

**CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY:**  
**THE IDEA OF AESTHETIC COMMUNITY**  
*ESSAY SUBMITTED TO DR. BRIAN ELLIOTT*  
*IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE*  
*DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY*

**JEAN-LUC NANCY**  
**AND THE “VESTIGE OF ART”**

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April 2006



## Introduction - 1

Jean-Luc Nancy's first step on the track of the vestige of art<sup>1</sup> questions the value of art or, more exactly, sets the very value of this question of the value of art, sets as proper value the very value of this question of the value of art. As he warns us right away, such a question is not, therefore, *about* the value of art, but a question *of* the value of art, i.e. a question emanating from art, or rather a question *of art by art, for art and within art*; a question about its very value which is the value of art; a question *of art which is the art in question*.

Hence, it transpires that art is necessarily emptied of all its value in (and by) any value that would not be attributed to it by itself, for itself and in itself: indeed, how could art draw its value from what is not art without being thereby emptied of its proper value? Quite obviously, everything that is not art and nevertheless happens somehow to attribute value to art unmasks itself as an attributer far more than it indicates or affects the proper value of art. It is in this way that the market value of works of art, for instance, is far more reflecting market society than the intrinsic artistic value of these works (or of art).

If art, as we admit it with J.-L. N., is different from any value that it would not attribute itself to itself, then it cannot but be inestimable, for the diverse entities that value it externally (and thus work hard at estimating the inestimable) will always persist in and come up against (*s'ahurteront et se heurteront toujours à*) the inadequacy of their attempt: sciences, economy, politics, morals, religion, etc. will never value art (or, on the contrary, exclude it) but according to criteria which characterise themselves far more than that which they were expecting to characterise. Art is inestimable insofar as it confronts such value systems, which try to estimate it extrinsically, to a criterion that surpasses them, that they do not possess and that dispossesses them: for economy, art is *hors de prix* (priceless or out of price); for morals, it is beyond good or beyond evil; for religion, it is divine or sacrilegious, etc.

As a result, it is not surprising that what tries to attribute its value to art also tries to contribute to it. But, clearly enough, art, then, is not art anymore and the work composed according to values that it would not have freely attributed itself to itself immediately decays (*se décompose*), wherewith these intruders (the values) that tried to invest it (art) are merely left lying and gaping. It is thus in certain works, for instance, which would aim at verifying a scientific theory (like these books drawn up by automatic writing and meant to be an aesthetic practice of psychoanalysis), or which would aim at supporting a political ideology (like certain Soviet paintings), etc.

Innumerable artists, in the self-questioning of their works, would also let their art deviate from itself while responding to the solicitations of external value systems: one will be tempted to mimic the most prized or successful works, another one to let shine the self-

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, Stanford University Press, California, 1996, chap. 5, "The Vestige of Art", pp. 81-100

theorisation of his art, or his intention to realise a work, at the expense of the work itself and at the expense of art.

But in these attempts (clumsy because depending on what they precisely wanted to surpass) lies the evidence of an inquietude, that of ‘presenting “art” itself,’<sup>2</sup> an art which would exhale everything from (and by) itself, beyond all value systems (but not valuelessly), and beyond theory. Now in this inquietude, in this first trace of the vestige which puts art in an exclusive face-to-face with itself, philosophy performs the first step of a deferential leave-taking (*le premier pas d’une révérence*). For philosophy itself, in this gesture which consists in making art non-philosophical, becomes unfit for estimating art, that is to say not for thinking it, but for defining it and, *a fortiori*, for amending it. Neither renouncing to question it, nor to be itself, philosophy notwithstanding renounces to be able to define it, to set its principles or to present its benchmarks. Granting art with its proper value, which is its self-valuation, philosophy then withdraws vis-à-vis art – takes its leave (*tire sa révérence*) – in the manner of what J.-L. N. calls a “vestige” and that we shall now *investigate* along with him.

