



## Paintworks

Jonas Georg Christensen and Peter Olsen



*The Danish word bemalinger can be translated as paintworks. The term bemale indicates and notes the act of painting onto something; either partly or wholly.*

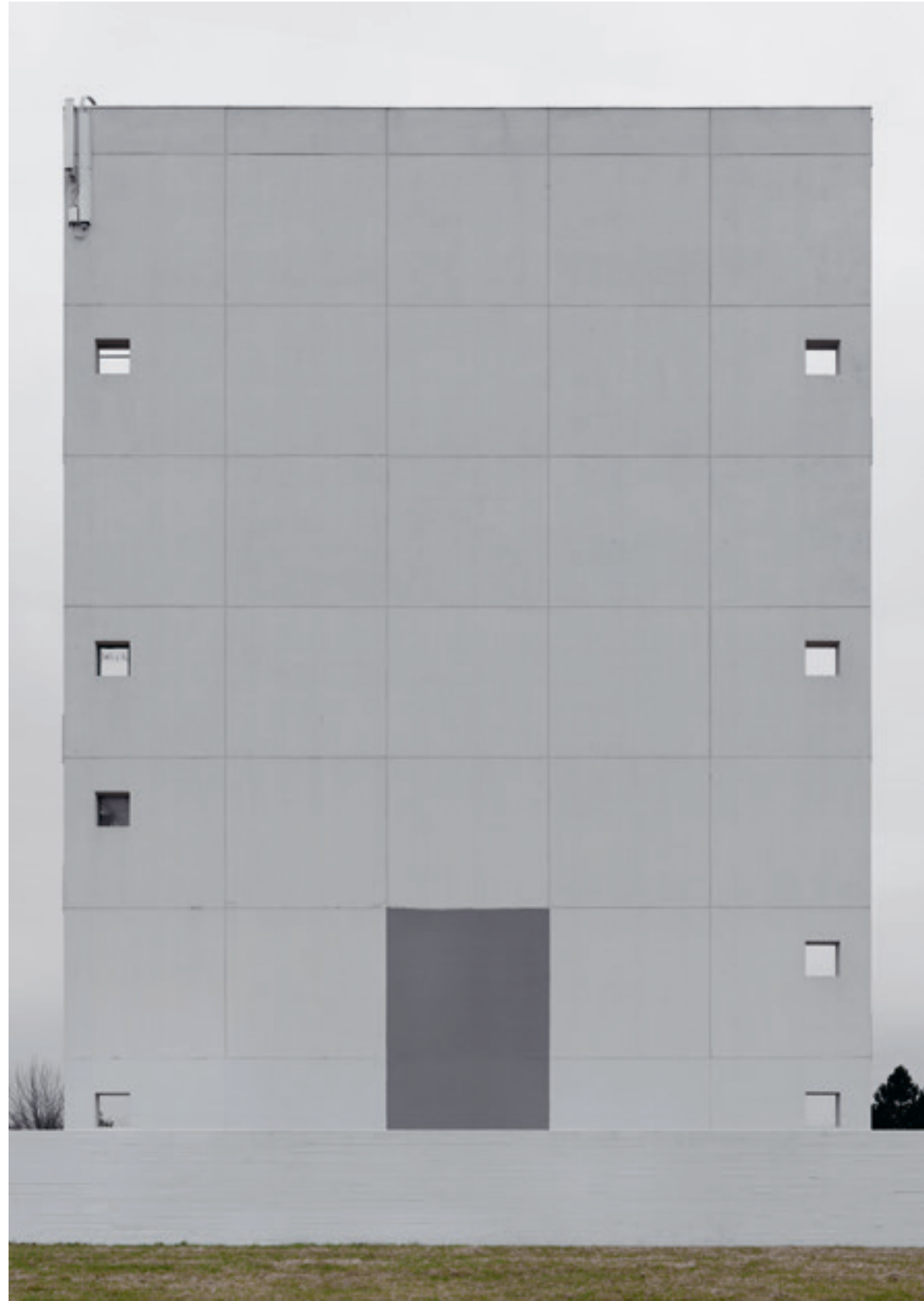
*In this book, a series of separate works made between 2010 and 2018 have been brought together with related material to create a new work: Paintworks*

*Bemalinger (2010-18)*

- Grå på hvid (affotograferet 30. marts)*
- Grå på grå (affotograferet 22. januar)*
- Grå på rød (affotograferet 22. januar)*
- Grå på gul (affotograferet 25. april)*
- Hvid på grå (affotograferet 24. februar)*
- Sort på grå (affotograferet 12. maj)*
- Hvid på grå (affotograferet 12. februar)*
- Grå på rød, (affotograferet 18. marts)*
- Grå på sort (affotograferet 6. februar)*
- Grå på gul (affotograferet 25. juni)*
- Grå på grå (affotograferet 1. marts)*

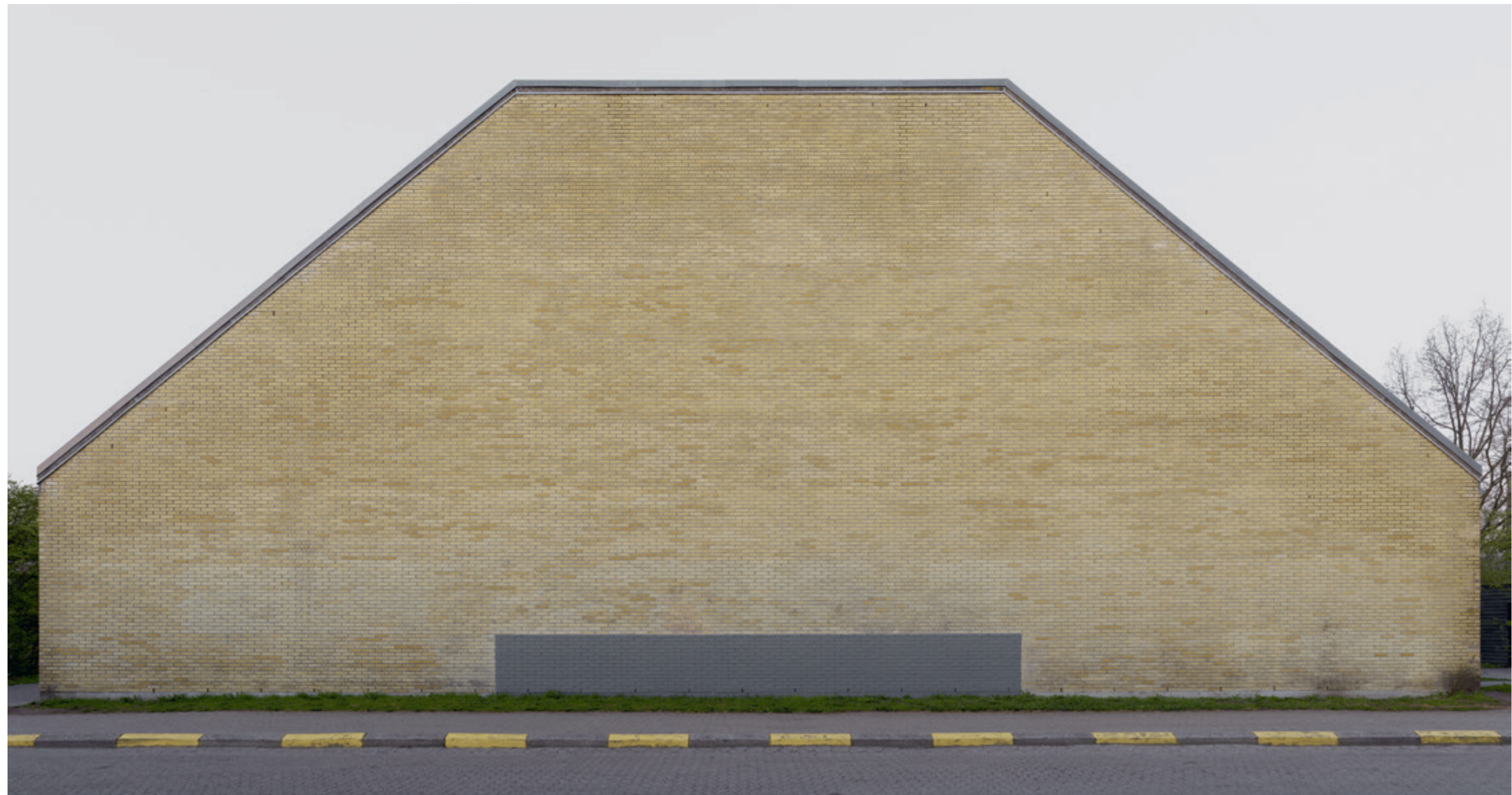
*Paintworks (2010-18)*

*Grey on White (photographed on 30<sup>th</sup> March)*  
*Grey on Grey (photographed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January)*  
*Grey on Red (photographed on 22<sup>nd</sup> January)*  
*Grey on Yellow (photographed on 25<sup>th</sup> April)*  
*White on Grey (photographed on 24<sup>th</sup> February)*  
*Black on Grey (photographed on 12<sup>th</sup> May)*  
*White on Grey (photographed on 12<sup>th</sup> February)*  
*Grey on Red (photographed on 18<sup>th</sup> March)*  
*Grey on Black (photographed on 6<sup>th</sup> February)*  
*Grey on Yellow (photographed on 25<sup>th</sup> June)*  
*Grey on Grey (photographed on 1<sup>st</sup> March)*

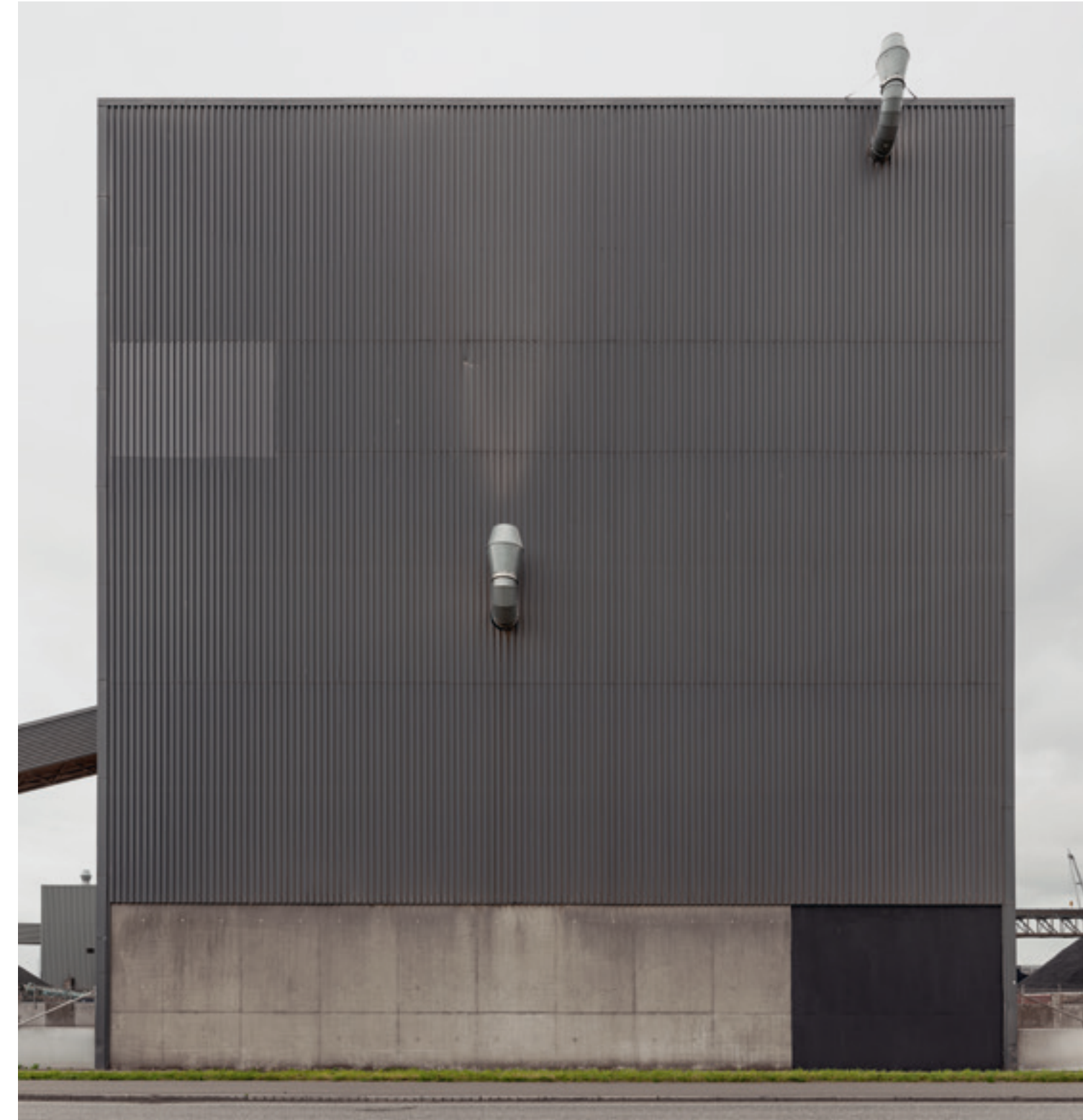






















*I like the druggy downtown kids who spray paint walls and trains*

*I like their lack of training, their primitive technique*

*Trouble With Classicists*, John Cale

John Cale let Andy Warhol express his fascination with street art and graffiti on the tribute album *Songs for Drella*. It is easy to understand why the graffiti writer's colour explosions on New York subway trains enthused Warhol, or why he would be enamored in Haring's lean comic ornaments or Basquiat's cryptic epigrams. However, today, it is more challenging to maintain enthusiasm for street art. The underground status is long gone, although street artists are still frequently invited to add an 'edge' to cultural events and commercial activities. What respectable extreme sports event, progressive urban festival or save-the-future conference would be without a street art exhibition? A standardisation of expression, perhaps already latent from the outset in graffiti's many sub-styles, has followed this transition into the mainstream. Clichéd motifs, illusionistic effects and cheap painterly tricks seem to characterise a lot of street art and graffiti. Maybe these characteristics are accentuated by the need for a certain boldness in order to be noticed in busy urban contexts? The necessity of painting monumental works, fast, in dimly lit conditions on less than ideal surfaces could also influence the choice of techniques and expressions. In any case, this might all lead the unassuming public to grow immune to the political statement, the splash of colour, the visual pun that is forced upon us as we hurry through the city to whatever we are doing.

