

Given that there were visual arts projects also in other sites, the designation of the seven sites that Blistène worked on as "the visual arts sites" is somewhat misleading. However, from the perspective of the production team at the CCI, these "visual arts" sites, their preparation and installation were a matter apart and lay in the responsibility of the MNAM.¹ Another feature that makes these sites and the artworks they comprised stand out is their coverage in the exhibition catalogue, the *Inventaire*, with its unbound double-sided sheets, one for each of the sites. While the verso pages of almost all other sheets of the catalogue, dedicated to the various other sites, are only used to provide short production credits, and leave most of the available space empty, the verso pages for the 'visual arts sites' make ample use of the space, providing detailed technical descriptions and short, interpretative texts and quotations for the exhibited artworks. These descriptions and texts were prepared and edited by Bernard Blistène, even if – like all other text contributions from staff members – his name was not mentioned.²

It is generally known that Blistène had a role as an advisor to Lyotard for the selection of artworks. In the credits section of the exhibition catalogue, Blistène is mentioned as a conceptual advisor for visual arts, and as a coordinator for the MNAM of the cooperation within the CGP (alongside Catherine Counot for the BPI, and Nicolas Snowman for IRCAM).³ However, the extent of the collaboration between Blistène and Lyotard has so far been neither acknowledged nor analysed – an unfortunate deficit, not least in view of Blistène's career that led him to become the director of the MNAM from 2013 to 2021, making his contribution to *Les Immatériaux* one of the first major exhibition projects of one of the most important museum curators of contemporary art, in and beyond France.⁴ For the retrospective reception of the exhibition the unobtrusiveness of Blistène's contribution to the 'visual arts sites' was exacerbated by the fact that a much-noted interview about *Les Immatériaux* that Blistène conducted with Lyotard for the French and the international editions of *Flash Art* magazine, early in 1985, gives no indication that Blistène was in fact himself involved in the project in a role which was much more active than that of the critical observer he enacted for the interview.⁵

Yet, this oversight is somewhat understandable given that the 'visual arts sites' were dispersed throughout the large and diverse exhibition on the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou, making it unlikely that any visitor would have been able to conceive these seven sites as an ensemble. Lyotard would mostly have regarded them in their respective constellations with the immediately surrounding sites which contained a variety of other exhibits that he and other team members had selected, or that had been inherited from the earlier preparations of the exhibition, of which some projects had been initiated before Lyotard joined Chaput and his team in the summer of 1983. And even Blistène was aware that the 'visual arts sites' would not be perceived as an interrelated constellation, but rather as separate "interventions" into a wider, complex mesh of exhibits in which for most exhibition visitors

¹ For instance, they appear in a planning document compiled by exhibition scenographer Philippe Délis and architect Katia Lafitte for the set-up of the exhibition ("mis en scène, descriptif montage", dated 17 January 1985, CGP-AP 1995052W026_011); while there are installation details here for all other sites, this document summarily refers to the "MUSÉE" for the installation of the seven 'visual arts sites.'

² Personal correspondence by Sabine Vigoureux, 12.5.2020, who assisted Blistène and compiled the material for the catalogue. – Another exception is formed by the *Inventaire* sheets for three sites related to architecture (*Architecture plane, Référence inversée, Terroir oublié*) which also include detailed descriptions of the exhibits, drafted by the CCI's curator of architecture, Alain Guiheux.

³ See *Les Immatériaux, Épreuves d'écriture*, 1985, p. 3.

⁴ While the study by Antonia Wunderlich (2008) mentions Blistène only with regard to the interview that Blistène did with Lyotard for *Flash Art* (1985), Francesca Gallo (2008, p. 81) and Antony Hudek (2009/2015, p. 74) briefly acknowledge the fact that the collaboration occurred; Hudek even writes that "Blistène was responsible for the selection of most artworks in *Les Immatériaux*," but, like Gallo, offers neither proof for this claim nor further analysis of Blistène's contribution. Hudek emphasises that it was Lyotard's choice to include the Egyptian bas-relief, as well as Duchamp, Monory, and Buren. – The letter to Pierre Gaudibert of the Grenoble Museum which Hudek references for information "on Blistène's role" (p. 74, fn. 15) does not mention Blistène (CGP-AP 1994033W669_251).

