

Penelope Curtis characterizes the 'vocabulary' of sculpture according to four 'qualities' or 'functions': horizontal, vertical, closed and open.¹ On the basis of series of examples, dating from the Middle Ages to the present, Curtis elaborates on these qualities. Rachel Whiteread's castings of mattresses have, for example, horizontality in common with medieval tombs, and reliquaries are closed just like Damien Hirst's *A Thousand Years* (1990). Curtis's approach is founded on the conviction that these four qualities of sculpture are universal; they are more or less archetypes that can be discerned in sculpture from any historical period. The classification of sculpture in this way gives prime importance not to differences but to similarities with other and earlier traditions.

In the 1970s Rosalind Krauss argued precisely the opposite. In her book *Passages of Modern Sculpture* (1977) and the article 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1979) she shows, through the work of artists such as Carl Andre, Robert Smithson and Richard Long, that 'sculpture' is no universal category, but that it has been defined historically.² Sculpture has its own internal logic, with its own set of rules, and although that logic applies to a great number of objects, it allows for little change. A specific logic gives rise to traditions, but those traditions are subsequently exhausted and that leads to new types of logic. Here logic should not be taken in the strictly philosophical sense; this logic can instead be compared to what is referred to in literary theory as poetics: a set of assumptions as to the nature and function of, in this case, sculpture. For centuries the logic of sculpture could not be distinguished from the logic of the monument, but at the end of the nineteenth century the logic of the monument began to show cracks. While the patrons of Rodin's *La porte de l'enfer* and his

Les bourgeois de Calais had commissioned monuments, the works that he realized no longer complied with the rules that applied to these. For contrary to what can be seen today in Calais, Rodin's intention was to place the six citizens of Calais on a kind of low platform at a height of about twenty-five centimeters. As such the citizens of Calais would mingle, as it were, with the current citizens of this city. Such a staging was not consistent with the function of commemoration or tribute that was presumed in the logic of the monument. A high pedestal was required for that.

Abandoning the logic of the monument means that sculpture is no longer tied to a space or place. Two changes contribute to that. First and foremost, sculpture absorbs the pedestal on which the work stood until then, causing it to become detached from a specific place. Furthermore, in modern sculpture, the material and/or the constructive process becomes visible in the work, by which it represents its own autonomy. The work of Rodin is regarded as an example of sculpture that shows the constructive process; work by Brancusi is then the classic example of the pedestal being assimilated into the sculpture, and of sculpture which is nothing more than its own material.

This 'passage' to modern sculpture, epitomized by Rodin and Brancusi, is a detachment from classical sculpture in yet another respect. Until the birth of modern sculpture, sculpture derived meaning from the illusion that the image had an inner crux or essence which was responsible for its outward appearance. In a physical sense this can, for instance, be the skeleton of a human figure or muscles beneath the skin, which determine the outward appearance of a work. In a psychological sense it is a mood which is 'expressed' on the tactile

¹ Penelope Curtis, *Sculpture. Vertical, Horizontal, Closed, Open*. New Haven 2017, Yale University Press

² Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. New York 1977, The Viking Press; "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", October 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 30-44

surface and exterior of the sculpture. The late works of Messerschmidt, for instance, portray, perhaps most radically, this psychological essence expressed in the manifestation of the body. According to Krauss the work of Rodin and Brancusi provided the meaning of the image with a new location: the nature and meaning of the body is no longer to be understood from an inner core of that body, but must be interpreted from its surface.

Even when modern sculpture no longer involves a portrayal of the human body, the illusion of an inner core continues to have symbolic importance. The abstract forms of Henry Moore, for example, still suggest that the lifeless matter of the sculpture has taken shape on the basis of an organic heart, one which is outwardly responsible for the form. Not until the minimalism of Donald Judd or Richard Serra does the artist take distance from this as well.