Peter Olsen and Jonas Georg Christensen should not be held responsible for this somewhat prejudiced view on street art and graffiti. But, their

*Paintworks* can be seen as a critical exploration of inherent norms of street art practices, not least how these practices enter into urban processes and power relations. From a superficial view, the work adheres to the conventions of graffiti and street art practice. The unsolicited painting of large building walls forms its starting point. The building walls face public or semi-public spaces in what appears to be urban fringe zones. The work is anonymous and carried out in a grey zone of legality where the artists are unaware whether the property owner will respond with indifference to the work or act to re-cover the painted surfaces immediately.

Despite the similarity with street art as a practice, we see none of the too well-known motifs or styles of street art's many sub-genres. None of the graffiti artist's showy demonstration of spray can techniques or ability to paint on the most prominent or unreachable walls. There are no apparent traces of political resentment, criticisms of authorities, or calls to action. The works of Olsen and Christensen take a more subtle, relational approach. Although they are carefully conceived and the result of deliberate artistic choices, the works comprising *Paintworks* aim to – almost – blend into their urban context, rather than stand out. The paintworks often changes the context significantly, but it might be difficult for the passer-by to discover and understand them as deliberate painterly acts – and even less as part of artistic explorations. The prosaic title *Paintworks* hints at this. It refers to the laborious act of applying paint, rather than more high-brow notions of artworks. The works operate in the entropy of left-over urban areas where graffiti, banal vandalism, disrepair, casual mendings and general decay overlap and blend together making it difficult to discern between conscious acts, neglect and haphazard incidents. *Paintworks* adopts and adapts processes and visual appearances from this context. The approach abandons the individual creative expression for a camouflaged practice that is intricately woven into the processes shaping the fringes of urban spaces.

The act of buffing plays a significant role in the painterly explorations of Olsen and Christensen. 'To buff' refers to the act of removing painted graffiti with chemicals and other instruments, or by painting it over with a flat colour. The intention of buffing is two-fold. It eliminates the graffiti as fast as possible to discourage graffiti artists. But the restoring of a 'neutral' surface also demonstrates authority and power to determine the visual appearance of buildings and urban spaces. This restoration is, however, often only partly successful: washing down might leave smeared colour stains, or the uniform, often greyish, colours of a painted buff stand out from the background. Even if the buff attempts to approximate the original wall colour, it is often distinctly different, leaving a sense of decay.

The last chapter of this book demonstrates Olsen's and Christensen's fascination with buffs. Here they document several buffings photographically. The buffs are found in different urban contexts and

painted on a range of building types. The format of the photographs varies, suggesting that different cameras have been used to take them over an extended period. In the book, this diverse material is organised graphically in a simple two by four grid without any apparent attempts of ordering the content thematically. This layout leaves the viewer free to navigate through the images. A closer study reveals common traits and differences between the photographs. Most apparent is the different practices of shaping and colouring the buffs. There are minimalistic approaches that follow the outer contour of the graffiti, only barely covering it. Other buffs take a more ordered approach, where regular, often rectangular shapes overlay the graffiti leaving no trace of the previous work. In some cases, the shapes are extended to engage with the building; the buff can be cut off by a corner, stop at a plinth or incorporate a window.

Different buffing practices have different connotations. The minimal buffs relate directly to the now absent graffiti pointing to topics such as destruction, erasure, memory and the passing of time. The regular buffs refer less directly to the overpainted graffiti. Instead, they enter into contextual relations with the buildings and wall and hints at compositional questions of scale, positioning and rhythm. The execution and colouring of the buff further add to these connotations. The implementation of the buff can be carried out with professional competence or – more often – with a casual carelessness that leaves irregular shapes, visible brushstrokes and running paint trails. The colours of the buffs span from 'neutral' white and greys to colours that more or less successfully approaches that of the original wall. This use of colour can connote a dilapidating environment, or ongoing construction work where a wall might have been primed for a final layer of paint, or colour samples have been applied as a test for a future repainting.

The documented buffing practices forms a reference for the painterly explorations of Olsen and Christensen, but the paintworks are not buffs. They incorporate buffing practices without any aim of restoring a previous status quo. Unlike the graffiti fighting representatives of building owners, concerns for property values, vandalisation or decay do not motivate them. There is not even any graffiti covered up beneath the paint.

Buffing deals with ownership and rights to urban space. It taps into the complex dynamics of interests and actions of the groups and individuals of the city. The appropriation of buffing as a street art practice sets it free from the authoritarian power that it usually expresses. This enables it to engage in the urban context in new ways. The most poignant example of this shift is a paintwork spanning a row of garage doors, placed in *Untitled (paintworks)*. The property owner buffs an initial painterly gesture by Olsen and Christensen. Like a game of Cat and Mouse, artists and buffer takes turns at painting and buffing the garage doors. The buffer gives up and abandons the 'game' en route, but the artists continue until

the work fills the surface with an inseparably interwoven composition of painted and washed down shapes. Although the resulting work resembles a late-modern mural, the artistic exploration of authorship and ownership of the urban space is at least as important. The work may not have succeeded entirely in making the property owner an involuntary co-artist. It does, however, still show the traces of a process where painterly additions and erasures leave the viewer to wonder what intentions, practices and procedures led to this expression.

*Paintworks* actively engages the distinct visual appearance of buffing and its associated ambiguous connotations. The appeal of the buff probably relates to its lack of creative or expressive intentions. It is the result of a pragmatically applied procedure that results in an ‘innocent’ visual presence that operates outside of established aesthetic norms and conscious visual regimes. This innocence makes the buff attractive for an artistic appropriation. The garage door paintwork shows that Olsen and Christensen appropriate, and alter, the procedures as well as the visual appearance of buffing. *Paintworks* demonstrate a developed compositional awareness in comparison with the documented buffs. The placement, shape, and colours of the painted areas are deliberate. The figurative formations are concise. *Paintworks* traverses the walls in contrapuntal relationships with windows and doors. They form playful and perhaps even slightly humorous relations with building envelopes and elements.

The paint is applied with a confidence that leaves brush strokes and paint-roller tracks with casual authority. The application employs thinly covering paint and running paint trails as conscious gestural artistic acts. *Paintworks* even seek to alter the implied connotations of the buff’s normative colour schemes conceptually. Each of the paintworks incorporates a customised grey colour value adapted to respond to the specific context of the work. The variations of grey tones challenge the notion of grey as an unbiased colour that neutralises and reinstates order to space. The emancipated greys raise a subtle implicit criticism of the authoritarian chromatology of uniformity.

All *Paintworks* operate in marginal urban spaces. Spaces that are too socially and economically unimportant to be subordinated a public hegemony of norms and regulations. This marginalisation unleashes a particular urban dynamic as different users struggle to manifest their interests visually in space. *Paintworks* enters these power struggles with responses that adapt to their specific urban context. Some are painted in the leftover pockets of the historic city. They seek out the last remaining storage sheds, the courtyards that have escaped urban renewal, the blank walls and blind corners, and occasionally a building entrance. Most of these paintworks are of limited size. They engage with the context in different ways. Some could, almost, be geometric buffs, but the minimal conscious configurations of shapes, the particular way they attach to

a plinth or another building element, or the way they paraphrase the contours of close-by objects delicately points to their autonomous artistic nature. A few, broad lines define other *Paintworks*. The width of the line probably corresponds to a paintbrush or roller and leaves the paintwork as a simple drawing carried out over the building in response to geometries, proportions or building elements. A group of the paintworks have a very different character and appear as painterly gestures reflecting the bodily range and mobility of the painter without any apparent intentions of engaging with the geometry of the wall. These seemingly spontaneous *Paintworks* have little or nothing in common with buffing. They might leave a viewer to reflect whether they are hastily applied tags, acts of vandalism or the outcome of a leftover bucket of paint on a drunken night. The different paintwork practices add layers to the urban assemblages of building typologies and programmes in various stages of decay or transformation.

The *Paintworks (2010-18)* series that introduce the book are situated in suburban spaces. Spaces characterised by large, isolated buildings spread out in ample, undifferentiated landscapes. The paintings of this series are large. Their simple, graphically bold shapes correspond well with the uniform surfaces and simple geometric structures of the late-modern industrial and public buildings they are painted on. The painted shapes are centred, placed symmetrically or dispersed rhythmically, tightly integrated into the facades. They could have been part of the architectural design or integrated murals. (It is perhaps not a coincidence that the series includes buildings designed by the architects Friis & Moltke who frequently collaborated with artists Emil Gregersen, Kasper Heiberg and Ole Schwalbe). A passer-by might be left wondering whether this is a public artwork commissioned by the property owner. The scale of the work and the careful integration into the facade could confirm such an understanding, but the casual execution of the painting might leave doubt about whether building repairs have been going on, or perhaps an unusually large piece of graffiti has been thoroughly buffed. A new relationship is formed by adapting the paintwork to the scale and aesthetics of the building. The paintwork interacts with the building, which it offers a new interpretation perhaps even an improvement where authorship and authority enters into yet another relation.

The introductory *Paintworks (2010-18)* series stands out with authority. The series is sharply focused. The urban contexts and buildings share common traits and appear to be meticulously selected. *Paintworks (2010-18)* explore a precisely defined theme through large scale murals. The graphic presentation supports this authority. The prominent placement as an introduction to the oeuvre is backed by physically large photographs of the paintworks placed on fold-out pages that give ample opportunity to study the fine details.

The photographs differ from the other photo series through their formal treatment as well. Buildings and paintworks are photographed frontally.

Each photo is stitched together of up to two hundred laboriously captured photos. The stitching creates a highly detailed, almost hyper-real image. Digital editing corrects perspective and geometry while colours and lighting are retouched as little as possible to preserve a documentary, restrained soberness. The final photos are closely cropped around the painted building's outer contours. The absence of context eliminates the perception of spatial depth. The geometrically corrected facade makes it difficult to grasp the photographer's viewpoint despite the centralised motif. This provides the photos with a flatness where buildings, paintworks, and the few remaining elements such as lamp posts, vegetation, and coloured kerbstones interact graphically.

The stitching and editing of the photos support large prints that provide a realistic impression of the character and scale of the painterly intervention. But it also gives the photo autonomy as an artistic object that holds a value in itself beyond the scene it represents. It serves as a reminder that a photograph is never a transparent unbiased representation. It makes it explicit that the *Paintworks* (2010-18) series is not only based on a painterly practice but also a photographic one. This practice includes all the photographs in the work. Without them, we might not have noticed the works in their urban context, and we certainly would not have been able to understand how *Paintworks* forms a field of artistic explorations.

The photographic techniques adapt to convey the character of different paintworks. There is a significant difference between the carefully edited photographs of the initial series and the snapshot aesthetic of the found buffs. In the latter, the casual snaps and the accumulation of photos from many different contexts emphasise the omnipresence of buffings. The open matrix of photos lets the viewer reflect on relations and differences and form connections and discover patterns.

The widespread photos in *Untitled (paintworks)* employs yet another technique. The photos are stitched together like the initial series, but the elongated format does not leave the viewer with a centralised motif. Instead, the viewer is encouraged to scan the photo like a musical score that gradually reveals the balanced distribution and thematic variations of the paintworks.

It might be tempting to see a linear development through *Paintworks*. The documented buffs that conclude the book forms a starting point linking the artistic work to an established urban practice. From there, the work moves through a range of painterly investigations that culminate with the conceptually and formally resolved series that opens the book. But it is probably more productive to perceive *Paintworks* as a field of investigations. Each investigation develops a particular painterly practice to engage in an urban context and a specific photographic practice to capture the painterly engagement in a proper way.

Site-specific urban dynamics and their manifestly visible traits occupy the artistic practices of Olsen and Christensen simultaneously. The paintworks are guerilla actions that undermine pre-established authorities of urban spaces. The appropriation of buffing practices works like aikido moves that turn the momentum of the 'opponent' to work against him. The graffiti fighter becomes an involuntary co-artist, the 'institutional' greys are emancipated, the artist becomes a buffer who turns buffs into architecturally integrated artworks. Olsen and Christensen bring the hidden roles and relations that shape urban fringe spaces to a conceptual breaking point where practices and visual expressions take on new meaning. The work engages the paradoxical and ambiguous with a quiet humour to direct a subtle criticism at municipal regulations and land ownership.

The visual appearance of the paintworks is, however, more than a vehicle for a critical exploration of urban power relations. Olsen and Christensen take their painterly practice to the urban context to engage with new spaces, different scale relations, larger dimensions, irregular surfaces, and unknown actors. The encounter delimits and opens up new paths for painterly experiments as they explore different ways of engaging and appropriating urban spaces. *Paintworks* are not only paintings but place-makers. They are contextual, not only with the spaces they become part of and the buildings they are painted on but also with the painterly expressions that already exists in the urban fringe areas. They keep a close visual kinship, particularly with authentic buffings but to some extent with graffiti and tagging as well. They strike a balance between blending in and standing out. This balance is so delicate that most of us probably need to experience the paintworks as a body of work at an exhibition or in this book to notice how they stand out from other urban paintworks. The collected body of work allows us to discover the casual precision and careful consideration about means embedded in each paintwork. From this discovery, patterns and connections emerge. They enable us to understand them as a field of artistic exploration. Indirectly, they invite us to reflect on the nature of the buff and other anonymous urban paintworks we encounter in our everyday spaces. There is a generosity in the invitation by Olsen and Christensen to engage with these spaces. It has required a substantial investment of time, effort, manual labour and even some legal risks to develop *Paintworks* as an artistic practice without even knowing if anybody will appreciate, let alone recognise, the works as artworks. Now they are there for us to find and explore – or overlook if we are not paying attention.

*Untitled (paintworks)*

















## I.

Der finder noget meget grundlæggende sted, hver gang vi standser op i vores bevægelse på vej et sted hen eller på anden vis afbryder vores optagethed af daglige gøremål. Bevægelsen og optagetheden af gøremål er rettet mod et mål, men når vi standser op og afbryder vores bestræbelse på at realisere målet, om så blot midlertidigt, indtræffer der noget andet end det målrettede. Ganske vist kan en bevægelse være uden mål og med, ligesom en optagethed kan være skødesløs eller forgæves i sin gestus og dermed øjensynlig formålsløs. Tilsvarende kan en bevægelse uden noget klart mål være et mål i sig selv, sådan som det er tilfældet, når vi spadserer, slentrer eller på anden vis begiver os af sted på lyst-vandring. Men når der finder en standsning af den målrettede bevægelse sted, flytter målet sig fra det fjerne til det nære: da bliver *stedet* et mål i sig selv. For trækfugle er efterårets mål at vende tilbage til varmere himmelstrøg, men dér hvor de under deres træk gør holdt, opstår der et sted med sin egen bestemmelse; stedet bliver da til som et hvilested, et sted at finde føde, et sted for flokkens skræppende palaver og pleje af fællesskabet. Når vi mennesker gør ophold på vores vej, finder der endvidere det sted på stedet, hvor vi gør ophold, at vi hvælver et *rum* omkring os, måske i form af et ly, en midlertidig bolig, eller måske i form af praktiske aktiviteter, mere udfoldede bestræbelser på at bebo det sted, hvor vi nu befinder os. Samtidig sker der det, at vi taler med hinanden om den videre færd, fremtidige mål eller om det nye opholdssted, som i og med talen nu først omgiver os og får status af rum.