⁵ See Blistène (1985) in Lyotard 2020.

they were mere random encounters in a maze in which, infamously, some visitors afterwards claimed not to have seen any artworks at all.⁶

Viewed from the perspective of the overall exhibition and given the multiple other artworks and artists' projects on display, a focus on the ensemble co-curated by Blistène and Lyotard may therefore appear arbitrary.⁷ It would certainly not make sense to extract this set and to view it as separate from the rest of the exhibits. Blistène was well aware of the conceptual context in which the works he proposed would be presented. He joined several of the CCI's team meetings and therefore knew about the diversity of angles through which the issues of materiality and mediality were approached. Moreover, Lyotard would have made the meshwork and complex interrelations and neighbourhoods within the exhibition an important part of their conversations in 1984. However, if we want to understand the exhibition by analysing the thematic, medial, and conceptual relations between different sites and contributing actors, then one of these constellations to study should be *the visual arts sites* that Lyotard developed together with Blistène.

The following, first part of this text gives an account of the institutional and organisational context in which the collaboration of Lyotard and Blistène evolved. It draws on the preparatory documents for the exhibition that are held by the Public Archives of the CGP (CGP-AP). These also form the basis for the second part where we look more closely at the selection of artworks. The documents offer a unique insight into the curatorial process in that they refer not only to the works that finally were presented in the exhibition, but also mention a number of artworks that were considered and discussed at some point during 1984, but that for one reason or other did not make it into the final show. These works which were deselected, *pas-choisis*, or which could not be included for other reasons, form a sort of shadow zone which in itself elucidates aspects of the curatorial process under review here.⁸

The purpose of this text is twofold: it presents the specific historical case about which too little is known up until now, and it explores a methodology for adequately describing such a case of a curatorial practice, furrowed by the multiple entanglements that are part and parcel of the everyday experience of many curators. The investigation is marred by the fragmentary quality of the archive on which it can draw: while certain aspects can be gleaned from the available archival documents with much accuracy, other aspects of the curatorial process are today quite obscure and can only be guessed at. Such inconsistency is a standard feature of any historiographic work, yet it is worth considering its effects in the context of an art historical investigation of curatorial practice, asking how the material base of such research informs its potential results.⁹

⁶ Bernard Blistène, personal conversation, Paris, 7.9.2020; for the latter claim, see Heinich 1986, p. 77, and Wunderlich 2008, p. 43.

⁷ From the perspective of Lyotard's own, more synoptic view, it appears justified that, for instance, in a chapter on the arts program of the exhibition, Francesca Gallo (2008, p. 115-117) reviews the works by Soltau (in *L'Ange* and *Les trois mères*), Francken (*Inventaire* page for *Tous les auteurs*) and Klonaris/Thomadaki (in *L'Ange*) together, even though they featured in different parts of the exhibition, and outside the 'visual arts sites.'

⁸ One of the artists in this shadow zone is Daniel Buren who, instead of contributing to the exhibition proper, participated in the writing experiment *Epreuves d'écriture*. Buren was an important inspiration for both Lyotard's and Blistène's understanding of contemporary art; see Jean-François Lyotard: *Que peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren. What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren*. [1987] Leuven University Press, 2012; Bernard Blistène: "Daniel Buren at the Centre Pompidou." In: Daniel Buren: *The Museum that did not exist*. Munich, London: Prestel, 2010, p. 9-23 and 47-62.

⁹ I want to acknowledge the foundational work on *Les Immatériaux* by Antonia Wunderlich, Francesca Gallo and Antony Hudek, as well as the continued support of my research by Marie Vicet and Martine Moinot, and the assistance of Jean-Philippe Bonilli and Jean Charlier in the Archives publiques of the Centre George Pompidou. At an early stage, the material presented here was discussed in a seminar at Leuphana University, Lüneburg, in January 2020, whose students helped to advance the research that this text is based on. I'm grateful for important hints and commentaries on earlier versions of the manuscript, provided by Beatrice von Bismarck, Francesca Gallo, Jérôme Glicenstein, and Bernard Blistène.

I. Institutional and pragmatic aspects of the cooperation between Lyotard and Blistène

When Jean-François Lyotard, in the summer of 1983, joined the team at the CCI for an exhibition on "new materials and creation," one of his first initiatives was to insist on the addition of artworks to the exhibition project for which Lyotard proposed, in August 1983, the title *Les Immatériaux*.

Thierry Chapat's earlier concept, entitled *La matière dans tous ses états* [Matter in all kinds of states] and compiled in April 1983, before Lyotard's arrival, had mentioned a variety of media, art and design exhibits, but no artworks from museums or art collections. This document also lists a host of potential cooperation partners, institutions, agencies and companies, including the Centre Pompidou's IRCAM and BPI, but it does not mention the MNAM.¹⁰ The non-participation of the MNAM, envisaged at that point, is confirmed by the minutes of a general meeting at the CCI on 22 June 1983, shortly after Lyotard had first been contacted. The minutes mention the project on "*Matériaux nouveaux et création*" (still under a working title first formulated in the summer of 1981), and affirm that Lyotard will act as chief curator, "assisted by Thierry Chapat and his team, who have done a lot of hard work and who are maintaining their responsibilities." As regards the position of the project within the CGP, the report states: "Originally an interdepartmental project, it has now become essentially a CCI project with the participation of IRCAM and BPI."¹¹