## 2

Since art is only defined in (and by) itself, i.e. without going outside itself, the debate over contemporary art can therefore be only aesthetic itself. In this way, art in general, and contemporary art in particular, can fulfil neither a subjective definition (by virtue of which art would merely be what everybody claims, whether they are artists or not, and, consequently, would be everything and anything, i.e. *nothing*), nor a definition of a symbolic, normative, academic, economic, sociologic,<sup>3</sup> anthropological, psychological, political, historical, ethical, mythological, cosmological,<sup>4</sup> theological, etc. kind (by virtue of which, as J.-L. N. demonstrated it in the previous paragraph, art would not be art as such anymore, but the subversive of external entities).

Because it is always sketching and eschewing itself (*toujours s’esquissant et s’esquivant*), seeking and feeling itself without being able to find another sense, perhaps, than this sensing as such (*ce sentir en tant que tel*), the work of form, in which art and the world are mutually and endlessly brought into (inter)play and are at stake (*où se jouent sans fin l’art et le monde*), is therefore not that of a man, nor of a cosmos, but that of an absolutely virgin and

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<sup>2</sup> Most quotes in this essay come from the chapter whose precise reference is given in note no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> About Georges Salles, of whom I did not know anything, see the article that I devoted to him in Wikipedia ([http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges\\_Salles](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Salles)).

<sup>4</sup> See Lawrence Durrell, in *The Quartet of Alexandria*, of whom we found the quote that Nancy probably alludes to: “[writing is to] sum up in a sort of metaphor the cosmology of a particular moment in which we are living”...

fertile place which, like a museum or the breast of a mother,<sup>5</sup> is not even a place, but a passage, the unconditioned possibility of innumerable births, i.e. a vestige.

What J.-L. N. means by “art without art” is this very possibility of an art without any *Idea* of art, i.e. an art without concept or essence, as Kant, whom he explicitly echoes, had already defined it in the *Critique of Judgment*:

There can be no objective rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful. For any judgment from this source [i.e. taste] is aesthetic, i.e. the basis determining it is the subject's feeling and not the concept of an object. If we search for a principle of taste that states the universal criterion of the beautiful by means of determinate concepts, then we engage in a fruitless endeavour [...].<sup>6</sup>

[Free] beauties themselves belong to no object determined by concepts as to its purpose, but we like them freely and on their own account.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Kant, however, J.-L. N. specifies that art is not only without concept, i.e. without any *Idea* of art, or without some *Idea* presented in art, but that it could not even be thought within this privative form; and must consequently be thought only as a vestige. In other words, if art is not the cosmetics of a cosmos, it is not either a cosmetics without cosmos, a cosmetic art without cosmos-art: it simply seeks itself in this impasse and moved towards its proper essence become enigma, its proper vestige become vertigo. Art and the world are thus vacillating in their destination: we must accompany this vertigo, we must try to know it; this only matters.

### 3

The exhaustion of art has been said to exhaustion, and yet this exhaustion is not exhausted: nothing remains more than this dying art. Art, throughout all its history, has sketched worlds that were not, made itself up (speaking of cosmetics) with *cosmoi* which were nothing. Throughout all its history, the end of art has been announced within worlds that existed only on their own account and that, to their own eyes, would not cease to end either; and these worlds, which were (created) only for themselves, are continuously and paradoxically coming back to us, so that our world, like our history, are made and make themselves out of these worlds which do not exist, *are* these worlds which do not exist, and which nevertheless remain, resound, as the most present farawaynesses, and the most faraway presences, and are, as time goes by, mere “passage, succession, appearance, disappearance, event.” Whatever the world is, in sum, art is not it anymore, has never been it, will not ever be it

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<sup>5</sup> See Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Naissance des seins*, Valence, 1996

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 17 (On the Ideal of Beauty), Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis / Cambridge, 1987, p. 79

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, § 16 (A Judgment of Taste by Which We Declare an Object Beautiful under the Condition of a Determinate Concept Is Not Pure), p. 76

anymore (this is what Hegel means when he writes that “art will be a thing of the past”), even though each time art sketches (or avoids) [*esquisse (ou esquivé)*] this (these) world(s) that does (do) not exist. Each time, art makes itself up (*se farde*) with a *perfection* which is nevertheless but a passing confection (it is in this way that J.-L. N. splits the word “*perfection*” into two parts) and which, thus, represents nothing, does not realise any *Idea* whatsoever, but passes in “the incommensurable strangeness of [its] forms.”<sup>8</sup> All art such as in itself finally (« *tel qu'en lui-même enfin* ») is thereby never but the passage of its whole confection (not only as a style, a form or a work, but “as such”): each time fully itself, and yet each time *passing*, each time a *nevermore*.<sup>9</sup>

