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Seeing Scale: Richard Dunn's Structuralism

ABSTRACT

Writing on the occasion of a retrospective of Richard Dunn's work, Terence Maloon argued that 'structuralism had an important bearing on virtually all of Richard Dunn's mature works', with 'his modular, "crossed" formats' being the most obvious manifestation of this. In this article I wish to reconsider this relation, withdrawing from a broad consideration of the framework of structuralism to focus on some of the quite particular ideas that Lacan proposed in response to structuralism. Beginning from a pivotal painting in the 1960s that developed out of Dunn's experience of viewing the work of Barnett Newman, I wish to suggest a relation between the ongoing exploration of the thematic of scale in Dunn's work and the idea of the symbolic that Lacan derives from structuralist thought. This relation, I argue, opens up a different way of understanding the art historical transition from Minimalism to Conceptual art.

In a recent exhibition, 'Some Decades', Richard Dunn exhibited four works from four different decades of his career. The earliest work was a 1969 floor piece and the latest a painting from 2011. The exhibition, however, was not staged with the intent of being a retrospective. In his introductory remarks to the exhibition, Dunn stated that he hoped that the works would not be approached in terms of a chronological order or a linear form of development and progression. Rather, he aimed for viewers to see a dialogue between the works, a form of relation that does not necessarily pose a sequential priority of one work over the other. He writes:

> So here is a dialogue of periods; ideas that continue, or are transmuted, that back and forth disregarding time. In this sense there is no time, only actions — and things that can speak to each other and to us in a space. This collection of objects is only one of many possibilities that could have been assembled to function in this kind of way, where each potential variation would make a new dialogue with, and for us.[1]

This proposal is suggestive of the priority structuralism gives the synchronic over the diachronic. In an earlier 'retrospective' of his work, 'Richard Dunn: The Dialectical Image — Selected Work 1964–1992', the exhibition's curator, Terence Maloon, explicitly drew a connection between Dunn's work and structuralism. Noting the rise of structuralism in the 1960s, Maloon felt that 'Structuralism had an important bearing on virtually all of Richard Dunn's mature works, with his modular, "crossed" formats being the most obvious manifestation of its influence.'[2] Using two drawings from 1985, *Untitled (Couple and Fire)* and *Untitled (Couple and Waterfall)*, as examples, Maloon further suggested that the 'crossed' format could 'be linked to the ideas of the Structuralist-influenced psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan', particularly the diagrams for his theory of the crossing of metaphor with metonymy. For Maloon, this 'exact (but completely accidental) concordance of Dunn's image and Lacan's theory indicates how closely Dunn's poetics correspond to Structuralism.'[3] In this article I

[1] Dunn, 2011.
[2] Maloon, 1992, p. 30.
[3] Maloon, 1992, p. 30.

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wish to further explore this idea of how Dunn's poetics corresponds not to structuralism understood as a rather broad category illustrative of the general thinking of the time, but rather to Lacan's quite particular use of ideas drawn from structuralism to the key features of structuralism that informed Lacan's thinking. However, this correspondence will not be figured in the sense of a direct influence, as if there is a reading and then an application. Rather, as I will show, this relationship develops out of Dunn's art practice itself, thus conforming more closely to Maloon's suggestion of an exact but accidental concordance.

In the late 1960s, Dunn made a number of 'floor pieces'. As their titles indicate, these are works in which the object — and it is perhaps an object rather than a sculpture — is placed directly on the gallery floor. In their direct association with Minimalism, these floor pieces registered a dramatic shift in Australian sculpture. Noel Hutchison has argued that from the mid-1950s up to the time of the appearance of works such as Dunn's 1969 *Untitled Floor Piece* (Fig. 1), Australian sculpture was dominated by a style that he labelled 'residual organicism'. The common element across a broad range of sculpture was, as Hutchison perceived it, a 'distinctive concern with organic growth — be it in either form or principle, in either mutation or creation.'[4] Thus, without actually being representational, the sculptures developed organic associations, giving the appearance of being plant-like, rock-like or animal-like.

Fig. 1. Richard Dunn, *Untitled Floor Piece*, 1969. Enamel, wood, 29 x 300 x 25 cm. (Courtesy of the artist.)

[4] Hutchison, 1970, p. 11.