To use the words of Krauss: “One arrives at a mode of composition from which the idea of *inner* necessity has been removed: the idea that the explanation for a particular configuration of forms or textures on the surface of an object is to be looked for at its center. In structural or abstract terms, compositional devices of the minimalists deny the logical importance of an interior space which much of previous twentieth-century sculpture had celebrated.”³

The steps taken by Krauss, from classic to early modern and then to minimalist sculpture, are quite big. I would like to focus here on a logic of sculpture to which she gives no consideration. How can we, for instance, understand the work of someone like Hans Hovy in terms of sculptural traditions? His series of works from 1995 and 1996, *Cast Iron Ordinair* and *Cast Iron Delux* do not consist of a human or abstract body placed on a pedestal. Although there is indeed a ground or a base, it sooner takes

the shape of a stage, a platform or a playing field. When we depart from the idea of a playing field, then multiple objects or ‘players’ continue to be placed on the field. Created in the platform are recesses or grooves in which the objects can be placed. The players on the field seem to adopt no fixed positions: they seem to be movable, and this gives rise to different dynamics among the objects. While the platforms and the objects on them are abstract, they do evoke a narrative dimension. This is where something happens. Scenes come about due to the way in which the objects relate to each other. Hovy is certainly not alone in creating such sculpture; he is part of a tradition which crops up on the fringes of the dominant sculptural traditions.

The platform serves as a base for a theatrical moment. The import of such sculpture should not be sought in an intrinsic essence, but in the dramatic tension among the objects inhabiting the scene. In modern sculpture this scenic logic is very important; one might think of Rodin’s *The Burghers of Calais*, but of even greater importance is the work of Alberto Giacometti, particularly that of his surrealist period. But with this scenic sculpture the tension between inner and outer has not been banished entirely.

These are now manifest differently, no longer as opposites but in contiguity, that is to say in direct connection with each other. And for the sake of clarity: the logic of the scenic platform should not be confused with that of the installation. Dramatic interaction on a platform is of an emphatically theatrical nature; this takes place on a stage. Despite the fact that installations are also three-dimensional and therefore possibly related to sculpture, the multiple elements that comprise an installation give rise not to a dramatic tension, but rather a tension that seems to have come about by chance or discovery. The difference is the

³ Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, pp. 251–53

podium on which the dramatic scenes are staged. They are not part of installations. In the famous letter that Giacometti wrote to Pierre Matisse in 1948, he explicitly distances himself from the sculptural tradition based on a human or abstract body:

Figures were never for me a compact mass but like a transparent construction. Again, after making all kinds of attempts, I made cages with open construction inside, executed in wood by a carpenter. There was a third element in reality that concerned me: movement. Despite all my efforts, it was impossible for me then to endure a sculpture that gave an illusion of movement, a leg advancing, a raised arm, a head looking sideways. I could only create such movement if it was real and actual, I also wanted to give the sensation of motion that could be induced. Several objects which move in relation to one another.⁴

With his ambition to portray the 'inducement of motion', Giacometti seems to indicate a transition from sculpture based on the compact mass of bodies to a type of sculpture consisting of a scene involving multiple objects or figures. And the inducement should not be represented but rather 'happen' in the sculpture itself. It is, after all, the dynamics among the figures or elements which prompt the movement. In the words of Matti Megged: 'Giacometti's stage has its own life, its own reality. On this stage, a sense of space-atmosphere surrounds the objects (both human and inanimate), penetrates them, becomes independent yet related to the world outside, through the field of vision that is created between the objects and the observer. In these surrealistic sculptures, one feels the element of dramatic action: the relations between the objects themselves, confined on the stage that the

artist created for them, indicate potential movement, struggle, change, although as sculptures they are, of course, static and immobile.⁵

Because the stage assumes various forms in Giacometti's work, I shall discuss a variety of works from different periods. Only then does it become clear that he assertively attempted to develop a new sculptural logic of scenic sculpture. His *Homme et femme* from 1928–29 is plainly comprised of two objects that relate to each other in a dramatic context. The title and the symbolic forms leave nothing for us to guess at. It is about penetration by a man, recognizable by way of the phallic form, in the middle of a woman's broad pelvis. This is no longer a body (abstract or otherwise) on a pedestal, but a scene of multiple objects on a foot which functions not as an anchoring of the scene, but as the location at which the scene takes place. With his *Homme, femme et enfant* from 1932, one can no longer speak of a foot which still has ambiguity; here three objects have simply been placed on a base consisting of a platform. The three objects on this are again obviously symbolic. A phallic triangle is directed at the wide hips of the female figure, while a little ball is supposed to represent the child. The triangle resembles, more than anything, a sharp weapon. The most singular thing here, however, is the platform that functions as a location for the theatrical scene between the man, woman and child. The male figure is situated inside a carved-out circle, the arena where the encounter between the man and woman will take place. The female figure is in a kind of slot, as though she can dodge to the right or left when attacked. The child remains in the background and is protected by the position of the mother. This marital scene is by no means romanticized – it is an image of violent conflict.