The gesture of the artist, doubtlessly mimicking human life, is entirely in this appearance which merely performs its own disappearance. This “suspension of a form,” which in Aristotelian terms J.-L. N. refers to as an “entelechy” without a *telos*, always in progress, is but the vestige, the unseizable trace and track of the unseizable. Mark of their finitude, men thus follow traces in which they do not recognise themselves and which never have fixed forms. Since Lascaux, they merely recognise themselves, so to speak, in wandering (and wondering) forms, perpetually hunted down like these beasts drawn on the rock: the wandering of drawing, the never-ending track and flight of forms, this drawing without design (*ce dessin sans dessein*), or without any other design than itself, is also our design, our destiny (*notre dessein*), our layout, our trail (*notre tracé*), our trace, our passage:<sup>10</sup> in one word, our “vestige.” Hence, there is what our concern must be, in a philosophy which would think but the passing life (*dans une philosophie qui ne serait pensante que de la vie passante*): “a *finite or vestigial per-fectio*” ...

#### 4

Philosophical definitions of art, like the “natural” disposition of human thinking, have always been tracked down, “[haunted]” by the question (or by the *Idea*) of “*the sensible presentation of the Idea*,” as Hegel formulated it. This is due to the duality of man, as expressed by our Platonic lexicon, strained between the sensible and the Ideal. Entangled at the core of this dualism, art is then indissociable from the theories of imitation which make out of the sensible the image of the invisible visibility of the *eidos*. The sensible like the Ideal are reciprocally approachable only in touch with image, each one being the *monstration* of

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<sup>8</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, chap. 4, “Painting in the Grotto”, p. 78

<sup>9</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven”

<sup>10</sup> About the aesthetics of passage and passages, see Walter Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, and in particular his *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. An excellent online synthesis of this thematic is provided by Christopher Rollason, in a study called *The Passageways of Paris: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Contemporary Cultural Debate in the West* (<http://www.wbenjamin.org/passageways.html>). See also Louis Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris*, notably his famous « Préface à une mythologie moderne » and the chapter « Passage de l'Opéra ».

the other and only thanks to the other. Hence, there is no such man, nor such art, that could have been thought other than by metaphors (i.e. by symbols) and in accordance with the theological paradigm of *imago Dei*, “visible image of the invisible God” (which is Origen’s definition of Christ, as J.-L. N. reminds us).

In the same way as man, according to Klee’s epitaph, “cannot be caught in immanence,” art cannot be caught in the sensible, in the sense that the sensible itself cannot extricate, just like immanence from transcendence, from its symbolic interlace with the suprasensible. The symbolic that, according to its etymology, gathers immanence and transcendence, the sensible and the suprasensible, is also the diabolic, i.e. what upholds the separation within this very relation. Unable to leave it and to integrate it, art and ourselves are in this symbolic-diabolic in-between, on the threshold – or rather, we are this in-between, “and perhaps we are, ourselves, the threshold.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus man, like art, are doomed not to ever be (able to be) themselves, to be always engaged, naively or desperately, towards a meaning out of reach, in the very agonising struggle (*dans l’écartèlement même*) that Baudelaire would call *correspondence*, this rush of the sensible which precipitates us towards its extreme and unbearable limit, making us enrage (be in “delirium,” Dubuffet would burst out) on the resounding threshold of the Ideal, frustrating all our being because the Ideal is impossible to represent, and eventually withdrawing ourselves into the sensible to take out our furor on it: Durrell, Conrad,<sup>12</sup> Martin Johnson,<sup>13</sup> Dubuffet, etc. are merely saying this. It is also what Deleuze<sup>14</sup> expresses: between the senses, there is “an existential communication that constitutes the ‘pathic’ (non representative) moment of sensation in general,” or also Bacon:<sup>15</sup> “make one see a kind of original unity of the senses and to cause a multisensible Figure to appear visually is possible only if the sensation of any particular domain is directly plugged into a vital power that exceeds and traverses them.”