In her book on the history of twentieth-century sculpture, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Rosalind Krauss offers a crucial insight into the reason why the organic approach emerged. She suggests that once sculpture's ambition towards realistic representation was discarded, 'the possibility arose — as it had not for naturalistic sculpture — that the sculpted object might be seen as nothing but inert material'.[5] Abstract sculpture overcame this potential problem by suggesting an analogy between the way that the artwork took shape and the logic of organic growth. Krauss observes that an abstract sculpture's formal development is dictated by the symbolic importance given to a central interior space from which, it is imagined, a life-giving energy force radiates. The key point of focus in an abstract sculpture, therefore, is its centre. From this interior energy source, Krauss writes, a sculpture's 'organisation develops as do the concentric rings that annually build outward from the tree trunk's core'.[6] Of importance in the organic conception of sculptures by artists such as Henry Moore or Jean Arp, then, is not so much the use of organic materials, such as eroded stone or rough-hewn wooden block, but instead how the illusion is created of there being 'at the centre of this inert matter ... a source of energy which shaped it and gave it life'.[7]

The important result of this sense of growth from the interior is that the contextual placement of the sculpture — its specific site — is not a determining factor in the production of meaning. In fact, by placing emphasis on the work's central core, sculptors believed that they were set on a quest to give form to universal truths. Think, for example, of how Henry Moore represented the mother and child as a universal condition: it was not a particular mother and child but a couple who were abstracted to stand for a kind of shared humanity. As sculpture becomes more explicitly abstract and promotes itself as organic, one cannot help but think of how the organic can evoke the supposedly eternal and timeless qualities of nature. This, in turn, suggests that inside sculpture may be a truth of nature that is beyond any specific cultural context.

Considering this, one can appreciate that Minimalism's arrival may have initially seemed like a dramatic shift, indicating an all-encompassing change from nature to culture. Using readymade, industrially produced materials, Minimalism does not attempt to use material in an illusionistic manner (there is no suggestion that the resulting sculpture has been crafted in response to the inner life radiating from within). With a work like Dunn's *Untitled Floor Piece* one does not search for its meaning or reason for being in any veiled central core: everything remains on the surface, with no compositional key to be sought in any interior space. The lack of any idea of a compositional centre also eliminates the sense of there being any hierarchical relationships within the work. As is also the case in so-called 'all-over' painting (and it is significant that insofar as the floor piece is painted it could be called a painting as much as a sculpture), no emphasis is given to one part over any other. Furthermore, with this lack of composition, any limit can seem to be arbitrary. How long should a floor piece be? Simply as long as the gallery space permits?

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[5] Krauss, 1981, p. 253.
[6] Krauss, 1981, p. 253.
[7] Krauss, 1981, p. 253.

Like other minimalist works, Dunn's floor pieces are difficult to dissociate from the concerns of late-modernist abstract painting. For example, in the paintings of Frank Stella — the painter who has been positioned as forming the link between abstract modernist painting and Minimalism — the absence of a centre diverted attention to the 'framing edge' of the work.[8] As Michael Fried famously proposed in relation to Stella's work, there is a 'deductive structure' in place.[9] There is no sense of interiority to the work: all is exterior surface insofar as the composition of the painting deductively follows from the outside 'framing edge'. Similarly, *Untitled Floor Piece* can be understood to present the frame itself, or, rather, that which is the equivalent of the frame in sculpture: the pedestal. Yet, what is then inside the frame? What stands upon the pedestal? It could simply be that the extension of the work is there to substitute the absent interior of the work. This idea is reinforced in another floor piece from 1969, *Line* (Fig. 2), which consists of two-inch masking tape taped to the floor in a rectangular shape. Here it is as if the tape is marking out a work that is not there, creating a hole, a gap; it presents the sign of a vacated work.