⁴ Alberto Giacometti, "(Première) Lettre à Pierre Matisse", Alberto Giacometti 1901–1966. Den Haag 1986, Haags Gemeentemuseum, p. 71; "Letter to Pierre Matisse", Alberto Giacometti.

New York, MoMA 1965, p. 20

⁵ Matti Megged, *Dialogue in the Void: Beckett & Giacometti*. New York 1985, Lumen Books. p. 21

Giacometti's *Pointe à l'oeil* from 1932 consists of a wooden platform into which three lines have been gouged. The lines suggest a division on a playing field or battlefield. On one side a head has been placed on a metal pin, and on the other side a long phallic form has been placed on top of the same type of pin and directed at the eye of the head. Although this scene is not necessarily from a marriage, it is indeed violent. The playing field takes on gruesome forms. Once again, the platform on which this scene has been situated is more than a base to which the objects have been attached. It is the landscape in which the dramatic events unfold. The platform of *Circuit* from 1931 offers more room to events that aren't necessarily violent; here the platform is sooner a playing field than a battlefield. Gouged out of the wood are a small cavity and a circular track. There is a little ball that can be rolled around the track. Giacometti's *On ne joue plus* from 1932 clearly suggests that playing fields can become battlefields. Carved out of the marble slab are a great number of round cavities. Three of these function as graves that can be covered. The title can be seen as a variation on the conclusive *rien ne va plus* which forbids players of roulette from placing further bets.

The platforms in Giacometti's work that provide a basis for dramatic scenes function as a defining context. In a few instances he also used frameworks that assumed more three-dimensional forms: what was referred to as the 'box'. It was these works in particular that the painter Francis Bacon admired; he adopted similar structures in many of his paintings. Giacometti's most famous work from this surrealistic period makes use of such a cage- or box-like space. *Boule suspendue* from 1931–1932 is situated inside the ribs of an open cage; a ball and a moon- or banana-shaped form are suspended within this three-dimensional structure. This variation on the platform also

offers room for a dramatic scene between two elements. The sexual overtones are again evident. Whether this is a playing field or a battlefield remains ambiguous. While similar to *Boule suspendue*, *La cage* (1931–32) is much more complex. A great number of abstract objects have been placed inside a cage construction; the sexual connotations of the work are once again obvious. Of a more ambiguous nature are the five large teeth that can be regarded either as phallic objects or as a *vagina dentata*. Whether this happens to be a phallic man or a phallic woman, the cage sooner functions as a battlefield than as a playing field.

When Giacometti begins, during the second half of the 1940s, to produce the elongated figures that made him so famous, he initially continues to make frequent use of platforms. In addition to this he uses cages around his figures, and pedestals on which to place them. In every case the platforms and pedestals are emphatically part of the work, rather than being a functional base on which it is placed. As such the platform or pedestal itself is exhibited, and the viewer must think about what its function is. *Quatre figurines sur base* from 1950, for instance, makes use of a tall, elongated pedestal, which in turn has been placed on a bronze table. In this case no dramatic or narrative tension whatsoever exists among the four female figures on the pedestal. They make up a row or a series which cannot be regarded as a scene.

When Giacometti places his figures not on a pedestal but on a platform, the works are plainly dramatic or narrative. This is suggested not only by the scenic compositions but the titles as well. Even though only one figure appears on the platform of *Homme traversant une place* (1949), it can indeed be called a scene, since the man is walking. *Place II (quatre hommes et une femme)* comprises a scene of multiple figures crisscrossing or meeting each other on a plaza.