## II.

Lige nu er et menneske standset op ved en tekst i en bog, der er slået op på netop denne side og *her* gør opmærksom på sig selv gennem sine sproglige gestus, under henvisning til sit sted, det rum hvorudfra den taler til det læsende menneske. Vi kan finde en sådan situation gennemskrevet i et digt af Wallace Stevens, hvor læseren i de to første strofer møder ordene: “The house was quiet and the world was calm./ The reader became the book; and summer night// Was like the

conscious being of the book./ The house was quiet and the world was calm.” Digtet, der har titel efter første linje, udfolder gradvist sit univers: på et materielt plan et hus, en verden, læser, bog, bogside, sommernat, ord, ro og stilhed, på et åndeligt plan en bevidsthed, sandhed, tanke, perfektion, betydning samt et fravær af mening. Dette poetiske univers udfoldes gennem et sprog, der kun kan falde tilbage på sig selv, indtil det læsende menneske ikke længere kan henvise til et sted eller en verden uden for dette sprog. Idet digtet direkte benævner sin læser, “the reader leaned above the page”, bliver denne selv en simpel effekt af digtet. Læserens verden reduceres til de ord, der læses, og digtets fremlæste verden læser samtidig sin læser, så at “læseren *bliver* bogen” og derved hensættes til en særegen indre verden: “The truth in a calm world,/ In which there is no other meaning, itself// Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself/ Is the reader leaning late and reading there.” På den måde synes digtet at virkeliggøre den poetiske forestilling, som en ældre digter, Stéphane Mallarmé, har udtrykt med ordene: “Alt, i verden, eksisterer for at munde ud i en bog”. Sådanne tekster, der alene synes at tale om sig selv, kalder man med vage tekniske termer til tider for ‘metatekstuelle’ eller ‘selvreferentielle’. Men er der her blot tale om tekster, der er standset op ved sig selv som sit eget mål, og som hyllet i et monadisk rum lader verden fare forbi, overlader tingene til sig selv, unddrager sig mere presserende sager for ikke at tale om andet end sin egen tale?

### III.

De bemalinger på vægge og mure i det offentlige byrum, der sammen med foto-dokumentationen af deres processuelle tilblivelse udgør Peter Olsens og Jonas Georg Christensens værk, *Paintworks*, forekommer at tale *for* sig selv *om* sig selv gennem en flerhed af stemmer. Værket består af anonyme, spredte udtryk eller udsigelsener uden *tag* eller *scribble*, graffiti-kunstens traditionelle stiliserede signatur. Bemalingerne er nonfigurative og fremsætter intet udsagn, de betegner intet, og de rummer ingen symbolik. I flere henseender kan de på én gang betragtes som en bearbejdning og fortsættelse af en *readymade* æstetik og af byrummets almindelige graffiti-kunst. De fremstår heller ikke som dekorativ udsmykning eller destruktivt hærværk, de hverken forskønner eller skæmmer de fordringsløse bygninger, på hvis baggrund de fremtræder. Og for den hastigt forbipasserende kunne bemalingerne måske synes opstået som ud af intet, fra den ene dag til den anden, vilkårligt, formålsløst, gedulgt, en næppe ænset handling udført med en skjult, natlig gestus.

### IV.

Den franske filosof Maurice Merleau-Ponty henviser i essayet *Det indirekte sprog og tavsbedens stemmer* til en bemærkning af forfatteren André Malraux om, “at maleri og sprog kun kan sammenlignes, når man har befriet dem for det, de “forestiller”, for at forene dem under det skabende udtryks

kategori. På denne betingelse anerkender de hinanden som to udslag af samme bestræbelse.” Ud fra et sådant forestillingstomt perspektiv, der fremhæver kunstens abstrakte kvaliteter, vil arkitektoniske, skulpturelle og malerkunstneriske udtryk, hvis materialitet hovedsageligt er bearbejdet på billedlige og rumlige præmisser, altså ikke være mindre sproglige end sproglige udtryk fremstillet på skriften og talens præmisser. Og ud fra denne opfattelse skulle vi også kunne betragte Olsens og Christensens *Paintworks* som et sprog, der manifesterer sig i et mellemområde af sproglige og visuelle tegn, og som i manglen på noget forestillet fremtræder som et “skabende udtryk”, en tale, der primært er optaget af sin egen udtrykspraksis.

### V.

Stillet over for en sådan udtrykspraksis kommer beskueren gerne til kort, fordi den afviser de traditionelle forståelser, der forsøges investeret i mødet med den. Konsekvensen bliver, at bemalingerne kommer til at fremstå med en slags fremmedhed, der fremtvinger andre egenskaber ved deres udtryk end ved en ordinær udtrykspraksis. Som artikulationer i byrummet ville vi måske forvente, at de fremsætter en form for udsagn om det rum og det sted, hvor de kommer til udtryk, men ligesom det er karakteristisk for litterære udtryksformer optaget af deres egen udtrykspraksis, kan også disse billedkunstneriske udtryk opfattes som orienteret mod den *tid*, der udgør betingelsen for deres tilblivelse.

### VI.

Ifølge en sådan opfattelse fremtræder det kunstneriske udtryks sprog i en vis forstand ikke længere på baggrund af en forud eksisterende verden, men det skaber sin egen verden ved at manipulere den velkendte og fremvise den på ny som noget uerkendt. Det kunstneriske sprog fremtræder da på baggrund af forvanskede sproglige udtryk ligesom på et pergaments palimpsest (gr. *palim*, igen og *psestos*, skrabet), hvor den nye tekst skrives hen over en bortkradset tekst, som imidlertid stadig lader sig ane og tyde bag den nye. Forstået som en tale bruger det sproglige udtryk her sprogets brugthed, som en *readymade*, en bemaling på den allerede bemalede eller på anden vis færdigbehandlede flade, en graffiti på den herskende ordens æteriske flade. Denne tale er på én gang additiv og subtraktiv, den vrider betydninger ud af eksisterende betydninger, som den med samme gestus fjerner. Det er det, der finder sted, når den unge Robert Rauschenberg i sit værk fra 1958, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, bortkradser en tegning tøvende stillet til rådighed af den ældre, allerede anerkendte kunster Willem de Kooning: den eksisterende kunstneriske betydning tømt for mening, dens værdi opbrugt og genbrugt, og nu alene båret af den gestiske betydningshandling. Med en sådan udsigelse taler digteren, og med samme udsigelse taler billedkunstneren, i hvert deres sprog.

Men hvordan læse tiden i kunstneriske udtryk, hvis udtrykspraksis ikke direkte forpligter sig på udsagn om tiden, men fremstår som fuldstændig befriet for noget forestillet? Dette er én af de væsentligste udfordringer, som Olsens og Christensens *Paintworks* stiller vores forestillingsevne, og som yderlig besværes af, at vores forestillinger naturligt synes at prioritere rummet over tiden. For at forstå og tale om tiden er vi tilbøjelige til at standse den og udfolde den i rumlige anskuelser som tidsrum, tidslinje, tidspunkt osv. Når billedkunsten så ovenikøbet typisk bliver opfattet som et rumligt udtryk, forøges vanskelighederne. Problemet er, at *Paintworks* ikke taler *om* tiden, men ved sin udsigelse manifesterer tiden som præmis, dvs. at kunstværket gør tiden tangibel *gennem* sin tale. Herved forener værket sin materialebevidsthed med en moderne kunstnerisk og filosofisk tradition, hvis fortolkninger af tiden vi med fordel kan skitsere som en baggrund for udlægningen af tiden i dette værk.

Set fra tidens perspektiv kan et rum aldrig forblive det samme; det vil altid fremstå på bestandig nye måder, som kalejdoskopiske billeder der intet afbilleder, men endeløst muterende frembringer stadig nye forestillinger. Tiden vil altid allerede have forandret rummet, *temporaliseret* det, uafhængigt af dem der måtte bebo det, og uden indgriben fra andet end selve tidens varighed. Rummet er underlagt tiden, og som alt andet kan det derfor aldrig besidde en selvidentitet: forestillingen om  $X=X$ , at et rum lader sig identificere, fordi det først og sidst *er* (lig med) sig selv, beror på en illusion fremkaldt af *copula*, verbet 'at være', der forud-sætter en væren i verden, forud for at en sprogbrug vil have foretaget denne *sætten*. Og selv om rummet fremkommer ved at *spatialisere* den tid, hvormed det bliver til, og hvormed det samtidig bliver forandret, indtil det ikke længere ligner sig selv, vil bestræbelser på at give tiden et mere blivende provisorium ud over det enkelte, flygtige nu være dømt til at mislykkes. Hvis rummet kunne være identisk med sig selv, ville det netop være, fordi det kunne fastholde tiden i et punkt, et lokalt sted i rummet, som under evighedens synsvinkel. Men er det ikke netop dette, som kunsten altid, omend forgæves, har tilstræbt: at ophæve den tid hvortil dens frembringelser er uløseligt knyttet, og som således udgør betingelsen for dens gestus i rummet? "Hold paa dit Nu, min Siæl! Forsøg at smage/ Det Øyeblik, som er!/ O, bind det Flygtige, hold det tilbage/ Med stærke Følelser", som Johannes Ewald siger i *Haab og Erindring*. Eller det brændende begær efter at fastholde det allermest flygtige, når Goethes Faust henvendt til øjeblikket siger: "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" Eller Shakespeare, der i *Sonnet 18* holder skønheden fast med talens rumlige figurer: "But thy eternal summer shall not fade,/ Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;/ Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade/ When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:/ So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

Tiden vil altid komme *først*, før rummet, hvilket ligger i selve dens væsen. Dette vilkår gør det vanskeligt for hvilken som helst udtrykspraksis, der søger at rette sig mod den tid, der udgør betingelsen for dens tilblivelse. En tale er naturligvis underlagt både tidslige og rumlige vilkår, men talens tidslige vilkår gør, at tid griber forandrende ind i det rum, hvori talen udfolder sig. Rummet er altså ikke noget blot *givet*, noget uforanderligt, hvori talens udtryk finder sted, men talen skaber altså i en vis forstand det rum, hvori den udbreder sig. Så selv om tiden kommer først, skaber talen om tid et rum, hvori den kan anskueliggøre vores forestillinger om tiden. Talen om tiden fremstiller således et anskuelisesrum for vores forståelse af tiden. Det er det, der finder sted i filosofien Kants erkendelsesteoretiske redegørelse for tiden og rummet

som betingelse for alle vores erfaringer, hvor han på den ene side siger, at den tidslige anskuelsesform kommer først, men for at sige dette, må han på den anden side først fremstille den rumlige anskuelsesform. I afsnittet “Den transcendentale æstetik” i *Kritik af den rene fornøft* gør han gældende, at tid er en indre sans, en *a priori* givet anskuelsesform, der går forud for rummets tilsvarende ydre form: “Tiden er den formelle *a priori* betingelse for alle fremtrædelser overhovedet. Rummet, som den rene form for al ydre anskuelse, er som *a priori* betingelse begrænset alene til ydre fremtrædelser.” Alle vores forestillinger, uanset om det anskuede er noget ydre i rummet, gennemløber først sindets indre tilstand, hvilket overhovedet er sansningen og erkendelsens betingelse, og da denne er tidslig, “er tiden altså en *a priori* betingelse for alle fremtrædelser overhovedet”. Men denne bestemmelse af tidens anskuelsesform beskriver han først, *efter* at han har beskrevet den rumlige anskuelsesform. Konsekvensen er imidlertid, at tid er et uomgængeligt vilkår for alt, hvad der måtte finde sted i vores sind, og derfor også et vilkår, som ydre fremtrædelser i rummet nødvendigvis må være underlagt. Selv for den rumlige kunstner *par excellence*, billedhuggeren, der jo er henvist til at fremstille et legemes bevægelse som en ubevægelig gestus i rummet, sætter tiden en betingelse for såvel opfattelsen som fremstillingen af virkelighed: “i virkeligheden standser tiden aldrig”, som Auguste Rodin siger det i *Om kunst. Samtaler med Paul Gsell*.

## X.

Så hvordan tale om tid og rum uden samtidig at påtænke talens tid og rum? Ret beset ville det for eksempel være mere korrekt at sige, at tiden *kommer*, end at den *går*, for når tiden kommer, er den i færd med at udfolde sig forud for vores tilstedeværelse, der må afvente dens komme, mens den omvendt forlader os, når den går, som om vi allerede var til stede, *nu*, *her*, som et ubevægeligt første. Den er da også noget af det vanskeligste at tale om, hvorfor Augustin som bekendt siger: “Hvad er så tid? Hvis ingen spørger mig om det, ved jeg det. Hvis jeg skal forklare det for en, der spørger, ved jeg det ikke.” Et af problemerne med at tale om tiden drejer sig om vores ontologiske hang til at henvise til den med rumlige figurer og anskueliggøre den med rumlige analogier, som når den før-sokratiske filosof Heraklit vil anskueliggøre tidens forrang, at alting er underlagt en stadig tilblivelse, med billedet: “Du kan ikke gå ned i den samme flod to gange.” Det synes altså, som om vi *først*, i opstand mod det temporalt første, må lade talen fremstille et rum for at kunne anskueliggøre tidens kvalitative varighed for forestillingsevnen ved at give den en kvantitativ stofflighed knyttet til ting i rummet. Men hvis det er korrekt, at tiden kommer først, bliver det også et af vores afgørende problemer at finde en indstilling til tiden, der er skabende på samme vilkår, som tidens kvalitative varighed muliggør bevægelse og forandring, og hvis vi tager udgangspunkt i et tidsligt perspektiv på vores tilstedeværelse, må vi sætte os ud over ontologiens rumlige

forud-*sætninger*. Hertil kræves der imidlertid en særegen udtrykspraksis som den, vi kender fra poesi og billedkunst, hvor tiden som forudgående lader sig erfare gennem udtrykkets temporale udfoldelse.

## XI.

I løbet af vores læsning af følgende prosadigt fra Per Højholts *Praksis, 8: Album, tumult* bliver vi i stand til at erfare, hvordan tid og tale udfolder hinanden:

“Ikke særlig langt henne her i stykket indtræffer den begivenhed, at et frisk nu indledes og forsvandt. Eftersom dette præteritum omfattede nuet og ikke mig og jo heller ikke noget evt. kommende nu, må jeg have været i live, da jeg anvendte det og dermed nok også i stand til at bruge dette ny og friskere nu til her at notere Søren Kierkegaards navn, selv om han længe har været installeret i et præteritum magen til”.