From this we can surmise that it was on Lyotard's initiative that the MNAM was brought back into the project. When his first conceptual sketch, the "*Esquisse*" [Sketch] of 10 August 1983, was distributed to the directors of the different CGP departments at the beginning of September, copies were not only sent to Melot (BPI) and Boulez (IRCAM), but also to Dominique Bozo (MNAM).¹² There was a personal meeting between Lyotard and Bozo a couple of weeks later (19 September), during which the participation of the MNAM was arranged.¹³ When Lyotard returned in December from a semester of teaching in California, there was a follow-up meeting with "Bozo & équipe" (9 December), including the MNAM's contemporary art curators Alfred Pacquement, Catherine David and Bernard Blistène, and, three weeks later, the first occasion for Blistène to join the *Immatériaux* team (29 December).¹⁴ The participation of the MNAM was officially confirmed in the dossier for the CGP's annual press conference on 19 February 1984, which states, in the chapter on the activities of the MNAM, that "the Museum will participate in the interdepartmental exhibitions of the Centre, like for instance *Immatériaux*, *Miroir*, ..." ¹⁵

Given the tensions between the departments, and the scepticism within the MNAM towards the activities of the CCI which were mostly dedicated to applied arts and design, bringing the museum on board for his exhibition project was a significant achievement by Lyotard himself. And that scepticism on the part of the MNAM was not without justification, given that Lyotard quite obviously did not seek to reserve a special status for the artworks within the exhibition, but rather professed to mix them in with exhibits from other fields. In the "*Esquisse*," Lyotard suggested to use a "semantic" understanding of "immateriality" that would make it possible to juxtapose the "dematerialisation of financial securities or electronic money on one side, and Suprematism, Minimal Art in painting, or Serialism in music on

¹⁰ CGP-AP 1994033W232_001.

¹¹ Document dated 1 July 1983. ("*assisté par Thierry Chapat et son équipe qui ont fourni un gros travail et qui conservent leurs responsabilités. ... A l'origine un projet interdépartement devient aujourd'hui un projet essentiellement CCI avec la participation de l'IRCAM et de la BPI.*") – On the origin of the project for *Les Immatériaux* in 1979–1981, see LIR Working Paper #5.

¹² See CGP-AP 1994033W666_032.

¹³ See Sabine Vigoureux's handwritten meeting notes in her notebook, CGP-AP 1994033W232_002.

¹⁴ For these and other dates, see LIR Working Paper #1, "Chronology".

¹⁵ See CGP-AP 1999032W009, p. 25 ("*le Musée participera aux expositions inter-départements du Centre, telles que "Immatériaux", "Miroir"...*"); analogously, in the chapter on the BPI: "*La B.P.I. participe également aux deux expositions de la Grande Galerie: Immatériaux (du 7 mars au 25 mai [1985]) et Intercultures (de fin novembre 1985 à mars 1986).*" (p. 76). See also a letter by Bozo to the President of the Centre Pompidou, dated 17.10.1983, sketching the terms of the agreement between Bozo and Lyotard (1992014W060_001).

the other."¹⁶ Artistic experimentation and technoscientific research would be put on a par, the overarching *sujet* being how they were both moving away from the human as their main scale reference.¹⁷ Similarly, in a follow-up concept drafted by Lyotard and Chaput in October 1983, examples for the "immaterials" [*immatériaux*] addressed in the exhibition comprise "a distant star, the helix of the DNA, a sound, a mark in a painting."¹⁸ Lyotard's "semantic" approach meant that he looked more generally at the shift of relational meanings, at associations which changed, as he claimed, in a large variety of areas, not in any area in particular. It is therefore not surprising that in the following selection process, he was rarely concerned about specific exhibits (including artworks), but about their constellation in the overall exhibition.

During their encounter in September 1983, Bozo and Lyotard agreed that there would be several corresponding curators from the museum who would work with Lyotard and liaise between the CCI and the MNAM for the visual arts program of the planned exhibition. Bernard Blistène, reminiscing in 2015 on how he first got involved, described that in 1983 he was a young curator, recently invited to join the MNAM's curatorial staff by its director Dominique Bozo, where he worked in a team of "*contemporains*," together with Alfred Pacquement, Catherine David, and later Christine van Assche.¹⁹ On one occasion that autumn, Bozo asked the assembled curators, who of them would want to be the *correspondent* for a project of the CCI with the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. Blistène recounts that he raised his hand quickly and without hesitation, because, as he said in 2015, he hoped that this would be an opportunity to engage more closely with Lyotard's philosophy which he had encountered during his studies in the 1970, through books like *Discours, figure* and *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud*. From the end of December 1983 onwards, Blistène assumed the assigned role which implied a series of personal meetings between him and Lyotard, as well as occasional participation in meetings of the *Immatériaux* team at the CCI.²⁰