The platform on which a figure is standing can, as such, some-times suggest a dramatic situation. *Le chariot* from 1950 shows a female figure on a cart or chariot. The wheels of the carriage are, in turn, placed on blocks resembling pedestals. The figure is standing still in a forced posture, this making it initially difficult to regard this sculpture as scenic. But when we consider the fact that the platform in this case consists of a carriage, we can look upon the figure's posture as a narrative scene, also due to her arms that she holds slightly away from her body. The scene consists of the female figure attempting, in a forced manner, to keep her balance, because her base is far from stable. This work, too, makes it clear that Giacometti didn't grapple with the modern artist's familiar question as to what his work should be placed on, but that the stage on which the sculpture appears has become part of the work. This certainly becomes evident from the work *Trois hommes qui marchent* (1948), which shows three men on a platform which has, in turn, again been placed on a pedestal. Because of that the platform is no neutral base but a demarcated space which is itself exhibited, thus causing the nature of this space to be questioned by the work.

The series of works *Cast Iron Ordinaire* and *Cast Iron Delux* by Hans Hovy are, along with the work of Giacometti, part of a sculptural tradition that has remained outside Krauss's field of vision. Their scenes on platforms assume continually different forms and utilize continually different possibilities of this sculptural 'logic'. The collection of rules that make up this logic is not absolutely determined; it can be employed in various ways. That is already evident merely from the diverse works from different periods of Giacometti's work that I have discussed. But the exploration and development of this distinct sculptural logic also becomes quite visible in the work of Hovy. He has clearly been inspired by the scenic sculpture of

Giacometti but implements the principle of scenes on a platform or stage even more emphatically and literally than Giacometti.

During the early 1990s Hovy produced a series of works in which the platform emphatically assumes the form of a playing field. These resemble the tables often used for card playing, but in this case made from a combination of high-quality types of wood, such as maple and ebony, or from cheaper material such as plywood. Two objects from this series, *Cross-cut* (1992–93) and *Lengthwise* (1992–93), consist of tables that have been constructed in two colors and two types of wood. One half comprises black ebony, the other half white maple. This dichotomy suggests the two halves of a football field or tennis court. The doughnut-like curves and phallus-like shapes that have been placed on these playing fields are, however, difficult to understand from the perspective of these games. They sooner suggest a game of a more sexual nature.

Other playing tables from this series, which have not been divided into two halves, seem to relate to different types of games. *Untitled* (1993) has, situated in the middle of a table, a funnel-like form which opens beneath the table, as if this were a kind of snooker table where the ball must be aimed into the hole. The objects on the table, however, are not balls; one object is sausage-shaped (phallic), another looks like some kind of dropping, a third is shaped like a diabolo. Time and again the forms of the objects have anthropomorphs, or more specifically, erotic dimensions. The works with the titles *Sodom* (2006), *Gomorra* (2006), and *The World of Sodom & Gomorra* (2009–12) constitute further variations on the logic of the scenic platform. These works are made of white alabaster and pink soapstone. These materials and their colours are fraught with meaning; their sensuality inevitably gives rise to erotic connotations. The white alabaster platforms are, this time,

not a neutral ground. In terms of form they can scarcely be distinguished from the objects that have been placed on or in them. The platform is much more than a location at which the scene occurs; it has itself become involved in the dramatic scene. With its inner spaces the platform offers room to phallic protrusions. The platforms have not only surface, but also inner spaces that can be penetrated by the objects that dominate the scene in terms of number. Here, the distinction between playing field and players that move about on it ceases, in fact, to exist. The platform no longer seems to be a stable ground, but is itself in motion and undergoing transformation.

While the surrealist-erotic platform scenes of Giacometti assume the gruesome forms of a battlefield, those of Hovy are chiefly playful and light-hearted, despite the ironic designation *The World of Sodom & Gomorra*. With Hovy the scenes are about innocent and naive children who unsuspectingly, and without any awareness of the implications of sexuality, stick their penises or fingers in every orifice or present their vulvas, mouths or anus to anyone who asks. In an age dominated by me-too conflicts, this portrayal of sexuality is not only literal and emphatic; it is also liberating. For sexuality is not only dead seriousness.