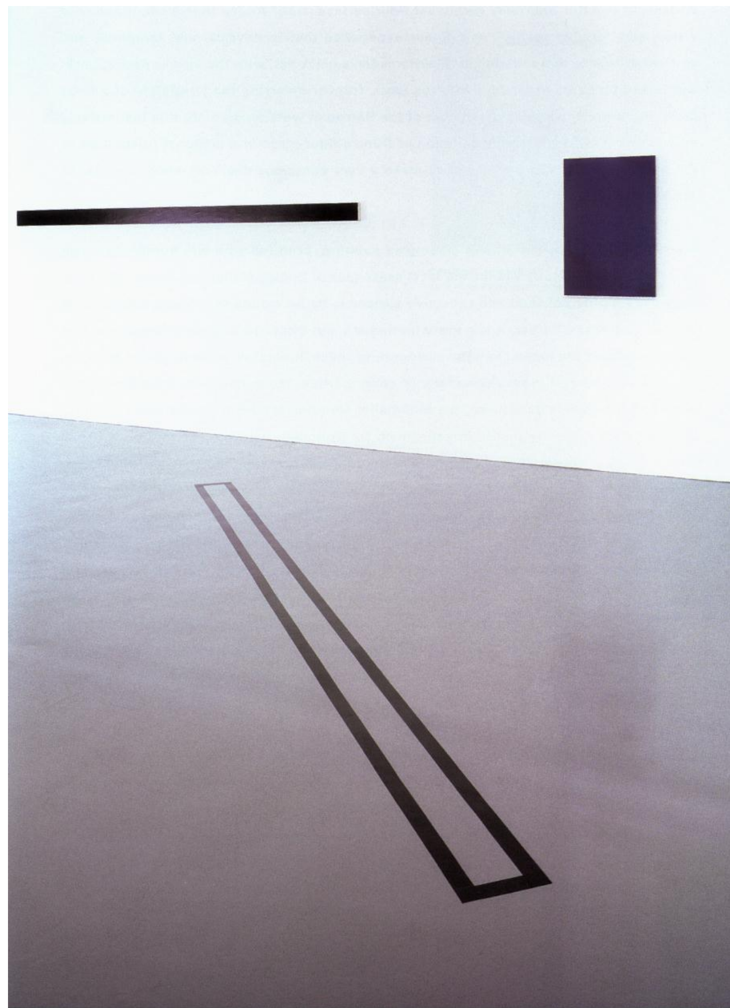


Fig. 2. Richard Dunn, *Line*, 1969. 2 inch masking tape on floor, (with works by Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn in background). (Courtesy of the artist.)

[8] For an historical account of this key positioning of Stella amongst different art critics see the chapter 'Art Critics In Extremis' in Foster, 2002.
[9] Fried, 1998, p. 77.

To understand the particular self-referential nature of the floorpieces, it is important to consider the paintings that preceded them. Terence Maloon pinpoints Dunn's 1968 painting *Untitled* (*New York City*) #1 (Fig. 3) as decisive in marking the singular trajectory of his art. As Maloon relates, Dunn completed this work after visiting New York that year and it was an outcome, in particular, of seeing Barnett Newman's painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950) at the Museum of Modern Art.

Fig. 3. Richard Dunn, *Untitled (New York City) # 1*, 1968. Acrylic and enamel paint on canvas (two parts), 204 x 488 cm. (Courtesy of the artist.)

Untitled (New York City) is approximately two metres high and five metres wide, consisting, as Maloon describes it, 'of five horizontal bands of chrome yellow household enamel paint alternating with six thinner bands of black acrylic paint, and the parallel bands extend over two abutted canvas panels.'[10] However, immediately following the seemingly self-evident nature of this plain description, Maloon astutely draws attention to a number of unanswerable questions: 'Are there five or six horizontal divisions? Does the juncture between the two canvases imply their fusion or fission? Is the surface governed by continuity, repetition or rupture? If we focus on the yellow and black bands, which set of bands is "figure" and which "field"?'[11] This proliferation of undecidable characteristics leads Maloon to assess the painting as particularly significant to Dunn's 'development', for it 'indicates how well he understood the way that Newman's abstract paintings lend themselves to dialectical

[10] Maloon, 1992, p. 12.
[11] Maloon, 1992, p. 12.

performance and self-engendered paradox. This is a feature that Dunn made his own in *Untitled (New York City)*, and it has been his ever since.'[12]

Maloon's isolation of this work as the key turning point in Dunn's 'development' is wonderfully suggestive and perceptive. Maloon moves forward through different decades of Dunn's work, following this 'dialectical performance' and 'self-engendered paradox', and places particular emphasis on how, in 1985, 'Dunn settled upon a format which embodied the principles of crossing, intersection and abutment.'[13] It is from here that Maloon makes the final and equally suggestive theoretical step of linking this format with structuralism.

While Maloon highlights the Newman influence on *Untitled (New York City)* (undoubtedly following the artist's own recollection of what took place), this connection is not immediately obvious. If Newman's 'signature' is the vertical 'zip', the stretched horizontal bands in this painting would seem a strange divergence. In the horizontality and high-keyed colour effect of Dunn's piece, what Maloon describes as a yellow 'at optimal brilliance, at saturation-point', it is perhaps more Kenneth Noland's work than Newman's that is evoked. Nevertheless, the Newman reference is remains illuminating due to the unexpected way in which the connection with Newman is established: it dramatically adds to the decisive importance that Maloon gives to this work. The verticality in Dunn's painting, Newman's 'zip', has become not a line 'in' the painting, part of the painting, but a split, a gap. However, to describe it so is not exactly accurate. To build on the paradoxes that Maloon identified, it is in fact a line that is at once 'in' the painting but equally *not* in it at all. Created from an absence, a space between, it can simultaneously join and divide, unify the two panels into one painting at the same time as it produces separate parts. Indeed, it can create not a single painting, but paintings in the plural. The zip represents the paradoxical possibility of a simultaneous continuity and discontinuity.