Det sproglige udtryks leg med tiden synes her at hente sine betydningsmæssige ressourcer fra forløbets stadige fortabelse af sit flygtige nærvær i nuet til fortidens forgangenhed. Verbalformerne markerer først tidens forløb fra 1) en nært forestående nutid (“indtræffer”), der endnu er fremtidig, til 2) en passiv nutid (“indledes”), hvor der ikke er nogen agens, der bevirker nuets forløb, og frem til 3) dets ophør som en i fortiden afsluttet begivenhed (“forsvandt”), der i og med ordets udsigelse bekræftes som forgangent. Præteritum (af lat. *praeterire*, gå forbi) er det grammatiske udtryk for datidens verbalform, hvormed vi udtrykker, at noget fandt sted eller gjorde sig gældende i fortiden. Men teksten er ganske kompleks, fordi der i dens udsagn om tidens forløb, der opstår hen langs eller i løbet af dens udsigelse, finder en spaltning af tiden sted. På den ene side fastholder teksten tiden i ordenes forestillingsindhold, sproglige antydninger og henvisninger til en for læseren mere eller mindre genkendelig verden vedrørende liv og død, nutid og fortid, notationens tid og notatets tid, jeget og Kierkegaard samt eventuelt Kierkegaards begreber om *Gjentagelsen* og *Øjeblikket*. Ordene fastholder det sproglige billede af den forgangne og forgængelige verden i et præteritum, skriftens testamentariske epigram over den levende nutids nærvær i øjeblikket. På den anden side fremstiller teksten samtidig det tidslige forløb i udfoldelsen af den handling, der vil have nedskrevet den i dens skriftlige stofflighed. Teksten fremstiller tid som et vilkår for sin *udsigelse*, men denne tid er ikke direkte forbundet med de forestillinger, som tekstens *udsagn* om tiden måtte fremkalde hos læseren. Teksten fremstiller på én gang tid som en forestilling og et opleveligt forløb, mens den varer, og er derforuden selv et produkt af den tid, der betinger dens fremstilling. Det temporale vilkår for udsigelsen gentages af læseren, *mens* der læses, og herved bliver det en erfaring på andre og rent temporale betingelser end den forestillede tid, der gengives i ordenes forestillingsindhold: erfaringen erfarer herved sig selv som effekt af den

ellers uerfarbare tid. Ved hver ny læsning gentager læseren udsigelsens tid, som i sin egenskab af temporal og produktiv gestus har forbindelse til den skrivehandling, der i en forgangen nutid vil have frembragt den. Teksten bliver således på én gang et udsagn om og en udsigelse af den tid, hvori skrivehandlingen vil have fundet sted, i et nu hvor jeget må “have været i live, da jeg anvendte det.”

## XII.

Som betegnelse for den manifesterende skrivehandling, der i rummet frembringer en betydningsbærende skrift eller tale, anvender Højholt, bl.a. i *Intetbedens grimasser*, den substantiverede infinitiv *skrivnen*. I sig selv er en sådan skriven en temporal gestus, men gennem grafiske eller akustiske indridsninger i rummet frembringer den de materielle betingelser for sproglige udtryk, hvoraf vi tilkender enkelte status af litteratur eller kunst. I den traditionelle litteratur, ligesom i en ordinær sprogbrug, er den frembragte skrift bærer af et sprogligt udtryk, der henviser læseren til en genkendelig verden. Dette er den ontologiske forpligtelse, de instituerede forventninger, formelle konventioner og retoriske *topoi*, hvorpå traditionen holder litteraturen og læseren fast, idet den afkræver litteraturen udsagn om vores tilværelse, den verden hvori vi føler os hjemme. Litteratur adskiller sig måske nok fra den ordinære sprogbrug, for så vidt vi forventer, at den afdækker sider af tilværelsen, som vi ikke fuldt ud kendte eller kunne kende før da uafhængigt af litteraturens sproglige udtryk. Og med sit triumferende credo om at “dykke til bunds i det ukendte for at finde noget nyt”, sådan som Charles Baudelaire sender sin hilsen til afsked i *Le voyage*, det afsluttende digt i *Les Fleurs du Mal*, bliver poesi og kunst ontologisk forpligtet på en sandhed og en autenticitet, hvortil vi hidkalder digtere og kunstnere som vidner og garanter. Men der finder en grundlæggende forskydning af den poetiske praksis sted, når den skriven, der almindeligvis blot frembringer skrift eller tale som bærer af betydning, dvs. de materielle betingelser for sprogets engagement i en forudsat væren, begynder at henlede vores opmærksomhed på skrift og tale uafhængigt af den ordinære udtrykspraksis, så at det i udtrykket bliver muligt at fremlæse en forbindelse mellem skriven selv og dens skrift, talen selv og dens tale. Dette er tidens gestus, hvormed talen alene synes at tale for at tale, tilsyneladende kun optaget af sin egen udtrykspraksis. Den kommer til syne dér, hvor der ikke længere henvises til en forudsat væren, men nu kun til den handling eller skriven, der vil have frembragt den, mens den var i færd med at blive udfoldet, og som vi *nu, her* gentager gennem vores læsning. Væren er da ikke længere noget forud-*sat*, som sproget *afdækker*, men noget, som det *frembringer* som sin effekt, som ud af intet. Vi opfatter måske nok, at sproget uvilkårligt betyder noget, men i en udtrykspraksis som Højholts afmonterer den æstetiske gestus den ordinære henvisning til væren som udtrykkets forudsætning til fordel for en manifestation af væren som en effekt af sproget og tidens udfoldelse. Selv om sådanne

udtryk kun synes at tale om sig selv, kan de bringe læserens ontologiske opfattelse af væren som noget forudsat i kritisk dialog med erfaringen af (sin egen) væren som en tilstedeværelse underlagt en varigheds forløb.

## XIII.

Længe før den moderne litteratur ændrer den moderne billedkunst sin udtrykspraksis på en sådan måde, at dens værker ophører med alene at *overbevise* i kraft af repræsentation, den rumlige virkelighed gengivet gennem et forestillingsindhold, for malerkunstens vedkommende som en rumlig illusion på lærredets flade. I den klassiske fremstilling af malerkunst vil repræsentationen søge at skjule sit skuespil for at kunne fungere så overbevisende som muligt på samme sanselige betingelser, hvorunder ting kommer til syne i verden. *Persuasio*, overbevisningens gestus, beror her som i en hvilken som helst anden repræsentation på publikums indlevelse. Ligesom ved et klassisk skuespil skal publikum til en tale eller et æstetisk udtryks repræsentation af en given virkelighed emotionelt og intellektuelt leve sig helt og aldeles ind i dens hævde af, hvad der er virkeligt, for at *virkeliggøre* det, der fremføres eller opføres for øjnene af dem *som* virkeligt. Publikum skal indgå en kontrakt om, at det er villigt til at indlade sig på en illusion, at lade sig forføre, jvf. den græske gudinde Peitho, der udgør den personificerede ånd for overbevisning, forførelse og indsmigrende tale (svarende til Suada i romersk tradition, cf. *suadere*, overtale). Allerede Constable og Turner begynder at opløse dette skuespil, idet de, hver på deres måde, trækker et hidtil metafysisk himmelrum over på lærredets fysiske flade, og snarere end gennem farverne at gengive en sanseopfattelse af himlen gør de farvernes materialitet tilgængelig for sansningen. Farverne henviser til farver, snarere end til himlen, og i kraft af deres egen materialitet opnår de en arkitektonisk fasthed og styrke. Og i særdeleshed siden Cézanne har moderne malerkunst således i stigende grad søgt at udforske de æstetiske muligheder i at insistere på sin egen tingslighed, hvor lærredet fungerer som en flade, der intet repræsenterer, der *intet* betyder, hvilket også vil sige, at det *betyder* intet, tyder eller udlægger det intet, som *er*.

## XIV.

Da billedkunsten i det nittende århundrede begynder at fremstille de temporale vilkår for bevægelser og forandringer i rummet, finder det i udgangspunktet sted som deformationer af det fremstillede motiv. Tiden er ganske vist hverken defineret af bevægelse eller forandring, men det er tværtimod den, der gør disse mulige og derved definerer dem. Så når kunsten søger at fremstille tiden i billeder, fremtræder dens effekter i rummet på en sådan måde, at tingene ikke længere fremstår i den orden, hvori vi almindeligvis forventer at forefinde dem. Vi kan iagttage momenter af denne udvikling af billedet i den gensidige inspiration

og udveksling, der finder sted mellem den franske videnskabsmand og fotograf Étienne-Jules Marey og den excentriske engelske fotograf Eadweard Muybridge. Som bevis for at en hest i trav et kort øjeblik har alle fire hove løftet fra jorden, kan Muybridge efter mange eksperimenter gennemført i 1870'erne fremvise en række sekventielle fotografier og dermed afdække et hidtil skjult temporalt aspekt af væren: som en Pegasus løfter hesten sig kortvarigt fra jorden. Dette fotografiske punktum på den indtil da herskende tvivl siger ganske vist intet om tiden i sig selv, men det fungerer som et udsagn om bevægelsen som temporal effekt. Adspurgte af en imponeret Marey, om hans kamera også kan indfange en fugl i sin flugt, må Muybridge imidlertid give fortabt. Til gengæld lykkes det Marey selv at fastholde flyvende fugles bevægelse ved hjælp af en kronofotografisk teknik, som han udvikler i løbet af 1880'erne. Men i modsætning til tidligere tiders forsøg på snapshots er hans billeder af fugles flugt ikke fastfrosne øjebliksbilleder, men forskudte stadier i bevægelsen fastholdt på en enkelt fotografisk plade, således at den synes at gengive en fortløbende bevægelse, hvilket kan findes rigt dokumenteret i værket *Le Vol des Oiseaux* fra 1890. Fastholdelsen af bevægelsen medfører ganske vist, at fuglenes figurer fremstår uklare og konturerne uskarpe, men deformationen af motivet får ingen indflydelse på det rum, hvori bevægelsen er fastholdt. Rummet som ramme for gengivelsen forbliver intakt, idet det diskret føjer sig fremstillingen af motiverne. Men hvis rummet forbliver en lokal ramme for et øjebliks nu, må den legemlige bevægelse gennem rummet nødvendigvis fremstå som forvansket af tidens forløb, eftersom denne netop ikke lader sig lokalisere i et entydigt og fikserbart nu i rummet. Så selv om sagen fremstilles i en paradoks form, træder paradoksaliteten frem i et ubevægeligt og for så vidt upåvirket rum.

## XV.

Malerkunsten bearbejder samme problem, men nu bliver problemet underlagt æstetiske vilkår i en forståelse af, at den kreative gestus, *skrivnen* som betydningsgestus, er underlagt tiden, og at denne fremstillende tid ikke lader sig holde ude fra den fremstillede tid. Problemet optager især Marcel Duchamp, og allerede i værket *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2* fra 1912, inspireret af Muybridges billedserie fra 1887, *Woman Walking Downstairs*, overlejrer de forskellige stadier i den fremstillede figurs gang ned ad trappen hinanden med en visuel ekko-effekt, der udfylder billedrammen. Herved er forholdet mellem rum og figur i færd med at blive ophævet, og billedet fremstiller en begyndende deformation af selve det rum, hvori bevægelsen er gengivet. Rummet føjer sig ikke længere bevægelsen gennem det, men bliver nu selv underlagt tiden. Samme konsekvenser kunne drages fra Umberto Boccionis skulptur fra 1913, *Bevægelsens urform i rummet*, hvor deformationen af en gående skikkelse udbreder en fremadskridende bevægelse, der dynamiserer den skulpturelle forms negative rum.

## XVI.

Imidlertid er deformationen af det billedkunstneriske rum langt mere gennemført i Duchamps ufuldstændige værk, *Le Grand Verre* (1915- 23), hvor tidens dynamiske forløb i den fremstillende gestus griber strukturerende ind i forskellige aspekter af det overordentligt komplekse og i princippet uafsluttelige værk, som Duchamp da også selv til sidst må erklære for “definitivt ufuldendt”. Det glasmalede værk lader sig på ingen måde fastholde af det æstetiske blik, der måtte søge at betragte det på Philadelphia Museum of Art. Værket lader sig ikke underordne ét blik, ikke mindst fordi dets status af værk bliver forstyrret af det senere udgivne bogværk, *La Boîte Verte* (1934), ikke som en eftertanke, et tillæg til værket, men som en del af det, en graffiti på værket. Og fordi det således bliver til hen over tid, forbliver det netop uafslutteligt og dermed ubestemmeligt. Bogen indeholder “otte års idéer, refleksioner, tanker,” som han siger, knyttet til arbejdet med *Le Grand Verre*, og omfatter 93 skrevne noter, skitser og fotografier med visuelle og sproglige motiver. Originalerne herfra er desuden blevet udgivet som 320 litografier (for de tyves vedkommende sammen med et enkelt originalt dokument), hvilket, i lighed med Duchamps forskellige *readymades*, er med til at sprænge såvel værket som værkkategoriens enhedskarakter. Ydermere findes der replikaer i Sverige og England autentificeret og certificeret af Duchamp selv, ikke som kopier i traditionel forstand, men som simulakrer på lige fod med det ‘originale’ værk. Flere replikaer er fremstillet efter Duchamps død i 1968, og sammen med bogen og litografierne skriver de alle videre på værket, ligesom også kommentarer som denne gør, som en til stadighed foranderlig palimpsest. Det kan derfor næppe heller undre, hvorfor den mexicanske forfatter Octavio Paz i *Marcel Duchamp or The Castle of Purity* betragter Duchamp som digter og hans udtrykspraksis som litteratur snarere end som malerkunst: “Duchamps direkte forgænger skal ikke findes inden for malerkunst, men inden for digtning: Mallarmé.” Og under henvisning til Mallarmés store typografiske eksperiment, det permuterende prosadigt fra 1897, konkluderer Paz, at “det værk, der i lighed kommer *Le Grand Verre* nærmest, er *Un coup de dés*.”

