes an immobile, disembodied eye. Feminism, virtual reality, new forms of scientific articulation, new threats to the body in the forms of the illnesses of the later twentieth century and so on are some of the factors re-directing attention to the impoverished state of out language about the body. The reign of cinema also has surely played a part in the genesis of an art format that also celebrates moving points of view. With this art genre comes the potential for corporeal offerings in the guise of much-needed balm for the operations of the senses which seem to be teetering on the point of redundancy elsewhere. Of course many commentators argue for the impossibility of installation, asserting that it is always already failed, like any other art genre that Modernism proposed, but just for a moment here and there, on the margins, unexpectedly, catching the body off guard, there is still the hope for some practitioners to revive the tired censorial apparatus of the odd body stumbling upon the work while wandering the streets, bored from consuming and jaded from surfing the net...

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End-notes:

1 Krauss, R., *The Optical Unconscious* (1993), Cambridge, MA. p. 137.

2 Lyotard, J.F., "Reserves of Spatial Events: Arakawa and Madeline Ginns", *Art and Design Magazine*, no. 30, 1993, pp 53-58.

3 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., *Anti-Oedipe* (1972), Paris.

4 Krauss, R., *ibid.*, p. 230.

5 Bataille, G., "Le bad materialisme et la gnose", *Documents* 2, no. 1, 1930, pp 1-8.

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Jacinta Bennink
Nameer Davis
Sebastian Di Mauro
Susan Ostling
Barbara Penrose
Stephen Roberts
Danielle Wood