Art so-conceived is fated to the “monstrous,” i.e. to a *correspondence* with a meaning, “an Idea, a Form, a Being,”<sup>16</sup> towards which it is engaged, in “futile fumbings,”<sup>17</sup> or from which it tries, in vain, to withdraw; art is only this failed, irritated *monstration* of “ideality made

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, chap. 3, “On the Threshold”, p. 57

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Conrad, Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*: “A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence.”

<sup>13</sup> About Martin and Osa Johnson, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin\\_and\\_Osa\\_Johnson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_and_Osa_Johnson)

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, p. 31

<sup>15</sup> Idem

<sup>16</sup> Charles Baudelaire, poem XXXIV of the *Flowers of Evil*, “The Irremediable”

<sup>17</sup> Idem, v. 14

present, even if it be the paradoxical presence of its abyss, its darkness, or its absence” – sublime, terrible, grotesque or malformed monster of the Ideal... Even art yearning not to signify anything, art struggling against all Forms and Ideas, remains reined in by them, by the necessity of their representation, their jettison or the impossibility of such a representation; and in this “irremediable” *monstrousness* of art, which is its dia-bolic liaison with the representation of an Idea, a Form, a Being, man recognises himself quite ironically, he whom Pascal so germanely called “an incomprehensible monster.”<sup>18</sup>

## 5

Reasoning about the end of art as Idea-art still consists in making Idea-art resound in art as a residue; and this is still not what J.-L. N. has in view in what he calls “the vestige of art,” or “vestige-art” (which is an art absolutely not residual of Idea-art). Hence, in moral and reactionary imprecations, Idea-art still resounds (or, much rather, lets sound hollow its wail nostalgic for Values); in nihilism à la Nietzsche, merely the other side of the coin of idealism (but of a vexed or cynical idealism, prostrate in its self-refusal or in its will to get it over with itself), Idea-art (its residue) still resounds. In all these attempts and temptations of materialistic, conceptualistic, minimalist, performative, events-based, etc. art, Idea-art (its residue, its reduction, its refutation, its suspension) obviously resounds and eternally perpetuates its agony.

This comes from the fact that “all men by nature desire to know;”<sup>19</sup> and art does not eschew this human trait par excellence that Aristotle coined, maybe forever, in *Metaphysics* I. At the core of art, the residual alliance of the senses and sense irreducibly goes on, even to no avail:

[This] residue still functions as Idea, and even as pure Idea of pure sense, or like an ideal visibility without any other content than light itself: like the pure kernel of darkness in an absolute self-imitation.

This vivid light of Idea, bared and pierced by / in the metaphysical intention for sense (which resists up till the absence of sense), drowned by (/ in) art in (/ by) its erotomania-to-signify, and thus congealed up till the darkest nonsense, shines in a fatal *éclat* (splinter and flash) which sweeps away the “world and filth [we shall add the *non-world*] [*le monde, l'immonde [ajoutons l'a-monde]*], technics, silence, subject and its absence, body, spectacle, insignificance, and the pure will-to-signify,” but all this still at the expense of art as such – i.e. as a vestige.

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<sup>18</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, VI, 420 [442] : “It is dangerous to make man see too clearly his equality with the beasts without showing him his greatness. It is also dangerous to make him see his greatness too clearly, apart from his vileness. It is still more dangerous to leave him in ignorance of both. But it is very advantageous to show him both. If he exalt himself, I humble him; if he humble himself, I exalt him; and I always contradict him, till he understands that he is **an incomprehensible monster.**”