Bernard Blistène, born in 1955, had studied Art History and Archaeology at the École du Louvre and worked as an art critic before joining the MNAM in 1983. His first tasks, besides the assignment to work with Lyotard, included exhibitions in the CGP's contemporary art galleries, of Barry Flanagan, Ulrich Rückriem, Christian Boltanski (all in 1984), Klaus Rinke (1985), and Enzo Cucchi (1986). For our present context it is also interesting that, in the summer of 1984, Blistène curated a group show called *ALIBIS*, which brought together a rather diverse mix of artworks on the theme of staging and make-belief.²¹

¹⁶ See Lyotard, *Esquisse*, p. 3 (CGPAP_1977001W130_002) ("... *la 'dématérialisation' des titres mobiliers ou la monnaie électronique, d'un côté et de l'autre le Suprématisme, le Minimal Art en peinture, ou en musique le Sérialisme.*")

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 6–7.

¹⁸ CGP-AP 1994033W669_003. The same text is used in the press dossier for the press conference on 19.02.1984 (CGP-AP 1999032W009). – In a meeting with the scientific advisors on 19.12.1983, Lyotard mentions as potential exhibits "scientific next to technological, artistic, etc." dispositives (CGP-AP 1994033W666_001). During the following meetings with this group (24.2., 20.3., 24.4., 14.5.1984), which did not include Blistène and must have been perceived by Lyotard as a different research track, there is, according to the minutes, no explicit mention of artworks. (Lyotard mentions these meetings with the scientific advisors in the full version of the interview with Blistène, 1985, p. 28.) – See also Lyotard's remark in the conference talk on 12 May 1985, where he states that the interrogation intended by the exhibits can occur in "*des oeuvres qui peuvent être de pensée, de science, de réflexion de littérature, de peinture, de cinéma.*" (CGP-AP 1977001W130_003, p. 9)

¹⁹ See Blistène 2015. Blistène and David started working for the MNAM at the same time, in 1983, whereas van Assche had worked at the CGP since 1974 and joined in 1984 the curatorial staff of the MNAM which Pacquement had been a member of since 1974.

²⁰ See "Chronology of *Les Immatériaux*," LIR-WP #1, v.2, 2020.

²¹ Exhibition *ALIBIS*, 6 July – 17 September 1984, Centre Georges Pompidou, Galeries Contemporaines, with works by Richard Artschwager, Gérard Collin-Thiébaud, Gérard Garouste, Luciano Fabro, Pierre Klossowski, Robert Longo, Carlo Maria Mariani, Cindy Sherman, Jan Vercruyse, Didier Vermeiren, William Wegman, and a catalogue insert by the artist group IFP (Information Fiction Publicité) whose members were Jean-François Brun, Dominique Pasqualini, and Philippe Thomas.

The work on *Les Immatériaux* was one of the early steps in the curator's career. In retrospect, Blistène regarded the insights gained from the collaboration with Lyotard – though maybe not so much from his involvement with the CCI and *Les Immatériaux* in general – as crucial for his future approach to contemporary art and exhibitions as spaces of knowledge and discourse:

I entered into an extraordinary situation, because here was Lyotard who considered the exhibition space as a space of reflection, as a space of genuine experimentation. In his private apartment Lyotard gave me and my wife, who was equally interested as I was, an "accelerated" philosophy course on the "postmodern condition" in order to build a base for moving ahead together. For me this was a truly enlightening moment. [...] The relation between the museum and knowledge [*savoir*] became a crucial aspect of this adventure. What I want to say is that this exhibition has opened up crucial breaches [*à ouvert des brèches essentielles*] above all in the relationship between universities and museums, especially with respect to the question of speech [*parole*].²²

A more formal description of Blistène's working relationship with Lyotard, and of the institutional relationship between CCI and MNAM, is provided by the phrasing used in the lending requests for artworks, submitted by the CCI in September 1984. It explained that the CCI had invited Lyotard to organise an exhibition entitled *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Georges Pompidou and continued:

The Centre de Création Industrielle has asked the Musée National d'Art Moderne to take charge of the visual arts part of this exhibition. This is why, in agreement with Dominique Bozo, Bernard Blistène was entrusted with the task of elaborating it in conjunction with Jean-François Lyotard and his team.²³