However, to bring to a halt this proliferation of undecidable characteristics, we must ask the following question: what is the fundamental importance of Newman to Dunn's work? Why does Newman's 'zip' become this 'abutment', this 'crossing', this 'gap'? It is, I argue, a question of scale. Newman searched in his lines to present something like the origin of scale, or even perhaps more simply, measure. Throughout Dunn's work, a common element is a heightened concern with matters of scale and measure, or variations of the same such as proportion and relation.

It is not uncommon for an artist interested in abstraction to develop a fascination for all things mathematical. One way of understanding this is that the mathematical functions in the same way that I previously outlined in relation to the organic. As with the idea of organic growth, if a painting is structured according to some mathematical progression or series, then it is as if it proceeds by itself. The work, without in some ways even requiring the intervention of the artist's hand, can seemingly auto-generate its own internal logic, giving to the inert abstract matter a reason for being, a principle to establish its autonomy.[14] Yet, if this is the case in many abstract artists' work, it is

[12] Maloon, 1992, p. 12.
[13] Maloon, 1992, p. 30.
[14] On the work of Sol LeWitt as emblematic of this approach, Donald Kuspit (1975) writes that 'rationalistic, deterministic abstract art links up with a larger Western tradition, apparent in both classical antiquity and the Renaissance, *viz*, the pursuit of intelligibility by mathematical means.'

not Dunn's approach. Here Maloon's selection of Dunn's *Untitled (New York City)* as the decisive work is telling, because what this work evidences, and what subsequently follows from it, is that of equal importance to the establishing of a mathematical relation is its simultaneous faltering — that is, the gaps and 'crossings' that create disturbances and antagonism. It is as if the artist is saying: no measure, no proportion, without at the same time discord, opposition and contradiction. Why is this? How can we understand this relation in Dunn's work?

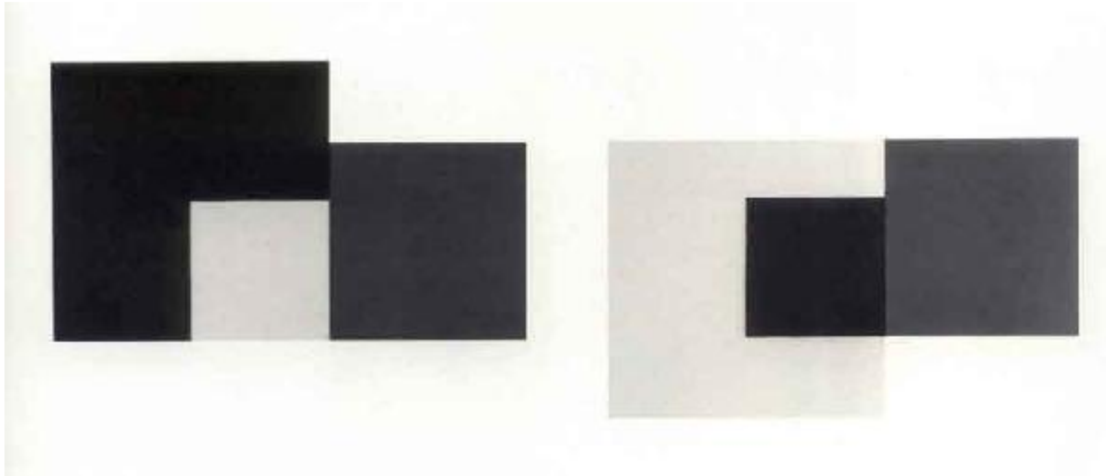


Fig. 4. Richard Dunn, *Growth Plan for Meno*, 1977. Matt and gloss enamel/masonite, four panels, two parts 80 cm x 295.5 overall. (Courtesy of the artist.)

Fig. 5. Richard Dunn, detail of *Growth Plan for Meno*. (Courtesy of the artist.)

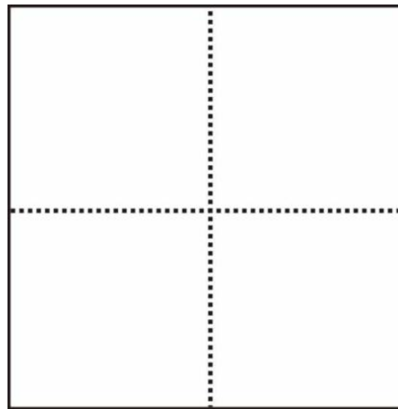
Consider a later work from the 1970s, *Growth Plan for Meno* (1977) (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), a painting that is sourced from the rather unlikely combination of Plato and Pop Art. The work's title references a strange and slightly disturbing painting, *Growth Plan* (1966), by James Rosenquist, an artist who has been a constant source of