## XVII.

Men tidens gestus lader sig også fremlæse i den malerkunst, der på mere traditionelle materielle og sanselige vilkår vender sit æstetiske udtryk ind mod fladen. Dette bliver tydeligt, når vi sammenholder et stilleben af 1600-tallets hollændere eller Chardin med et stilleben af Cézanne. Hvor det klassiske stilleben underordner sit motiv et fast syns- og tidspunkt i et roligt, upåvirkeligt og for så vidt abstrakt rum, så at det forekommer at gengive sit motiv med en evig tøven, dér opløser Cézanne sit motiv i flader gengivet fra forskellige synspunkter og fremstillet på forskellige tidspunkter med motiviske forvrængninger som sit resultat. Motivets former synes betragtet som med et flueøj, et facetteret blik

der opfatter dem fra forskellige synsvinkler samtidig. Men det er snarere den forgangne tid, hvori motivet er blevet fremstillet, der er malet ind i, *indskrevet* i maleriet som en endnu virksom tid, hvorved det bliver op til beskueren at legemliggøre dets tid. Beskueren drages ind i billedrummets flade og samler i løbet af betragtningens varighed de forskellige syns- og tidspunkter i og med kroppens egen udelelige og fortløbende tid, hvilket får den konsekvens, med Duchamps ord, “at tilskueren laver billedet”. For dele af den moderne malerkunst bliver den videre konsekvens heraf imidlertid, at tidens gestus begynder at overtage dens værker, indtil motiverne helt vil have fortonet sig, og lærrederne intet længere gengiver, sådan som det kan aflæses hos Mondrian, Malevitj eller i den amerikanske abstrakte ekspressionisme. En sådan udtrykspraksis forestiller ikke længere noget, men er trukket helt ud i sin materielle fysik som en udtryksflade, hvis eneste betydning er, at tidens gestus, en *skreven*, vil have frembragt den.

Umiddelbart giver Olsens og Christensens bemalinger på mure og andre flader rundt om i byrummet ikke anledning til stor postyr; de er hverken falbelader eller fikumdik og forekommer ikke alarmerende eller anmassende. Særligt i de tilfælde hvor de er udformet som en firkantet flade med en svag farvekontrast eller en koloristisk velafstemt nuance i forhold til den bemalede mur, følger de sig diskret, nærmest elegant bygningernes prunkløse arkitektur som en naturlig del af murenes ellers tavse udtryk. I disse tilfælde fremstår de snarere som en *buff*, en overmaling af en allerede eksisterende graffiti med en flad farve, der søger at genoprette murfladens anonymitet, men for så vidt er de graffiti på graffiti, *buff art*, den parodiske palimpsest på pænhedens bornerte *buff*. Hermed synes de samtidig i færd med at indgive bygningerne en stemme, at lade dem tale, eller endda *synge*, sådan som den franske digter og essayist Paul Valéry taler om det i *Eupalinos eller arkitekten*, en pastiche over Platons dialoger. Valéry lader Eupalinos sige, at af de bygninger i byen, der er befolkede, “er nogle stumme; andre taler; og atter andre, men det er de sjældneste, *synger*.” Bygninger udtrykker sig altså gennem forskellige former for udsigelser, ikke fordi det er “deres formål, heller ikke deres udseende i almindelighed, der således gør dem levende eller tvinger dem til tavshed. Det skyldes deres bygmesters talent eller også musernes gunst.” Men når bygmesteren har forladt sin bygning i utide og har overladt den til at henleve sit liv i anonymitet, er det op til graffiti-kunstneren at vække den til live, at give den en stemme ved at lade graffitien bortviske dens tavse udtryk og genbruge bygningen, ikke som *baggrund* for sin egen udtrykspraksis, men i *dialog* med den. Når vi *nu, her*, i en bog eller på en udstilling, betragter de spredte bemalinger samlet, fremstår de som underordnet et gennemført mønster, den dialogiske udtrykspraksis’ fremskrevne æstetik, der efterhånden røber en kunstnerisk signatur, skønt de enkelte bemalingers graffiti i deres spredte lokaliteter udgør deres egen autograf.

Selv om flere bemalinger gennem iterative indstregninger på murenes flader – i form af zigzagger, vertikale og horisontale streger eller bølgende, arabesk-lignende kruseduller – nærmer sig alfabetets skrifttegn eller ideogrammer, forbliver de i deres tegnstatus betydningstomme og afsætter ingen henvisninger i ordinær forstand. For så vidt respekterer bemalingerne det billedforbud, der er definerende for arabeskens forhold til figuration. Bemalingernes tilnærmelse til figuration forestiller ikke noget, rummer ingen ikonicitet, ligner ikke noget og gengiver intet forud givet: idet de trækker deres udtryk ud mod skribleriernes materialitet som en ren skriftflade, forestiller de *intet*, eller man tvinges til at læse dem som udsigende *intet*. Der er her tale om den form for *anti-mimesis*, som Niels Egebak i sin bog af samme navn præciserer som en mere autentisk *mimesis*,

der fremhæver det skabende moment (*poiēsis*) i den kunstneriske frembringelse frem for det efterlignende moment, som den traditionelle *mimesis*-fortolkning i forlængelse af Platon har opholdt sig ved. At forestille (sig) intet er en destruktion af den ontologi, der mener sig i stand til at forfægte en naturlig forbindelse mellem ord og ting, billede og verden. Samtidig besidder bemalingerne i kraft af deres abstraktion og svævende balance kvaliteter, der fremkalder mindelser om klassisk zenbuddhistiske *kalligrafier*. I modsætning til den vestlige forståelse af kalligrafi som skønskrift er kalligrafien inden for zenbuddhistisk tuschtegning, ligesom i disse bemalinger, karakteriseret ved et improvisatorisk udtryk bestående af dynamiske bevægelser, asymmetriske markeringer, en rytmisk vitalitet i overensstemmelse med det naturgroede samt en artikulation af det *spatium* mellem strøgenes 'kød' og 'ben', som zen-kalligraferne udtrykker det, der beforder det samlede udtryks harmoni og balance. De rum, der hermed opstår gennem bemalingernes tale, bliver på paradoksal vis fastholdt i fladen som talende mellemrum, *spatium*, i en dialog med den bemalede murs indtil da tavse udtryk.

## XX.

Samme balancerede udtryk manifesterer sig i de større flade-bemalinger, der som palimpsester er påført de forskellige bygningers ofte voluminøse, men i sig selv stumme flader. *Paintworks* afsøger således først og fremmest aspekter af fladens dimension i dens særegne udtrykspotentialer; bemalingerne taler *gennem* deres flader *om* fladen *som* tale. I den henseende udgør de en enestående variant over den form for sproglige udtryk, der er optaget af deres egen udtrykspraksis. Samtidig underkaster de sig eksperimenterende de æstetisk produktive muligheder, der er forbundet med at lade udtrykkene påkalde og besinde sig på deres allermest umiddelbare materialitet: farve, form, flade, malestrøg, baggrund og lokalitet. Ved at insistere på deres egen flade karakter, i form af rektangler og betydningstomme tegn, indleder bemalingerne en dialog med murenes flade baggrund og trækker derved disse i forgrunden: murene er her ikke mere eller mindre neutrale bagtæpper for graffiti, men gennem bemalingernes forskelsindstiftende bevægelser på deres flade, springer murene pludselig frem fra deres uanseelige baggrund og manifesterer sig som bemalingernes *spatium*. Hermed står *Paintworks* endnu i forbindelse med den tendens i billedkunsten fra Manet og Cézanne til den amerikanske ekspressionisme, hvor forholdet mellem bag-, mellem- og forgrund efterhånden bliver nedbrudt. Allerede i Cézannes mange portrætter af Mme Cézanne, hvor baggrunden fremstilles med samme lidenskab som hustruens ansigt, nivellerer den fremhævede grund billedets dybde: et sammenfald mellem figur og grund forskyder dybden i billedet hen mod et *spatium*. Det er en tilsvarende fortolkning af rummet som *spatium*, snarere end som illusionsrum, vi finder i *Paintworks*. Her fremstiller udtrykket i dialog med murene en rumlighed, der betoner *intensio* frem for *extensio*. I sig selv fremstår murene som en

artikulation af et udstrakt, ensartet, optisk rum og glider i baggrunden for byrummets tomhed, men bemalingernes dynamisering af murene frembringer et intensivt, affektivt, haptisk rum, et *spatium*. Det visuelle udtryk i bemalingerne synes derfor også at stå i en slags valgslægtskab med den obskure kortroman, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, som skolelæreren og teologen Edwin Abbott Abbott udgiver i 1884 under pseudonymet A Square. *Flatland* er udformet som en systematisk undersøgelse af sin verdens to dimensioner gennem beskrivelser af natur, klima, huse, indbyggere, den irregulære figur, synssansen, den antikke verdens malepraksis, farver, visioner om et *Lineland*, et besøg af Sphere fra *Spaceland* samt en todimensional verdens problem med en teori om tre dimensioner. Øjensynligt fremstiller *Paintworks* sit eget *Flatland*, der på det visuelle udtryks præmisser undersøger *sin* verdens dimensioner, men en sådan bestemmelse henholder sig endnu blot til udtrykkets formelle begrænsninger ud fra en strengt rumlig betragtning. I fastholdelsen af et rumligt perspektiv på disse bemalinger underkaster vi os nok i for høj grad den konventionelle kunstforståelses ontologiske æstetik, der altid har haft vanskeligt ved at fastholde og dokumentere happening-kunst, *land art*, *environmental art*, kunst i byrummet og andre kunstformer, hvis udtryk er knyttet til stedets *lokalitet* og er underlagt sin tilblivelses *temporale* vilkår.

## XXI.

De rytmiske og dynamiske improvisationer i *Paintworks* er underlagt den tidslige proces i de betydningsgivende gestus, hvormed de er fremstillet. Selv når de ifølge foto-dokumentationen er fremstillet hen over længere tid, fremstår bemalingerne med umiddelbarhedens udtryk, *nu*, *her*, ikke som noget *givet*, men i overensstemmelse med *kairos*, det opportune øjeblik, som noget, der er *grebet* på rette tid og sted, et greb på stedet, den lokalitet foran hvilken vi er standset op. Improvisationens temporalitet står direkte at aflæse i de bemalinger, hvor den våde maling er løbet i bunden af et bemalet felt eller et tilsyneladende hastigt påført malestrøg, eller hvor feltet forekommer uafsluttet, eller hvor de kalligrafiske tegn fremtræder på murenes lærred med en pludselig, overrumplende effekt. Via dokumentationen er det muligt at aflæse den temporale tilblivelse hen over tid. Men endnu væsentligere tilhører det bemalingerne som graffiti-kunst, at de fremtræder med et provisorisk udtryk, der forbryder sig mod en orden og derfor typisk vil blive fjernet igen, når bygningernes autoriserede forvaltere søger at genoprette den brudte orden, der opstår gennem bemalingernes uautoriserede handling. Bemaling og overmaling eller fjernelse af maling på den enkelte lokalitet kan på den måde gentages i flere omgange, indtil bemalingen i tilstrækkelig grad synes at have nærmet sig færdighedens karakter, om end den aldrig får et blivende udtryk. Herved manifesterer der sig en dialog mellem kræfter, der forbliver usynlige for hverandre, og som viser tilbage til to væsensforskellige, men gensidigt afhængige betydningsgivende gestus, der forbinder og sammenfolder to tilgange til tiden, implicerer og

komplicerer tiden gennem deres skiftende handlinger. Vi har her at gøre med to former for palimpsest: 1) *tilføjelsen* i form af bemalinger, der i første omgang træder i dialog med murenes tavse udtryk, men i næste omgang træder i dialog med bestræbelserne på at fjerne dem, og 2) *fjernelsen*, der på ingen måde er mindre betydende end bemalingerne, selv om den søger at ophæve dem, men derved kommer den også uvilkårlig til at træde i dialog med dem. Fjernelsen udgør indirekte en del af værket og bidrager til dets suggestive karakter, idet det potentielt både kan være nærværende og fraværende, og egentlig er det på samme tid. Denne processuelle effekt af værket bliver dog først klart fremkaldt gennem de dokumenterende fotografiers montageteknik, om end de med samme gestus synes at oprette en ny palimpsest.

## XXII.

*Paintworks* spiller således på dobbeltheden i at være og ikke at være på én gang, sådan som vi også kan læse det i Mallarmés sonet, *Toute l'âme résumée*, hvor den afsluttende kuplet lyder: “Le sens trop précis rature/ Ta vague littérature” (“Den alt for præcise mening bortvisker/ Din vage litteratur”). Rimparret *rature-littérature* markerer dobbeltheden i den æstetiske palimpsest: den både fjerner og frembringer, den både *er* noget og er *intet*, noget intet. Fjernelsen af bemalinger søger at indstifte en rumlig tilstand, hvor tiden står stille eller i det mindste ikke fremstår virksom i det byrum, hvis forandringer og forfald den ikke desto mindre bevirker. Det er det, vi almindeligvis kalder ‘pænhed’, selv om flere af lokaliteterne udvalgt til bemaling i udgangspunktet fremstår som eksempler på post-industrialismens trøstesløse tomter. Fjernelsen af bemalingerne er imidlertid underordnet bemalingernes gestus, der initierer dialogen, og ved at fremkalde forandringer i og af byrummet bliver dette med samme gestus underordnet tiden. Bemalingerne åbner byrummet, ikke i form af forskønnende byfornyelse, men i form at et spil eller en leg med murenes flader, hvorved det lokale byrum bliver dynamiseret. Hvor murene før blot antydede omgivelsens rum, dér giver bemalingerne dem stemmer og sætter den involverede arkitektur i stand til at artikulere rummet og gøre det til sin sag som byrum. Gennem temporaliteten i denne udtrykspraksis iværksætter bemalingernes gestiske betydningshandling, eller *skrivnen*, på den måde en kritisk dialog og forhandling med de strukturelt skjulte kræfter, der gør sig gældende i byrummets lokale ontologi.