Sexuality is evoked by Giacometti and Hovy in very different ways. Giacometti works mainly on a symbolic level: he makes use of objects that symbolize the phallus or 'the woman', as a wide pelvis does. Due to that symbolic dimension, his surrealistic universe is a mythological universe. Hovy, on the other hand, suggests sexuality on the basis of form and matter. He does not represent sexuality directly, but suggests it indirectly; he gives rise to this association with the aid of, among other things, an affective transmission of form and material. The sensuality of soapstone and alabaster, and

his workmanship in this, are the qualities that set the affective transmission in motion. And even though many of his objects are phallic, they are not as such due to the symbolization or representation of the phallus. This is partly suggested by a very vague similarity. They are phallic because they display a similarity: in terms of Peircean semiotics, they are icons rather than symbols. But this suggestive, iconic likeness is affectively heightened by way of color and material.

Hovy's Arcadian depiction of sexuality should not be regarded as a naive idealization. The scenic depiction of sexuality as a battle-field is, as with Giacometti, more common, and for that reason Hovy's playing fields are more provocative. Or perhaps we should say that Hovy's depiction of sexuality is provocative precisely because it is a naive idealization. Because ever since Adam and Eve were banished from paradise, sexuality lost its innocence once and for all. Nonetheless some of Hovy's sexual playing fields have titles such as *Total Innocence of Small, Little, Lovely*. The distinction between good and evil seems, with these works and their titles, to be denied or ignored. Whereas Adam and Eve become aware of their sexuality outside of paradise and cover themselves in shame, Hovy's works seem to express no sense of shame whatsoever. This is sooner a matter of uninhibited surrender.

Hovy's works *Small, Little, Lovely I* and *II* introduce scenic dynamics to the nth degree. (With Giacometti we already saw that he focused emphatically on scenic dynamics by placing the platform, in turn, on a pedestal.) In *Small, Little, Lovely I* a spherical white alabaster platform is standing on a flat bronze platform. Standing on the latter platform are also, aside from the first platform containing objects, two bronze objects. These objects relate not only to each other, but to the other platform as well. Such stratified dynamics

can be seen as a voyeuristic situation: the black figures observe what takes place on the other platform.

In recent works such as *Sculptissimo* and *Masterpiece*, Hovy reflects on the scenic platform in yet another way. We already saw previously that the platform in his work does not necessarily consist of a flat location; it can also involve hills, bulges and ball-like shapes. The platform in recent work consists of unpolished rock masses. Placed on these unformed rocks are figures or objects, each containing a letter. The titles of the works, *Sculptissimo* and *Masterpiece*, are displayed on the rock platforms. The rock masses occupy far more space than the more neutral base of the platforms. Nevertheless these continue to be bases for objects. But it is unclear as to whether those objects still collectively comprise a scene. They are less emphatic players on a playing field, or warriors on a battlefield. The rock masses are no longer subordinate to the scenes for which they offer room. The integration of the pedestal into the sculpture had already taken place earlier when the modern sculptural logic came about, particularly in the work of Brancusi. Here something similar seems to occur, not with the pedestal but with the platform. The dramatic tension is of a different nature, as it arises among different elements. The scene now assumes a different form: rather than the usual dramatic tension among various elements on a stage, now there is tension mainly between the elements and the rock-like platform. The platform gains the upper hand and begins to demand more attention.

The elements that have been placed on the rock masses are of a very different nature than before. Instead of phallic shapes, bulges or curves that evoke sexuality in an iconic manner, we now see, apart from opened spherical forms, letters in particular. Even though many of those letters once again suggest phallic forms, at the same

time they symbolically signify the letter for which they stand.

Not all of the objects that collectively give rise to dramatic tension have been placed 'on' the rock masses; with increasing frequency they are situated 'in' or 'inside' the rock, as if in caverns. The classical tension between the sculpture's outward appearance and an inner essence which 'causes' or 'accounts for' the outward appearance has been turned inside out here. The object, which formerly consisted of a body (be it abstract or otherwise) which was placed on a pedestal, now constitutes the inner world of a rocky platform.