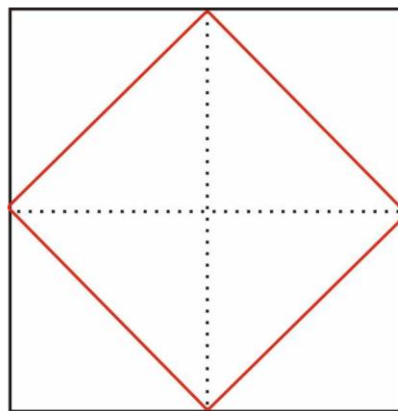
inspiration for Dunn. *Growth Plan* (Fig. 6) shows a group of young boys standing to attention on an oval. They look ready for a gym class, although the reason why the boys are standing as they are and where they are remains enigmatic, which adds to the painting's uncomfortable quality. There are lines marked out on the ground, which may be for a running track, yet the exact purpose of these lines is, again, unclear. There are also a few lines at right angles to these, suggesting a grid pattern. Apart from two off to the left-hand side, the boys are standing within these marked lines, forming a row, despite each boy being placed at a different distance from the picture plane. Presumably the lines on which the boys stand — facing forward, still and straight for the unseen and off-stage schoolmaster — are mapping out the 'growth plan'. Yet again, what this plan is, and how the boys are positioned within this plan, is hard to determine. The lines, which double as perspectival lines, are at an angle off to the side, forcing a separation between the painting's construction, the point of view from which it is mapped, and the spectator's viewing of the image. The effect of this is that our face-to-face encounter with each of the boys — how they stand frontally addressing us, each with his own distinctive presence — is divorced from the painting's perspective, that is, its mathematical plan. Importantly, what results from all of this is an uncanny sense of scale. The split in the point of view in the painting creates an alternation between the boys being placed at once in scale but also not being so placed. It is as though the painting wants viewers not to see the boys — figures placed on the ground — in scale, but to view them from a position outside of scale. Or rather, in moving from being within scale to what is not contained by scale, it is as though one is meant to see scale itself. The oddity of this however, the making of scale itself the subject matter of a work, requires an impossible inversion. It is like perspective: one speaks of a painting being *in* perspective, but can it ever be the subject *of* a painting? The same applies to scale: one can see a figure *in* scale, but can one see scale itself? This question lies at the centre of the other source of Dunn's painting: an exchange between Socrates and the titular character of Plato's *Meno*. This other source shares some key elements with Rosenquist's painting: Socrates replaces the role of the unseen and off-stage school master, the young boys become a single young boy (a slave), and the lines mapped out on the oval become lines drawn in the sand.

Fig. 6 James Rosenquist, *Growth Plan*, 1966. Oil on canvas, 178 x 356 cm, Iwaki City Art Museum, Japan. See image.

Under discussion in this dialogue is the doctrine of knowledge as recollection (anamnesis), the proposal that all knowledge is somehow present in our souls at birth. Socrates aims to prove this to Meno by showing how he can take anyone, in this case a lowly slave, and, through a process of questioning, demonstrate how one can recollect knowledge that one thought one did not possess. The central scenario involves Socrates first drawing out a two-by-two square in the sand and asking the slave to produce a square twice as large in area. The slave immediately responds by making a mistake, thinking that doubling the square's sides will double the area. In the sand, Socrates then shows the slave how this produces a square not double in area but quadruple, sixteen instead of eight. In order to let the youth find the required solution, Socrates cuts off the corners of the larger square, thus halving its size, and

producing a square double the original size.[15] The following 3 diagrams represent the different steps:





As it so happens, this dialogue, and crucially what is traced in the sand, was central to Lacan's structuralism. From Socrates' procedure Lacan finds a demonstration of his idea of the emergence of what he terms the symbolic. After outlining what takes place in the dialogue, Lacan provides the following commentary:

> Don't you see there is a fault-line between the intuitive element and the symbolic element? One reaches the solution using our idea of numbers,

[15] *Meno* (82b-85c), Plato, 1963.

> that 8 is half of 16. What one obtains isn't 8 square-units. At the centre we have 4 surface units, and one irrational element, √2, which isn't given by intuition. Here, then, there is a shift from the plane of the intuitive bond to a plane of symbolic bond.[16]

What is not fully revealed in Socrates' trick is that he finds a relationship between things that are incommensurable. Replacing squares with triangles, the relationship is not the same as that of whole numbers to each other, that is to say, 2 + 2 = 4, but of the relationship of the side of the original square to its diagonal, 2√2, two elements that are without common measure. Lacan further explains the significance of this:

> This demonstration, which is an example of the shift from the imaginary to the symbolic, is quite evidently accomplished by the master. It is Socrates who effects the realisation that 8 is half of 16. The slave, with all his reminiscence and his intelligent intuition, sees the right form, so to speak, from the moment it is pointed out to him. But here we put our finger on the cleavage between the imaginary, or intuitive, plane — where reminiscence does indeed operate, that is to say the type, the eternal form, what can be called *a priori* intuitions — and the symbolic function which isn't at all homogenous with it, and whose introduction into reality constitutes a forcing.[17]