In similar contexts, Blistène wrote to his own correspondents that the CCI was organising with Lyotard an exhibition entitled *Les Immatériaux*, and again Blistène emphasised the collaboration with the philosopher over the institutional constellation: "Jean-François Lyotard asked me to work with him on the visual arts part of the exhibition."²⁴

More practically, Blistène retrospectively described his position towards Lyotard like this:

My role was one of a courier [*porteur*], to show to him certain artists of the time – I remember for instance introducing him to the work of Philippe Thomas; I also remember showing him the work of conceptual artists like Ian Wilson, who then in fact appeared in the exhibition.²⁵

This is, however, an overly modest description of the work that Blistène did for the exhibition, in the months from December 1983 to March 1985. A synoptic sketch that was drawn up in the summer of 1984 and that documents the names of the people responsible for the conceptualisation of the various sites, clearly indicates Blistène as the person in charge of the 'visual arts sites,' – analogous for instance to the scientific advisors Paul Caro and Michel Cassé for some of the scientific sites, or Alain Guiheux named for the architecture sites, or Jean-Louis Boissier for the site *Visites simulées*.²⁶ The

²² Blistène 2015.

²³ ("Le Centre de Création Industrielle a demandé du Musée National d'Art Moderne de prendre en charge la partie arts plastiques de cette exposition. C'est pourquoi, en accord avec Dominique Bozo, Bernard Blistène s'est vu confier en relation avec Jean-François Lyotard et son équipe, le soin de l'élaborer.") See respective letters to Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth, Takis, a.o., dated 22 February 1985 (CGP-AP 1994033W669).

²⁴ Blistène, 24.9.1984, to galerist Eric Fabre (CGP-AP 1994033W223_027). ("Jean-François Lyotard m'a demandé de m'occuper avec lui de la partie arts plastiques de l'exposition.")

²⁵ Blistène 2015. In the same context, Blistène also mentions that he carried "a gigantic computer to Jacques Derrida", a remark that relates to the computer Derrida was provided with for his participation in the collaborative writing experiment, *Épreuves d'écriture*, a project that Blistène was otherwise not involved in (see LIR Working Paper #7); he must have volunteered to help out, even though this lay outside of his responsibilities.

²⁶ 1994033W234_003. In this document Blistène's name is mentioned for the six sites, save for *Mots en scène* which, together with the entire *Labyrinthe du langage*, had not yet been conceptualised at that point in time.

two people who Blistène worked with most closely on this project, Jean-François Lyotard and Sabine Vigoureux, also confirmed his active and decisive role.

Sabine Vigoureux was detached from Chaput's team to assist Bernard Blistène and act as a go-between for the CCI's cooperation with the MNAM. Vigoureux had worked for the CCI, and occasionally with Chaput, since 1975, and had been part of the current project team for one year already when, in April 1984, she started working with Blistène, first researching the availability of artworks and later preparing lending forms, soliciting photographic reproductions, etc..²⁷ In retrospect, Vigoureux wrote:

As far as I remember, Blistène made a number of suggestions that were generally accepted. He understood perfectly the spirit of the exhibition and Lyotard's aspirations. From these meetings were born the themes, the ideas, which were then transformed into a site.²⁸

As historical sources, reminiscences like these have to be evaluated critically; not only were they formulated with a temporal distance of over 35 years, but we must also presume that Vigoureux would not have been present at each of the conversations between Blistène and Lyotard, possibly making her the witness only of the results, and not the discussions that led to them. Moreover, Vigoureux was only referring to the period since April 1984, when many foundational decisions about the artworks had already been taken, and not to the earlier period in the winter and spring, when the conceptual ideas for sites and proposals of specific artworks were first worked out. Yet, it is striking how she describes the unanimity between the two men:

Bernard Blistène presented his plans and intentions for the sites to Jean-François Lyotard. From my memory, Blistène asked me to research some of these works without him having talked to Lyotard about them previously. Blistène and Lyotard were in perfect agreement, as far as I recall. Lyotard trusted Blistène completely in his choice of works. Perhaps they had discussed them together before, but I believe that Blistène was effectively quite autonomous. Lyotard had a lot of respect for Blistène and accepted his propositions. They were very courteous with each other and, from what I remember, Lyotard did not question Blistène's decisions. I don't remember any disagreement between the two of them. Quite the contrary!²⁹

Vigoureux also remembers that the final decisions on the exhibits were taken collectively by the team, confirming Lyotard's frequent remarks about the active role that Chaput and the other team members played in shaping the exhibition:

Blistène then presented the concepts and works which Lyotard had approved, to Chaput and the rest of the team. To my recollection, there were hardly any critical discussions with the team, and on the whole everything was accepted.³⁰

These memories are seconded by Lyotard's own rendition of the collaboration with Blistène, formulated in a talk at a symposium at the Centre Pompidou during *Les Immatériaux* on 22 May 1985, which similarly describes the mode of working. Lyotard recounted:

Bernard Blistène, after joint briefing sessions, he said "OK, I see, I'm going to make proposals." So we examined the proposals, we discussed, we refined them and so on.³¹

²⁷ See Vigoureux's notes of the first meeting with Blistène that she participated in, on 2 April 1984, after her return from maternity leave (1994033W232_002). Judging from her notes, this meeting established the state of planning of the visual arts contributions as they appear in the first full overview of the planned exhibition, compiled in April 1984.