The podium or platform manifests itself in yet another way in the wearable and unwearable rings Hovy started making since 2010. These rings are usually placed on small ebony or white alabaster platforms. They suggest or foreground the idea of the podium in a new manner. The part of the ring that contains the hole through which one should stick one's finger already functions as a platform on which the ring can stand. But this functional part looks rather like a pedestal instead of a platform. The platforms on which the rings stand suggest that we should also read the hand or body that is supposed to wear the rings as platforms, as bodily platforms that is. The body is then not just the carrier of clothing and jewelry, but more like a podium on which scenes can be staged.

The relationship between interior and exterior which, according to Krauss, defines classical sculpture has not entirely vanished from these scenic platforms however. It simply manifests itself in a different way, that is to say no longer as opposites of each other but in relatedness to each other. All of the forms are 'in the making', which means that an inner space can become an outwardly protruding bulge. Inner and outer are not stable; they seem to merge with each other. This accounts for the many

sexual associations inevitably evoked not only in Hovy's but also in Giacometti's works. As I stated earlier, Giacometti's works symbolically conjure up, in particular, scenes from a marriage, while Hovy brings this about on the basis of similarity, by allowing forms iconically to resemble bulges and cavities. But neither of these forms are fixed, as they seem capable of merging effortlessly with each other.

The form of sexuality that is being evoked here can, in imitation of Sigmund Freud, be called polymorphous in the most literal sense. It concerns forms which, no matter how diverse they are, can merge effortlessly with each other. Among the consequences of this is the fluidity of all associations; in other words there are no fixed meanings to be ascribed. Male, female, top or bottom, all fixed positions and roles are inverted or interchangeable. The many inner spaces shown in Hovy's works are no longer typically female, nor can the protrusions be considered typically male. Both bodies and platforms have inner spaces and bulges. But what does that say about sculpture? This is a rephrasing of sculptural logic, and for that reason is the pinnacle of sculpture, by a master of the art. The works thus adhere to their promise, that is to say their titles: *Sculptissimo* and *Masterpiece*.

For a better understanding of the type of sculptural logic this concerns, it may be helpful to introduce a third player to the domain of sculpture: the Austrian draftsman and ceramist Elmar Trenkwalder. On initial consideration his sculptural work appears unrelated to that of Giacometti and Hovy, since he makes no use of platforms, not even pedestals. His works are sooner architectonic constructions, completely covered with ornamentation, comparable to Indian stupas. Even so, I should like to argue that his architectonic structures are comparable to platforms, because they too constitute a stage for elaborately ornamental scenes. Another significant

similarity with respect to Hovy's work is that his work, too, is sexual, even more explicitly than that of Hovy. In the baroque ornamentation of his drawings and sculptures we can discern vulvas, penises and anuses everywhere. Due to the profusion of male and female genitalia, of sexual positions and acts, in his work we begin to wonder, with this artist as well, whether this might be a somewhat childlike obsession with sex or if there might be more going on. The critic Frédéric Bodet takes the view that this is no childlike obsession but rather the manifestation of a specific outlook with regard to form. He argues that the ornamental forms of Trenkwalder are no longer determined by an inner essence or an expression from the inside out, but by an interaction with the surroundings. Sex is consequently not a provocative, childlike motif, but rather the illustration of how the forms of (sexual) 'bodies' are determined by the interaction with their surroundings. A clear example of that principle of design is one of Trenkwalder's drawings of a penis which, in a semi-erect state, gives shape to the monster-like creature that surrounds the penis. These two creatures are not stable in terms of form, but one form evokes the other.

With such a concept of form, sexuality is no longer a metaphor only for life but for sculpture as well. It implies a radically different notion of sculptural form than that of the classical tradition. Bodet substantiates this with the following statement that sex is not a theme being represented by Trenkwalder, but that the suggestion of it stems from a specific view as to how sculptural form comes about: 'Plant forms and decorative patterns drawn from sinuous and exacerbated baroque lines become sexual in his work in the same way. Their germinating growth and their symmetrical movements compete in glorious impression of a monumental

“erection”, whatever the actual dimensions of the sculpture might be.’⁶

The work of Trenkwalder helps us to gain a better understanding of the scenic sculpture by Giacometti and Hovy. With Trenkwalder, too, we repeatedly see a dramatic tension among multiple ornamental elements, but the form of those elements changes due to that dramatic tension. This treatment of form translates into sexual ‘bodies’, because these epitomize such a notion of form in the most natural and literal way. In any case, female ones do, but especially male genitals are not very stable in terms of form. This polymorphous sexuality shows that the battle fields or playing fields which the platforms comprise do not involve, as in football, established teams of players opposing each other. The sculptural form adjusts itself during the interaction among the elements, thus causing forms to be turned inside out and to become the opposite of what they initially were. Sculptural form consequently has no inner essence which explains or causes its outward appearance; it comes about in the dramatic tension for which the platforms offer or constitute an arena as demarcated spaces.