My argument is that the line in Dunn's work is this 'forcing', or, from the previous Lacan quote, this 'fault-line'. Although it may just be the gentle tracing of a line in the sand, Lacan emphasises the force of the symbolic, the fact that the symbolic only emerges because of an original violence.[18] He also stresses that the symbolic is something that cannot be recalled or remembered, it is rather that which breaks and disrupts memory. The symbolic element, like the irrational element √2, does not emerge gradually, step by step; its origin is always lost, it is just with the lightening sketch of a line that it is there. Yet, at this instant, all changes, the past is rewritten, and it is as though this symbolic element has always been there, its placement seemingly indisputable.

Dunn's work, however, attempts to displace the symbolic, to find the viewpoint from which its certainties begin to shift. In *Growth Plan for Meno* one finds all the elements of Socrates's demonstration: the original square, the larger squares and then also the diagonals. However, the order of reasoning, the logic, has broken down. It is as though the process of deduction that Fried identified as operating in late modernist painting has gone astray. Nothing is deduced from the framing edge or shape of the work. Equally, to recall the intimate connection between organic growth and modernist abstraction, here mathematical progression does not replace it — any growth plan remains obscure or strangely perverse.

In Rosenquist's *Growth Plan*, the discord between the two competing points of view, between the perspectival alignment of the painting and the address of the figures within it, is also a way of registering the 'forcing' of the symbolic of which Lacan

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[16] Lacan, 1988, p. 18.
[17] Lacan, 1988, p. 18.
[18] On the relation between violence, √2, dialogue and the diagonal, see the chapters on the origin of geometry in Serres, 1982.

speaks. In the shifting of the point of view it is as though there is an attempt to step outside the workings of the symbolic to see the symbolic itself, that is, as was said before, to see scale itself. But how is this possible if the symbolic has always already occurred, if there is no going back to the moment of its origin? To take *Growth Plan for Meno* as emblematic of the correspondence between Dunn's poetics and Lacan's structuralism, it is as if the focus shifts from the measured proportion and harmony that the diagonal creates, to the irrationality of the diagonal itself: it is a focus on the crossing itself, the relation between things rather than things themselves. To return to the 1960s, this shift can be identified in another key work by Dunn from this period, one also indebted to Rosenquist.

Fig. 7. Richard Dunn, *Untitled 1967/8* (1967–8). Oil on canvas, 150 x 750 cm (five parts). (Courtesy of the artist.)

Untitled (1967–8) (Fig. 7) presents a series of paintings in sequence, almost as if they are stills from a film. There are alternating images in 'close-up', of flowers, evoking the still-life genre, and then an image in 'long shot', such as the distant shot of an F-111. Between each there is a line, a gap that I would associate with the one that will soon follow in *Untitled (New York City)*. Because the images are placed in such a sequence, one becomes aware of their relational quality: one acknowledges that seeing one image next to another changes one's perception of each individual image. Here the issue of scale is brought to the fore; specifically, Dunn's juxtaposition of the images highlights the arbitrary nature of scale. Seeing the image of the F-111 placed alongside the flowers causes one to realise that what you might initially take to be a 'long shot' might not be a 'long shot'. The indeterminate scale of the F-111 becomes increasingly evident; in this image, there is no way of determining the distance of the 'ground' relative to the 'figure' (the F-111). From this the possibility follows that what is initially taken to be a plane may be no more than a 'scale model', though of course with the scale itself completely unknown. With this sense that it is maybe only models, that is, imitations and copies that we have access to, there is a heightened sense of mediation in the work. The idea that one is not seeing original images but only images of images is also conveyed through the suspicion that these are paintings after photographs. For example, the blur of the pink rose as it comes too 'close' to the picture surface suggests a photographic blur, indicating the sense of a technological rather than natural vision. One's awareness of the impossibility of having any direct access to an original or primary seeing of the thing itself becomes part of the impossibility of determining scale. The final image in the sequence also collapses the differences of scale: the image of the ripples (or are they waves?) on the surface of the water could be both 'close up' and 'long shot'. There is no figure in this image to give us scale, but then perhaps this is so because it is scale itself that is to be seen. However, again, if the subject matter of the work is scale, the attempt to see scale, from where could this be seen? This question becomes the subject matter of another work, *The. Art. Act*. (1969) (Fig. 8).