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A, 1, 980 a 21

## 6

Since even art openly or invisibly claiming an empty *telos* / *theos* still causes the beam of this emptiness to be reflected, then we have not yet plumbed the deepest depths of the end of art, nor the resource of its vestige, which we aim at. Two more steps are separating us from it, in the agony of Idea-art: the first one supposes going beyond Hegel (but following many a passage indicated by Hegel himself) and beyond the “dialectical necessity” by virtue of which the Idea must bloom outside itself, in its sensible representation, in order to be itself. Indeed, as art is the entity always necessary to the sensible presentation of the Idea, how could it *end*? (Hegel’s indication – and we are stating here what J.-L. N. highlighted in the previous paragraph – is that art, no doubt, only finishes as the presentation of the Idea, the latter eventually unable to present itself better than in its proper element – the philosophical concept, – that is to say in the mind (*dans l’esprit*) reflecting itself (*se reflétant, se réfléchissant lui-même*) as Absolute and, from then on, not needing anymore any metaphorical, allegorical or imagic substratum to seize itself in its infinite potency. And so, it is only art as an allegory of the Absolute that ends, but in this end also begins a self-allegorical art – in which there is no other allegory but of itself, – allegory, without allegory, of its simple and unique vestige.) As far as the second step is concerned, it must go beyond this very limit in Hegel. The residual Idea that the Idea presenting itself in the sensible cannot be presented in it but as its own withdrawal, cannot and must not anymore rhyme with asserting once again that the withdrawal of the Idea from the sensible (or of the sensible from the Idea) is itself “*an unpresentable Idea to be presented*”... The task for art is not to make out of this withdrawal of the Idea (from the sensible) an invisible Ideality to be visualised (even, as we have emphasised it, as the paradoxical form of its withdrawal – which is still the residue of Idea-art), but something else.

## 7

Let us say, just to parody Husserl’s famous statement on intentionality, that every image is image *of* and that, consequently, the whole of aesthetics, in its oscillation between the definition of art as the image of the Idea or as the image of the unpresentability of the Idea (that are respectively, throughout the classical approach, the Beautiful and the Sublime), merely swirled, indeed, around the same and unfailing ontotheological function of image-art, whose paradigm is religious art, visible image of the invisible, of an Idea, of a Form, of a Being, of the gods, of a God or of their absence (in this way, even atheist art may therefore be termed religious).

## 8

What is the withdrawal of the Idea, the peculiar Idea of this withdrawal which does not leave any image of itself (in the sensible) and whose other is the vestige? As for itself, it is certain that philosophy still deals with the Idea, be it only the Idea of its proper withdrawal (from the sensible); and so philosophy, while withdrawing from art or, as we worded it, taking its leave from it (*lui tirant sa révérence*), does not disappear, however, from its proper scene (even if it, on the contrary, definitely unable to be the *image* of the Idea, or of its proper withdrawal, could not be philosophically thought anymore but as a vestige...). Thus, it would not be surprising that philosophy be only the failure of its proper disappearance, the place where the Idea, after beating a retreat, collapses and desponds about itself, merges with this unfailing image of itself that it cannot be anymore, becoming a mere *salle de pas perdus* (*room of lost steps*), but not as a place anymore: as a passage. An Idea of a passage and of *passage*. Not a self-remembrance anymore, but a *dévidement* (a dispersal, an outflow, a broadcast).

Neither is the vestige the relic or the looking glass of the withdrawn image. In accordance with the theological distinction (theorised by Thomas Aquinas), the vestige represents the causality of its cause, but not its form. So the image is image because it represents a non-presented (or unrepresentable) *eidos*, like the statue of Mercury represents Mercury (or like man is said to be *imago Dei*, in the image of God). But the vestige, even though the word itself is the vestige of a certain mode of (non formal) *representation* of the causality of the cause (and especially, through theology, of a God *whose* trace has not effaced), must be differentiated from this ultimate ontotheological relic, in order to be only the pure *vestigium*, the footprint of a step, a lost step, a passage whose trace one follows (*vestigare*) but without willing to identify it, or even to *quest* for it.

## 9

Hence, the vestige as J.-L. N. envisages it, which is distinct from the image (we have fairly explained in what way), also differentiates from the vestige in the theological sense, for vestige-art, which even in image-art has always truly been art only as vestige-art, becomes “smoke without fire, vestige without God, and not presentation of the Idea” (and even, that should now go without saying, not presentation of the absence or of the withdrawal of the Idea). The *vestigium Dei*, though sensible exclusively (unlike the *imago*, which is sensible only in relation with the Idea – or with God, in the case of man *imago Dei*), does not yet expose itself without reference, for, as the Latin genitive case indiscreetly reports it, God

remains in *His* trace. But now we are tracing a vestige that is the withdrawal of all image, in which the Idea, and God (and even their absence, or their vestige) got lost, leaving their trace, doubtless, but not the imprint of their form: just the step of their disappearance.<sup>20</sup>

Not the form of [their] self-imitation, not the form in general of self-imitation, but what remains when self-imitation has not taken place.