²⁸ Sabine Vigoureux, personal correspondence, June 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. For examples of Lyotard's comments on the collective character of the team work, see Broeckmann 2017.

³¹ CGP-AP 1977001W130_003, p. 30. ("*Bernard Blistène, après des séances de briefing comme ça ensemble il a dit bon "O.K." je vois, je vais faire des propositions. Alors on a examiné les propositions, on a discuté, on a affiné etc..*")

Liotard mentions how the purpose of the selection was not a full art historical treatment of the themes, but rather to arrive at a number of significant examples. About the concrete working process, Lyotard said:

We take a theme, [...] we look at how that theme has been treated [in different art historical contexts], [...] and basically we left the responsibility for that to Blistène, I fully endorse what has been done.³²

Again looking critically at the historical source, the overall, unedited transcript of this talk in May 1985 suggests that Lyotard was speaking rather casually; but what we can glean from these remarks is that for Lyotard there was a dual responsibility, Blistène's for the specific proposals of artworks, and Lyotard's own for their ensemble and placement in the overall exhibition.

It is therefore not surprising to find documentation photos, taken during the official opening of the exhibition in March 1985, that show Blistène in the space of the "visual arts site" *Odeur peinte*, talking to the Minister of Culture Jack Lang, Claude Pompidou, widow of Georges Pompidou, and CGP President Jean Maheu, with Lyotard keeping in the background.³³ (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. Bernard Blistène (left) with Isabelle Maheu, Jack Lang, Claude Pompidou, Jean Maheu, and (far left, background) Jean-François Lyotard, during the exhibition opening of *Les Immatériaux*, 26 March 1985, site *Odeur peinte*. Photo by Jean-Claude Planchet. Courtesy of Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

Until today the exhibition is occasionally criticised for the sometimes problematic ways in which it dealt with artworks, utilising them as topical placeholders, rather than presenting them as autonomous artworks in their own right.³⁴ What for Lyotard was a calculated and intended provocation, turned out to be more problematic for the image of the young art curator, Bernard Blistène, because these deliberate conceptual decisions impacted not only the institutional relations within the CGP, but also the long-term reception of the exhibition.

Several years before its eventual opening, the exhibition project on creativity and new materials that would become *Les Immatériaux*, had originally been initiated by the CCI in 1981 as an interdepartmental project of the CGP, presuming the participation and support of the MNAM and its director Dominique Bozo who had succeeded Pontus Hultén in that position in September 1981. By spring 1983, the MNAM was not contributing to the project any more, a decision that, as we have learned, was only reversed by Bozo after conversations with Lyotard in autumn 1983.

³² Ibid. ("On prend un thème, ... on regarde comment ce thème a été traité, ... et au fond là-dessus on a laissé la responsabilité à Blistène, moi j'assume entièrement ce qui a été fait...") Blistène himself remembers the cooperation similarly: "Lyotard was happy to be convinced of my proposals; we discussed them, and then finally we decided whether something fit or not. I couldn't just do what I wanted, but Lyotard asked me to propose things which, in many cases, he accepted." (Personal conversation, 7.9.2020)

³³ See CGP-BK photos M5050_X0031_CCI_147_0021_P, and M5050_X0031_CCI_147_0022_P. – Lyotard provides another, more indirect indication of Blistène's role when in the May 1985 talk, which covers many aspects of the exhibition, the only artist he mentions by name, and three times, is Marcel Duchamp, suggesting that only this prominent figure who Lyotard had himself written a book about was really strongly present for him, while all the other artists – 31 in the 'visual arts sites' alone – did not so easily come to his mind; see CGP-AP 1977001W130_003, p. 30-31.

³⁴ See Wunderlich 2008 (especially on the German artist Annegret Soltau); Glicenstein 2014.