## XXIII.

For os forbipasserende, der foranlediget af bemalinger på en ubestemt lokalitet standser op i vores målrettede bevægelse på vej mod et bestemmelsessted, bliver lokaliteten et *sted* i sig selv, og som sted hvælver den et rum omkring os og åbner derved muligheden for samtale, måske om stedet, om *Paintworks* eller om andre mellemværender foranlediget af

værket. Sådanne gestiske betydningshandling i litteraturen og kunsten befordrer altså en standsning på deres sted, der så at sige lader os støde ind i det. Når vi støder ind i sådanne værker og det sted, hvor de udfolder sig, skyldes det, at de manifesterer sig med en særlig kraftfuld retorisk *persuasio* eller arkitektonisk fasthed, der *først* gør opmærksom på sig selv, *før* den måtte gøre opmærksom på andet. Det er denne temporalitet, vi gør gældende som forudgående i en hvilken som helst udtrykspraksis som en tale, der taler om sig selv, en diskurs (lat. *discurrere*, løbe frem og tilbage) der dvæler ved sin udsigelses fortløbende bevægelse, før den kan træde ud over sig selv og fremsætte udsagn om verden. Først på den baggrund kan vi *nu, her* bestemme lokaliteten lidt nærmere som et afgørende betydningselement i *Paintworks*. Værket drager jo tydeligvis omsorg for det sted, hvor det udfolder sig. Det udviser en form for *etisk* hensyn over for det lokale sted, hvilket er medvirkende til, at beskuerne på lokaliteten kan tildele værket *ethos*, dvs. karakter. Men hvad er det lokale, som *Paintworks* på den måde giver anledning til at overveje? Det giver egentlig ikke mening at tale om et *lokalt* sted eller et lokalt *sted*, for så vidt et sted altid er defineret ved sin lokalitet, hvilket også vil sige de lokale, der opholder sig på stedet, og hvis hele tilstedeværen i situationen er knyttet til stedet. De, der bringes til at standse et sted, bliver tilstedeværende, de får tildelt en Tilstedeværen i kraft af stedet og et fællesskab med hinanden, og det er derfor, at et værk som *Paintworks* bærer et etisk ansvar i sin påkaldelse af de forbipasserende, hvilket vil sige, at værket åbner byrummet og gør de forbipasserende tilstedeværende. Før noget andet vedrører det lokale (lat. *locus*, gr. *topos*) således sit *eget* sted, ikke som en fortrolighed, en hjemlighed, idet også den fremmede er velkommen i det fremmede, i den etisk ansvarlige lokalitet, men i form af det *egne*, det sær-*egne* som de tilstedeværende bliver i stand til at til-*egne* sig gennem deres ophold på stedet. Det er denne tilegnelse af det særegne, som det lokale værk i byrummet gør muligt, og som *Paintworks* bibringer forskellige udvalgte lokaliteter, som ikke i forvejen har gjort sig bemærkelsesværdige ved deres særegenhed.

## XXIV.

Det er for så vidt altid graffitiens gestus at tilegne sig et sted ved at tilføje det en særegenhed, en lokalkolorit, eventuelt blot i form af et *tag*, uanset om det er *all city*, det mere permanente *landmark*, den banale ‘Kilroy was here’ eller den spektakulære Banksy, der lidt for velvilligt synes at lade sig underordne den konventionelle æstetiks ontologi. Men det er et anderledes mellemværende med lokaliteten, vi finder i de forskellige og spredte *Paintworks*, fordi de ikke på samme måde forstiller noget, men tværtimod forestiller *intet*, siger *intet*. De vil ikke ‘male fanden på væggen’ eller lade os ‘læse skriften på væggen’, men fremtræder i deres betydningsgivende gestus snarere som resterne af en *skrivnen*, der ikke havde sit udtryk som sit mål, men som accepterer det som en uvilkårlig omstændighed ved at lade handlingens gestus udfolde sig på sit sted.

Desto mere får de øjeblikkets karakter, som vi flere gange har markeret som et *nu, her*, hvilket ikke lader sig lokalisere andre steder end i den enestående lokalitet. Et *nu, her* er ikke generaliserbart, det er ikke sammenligneligt med andet end sig selv, og det er for så vidt lige så meget et intetsteds. Denne dobbelthed kommer til udtryk på engelsk som et *now-here*, der samtidig er et *no-where* og i den forstand får betydning for titlen på Samuels Butlers roman-utopi, *Erewhon, or Over the Range* fra 1872. Selv om bogstaverne *b* og *w* bytter plads, forstår Butler *Erewhon* som *nowhere* stavet baglæns, og som den franske filosof Gilles Deleuze bemærker i *Différence et répétition* (1968), “synes Butlers *Erewhon* ikke kun at være et skjult *no-where*, men også en omvæltning af *now-here*”. Det er en sådan betydning af lokaliteten, der manifesterer sig med *Paintworks*, ikke som udsagn om det empiriske byrums partikularitet eller byens abstraktes universalitet, men som graffiti om graffiti, en tale der taler for blot at tale, og derved giver stedet stemme. Hvordan finder lokaliteterne da sted i disse bemalinger? Som stedet i Mallarmés typografisk orkestrerede *Un coup de dés*, når han hen over flere sider, med en egen typografi, spreder ordene: “RIEN // N’AURA EU LIEU // QUE LE LIEU // EXCEPTÉ // PEUT-ÊTRE // UNE CONSTELLATION” (“Intet // vil have fundet sted // undtagen stedet // bortset fra // måske // en konstellation”). Spredt rundt om i byens rum, på udvalgte lokaliteter, markerer *Paintworks* et sted, hvor vi standser op og støder ind i stedet *som* sted. Værket åbner stedet som et sted, der *nu, her* ikke står i stedet for andet end sig selv.

Pictures of buffings















I.

Something very fundamental takes place whenever we halt our movement on the way to somewhere or interrupt our absorption in our daily activities in some other way. That movement and absorption in daily activities are focused on a goal, but when we halt and interrupt our endeavour to realize the goal, albeit only temporarily, something other than that goal-oriented activity takes over. Admittedly, of course, a movement can be without a goal, just as an absorbing preoccupation can be casual or fruitless in its gestures and hence apparently aimless. By the same token, a movement with no clear goal can be an end in itself, as is the case when we go for a walk, a stroll or set off on some other form of ramble purely for pleasure. But when a halt is made to that goal-oriented movement, the aim shifts from far to near: the *place* then becomes a goal in itself. For migratory birds, the goal of the autumn is to return to warmer climes, but where they come to a halt on their passage, a place with its own determination arises. The place itself then turns into a resting place, a place to find food, a place for the flock’s cackling chatter and for cultivating their communality of purpose. When we humans halt along our way, something additional takes place at the place where we halt: we arch a *space* around us, perhaps in the shape of a shelter, a temporary dwelling, or maybe in the form of practical activities, more developed efforts to inhabit the place where we now happen to find ourselves. At the same time, what happens is that we speak to one another about the ongoing journey, future goals or the new residential habitat that only now, through the act of speech, encompasses us, taking on the status of space.

II.

Just now, a human being has halted at a text in a book that has been opened at this very page, drawing attention to itself *here* by its linguistic gestures, referring to its place, the space from which it is speaking to the reading person. We find such a situation written out in a poem by Wallace Stevens, where in the first two stanzas the reader encounters the words: “The house was quiet and the world was calm./ The reader became the book;

and summer night// Was like the conscious being of the book./ The house was quiet and the world was calm.” The poem, which takes its title from the first line, gradually unfurls its universe: on a material level a house, a world, reader, book, page, summer night, words, calm and quiet; on a spiritual level a consciousness, truth, thought, perfection, significance and an absence of meaning. This poetic universe is unfurled through a language that can only rebound on itself, until the reading person can no longer refer to a place or a world outside of this language. Since the poem refers to its reader directly, “the reader leaned above the page”, the reader as reader becomes a mere effect of the poem. The reader’s world is reduced to the words being read, and the world read out of the poem simultaneously reads its reader, so that “the reader *becomes* the book”, thereby being transported to a distinctive inner world: “The truth in a calm world,/ In which there is no other meaning, itself// Is calm, itself is summer and night, itself/ Is the reader leaning late and reading there.” In that way the poem seems to realize the poetic notion which an older poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, has expressed: “Everything in the world exists in order to end up as a book”. Such texts, which only seem to speak of themselves, are sometimes called, to use vague technical terms, ‘metatextual’ or ‘self-referential’. But are the texts in question here merely ones that have halted at themselves as their own goal and, shrouded in a monadic space, leave the world to pass by, leaving things to their own devices, shirking more urgent matters so as not to speak of anything other than their own speech?

### III.

The paintworks on walls in the public urban space, which together with the photo-documentation of their process-based creation make up Peter Olsen’s and Jonas Georg Christensen’s work *Paintworks*, appear to speak *for* themselves *of* themselves through a plurality of voices. The work consists of anonymous, diffuse expressions or enunciations without a *tag* or *scribble*, the traditional stylized signature of graffiti art. The paintworks are non-figurative and make no statement, they denote nothing and they contain no symbolism. In a number of respects they can at once be regarded as a processing and a continuation of a *ready-made* aesthetics and of the common graffiti art in the urban space. Nor do they give the appearance of decorative embellishment or destructive vandalism; they neither beautify nor disfigure the unassuming buildings against whose backdrop they appear. And for the hasty passer-by the paintworks might perhaps seem to have arisen as if out of nothing, overnight, haphazardly, aimlessly, clandestinely – a barely heeded act performed with a covert, nocturnal gesture.

### IV.

In the essay entitled *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence* the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty refers to an observation by the author André Malraux that “painting and language are comparable only

when they are detached from what they ‘represent’ and are brought together under the category of creative expression. It is then that they are both recognized as two forms of the same effort.” Viewed from such a non-representational perspective that accentuates the abstract qualities of art, therefore, architectural, sculptural and painterly expression, whose materiality has chiefly been processed on imaginative and spatial premises, will be no less lingual than linguistic expressions created on the premises of writing and speech. And based on this view, we should also be able to regard Olsen’s and Christensen’s *Paintworks* as a language that manifests itself in a *spatium* between linguistic and visual signs, and for want of something represented appears as a “creative expression”, a speech primarily concerned with its own expressive practice.

### V.

Faced with such expressive practice, the beholder tends to fall short, because it rejects the traditional understanding and appreciation that she tries to invest in the encounter with it. Consequently, the paintworks come across with a kind of unfamiliarity, prompting characteristics by their expression other than those evinced by ordinary expressive practice. As articulations in the urban space, we might perhaps expect them to make some form of statement about the space and the place where they are expressed; but as is characteristic of literary forms of expression preoccupied with their own expressive practice, these painterly expressions can also be taken as being oriented towards the *time* that constitutes the condition for their creation.

### VI.

According to such a view, the language of artistic expression no longer appears against the background of a pre-existing world, but in a certain sense creates its own world by manipulating the familiar one and exhibiting it anew as something yet unacknowledged. Artistic language then appears against the background of distorted linguistic expressions, as on a parchment palimpsest (Gr. *palim*, again, and *psestos*, scraped), where the new text is superimposed on top of a scratched-out text, which to some degree may still be made out and interpreted behind the new one. In terms of a speech act, linguistic expression here uses the ‘usedness’ of language as a *ready-made*, a paintwork painted on an already painted or in some other way finished surface, a graffito on the ethereal surface of the prevailing order. This speech is at once additive and subtractive; it wrests significations out of existing significations, removing them with the same gesture. This is what takes place when in his work from 1958, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, the young Robert Rauschenberg scratches out a drawing reluctantly made available by the older, already acclaimed artist Willem de Kooning: the existing artistic signification voided of sense, its value depleted and recycled,

now borne solely by the gestural act of signifying. Each in their own language, the poet and the visual artist speak with such an enunciation.

## VII.

But how to read the time in artistic expressions whose expressive practice does not commit itself directly to statements about time but appears completely liberated of anything represented? This is one of the main challenges which Olsen's and Christensen's *Paintworks* poses to our imagination, and one additionally complicated by our perceptions naturally seeming to prioritize space over time. In order to understand and speak about time, we are inclined to stop it and unfurl it into spatial notions like a stretch of time, timeline, point in time etc. What is more, those difficulties are compounded, as visual art is typically viewed as a spatial expression. The issue is that *Paintworks* does not speak *about* time, but in its enunciation manifests time as a premise, i.e. the work of art renders time tangible *through* its speech. The work thereby reconciles its material awareness with a contemporary artistic and philosophical tradition whose interpretation of time we can beneficially outline as a backdrop to the exegesis of time in this work.

## *The gestures of time in language and image* VIII.

Viewed from a time-based perspective, a space can never remain the same; it will always appear in constantly new guises, like kaleidoscopic pictures that do not depict anything but, mutating endlessly, generate ever new notions. Time will already always have transformed the space, *temporalized* it, independently of anyone who might inhabit it, and without intervention from anything other than the duration of time itself. Space is subordinate to time, so like anything else it can never possess a self-identity: the notion of  $X=X$ , that a space is identifiable because, above all, it *is* (equal to) itself hinges on an illusion brought about by the notion of *copula*, the verb 'to be', which pre-*supposes* a being in the world prior to any language usage will have carried over this *supposition*. And although space appears by *spatializing* the time it takes for it to come into existence and through which it simultaneously changes, until it no longer resembles itself, efforts to give time a more prolonged provisional state above and beyond the simple transient now will be doomed to fail. If space could be identical to itself, it would be precisely because it was able to retain time in a point, a local place in space, as if *sub specie æternitatis* (through a universal perspective). But is this not precisely what art has always striven for, albeit in vain: to suspend the time to which its creations are inextricably linked, thus constituting the condition for its gestures in space? "Retain thy present, my soul! Try to taste/ The moment that is!/ O, fetter the fickle, restrain it/ With powerful emotions", as Johannes Ewald says in *Hope and Recollection*. Or the ardent desire to hang on to the most fleeting of all, when Goethe's Faust, addressing the moment, says: "Tarry a while, thou art so fair!"; or Shakespeare, who in *Sonnet 18* clings to beauty with the spatial figures of speech: "But thy eternal summer shall not fade,/ Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;/ Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade/ When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:/ So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,/ So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

## IX.

Time will always come *first*, before space, which is implicit in its very nature. This prerequisite makes it difficult for any expressive practice that seeks to focus on the time that constitutes the very condition governing its creation. A speech, of course, is subordinate to both temporal and spatial terms, but the temporal terms of speech mean that time interferes transformationally in the space in which speech unfolds. Space, then, is not something merely *given*, something immutable, in which the expression of speech takes place; but in a sense, speech thus creates the space in which it unfurls. So although time comes first, speech about time creates a space in which it can render our notions of time intelligible. Speech about time thus produces a spatial form of intuition for our understanding of time. That is what takes place in the philosopher Kant's

epistemological account of time and space as conditional for all our experiences, saying on the one hand that the temporal form of intuition comes first. On the other hand, however, in order to say this he must first produce the spatial form of intuition. In the section “The Transcendental Aesthetic” in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he asserts that time is an inner sense, an *a priori* given form of intuition that takes precedence over the corresponding outer form of space: “Time is the formal condition *a priori* of all phenomena whatsoever. Space, as the pure form of external intuition, is limited as a condition *a priori* to external phenomena alone.” Whether or not the intuited is something external in space, all our notions first run through the inner state of the mind, which on the whole is the condition of the sense perception and the condition of the ability of realization; and since this is temporal, therefore, “time is a condition *a priori* of all phenomena whatsoever”. But he describes this determination of time’s form of intuition only *after* he has described the spatial form of intuition. The consequence, however, is that time is an indispensable term for anything and everything that potentially takes place in our minds, and therefore also a term to which external phenomena in space must necessarily be subordinate. Even for the spatial artist *par excellence*, the sculptor – who after all is reduced to crafting the movement of a body as an immutable gesture in space – time lays down a condition for both the conception and the representation of reality: “in reality, time never stops”, as Auguste Rodin puts it in *Art: Conversations with Paul Gsell*.

