

The Work Process as Spatial Situation

A Sketch

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Hatz M. The Work Process as Spatial Situation. A Sketch. Int Forum Psychoanal 2000;9:93-96. Stockholm. ISSN 0803-706X.

Interacting with the work of art entails a spatial situation, which is double. On a mental plane it is encapsulated reverie, on a physical plane it is production and consumption. These two are woven together as an orthogonal text or texture. The space of the work of art thus contains both the process of its making and its viewing. Seen as a dimensional space it is non linear. It is characterized by oscillations, discrepancies, misalignments, multiplicity and recurrence. There is a correspondance between the studio and the exhibition area, as well as a dialogue between privileged and unprivileged spaces. The situation has something in common with oneiric space, where weightlessness and gravity oscillate.

Key words: space, oscillations, viewpoints, palette, process

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Negotiating a work of art, interacting with it, as viewer or maker, inevitably means entering into a spatial relation to it. Even if simply hanging a painting on a wall, a spatial situation is set up ... As a painting, you traditionally enjoy the privilege of a particular position among objects and furniture of the architectural space. The gaze is here willing to slow down, even expecting a change in spatial perception, a special titillation. The informed spectator knows there is a possibility for reverie offered, encapsulated, bottled up, ready to be poured.

Interacting with the work of art also means for the viewer: consuming it as it were, for the maker: producing it. Both positions, which are symmetrical, entail entering the process of the work.

Jackson Pollock's action painting can be seen as a work process, as spatial situation. He painted "inside" his paintings (exclaiming; "I am nature"!). In his cubic, relatively small studio, the canvas took up the entire floor space. Likewise to fully interact with a Pollock painting, the viewer ought to be forced into its enveloping space. There one could follow the action, the dizzying travels of the drips.

In my own work though, the process is not a linear progression, taking place in time, with a beginning and end. Rather I see the process as intrinsic with space.

I enter the work process as I enter a space. It is a making contact with, or approaching of, a place where it is possible for the work to compel me. Here nothing is stable. No progression, no order, no hierarchy. Here trains of thoughts are instantly and continuously unraveled. Memory flashes in the form of sensory fragments immediately come to greet you. These sudden flashes may be sharp and vivid smells, textures, tastes (dark green nettle soup with egg balls). Good and/or bad, in rapid oscillation or simultaneously, these sensory fragments do not coincide with the appropriate associated thought, color, utterance or emotion. There is a discrepancy, a misalignment vis-a-vis the diametrical order of things. In this continual shift only a hair's breadth separates the regurgitated from the celestial.

In order to enter the work process I have to make room, to make a clearing for it. It does not suffice to physically step into the studio, this can actually be destructive if the (mental) approaching of the place has not been made beforehand ...

Yet here I am, in flesh and blood, on the studio floor, subject to gravity in an architectural space, surrounded by objects, matter and colors. Raw materials are spread out as so many ingredients for cooking. A worktable is being set as though for a meal, but again there is no linearity, rather an endless circle of consuming / cooking / regurgitat-