“Between presence and absence, between everything and nothing,” but not everythingness, not nothingness (which are an Idea and the Idea of the absence of Idea), between “image and Idea, in flight from these dialectical couples,” and keeping no memory of this flight, there is then this *almost nothing* of the vestige which is the whole of art.

## 10 - Overture

*L’art et les gens*: I leave you with this title for another occasion.” Overconfidently, I would like to seize this occasion to think about “l’art et les gens,” and yet feeling what is contraindicated in endeavouring a reflection on what, no doubt, could be thought only “in passing,” as the author notifies it... “I leave you with this title” was indeed, like a wink, a manner of entrusting us, the people (*les gens*), with the “vestige of art” in question – of making out of ourselves, perhaps, this vestige; it was a manner of confiding its charge to us, but a charge infinitely less weighty than the thought (*infiniment moins pesante que la pensée*), flighty like a dance, a leap or a passage. A charge which, therefore, should be danced, passed, released (*graciée*), always-already dispensed and finished, in the very bounce of its grace; and not thought over (*pensée*), that is to say (but it is already too late!) not weighed down (*appesantie*). Successors of the vestige, successors of what is mere “succession,” J.-L. N. also makes out of ourselves, out of us the people (*les gens*), the community of a title’s inheritors. *L’art et les gens*. Of a title that confers on us but the

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<sup>20</sup> Andrea Mantegna, *Dead Christ*, 1490, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan



privilege of becoming *passers-by* (*passants*). Of a title that itself must become mere passer-by and passer (*passant et passeur*); not thinker, nor weightiness (*non pas penseur, ni pesanteur*).

But of what will we be the passers-by or the *passers*? Not of the “man-image,” not of the man subject of (and subject to) “the image of his own Idea,” or of “the Idea of his “own-ness.” That is to say not the passers of a *genre*, nor even the engenderers of a generation, but of a man to whom the name “man” sounds painfully, fills itself up and also flows out painfully (*s’emplit et aussi bien se dévide difficilement*). Thus we will only be the passers of such a pain, of this essay, of this passing attempt of man, of a man passing, of a man so hardly man insofar as he is only passing. Of a man, at last, about whom one may hardly say that he is passing (*passant*), insofar as passage, although it exists itself, although it is being itself, is, above all, passage, and passes, much more than it is. We will be the passers of man, but not of the thought of man; we will be passers, but not thinkers of man (*passeurs, mais non penseurs de l’homme*). We will be mere passers-by, not weighed down by any identity, though not anonymous; consenting to die and consenting to live: lightnings... then night!<sup>21</sup>

I asked a question to myself, with which I have been floundering for quite a long time, which is but one of the thousand facets of the “vestige of art” (but each of its facets illuminates them all, enlightens them all, makes us follow the trace or the pace of them all and of each of them...), and which I would like to examine now: where are exposed *l’art et les gens*? where is exposed this art of the people (*cet art des gens*)? I shall not disguise that this question about exposition re-exposes, quite obviously, the question about contemporary art, that J.-L. N. was dealing with throughout his lecture. Where, then, do art and the people (*les gens*) hide? where does people’s art (*l’art des gens*) hide nowadays? where do the people hide art, or their art?

Vestige-art is actually not totally hidden (or hiding), nor totally exposed (or exposing itself), insofar as thinking it as hidden (or hiding) is once again thinking it as Idea-art (as art-Idea, or as an Idea of art) unpresentable or not presented and, therefore, *to be presented*; and thinking it as exposed (or exposing itself), or exposable, is thinking it as an image, not as a vestige. Thereby [and in the same way that there will be no more “museum of Man” (*musée de l’Homme*)], there cannot be a *museum* of art and the people (*un musée de l’art et des gens*), nor a *place of exposition* of art and of the people (*un lieu d’exposition de l’art et des gens*). Even Internet cannot be the vestigial place of art and of the people (or their passage): for this grand place of virtual exposition of the passage, this place of passage (*ce lieu de passage*) which exhibits itself as passage, is still the ontogenesis of an image of the people (*une image des gens*), of an image of art and of the people (*une image de l’art et des gens*) –