## X.

So how to speak about time and space without contemplating the time and space of speech at the same time? Strictly speaking, for example, it would be more correct to say that time *comes* rather than *goes*, for when time comes, it is in the process of unfolding ahead of our presence, which has to await its advent. Conversely, it leaves us when it goes, as if we were already present, *now, here*, as an immovable first. Indeed, it belongs to the most difficult things to talk about, which is also why Augustin, as is well known, says: “What, then, is time? If no one ask of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.” One of the problems with talking about time involves our ontological inclination to refer to it with spatial figures and to illustrate it with spatial analogies, as when the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus wants to illustrate the priority of time, that everything submits to a constant becoming, with the image: “You cannot step twice into the same river.” It would seem then as if *first*, in rebellion against that which is temporally first, we have to have speech produce a space in order to be able to illustrate time’s qualitative duration for the imagination by giving it a quantitative materiality related to things in space. But if it is correct that time comes first, one of our crucial problems will then be to find an attitude towards time that is creative on the same terms as time’s qualitative duration enables movement and change. And if we take a temporal outlook on our existence as the basis,

then we have to disregard the spatial pre-suppositions of ontology. However, this calls for a distinctive expressive practice like the one familiar to us from poetry and the visual arts, in which time, as an antecedent, can be experienced through the temporal unfurling of the expression.

## XI.

Through our reading of the following prose poem from the late Danish poet Per Højholt’s collection *Practice, 8: Album, tumult*, we are able to experience how time and speech unfold each other:

“Not very far into this piece the event occurs: a fresh now is introduced and vanished. Since this preterite included the now and not me, nor of course any possibly upcoming now, I must have been alive when I was using it and thus surely also capable of using this new and fresher now to note here the name of Søren Kierkegaard, even though he has long since been installed in a similar preterite.”

Here the linguistic expression’s play with time seems to derive its possible signification from the course of events constantly forfeiting its fleeting presence in the now to the pastness of the past. The verbal forms first mark the passage of time from 1) a present tense (“occurs”) for the yet future now, to 2) a passive voice (“is introduced”), where there is no agency that brings on the course of the now, up to 3) its closure as a completed event in the past tense (“vanished”), confirmed as something past by virtue of the word’s enunciation. Preterite (from the Latin *praeterire*, to pass) is the grammatical expression for the verbal form of the past with which we express something that took place or was in evidence in the past. But the text is very complex, because in its statement about the passage of time that occurs alongside or during its enunciation, a splitting of time takes place. On the one hand the text retains time in the words’ representational content, linguistic allusions and references to a world of varying recognizability for the reader relating to life and death, present and past, the time of note-taking and the time of the finished note, the I and Kierkegaard, and possibly also Kierkegaard’s concepts of the *Repetition* and the *Instant*. The words retain the linguistic image of the bygone and ephemeral world in a preterite, the testamentary epigram of writing on the presence of the living present in the moment. On the other hand, the text simultaneously produces the temporal progression in the unfolding of the action that will have written it down in its inscribed materiality. The text produces time as a term for its *enunciation*, but this time is not directly connected to any representations which the text’s *statements* about time might evoke in the reader. The text at once produces time as a representation and as an experienceable progression, during its duration, and moreover is itself a product of the time that determines its representation. The temporal condition for

the enunciation is repeated by the reader *while* reading is happening, thereby making it an experience on purely temporal terms other than that of the represented time rendered in the representational content of the words: the experience thus experiences itself as an effect of the otherwise inexperienceable time. With each new reading, the reader repeats the time of the enunciation, which in its capacity of a temporal and productive gesture links to the act of writing that will have produced it in a bygone present. Thus the text at once becomes a statement about and an enunciation of the time, in which the act of writing will have taken place, in a now where the I must “have been alive when I was using it”.

## XII.

The term used by Højlholt, inter alia in *The Grimaces of Nothingness*, for the manifestational act of writing that produces signifying writing or speech in space, is the substantival infinitive or gerund *writing*. [Ed. The Danish word “skriven” can thus be translated as “the act of writing”.] Such an act of writing is in itself a temporal gesture, but by means of graphic or acoustic engravings in space, it produces the material conditions for linguistic expression, some of which we grant the status of literature or art. In traditional literature, as in standard language usage, the writing produced is the vector of a linguistic expression that refers the reader to a recognizable world. This is the ontological commitment, instituted expectations, formal conventions and rhetorical *topoi* with which tradition fixates literature and the reader, exacting from literature statements about our existence, the world in which we feel at home. Literature may well differ from standard language usage in as far as we expect it to uncover aspects of our existence which we were not or could not be completely familiar with before that, regardless of the linguistic expression used by that literature. And with the triumphant credo, “plunge to the depths of Heaven and Hell,/ to fathom the Unknown, and find the *new*”, with which Charles Baudelaire greets farewell in *Le voyage*, the final poem in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, poetry and art become ontologically committed to a truth and authenticity to which we summon poets and artists as witnesses and guarantors. But a fundamental shift takes place in poetic practice when the act of writing that usually produces writing or speech merely as a vector of signification, i.e. the material conditions for language’s commitment to an assumed *being*, begins drawing our attention to writing and speech regardless of the ordinary expressive practice, enabling a connection to be read from expression, between the act of writing and its written work, actual speech and its speaking. This is the gesture of time with which speech seems to speak solely for the sake of speaking, apparently preoccupied merely by its own expressive practice. It comes to the fore where reference is no longer made to presupposed being, but now only to the action or writing that will have produced it as it was unfurling, and which we *now, here* reiterate through our reading. No longer is the being then something pre-supposed, uncovered by language, but something it produces as its effect, as if from nothing.

We may well perceive that language instinctively refers to something, but in an expressive practice like Højlholt’s the aesthetic gesture dismantles the ordinary reference to being as expression’s prerequisite in favour of a manifestation of being as an effect of language and the unfurling of time. Even if such expressions appear to speak only about themselves, they can bring the reader’s ontological view of being as something presupposed into a critical dialogue with the experience of (one’s own) being as an existence subordinate to the course of a duration.

## XIII.

Long before modern literature, modern visual art changes its expressive practice in such a way that its works cease to *persuade* solely by means of representation, rendering spatial reality by means of representational content – in the case of painting as a spatial illusion on the surface of the canvas. In the classical creation of painting, representation will seek to hide its illusory play in order to be able to function as persuasively as possible on the same sensuous conditions under which things appear in the world. *Persuasio*, the gesture of persuasion, depends on the sympathetic insight of the audience, here as in any other representation whatsoever. Just as in the case of a classical drama, the audience for a speech or the representation of an aesthetic expression of a particular reality must empathize emotionally and intellectually, completely and utterly, with its assertion of what is real in order to *realize* what is being presented or performed before their eyes *as* real. The audience must enter into a contract that it is willing to play along with an illusion, to allow itself to be seduced, cf. the Greek goddess Peitho, who was the personified spirit of persuasion, seduction and ingratiating speech (corresponding to Suada in the Roman tradition, cp. *suadere*, to *persuade*). Even Constable and Turner start to undo this illusory play, each in their own way drawing a hitherto metaphysical firmament over onto the physical surface of the canvas. And rather than reproducing a sensuous perception of the sky by the use of colours, they make the materiality of those colours accessible to the perception. The colours refer to colours rather than to the sky, and by means of their own materiality they achieve an architectural solidity and strength. Since Cézanne in particular, therefore, modern painting has increasingly attempted to explore the aesthetic possibilities by insisting on its own material thingness, where the canvas acts as a surface that represents nothing, signifies *nothing*, which is tantamount to saying that it *signifies* nothing, it interprets, expounds or elucidates the nothing that *is*.

## XIV.

When, in the nineteenth century, visual art begins to represent the temporal terms for movements and transformations in space, this starts out by taking place as deformations of the motif represented. Certainly,

neither movement nor transformation defines time, on the contrary, it is time that makes these possible and thus defines them. When art seeks to represent time in images, then, its effects unfurl in space in such a way that things no longer appear in the order in which we would generally expect to find them. We can observe elements of this development of the pictorial in the mutual inspiration and exchange that takes place between the French scientist and photographer Étienne-Jules Marey and the eccentric English photographer Eadweard Muybridge. As proof that a trotting horse has all four hooves lifted off the ground for a brief instant, Muybridge is able, after many experiments conducted in the 1870s, to produce a series of sequential photographs and thus reveal a hitherto hidden temporal aspect of being: like a Pegasus, the horse raises itself off the ground briefly. This photographic full-stop to the doubt that had prevailed until then says nothing about time per se, admittedly, but it does act as a statement on movement as a temporal effect. When asked by a duly impressed Marey whether his camera can also capture a bird in flight, however, Muybridge has to admit defeat. In return, Marey himself succeeds in capturing the movement of flying birds with the aid of a chronophotographic technique he develops during the 1880s. But unlike previous eras' attempts at snapshots, his pictures of birds' flight are not frozen stills but staggered stages of the movement captured on a single photographic plate, seeming to reproduce one successive movement. This can be found amply documented in the work *Le Vol des Oiseaux* from 1890. The capturing of the movement does admittedly result in the birds' figures appearing fuzzy and the contours blurred, but the deformation of the motif has no influence on the space in which the movement is captured. The space remains intact as a framework for the reproduction, succumbing discreetly to the representation of the motifs. But if the space remains a local framework for the present of an instant, the physical movement through space must necessarily appear distorted by the passage of time, precisely since the latter cannot be localized in an unambiguous and fixable present in space. So, although the matter is represented in the form of a paradox, that paradoxality appears in an immutable and in a way unaffected space.

#### XV.

The art of painting deals with the same problem, but the issue is now subjected to aesthetic terms in appreciation of the fact that the creative gesture, the act of *writing* as a signifying gesture, is subordinate to time, and this productive time cannot be kept apart from produced time. The problem particularly preoccupies Marcel Duchamp, and in a work as early as his *Nu descendant un escalier n° 2* from 1912, inspired by Muybridge's series of images from 1887, *Woman Walking Downstairs*, the various stages in the represented figure's walk down the stairs superimpose one another with a visual echo effect that fills out the picture frame. In so doing, the relationship between space and figure begins to dissolve, and so the picture represents an incipient deformation of the actual space in

which the movement is reproduced. The space no longer succumbs to the movement through it, but itself now becomes subordinate to time. The same consequences could be drawn from Umberto Boccioni's 1913 sculpture, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, where the deformation of a walking figure propagates an advancing motion that injects dynamism into the negative space of the sculptural form.

#### XVI.

However, the deformation of the pictorial space is much more consistent in Duchamp's incomplete work, *Le Grand Verre* (1915-23), in which the dynamic course of time in the productive gesture engages in structuralizing different aspects of the extraordinarily complex and, in principle, unfinishable work, which indeed Duchamp himself finally has to declare "definitively incomplete". The glass-painted work in no way allows itself to be captured by an aesthetic glance that might seek to view it at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The work allows for no subordination to any one gaze, not least because its status as a work is disrupted by the explanatory book published later, *La Boîte Verte* (1934), not as an afterthought, a supplement to the work, but as part of it, a graffito on the work. And because it thus comes about over time, it remains just that: unfinishable and hence indeterminable. The book contains "eight years' ideas, reflexions, thoughts", as he says, connected to the work on *Le Grand Verre*, and includes 93 written notes, sketches and photographs with visual and linguistic motifs. Furthermore, the originals of this were published as 320 lithographs (in twenty cases, together with a single original document) which, like Duchamp's different *ready-mades*, are instrumental in undoing both the work and the autonomy of the category of work. In addition there are replicas in Sweden and the UK authenticated and certified by Duchamp himself, not as copies in the traditional sense but as simulacres on a par with the 'original' work. A number of replicas have been made since Duchamp's death in 1968, and together with the book and the lithographs they all continue writing on the work, just as comments like this do too, as a constantly changing palimpsest. It can scarcely be any wonder, then, why the Mexican author Octavio Paz in *Marcel Duchamp or The Castle of Purity* regards Duchamp as a poet and his expressive practice as literature rather than as painting: "The direct antecedent of Duchamp is not to be found in painting but in poetry: Mallarmé". And with reference to Mallarmé's great typographical experiment, the permutational prose poem from 1897, Paz concludes that "the work which most closely resembles the Large Glass is *Un coup de dés*."

#### XVII.

But the gesture of time can also be read from the painterly art that turns its aesthetic expression inwards, towards the surface in more traditional material and sensuous terms. This becomes clear when comparing a

still-life by a 17th-century Dutchman or Chardin with a still-life by Cézanne. Where the classic still-life subordinates its motif to a fixed point of view and point in time, in a calm, indifferent and almost abstract space so that it appears to reproduce its motif with eternal hesitancy, this is where Cézanne dissolves *his* motif in surfaces reproduced from different points of view and made at different times with motivic distortions as its result. The shapes of the motif seem to be regarded as if through the eye of a fly, a multifaceted gaze that views them from different angles simultaneously. Rather it is the bygone time in which the motif was produced that has been painted into, *inscribed* into, the painting as a still-active time, leaving it to the beholder to embody its time. The beholder is drawn into the surface of the pictorial space and for the duration of the observation unites the various points of view and points in time, in and with the body's own indivisible and continuous time, and consequently, in the words of Duchamp, "the viewer makes the picture". In some traditions within modern painting, however, the additional consequence is that the gestures of time begin to take over its works, until the motifs will have faded away entirely and the canvases no longer reproduce anything, as it can be construed from Mondrian, Malevich or American abstract expressionism. Such expressive practice no longer represents anything, but has completely yielded to the materiality of its physical condition as an expressive surface, whose only signification is that the gesture of time, the act of writing, will have produced it.

On the face of it, Olsen's and Christensen's paintworks on walls and other surfaces scattered around the urban space do not cause a great stir; they are neither frilly nor fussy, neither blot nor bling, and do not appear alarming or intrusive. Particularly in those instances where they have been designed as a square surface with slightly contrasting colourways or a colouristically well-matched shade in relation to the painted wall, they comply discreetly, almost elegantly, with the buildings' unostentatious architecture as a natural part of the walls' otherwise silent expression. In such instances, rather, they give the appearance of a *buff*, a pre-existing graffito painted over with a flat colour that attempts to restore the anonymity of the wall surface. Yet in a way, they are graffiti on graffiti, *buff art*, the parodic palimpsest on the narrow-minded *buff* of niceness. Thus they seem to be in the simultaneous process of imbuing the buildings with a voice, allowing them to speak, or even *sing*, such as the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry talks about in *Eupalinos or the Architect*, a pastiche on Plato's dialogues. Valéry has Eupalinos say that, of the city's buildings which are populated, "certain are mute; others speak; and others, finally – and they are most rare – *sing*." Buildings, then, express themselves through different forms of enunciations, not because it is "their purpose, nor even their general features, that give them such animation, or that reduce them to silence. These things depend upon the talent of their builder, or on the favour of the Muses." But once the master builder has abandoned his building prematurely and has left it to live out its life in anonymity, it is down to the graffiti artist to raise it to life, to give it a voice by allowing the graffiti to erase its silent expression and rehash the building, not as *background* to his own expressive practice, but in *dialogue* with it. When, *now, here*, in a book or at an exhibition, we view the scattered paintworks as a whole, they appear to be subordinate to an unfailing pattern, the projected aesthetics of dialogic expressive practice, which has gradually come to disclose an artistic signature, though the graffiti of the individual paintworks in their scattered locales constitute their own autograph.