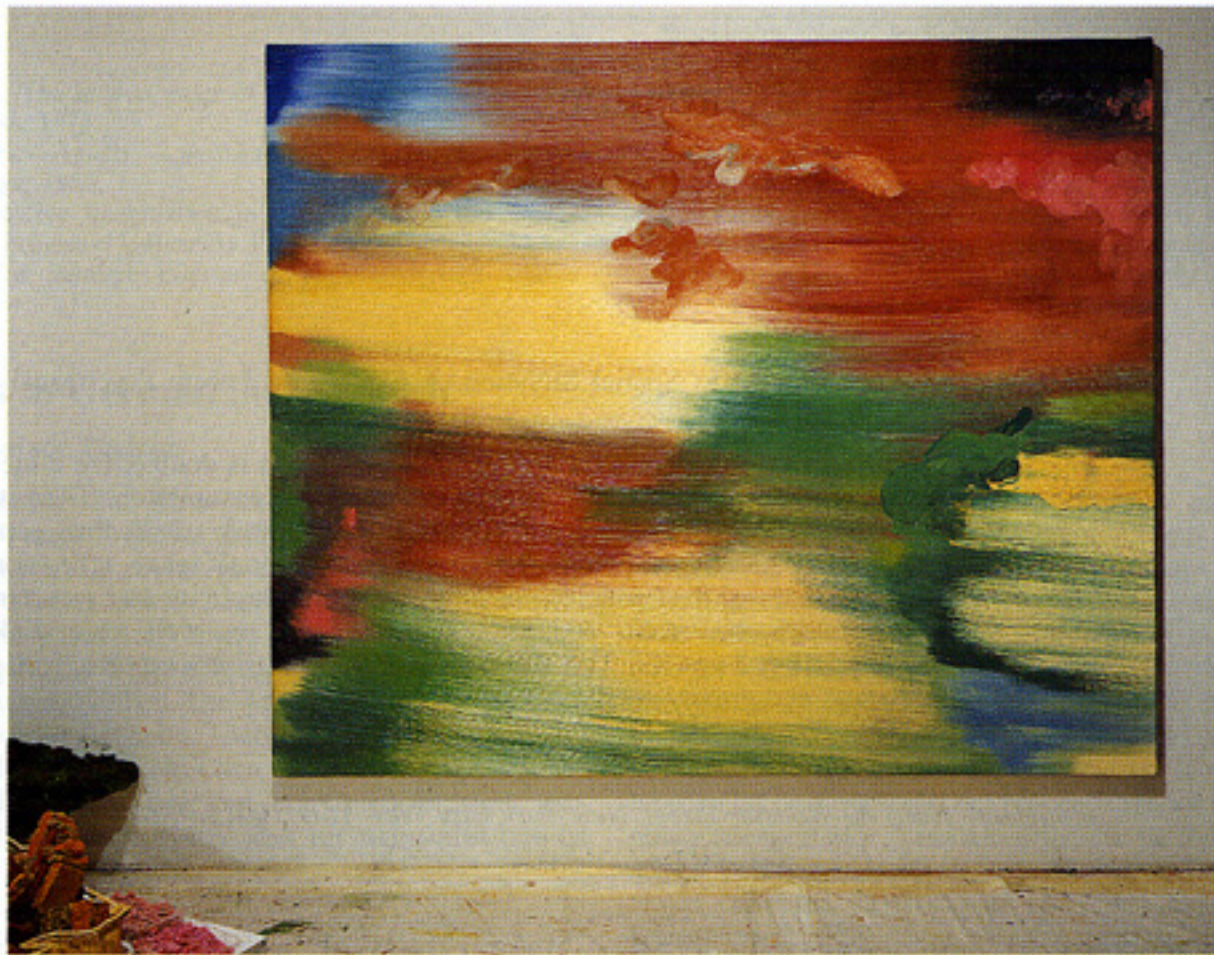


Fig. 1. Madeleine Hatz. *Untitled Painting III*.



Fig. 2. Madeleine Hatz. *Palette for Untitled Paintings: "High Calorie", "Fluff", "Sidewalk History", "Rubble"*.

ing / tasting / building / demolishing. The sifting and sorting of things make up another sort of logic, a paradoxical system of incongruities, a disjointed synthesis. Deleuze talks about the work of art as a desiring-machine, whose "breaking down is part and parcel of (its) very functioning" (1).

The set up in the studio is mirrored as the work is presented in the exhibition situation. The paintings exhibited with their "palettes" recall the studio, the wetness of the paint, the fluidity of amorphous continuous matter and color in unspecified quantities. Exhibition catalogs often designate specific "studio views", where the art is showed in its work situation. But maybe the exhibition itself is a "studio view" of sorts. As Merleau-Ponty writes: "Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the *means* whereby the positing of things becomes possible" (2) (my italics). A spatial situation is offered/entered. The invitation is extended to enter the work process itself.

The colors and textures of the palette are fragments of recurring leitmotifs, stories in themselves within stories. All this stuff, which could come from anywhere, news bulletins as well as dreams, and which keeps creeping up and seeping into one's mind. Each color nuance is like a line to be clicked, a memory containing other memories, like "countless alveoli"¹

As spectators we can uncork the privileged space of the red color in a painting. There is a possibility for inhabiting, dwelling in the red, in Bachelardian sense. But what happens when the same red color shows up in parts of the rubble-palette which happens to be lined up in perspective with the painting, from the particular viewpoint taken by the spectator? (The palette is made up of parts which are permutable. They can change place, move, be positioned in various ways in relation to the paintings. As a consequence we have a situation of multiple and mobile viewpoints.) And now what happens when the same red

color of another spectator's hat comes into view? Does it become part of the "palette"? If any object entering the space can acquire the special status or position, a sort of democracy installs itself. The sculpture falls off its pedestal and the painting becomes more of another element in the architectural space as its privilege is diminished. Something happened to the bottled up privileged space. There is a breach in the frame, a leak. The color leaks out, only to be woven back in again! Because on the one hand the continuous and fragmentary palettes recall and unravel the painting process, causing it to loosen its congealed shape and become fluid again. And on the other hand the painting itself with this discipline's history of privilege serves as a reminder that this amorphous stuff is ultimately also a picture.

Unlike the lines that fill up this paper in a sequential manner the unraveling process which is also a weaving is taking place in simultaneous 'space'. The simplest way to formulate this is a perpendicular relativity, an orthogonal weaving. Diametrical oppositions become oscillations in a dialectical play.

'What' we perceive in the work of art, as we dwell in its space, is not subject to gravity, leakage and breakage. But what happens when these very conditions are part and parcel of the work?

The space of the work process is like oneiric space in that it has moving viewpoints and oscillations of scale. Here we are always traveling perilously at various speeds in a slippery mess. Notions of gravity and weightlessness mingle. "Bricks are flying".

References

1. Deleuze G, Guattari F. *Anti-Oedipus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
2. Merleau-Ponty M. *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Humanities Press, 1962.
3. Bachelard G. *Poetics of space*. New York: Orion, 1964.

¹ "In it's countless alveoli space contains compressed time". Bachelard G. *Poetics of Space* (3).