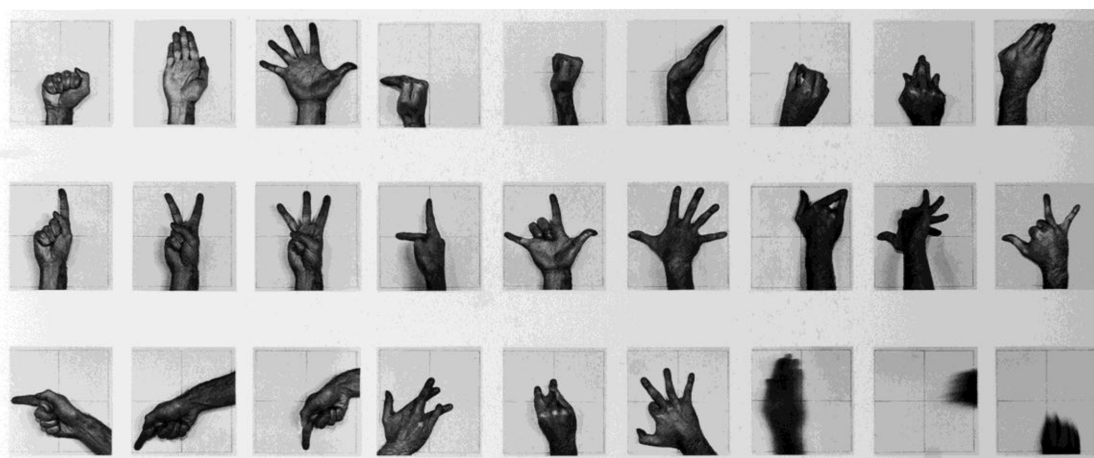

Fig. 8. Richard Dunn, *The. Art. Act*, 1969. 27 b/w photographs in three parts, 91.4 x 114.3 cm each. (Courtesy of the artist.)

This work seems to be an attempt to photographically capture the birth of a new language system. In each photo there is a gridded background on which a hand adopts different configurations. What is the relation between one photo and the next? Does the different placement of the same finger in different photos mean anything? Is there any meaning constructed from one's recognition of differences and similarities across the sequence? However much one might scrutinise the images, the work remains resolutely mute. The anguish of this inability to communicate seems to increase as one moves through the sequence. You begin to feel the pain and the strained tension as the hand and fingers adopt ever-stranger shapes and contortions. In the end the hand itself blurs, the exercise has been futile. It is as if the moment of signification is too quick and elusive even for the instant of the click of the camera.

The. Art. Act. could be classified as a work of conceptual art. The titling of the work, with its suggestion of an attempt to define what makes a work of art a work of art, that is, the 'act' that creates it, suggests this link to conceptual art. However, it is important that this work not be separated from the paintings already considered; they arise out of similar concerns. To specify this it is useful to compare Dunn's *The. Art. Act*. with what is perhaps the defining conceptual art piece, *One and Three Chairs* (1965) from Joseph Kosuth's 'One and Three' series.

In Kosuth's piece, as in Dunn's, it is as if the work tries to capture the emergence of the symbolic. Both highlight a connection with the primary insights of structuralism. Kosuth's work could indeed easily be imagined as some inventive resource material that a teacher put together for a lesson on structuralism. Pointing to the work you could imagine a teacher asking: Why is it that a chair is called a chair? What is the relation between the word chair, the signifier, and the thing? To give a demonstration of structuralism's proposal concerning the arbitrary nature of the connection between signifier and thing, you could further imagine the teacher pointing in turn to the dictionary definition of a chair, the photograph of a chair, and what is undoubtedly introduced within quotation marks as the 'real' chair. Yet if we were to follow through all of the teacher's demonstration, looking at the different elements that the teacher might point to, the key factor, the defining element of structuralism, remains one that we cannot see. For structuralism, a chair is a chair only insofar as it is an element within a system, it *is* its difference to all other elements within this system. It

is this 'all', the totality, that escapes representation. This is why for structuralism it is impossible to explain language, or the emergence of the symbolic, diachronically. As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes, language has always already arrived, it is just suddenly 'all here'.[19] Miraculously, as though out of nothing, 'everything has meaning'. However, as Slavoj Žižek argues, a crucial point follows from this:

> This is what the 'arbitrariness of the signifier' means: not the fact that we can 'compare' from the outside words and things and ascertain that their connection is arbitrary (table is called table or '*tisch*' or …), but quite the contrary the very impossibility of assuming such an external position from which we could 'compare' words and things. Words mean what they mean only with regard to their place in the totality of language; this totality determines and structures the very horizon within which reality is disclosed to us; within which we can eventually 'compare' individual words with things.[20]

To move beyond the scenario of placing Kosuth's work in a classroom lesson, what does it mean to present this as an artwork? The key point to be made is that the artwork addresses an impossible point, that is, in Žižek's words, 'the very impossibility of assuming such an external position from which we could "compare" words and things'. The position to see this work of art — the 'external position', the place 'outside' from which you could compare — is a position that you will never be able to occupy. This indeed is why, I would suggest, conceptual art is called conceptual art, because there is no place, no point of view that you could occupy to see the work. And if Dunn's work is often labelled conceptual then it is conceptual in this sense of a staging of an impossible point of view. This, however, should not be taken to necessarily mean that there is a lack of physical impact or presence. Rather, the presence of the work is intensified by the impossibility that drives it. This can be explained by returning to this essay's starting point, the floor pieces of the late 1960s.