Even though a number of paintworks, by means of iterative scorings on wall surfaces – in the form of zigzags, vertical and horizontal lines or wavy, arabesque-like doodles – approximate to the written characters or ideograms of the alphabet, in their sign status they remain devoid of significance and leave no references in the ordinary sense. In a way, the paintworks do respect the aniconistic prohibition of idolatry, which is a defining factor in the arabesque's relationship with figuration. The paintworks' approximation to figuration does not represent anything, does not invoke any iconicity, does not resemble anything and does not reproduce anything pre-established: by drawing their expression

out towards the materiality of the scribbles as a writing surface pure and simple, they represent *nothing*, or one is forced to read them as enunciating *nothing*. What we have here is the form of *anti-mimesis* which Niels Egebak, in his book by the same name, qualifies as a more authentic *mimesis*, which emphasizes the creative element (*poiēsis*) of artistic production rather than the imitative aspect dwelt on by traditional *mimesis* interpretation, carrying on from Plato. Representing (imagining) nothing is a destruction of the ontology that considers itself capable of asserting a natural connection between word and thing, image and world. At the same time their abstraction and suspended balance endows the paintworks with qualities evoking recollections of classical Zen Buddhist *calligraphies*. Unlike the western understanding of calligraphy as fine handwriting, the calligraphy in Zen Buddhist pen-and-ink drawing, as in these paintworks, is characterized by an improvisatory expression consisting of dynamic movements, asymmetrical markings, rhythmic vitality in accordance with a sense of spontaneity and articulation of the *spatium* between the ‘flesh’ and ‘bones’ of the strokes, as the Zen calligraphers put it, conducive to the harmony and balance of the expression as a whole. Paradoxically, the spaces thereby produced as a result of the paintworks’ speech are captured in the surface as speaking gaps, *spatia*, in dialogue with the expression of the painted wall, which has thus far been silent.

## XX.

The same balanced expression manifests itself in the substantial surface paintworks, which, like palimpsests, are applied to the different buildings’ often voluminous, but in themselves mute surfaces. *Paintworks* thus primarily scans for aspects of the surface’s dimension, taking into account its distinctive potential for expression. The paintworks speak *through* their surfaces *about* the surface, *as* speech. In that respect they form a unique variant of the kind of linguistic expressions concerned with their own expressive practice. At the same time, they submit experimentally to the aesthetically productive possibilities associated with making such expressions invoke and reflect on their most immediate materiality: colour, shape, surface, paint stroke, background and locality. By insisting on their own flattened character, in the form of rectangles and signs devoid of significance, the paintworks initiate a dialogue with the walls’ flat background, thereby drawing these into the foreground: the walls here are not more or less neutral backdrops for graffiti, but through the paintworks’ differentiating movements on their surface the walls suddenly leap forward from their insignificant background and assert themselves as the paintworks’ *spatium*. In so doing, *Paintworks* is still in touch with the trend in visual art from Manet and Cézanne to American abstract expressionism, in which the correlation between background, middle ground and foreground is gradually dismantled. Already in Cézanne’s many portraits of Mme Cézanne, where the background is represented with the same passion as his wife’s face, the emphatic ground levels out the

depth of the picture: a convergence of figure and ground shifts the depth in the picture over towards a *spatium*. We find a similar interpretation of space as *spatium*, rather than illusionary space, in *Paintworks*. Here, in dialogue with the walls, the artistic expression represents a spatiality that stresses *intensio* rather than *extensio*. The walls appear in their own right as an articulation of an extended, uniform, optical space, slipping into the background of the emptiness of the urban space, but the dynamic effect on the walls generated by the paintworks produces an intensive, affective, haptic space, a *spatium*. So the visual expression in the paintworks also seems to display a kind of elective affinity with the obscure novella, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, published by the schoolteacher and theologian Edwin Abbott Abbott in 1884 under the pseudonym A Square. *Flatland* is designed as a systematic investigation of its world’s two dimensions through descriptions of nature, climate, houses, inhabitants, the irregular figure, the sense of sight, the painting practice of the ancient world, colours, visions of a *Lineland*, a visit by Sphere from *Spaceland* and a two-dimensional world’s issue with a theory of three dimensions. Evidently, *Paintworks* portrays its own *Flatland*, which investigates the dimensions of *its* world on the terms of visual expression, but such a stipulation still relies solely on the formal constraints of expression based on a strictly spatial point of view. In adhering to a spatial outlook on these paintworks, we are surely in excessive thrall to the ontological aesthetics of conventional art interpretation, which has always found it hard to retain and document the art of happening, land art, environmental art, art in the urban space and other art forms whose expression is linked to the *locality* of the place and subordinate to the *temporal* conditions of its very creation.

## XXI.

The rhythmic dynamic improvisations in *Paintworks* are subordinate to the temporal process in the significant gestures with which they are made. Despite having been made over some length of time, according to the photo-documentation, the paintworks stand out for their expression of immediacy, *now, here*, not as something *given*, but in accordance with *kairos*, the opportune moment, as something *seized* at the right time and place, a seizure of the place, the locality in front of which we have stopped. The temporality of improvisation can be read directly in the paintworks where the wet paint is running at the bottom of a painted field or from an apparently rashly applied stroke of paint, or where the field appears unfinished or where the calligraphic characters figure on the canvas of the walls with a sudden and surprising effect. Through the documentation, it is possible to read the temporal creation taking place over time. Even more essentially, however, part and parcel of the paintworks as graffiti art is that they appear with a temporary expression that offends against an order and will therefore be removed again, typically when the buildings’ authorized managers attempt to restore the broken order that comes about as a result of the paintworks’ unauthorized action.

That way, painting and painting-over, or removing paint at the individual location can be repeated in several goes until the paintwork seems to have sufficiently approached the nature of completeness, although it never finds rest on a permanent expression. A dialogue herewith emerges between forces which remain invisible to one another and refer back to two quintessentially different but mutually dependent, signifying gestures, which in turn interlink and conflate two approaches to time, implicating and complicating time through their changing actions. We are dealing with two forms of palimpsest here: 1) the *addition* in the form of the paintworks that initially enter into a dialogue with the walls' silent expression, but next time round enter into a dialogue with the efforts to remove them, and 2) the *removal*, which is no less significant than the paintworks, even though it seeks to neutralize them, but in so doing also ends up involuntarily dialoguing with them. The removal indirectly makes up a part of the work and contributes to its suggestive nature, as it is potentially capable of being present and absent, and is actually so at the same time. This gradually unfurled effect of the work, however, is only evoked clearly through the montage technique of the documenting photographs, albeit they seem to create a new palimpsest with the same gestures.

## XXII.

*Paintworks* thus plays on the duality of being and not being at once, as we can also read in Mallarmé's sonnet, *Toute l'âme résumée*, in which the final couplet reads: "Le sens trop précis rature/ Ta vague littérature" ("A too precise meaning erases/ Your vague literature"). The end rhyme *rature-littérature* marks the duality of the aesthetic palimpsest: it both eliminates and generates, it both *is* something and is *nothing*, something nothing. The removal of paintworks attempts to establish a spatial state where time stands still, or at least does not appear operative in the urban space whose changes and decay time nevertheless brings about. It is what we generally call 'niceness', even though several of the localities selected for painting basically stand out as examples of the dreary vacant sites of post-industrialism. However, the removal of the paintworks is subordinate to the paintworks' gestures, which initiate the dialogue; and by evoking changes in and of the urban space this same gesture becomes subordinate to time by the same gesture. The paintworks *open up* the urban space, not in the form of beautifying urban regeneration but in the form of a game or through playing with the walls' surfaces, thereby making the local urban space become active in a dynamic way. Where previously the walls merely hinted at the surroundings' space, there the paintworks endow them with voices and enable the architecture involved to articulate the space and make it its own thing as an urban space. In this way, through the temporality of this expressive practice, the paintworks' gestural signifiatory act, or its act of writing, initiates a critical dialogue and negotiations with the structurally hidden forces that assert themselves in the local ontology of the urban space.

For us passers-by, occasioned by the paintworks at an indeterminate locality, halting in our targeted movement on the way towards a destination, the locality becomes a *place* in its own right, and as a place it arches a space around us, thereby opening up an opportunity for conversation, perhaps about the place, about *Paintworks* or about other issues brought on by the work. Such gestural signifiatory acts in literature and art, then, encourage people to halt at the place of the work, allowing us to bump into it, so to speak. When we can bump into such works and the place where they unfurl, it is due to them asserting themselves with a particularly vigorous rhetorical *persuasio* or architectural solidity, which *first* draws attention to itself *before* being allowed to draw attention to anything else. It is this temporality that we cite as an antecedent in any expressive practice whatsoever, as a speech speaking about itself, a discourse (Lat. *discurrere*, to run back and forth) that dwells on the progressive movement of its enunciation before it can step out beyond itself and deliver statements about the world. Only on that basis can we *now, here* determine the locality a little more accurately as a vital signifiatory component in *Paintworks*. The work evidently does take care of the place where it unfurls. It displays a sort of *ethical* consideration towards the local place, which is instrumental in allowing the beholders at the locality to assign the work *ethos*, i.e. character. But what is the locale that *Paintworks* gives occasion to consider in this way? It actually makes no sense to speak about a *local* place or a local *place*, in as much as a place is always defined by its locality, which also means the locals residing at the place, and the whole of whose presence in the situation is linked to the place. Those who are made to stop in a place become present; they are assigned a Presence by means of that place and a communality with one another. That is why a work like *Paintworks* bears an ethical responsibility in its invoking of the passers-by, which is to say that the work opens up the urban space and renders the passers-by present. Above all else, then, the locale (Lat. *locus*, Gr. *topos*) constitutes its own, *proper* place – not as familiarity, as homeliness, for the stranger is also welcome in a strange place, in the ethically responsible locality, but in the form of the *proper*, the *prop*-rietary which those present become capable of ap-*propri*-ating by remaining at the place. It is this appropriation of the proprietary which is made possible by the local work in the urban space, and which *Paintworks* bestows upon different, select localities, which have not already made themselves remarkable by their properties.

## XXIV.

In a sense, the gesture of graffiti is always to appropriate a place by adding features to it, a local colouring, possibly just in the form of a *tag*, regardless of whether it is *all city*, the more permanent *landmark*, the banal 'Kilroy was here' or the spectacular Banksy, who seems to subject himself

a little too willingly to the ontology of conventional aesthetics. But it is a different kind of interaction with locality which we find in the various and scattered *Paintworks*, because they do not represent something in the same way but, on the contrary, represent *nothing*, say *nothing*. They have no desire to bring down the ‘walls of Jericho’ or have us ‘see the handwriting on the wall’. Rather, in their signifying gestures, they appear to be the remnants of an act of writing that did not have its expression as its aim, but accepts it as an involuntary circumstance by allowing the gestures of the act to unfurl in their space. All the more do they assume the nature of the instant, which we have repeatedly highlighted as a *now, here* that defies localization anywhere other than in a unique locality. A *now, here* is not generalizable, it is not comparable with anything other than itself, and as such it is just as much a nowhere. In English this duality is expressed as a *now-here*, which is simultaneously a *no-where* and in that sense becomes important for the title of Samuel Butler’s utopian novel *Erewhon, or Over the Range*, from 1872. Although the letters *h* and *w* are reversed, Butler understands *Erewhon* to be *nowhere* spelt backwards, and as the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze notes in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), “Butler’s *Erewhon* seems to us not only a hidden *no-where* but a disguised *now-here*.” It is such significance of the locale that manifests itself with *Paintworks*; not as statements about the particularity of the empirical urban space or the city’s abstract universality but as graffiti about graffiti, a speech that speaks merely in order to speak, and thus gives voice to the place. Indeed, how do the localities take up place in these paintworks? Like the place in Mallarmé’s typographically orchestrated *Un coup de dés*, when, across several pages, with a typography of their own, he spreads the words: “RIEN // N’AURA EU LIEU // QUE LE LIEU // EXCEPTÉ // PEUT-ÊTRE // UNE CONSTELLATION” (“Nothing // will have taken place // but the place // except // perhaps // a constellation”). Spread around the space of the city, at select localities, *Paintworks* marks a place where we halt and bump into the place *as* place. The work opens up the place as a place which *now, here* does not stand in place of anything but itself.

Paintworks  
Jonas Georg Christensen  
Peter Olsen  
2019

Texts by  
Claus Peder Pedersen  
Carsten Madsen

Translation and proofreading  
Tim Davies  
Joel Letkemann

Image editing  
Peter Olsen

Text editing  
Jonas Georg Christensen

Design  
Wrong Studio

Repro  
Per Englund

Print  
Narayana Press

Publishing and distribution  
Dokument Press © Årstavägen 26, 120 52 Årsta, Sweden. info@dokument.org  
Forlaget emancipa(t/ss)tionsfrugten

Paper  
Chromolux  
Artic Volume Ivory

Typography  
Genath

Print run  
1000

ISBN 978-91-88369-31-4  
Copyright is held by the authors

Thanks to Jesper Rasmussen,  
Søren Andreasen,  
Cecilia Wendt, Kristine Kemp,  
Jan Danebod, Niels Bjørn,  
Tobias Barenthin Lindblad,  
Jaime Stapleton, Kasper Hesselbjerg,  
Absalon Kirkeby and Leth & Gori

www.jonas-georg-christensen.net  
www.peter-olsen.net

www.dokument.org  
www.emancipatssionsfrugten.org



– *in book format! So this might be the first time it's possible to experience Olsen and Christensen's paintworks through sequential movement. In 2010 there was an opportunity to view two paintworks on a white wall – or how many paintworks? What paintwork?*

– *making use of the digital...*

– *yes, it was as if the use of the digital material brought out the multiple perspectives embodied by various locations.*

– *you mentioned time, what kind of concept of time are you talking about?*

– *multiple concepts of time, simultaneously, I would argue.*

– *so, as a work of art, the book brings about a politics of time?*



ISBN 978-91-88369-31-4