However, the relationship between the project leadership and the MNAM remained fraught. During a meeting of Bozo, Blistène, and other MNAM staff members, with Lyotard, in May 1984, the museum confirmed that Blistène and Catherine David were assigned to Lyotard as curatorial advisors, and that Bozo himself would support lending requests for artworks, but it was also asserted that all practical, administrative and financial matters relating to the exhibition, including loans and technical services, would be in the sole responsibility of the CCI, and that the staff of the MNAM would not intervene.³⁵

This agreement was forgotten or ignored when, at the beginning of 1985 and now only weeks before the exhibition opening, the director of the CCI, François Burkhardt, wrote to Bozo, requesting support from the MNAM for arranging the transportation, storage and installation of artworks. Burkhardt's argument was that these artworks had been proposed and negotiated by Blistène, and that he hoped the Museum would now take responsibility for the works "for which Blistène has given us reason to hope for your collaboration."³⁶

These instances of interdepartmental wrangling show how Blistène was caught between two stools, with conflicting loyalties towards his professional superiors and peers on one side, and towards his partners – including the admired Lyotard – in the exhibition project which he had devoted so much energy to on the other. According to Blistène this conflict with his colleagues already began when he first committed to working with Lyotard in 1983. He recalls that, when he volunteered to work with Lyotard and the CCI, the other MNAM curators looked at him in dismay, one of the modern art curators even calling him a traitor ("*tu as trahi déjà*"), a sentiment which Blistène retrospectively affirmed:

and yes, I betrayed the doxa of museum curatorship [*doxa de la conservation*], I betrayed the separation between the university and the world of the museums, at that moment I felt *comme un loup dans une bergerie*, naïvely thinking that a young curator could create links and passages between the worlds of the university and of museums.³⁷

According to his own recollections, Blistène's colleagues sneered, "ah, a philosopher who wants to make an exhibition, a philosopher who does not know what he is talking about, who has written a book about painting and speaks about Adami, Arakawa and Buren, proving that he does not know what he is venturing into."³⁸ Retrospectively trying to make sense of the implied humiliation, Blistène explained in 2015:

This was, I say this with emphasis, for me a very important moment, because I realised how vertiginous was the step away from the museum and away from the field of art history.³⁹

³⁵ Note by Jean-Jacques Aillagon (MNAM) to Gourevitch (CCI), 29 May 1984, CGP-AP 1994033W669_452. There are no traceable indications of practical contributions by Catherine David, and Bernard Blistène has affirmed that she had no active role in the preparation of *Les Immatériaux* (personal conversation, 7.9.2020).

³⁶ Note by François Burkhardt to Dominique Bozo, 20 February 1985, reiterating a request that Chaput had put to Aillagon on 10 January (CGP-AP 1977001W130_014). See also the complaints by the MNAM about the CCI's usage of the film projection space Salle Garance for the *Ciné-Immatériaux* film programme (CGP-AP 1977001W130_011).

³⁷ Blistène 2015 (min 05:26-06:30).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. (min 06:55). – Blistène was confronted with this sentiment not only at the MNAM. In December 1984, the Louvre curator Jacques Foucart wrote to Burkhardt to explain the rejection of the lending requests for paintings by Metsys and Reymerswaele; on a copy of the letter, Foucart added a handwritten note addressed at Blistène whom he knew as a student of the Ecole du Louvre: "*J'avoue être scandalisé. Le Metsys pour cela, non! Je vous tiens donc au courant et salue cependant avec plaisir vos réalisations, mais pitié pour les vieux tableaux qui sont l'acmé de notre culture et n'ont pas à être des otages de nos brillantes (et parfois inutiles) spéculations! Ne croyez-vous pas? Bien à vous et avec mon meilleur souvenir, JF.*" (dated 21 December 1984, CGP-AP 1995025W155_003) The somewhat careless way in which Lyotard responded to questions concerning this matter in May 1985, would not have appeased the critics, and would thus also not have made it easier for Blistène to defend his own participation in the project in front of his peers. Lyotard, asked whether many artworks weren't misused in the exhibition, retorted that a strong artwork would resist such misuse: "if its complexity is such that it can withstand the service it is asked to perform, BRAVO!"]"*si sa complexité est telle*

It was a difficult position to be in for a young curator, not least because this was such a complex and enticing project.

Its development in the course of 1984 was marked by several crucial dates: there was a deadline for the completion of the first full project outline in the middle of April, and a meeting with the exhibition architects at the beginning of September, during which important decisions about the division of the overall gallery space would have to be taken.⁴⁰ The two documents that describe the state of planning at those two moments provide the main basis for the following analysis of the conceptual and programmatic decision-making process.

Between December 1983 and April 1984, there were six documented meetings between Lyotard and Blistène (29.12., 19.1., 9.2., 20.2., 28.2., 2.4.), and another five leading up to the September meeting with the architects (2.6., 17.7., 14.8., 20.8., 6.9.). Soon afterwards, the first lending requests were sent out and the frequency of meetings between Lyotard and Blistène diminished.