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Baudelaire, poem XCIII of the *Flowers of Evil*, “To A Woman Passer-by”, v. 9

of a eugenics. As J.-L. N. would likely highlight it, Internet cannot still conceal or embody the vestige of art, inasmuch as it is once again subject of (and subject to) the image (or the Idea) of the *own-ness* of the people who *per-form* it. It is a virtual cave of Lascaux where people are still tracking down their image. Albeit as a flight from this image, of its bestial unseizability. The diaristic diarrhea (*la diarrhée diariste*) of blogging (versed in the deceptive acosmism of the “blogsphere”), photocasting (photos of one’s family, of one’s friends or of anything), podcasting [anyone thinking one could be anytime like Joyce in the last pages of *Ulysses*, making freely one’s own sonorous or visual mirror, one’s own spittoon (*son crachoir*), one’s own bib (*son bavoir*), one’s own *gueuloir* (as Flaubert would say), one’s own outlet (*son déversoir, son dévidoir*)], etc., all these things I have just mentioned are once again attempts to regenerate an *essence* of the people (*une essence des gens*), albeit under the naive or cynical appearance of its emptiness or of its dispersal (*sous l’aspect naïvement ou cyniquement assumé de son vide ou de son dévidement*). In sum, vestige-art cannot be people’s art (*l’art des gens*) (an art of an image of the people, an art in people’s image) (*l’art d’une image des gens, à l’image des gens*), or an art of which the people would all be (and in general) the genitive case or the genitors; nor can vestige-art be the art of arts’ people (*l’art des « gens d’art »*). Art and the people cannot be conjugated in the form of an art *by* the people, of which the people would be the agents (*dont les gens seraient les agents*), nor in the form of an art of the people whose art or business would be art (*dont l’art serait l’art et l’affaire*). Vestige-art is not a business, nor something to be performed (*ni affaire, ni à faire*) (to be accomplished, like an Idea can be realised or perfected, or even like carelessness), but always vestige-art is being made, making itself, tracing itself (*toujours se faisant, se traçant*). Not questing after itself (questing after its own identification, or its own presentation), not giving light to its own intention [this is why there are no such people as *arts’ people* (*des gens d’art*), to whom art would be the first *intention*], and not dissimulating (consciously or not) this intention, but coming-before (*venant-devant*) (not presenting itself) (*non pas se présentant*), always “preceding, passing” (*« précédant, passant »*) and passed / past.

*L’art et les gens*. From one to the other, there is no access, no entry (from the people towards art, from art towards the people). But this is where we have entered, hurled / hurling, sent, swinging (*élanés, envoyés, balancés*). Dancing on the changing, on people’s chant (*Dansant sur le changeant, le chant des gens*). Not transposable. Transgeneric: *of* art and *of* the people (*de l’art et des gens*) [not only of art, not only of the people – not even only of genres of art(s) or of arts of genres of people (*des arts de genres de gens*)]. In the passage and in passing life, we seize that which always begins (but not a form in suspense), that upon which one never rests, that which neither ever rests or settles (*ce qui jamais non plus ne se repose ni ne se dépose*). Seizing the vestige (as a voltige), the *passage*; not even in everyday life, nor in modern life, but that on which one’s look can never dare to rest upon and merely

passes: traces. Not seizing, but caressing with ceaseless glances. Caressing in the instant that which is its own mere shimmer. Not daring to seize it, for fear of being simultaneously dispossessed. Through a few glances, nibbling and sketching (*croquant*)<sup>22</sup> the vestige furtively, scratching it, touching it, grazing it. Through a few *glances* (?) [*De quelques coups (d'œil ?)*], not seizing it; seized (*non pas le saisissant; étant saisis*).

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<sup>22</sup> See my analysis about sketching, scratching and the French war correspondent, water colour painter and illustrator Constantin Guys (whom Baudelaire called *the painter of modern life*) in my mémoire de maîtrise: *La Critique artistique, littéraire et musicale chez Baudelaire* (<http://www.guillaumedelaby.com/prose/ baudelaire.pdf>), p. 104