The question is whether this notion of form can be equated with notions pertaining to formlessness, which have been employed and explored in the work of many artists during the twentieth century.⁷ As the antithesis of form, formlessness can best be understood as a negation of the beauty of form as has been theorized in aesthetics. For harmonious form is supposedly considered ‘pure’. As such it comes as no surprise that Freud said little about the beauty of form in his writings on

psychoanalysis. The text in which Freud nevertheless commented most directly on the subject of beauty is *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. Freud makes the following observations that cause beauty to become something paradoxical: “Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it.”⁸ Several pages later he states the following: “‘Beauty’ and ‘charm’ are originally attributes of the sexual object. It is worth remarking that the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are nevertheless hardly judged to be beautiful; the quality of beauty seems, instead, to attach to certain secondary sexual characteristics.”⁹ Here Freud grapples with a potential relationship between a receptiveness to the beauty of form, aesthetic emotion and sexual excitement. The two emotions seem both closely related and mutually exclusive. The history of Western art appears to have confirmed Freud’s remarks. The representation of genitals in painting or sculpture has almost always been considered indecent. If a painting is to be considered ‘beautiful’, the representation of genitals should be avoided as much as possible. In his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* Freud makes a remark about the relationship between art and genitals which also sheds light on the relationship between the (broader) notion of beauty and sexual excitement:

The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts. It can, however, be diverted (‘sublimated’) in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the

⁶ Frédéric Bodet, ‘Details to the Point of Dizziness,’ Elmar Trenkwalder: Angel above Light and Shadows. Of the Redemptive Silence of Form. Wien 2018, Verlag für moderne Kunst, pp. 30–31.

⁷ Zie Yve-Alain Bois en Rosalind Krauss, *Formless. A User’s Guide*. New York 1997, Zone Books.

⁸ The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, The Hogarth Press, London 1953–73, Vol. 21, p. 82

⁹ The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, The Hogarth Press, London 1953–73, Vol. 21, p. 83

*genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole.*¹⁰

become polymorphous. This is not a loss of form, but rather the acquisition of form.

In his masterful study *Le Jugement de Paris*, Hubert Damisch writes that the quality beauty cannot be applicable to genitalia, because beauty is understood in terms of form, while genitals sooner belong to the domain of the unformed (*l'informe*).¹¹

But this is not to say that the one (the genitals) is a substitute for the other (the unformed). The psychoanalytic concept of sublimation forces us, actually, to justify the fact that the command of the unformed continues to play a role as a kind of undercurrent within the domain of form, of beauty therefore. Even though this view of the formlessness of genitals ascribes an aesthetic role to them, it does so at the expense of their form and the beauty associated with this. It is merely due to their instability of form and thus lack of beauty that they make sublimation obligatory and therefore nonetheless indirectly yield beauty.

The polymorphous sexuality of work by Trenkwalder and Hovy makes no use of the counterpart to form, formlessness, but of multiformity. The lack of stability in form signifies, in their work, not a negation of form but a continual transformation of form, in short multiformity. This multiformity is the result of the dramatic interaction among multiple elements. That dramatic interaction can occur, or come about, only within a sculptural logic which provides the opportunity for this by means of a stage. Both Hovy's platforms and Trenkwalder's architectonic 'stupas' offer that. When such a dramatic interaction is staged, the sculptural form adjusts itself during the interaction among the elements, thus causing forms to transform and

¹⁰ The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, The Hogarth Press, London 1953–73, Vol. 7, p. 148

¹¹ Hubert Damisch, *Le jugement de Paris*. Paris 1992, Flammarion.