The floor pieces could undoubtedly be placed under the category of what Michael Fried — before the term Minimalism was in use — termed 'literalist art' in his essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1967). In relation to my analysis so far, what I wish to highlight in Fried's essay is how literalist art causes a division or splitting of the spectator's point of view. Fried argues that literalist art directly addresses and acknowledges the spectator. This emphasis on the relation to the spectator can even be such that the artwork actually relies on the spectator for its existence. Fried writes that literalist art

> possesses an audience, though a somewhat special one: that the beholder is confronted by literalist work in a situation that he experiences as *his* means that there is an important sense in which the work in question exists for him *alone*, even if he is not actually alone with the work at the time … Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one — almost as though the work in question has been *waiting* for him. And inasmuch as literalist work *depends* on the beholder, is *incomplete* without him, it *has been* waiting for him. And once he is in the room the work

[19] Lévi-Strauss, 1987, p. 59.
[20] Žižek, 1991, p. 200.

> refuses, obstinately, to let him alone — which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.[21]

The situation that Fried describes here is far from straightforward. After suggesting that the artwork has been waiting for the spectator with the expectation that there will be a meeting between the artwork and spectator, this very expectation is cancelled. Any metaphorical greeting between the two is deferred insofar as the spectator arrives to find that the artwork never stops distancing itself from him or herself. Before any meeting has taken place, it is as though the work has already rejected the spectator, passed them by. It is, then, as if no meeting between spectator and artwork takes place. Moreover, if the artwork 'has been waiting' for the spectator, then, insofar as there is no moment of the present in which there is mutual exchange between spectator and artwork, this 'has been' is a past projected into the future.

With the artwork experienced as a kind of gap or hole in the present, a discontinuity enters into the spectator's act of looking. The nature of this discontinuity could be understood by saying that the artwork does indeed address the viewer, but this address never coincides with the place that the spectator happens to be in. It is you and also not you at the same time. What is directed to you is always for another that you cannot locate, it is to an elsewhere behind your back or off to the side. Here the important influence of Rosenquist's work on Dunn should again be highlighted. As was noted before, Dunn's *Untitled* work of the sequence of 'blown up' images follows Rosenquist's explorations of this format. Dunn has cited one work in particular, Rosenquist's *Horse Blinders* (1968–9), as influential. In this work the sequence of images continues around the room; one cannot see all of them at once. Hence the significance of the title: in seeing one part of the work, one is blind to another. In all of these works in this format, including his famous *F-111*, Rosenquist has spoken of how he was interested in the idea of peripheral vision and, in particular, the sense that there was always another look outside of your own — a look to the side, that would disrupt and disturb your own.[22]

This perfectly corresponds to Fried's analysis of an encounter with literalist art. Yet, what I would add to this in the case of Rosenquist and consequently Dunn, is that insofar as this other look cannot be seen, the impossibility of seeing it is precisely the inversion the work attempts to achieve: to see scale. It is this other point of view, impossible to locate, that ultimately constitutes the work. One finds that, increasingly, Dunn's subject matter becomes precisely the attempt to figure this impossibility; indeed, this becomes the 'crossed' format that Maloon highlights. So, in the *Couple* works (1985), for example, the couple is represented as if in stills taken from a shot and reverse-shot dialogue sequence in a film. Shot and reverse-shots traditionally work in film to convey a sense of seamless transition, part of the so called continuity editing style that aims to eliminate the sense of an edit intruding upon or interrupting a spectator's viewing. The shot/reverse-shot sequence also provides the impression that the characters in dialogue are looking at each other, that their looks coincide in an 'eyeline match'. It is precisely this, however, that is disrupted in Dunn's work; the looks do not meet. Further, this splitting of the point of view, the cut between one point of view and another, is the work itself. Beginning in the 1960s, it is the 'line' in

[21] Fried, 1998, p. 163.
[22] Siegel, 1972, p. 32.

Dunn's work that is this cut. In the instant of each line, to return to the words of Dunn with which we began, the artist is exploring actions that take place in no time, that place and time in which anything that is fundamentally new arises.

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