In the course of the entire year of 1984, the list of Blistène's tasks for *Les Immatériaux* included: the meetings with Lyotard; meetings with the CCI team, and with individual team members, especially with Sabine Vigoureux; researching and selecting artworks to be proposed, and the preparation of presentation materials;⁴¹ the presentation and discussion of proposed artworks with Lyotard, leading to the final conception of the sites, proposition of their titles, and selection of artworks to be presented in team meetings, to the architects, and on other occasions.⁴² Then followed the submission of lending requests, some of which had to be followed up with phone calls, the collection of information on technical and security aspects of sites and artworks for the installation, the preparation of the catalogue entries.⁴³ Finally Blistène also supervised the installation of the artworks in the exhibition.⁴⁴

qu'elle résiste au service qu'on lui demande, BRAVO!"] (CGP-AP 1977001W130_003, p. 32) In the same talk Lyotard somewhat ironically explains that the 'visual arts sites' were granted the exceptional right to exhibition walls, "*qui ont droit à des cimaises parce que le conservateur ne peut pas supporter de voir un beau Flamand du XVIIe suspendu à notre grillage de métal donc il a exigé les cimaises et on a fait une concession.*" (p. 30)

⁴⁰ Both dates can be found in Lyotard's calendars for 1984: 16.4.1984, "*Donner Maheu, texte, liste sites*", and 11.9.1984, "*architects, Blistène*" (see LIR-WP #5, "Chronology").

⁴¹ Among the production materials for the exhibition (see CGP-AP 1994033W223), there are photocopies of illustrations of artworks which constitute the materials that Blistène himself collected for his discussions with Lyotard; Sabine Vigoureux, personal correspondence, May 2020.

⁴² Eventually there were 39 artworks in the 'visual arts sites,' in total; the preliminary list from September 1984 (CGP-AP 1994033W233_022) comprised 34 works, not all part of the final list of 39, so that we can estimate that in the autumn of 1984 Blistène was negotiating around 50 artworks.

⁴³ Blistène also proposed a short bibliography on visual arts (1994033W223_020); the ten titles were, together with titles on photography, music, and architecture proposed by others, added to the section "lectures/sensibilités" of a four-page reading list in the *Inventaire* catalogue. Blistène's list included books on Futurism, Arte povera, Land Art, and Conceptual Art, Rosalind Krauss' *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1981), Benjamin H.D. Buchloh's *Formalism and Historicity* (1982), and the catalogue of the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969).

⁴⁴ Katia Lafitte, architect at the CGP and responsible for the installation of the exhibition, remembers that, "the installation team for the museum paintings was from museum. The CCI would never have had the right to do it, and I think that as the curator, Bernard Blistène certainly followed the installing of the paintings and took the decisions." Lafitte also seconds the account of the problematic relationship between the MNAM and the CCI: "I remember very well it was not easy for Bernard Blistène to negotiate and be the link between the museum people and the exhibition team. The director and curators of the museum felt that the hanging of artwork above the floor on plaster sheets was kind of degrading for artwork. They had difficulties working with the CCI people. A lot of discussions, quarrels and negotiations went on and I think it only worked because of Jean François... To a well-known philosopher you cannot say 'no!!' and JF was very persuasive!!" (Katia Lafitte, personal correspondence, 4.12.2019)

II. Program and concept of the visual arts sites

The documents on which the following analysis is based, suggest that the overall conceptual framework for the exhibition was established by April 1984.⁴⁵ Two thirds of the exhibition sites already appeared under the titles they would eventually carry a year later. Of the seven ‘visual arts sites,’ only one (*Mots en scène*) is not yet mentioned – like most of the other sites in the *Labyrinthe du langage*, which was conceptualised only in a second phase of the curatorial effort. In the first three months of working together, Blistène and Lyotard thus defined the general program of the ‘visual arts sites,’ as well as circa twenty, i.e. half of the works that were shown in these sites.

Our analysis here does not provide a full interpretation of the ‘visual arts sites’ and how they were embedded in the overall structure of the exhibition (the *mât*-paths, the audio zones, etc.).⁴⁶ Rather, the attempt here is to give an account of the cooperation of the two co-curators, their conceptual strategies as well as pragmatic considerations with respect to the visual arts sites, their interrelations, and their respective position in the overall exhibition. We do this by reading traces of the curatorial working process, and looking at the results.

The sequence in which the sites are discussed here is arbitrary. It is based on the artworks in the sites and the themes they address, in an attempt to organise them into a comprehensible narrative. The labyrinthine spatial structure of the exhibition itself prescribed no such sequence, and ideally they should be considered simultaneously, as a tableau of co-present constellations, and not sequentially.

For each of the sites discussed here, there is an overview of the artworks as they appeared in the exhibition, together with a list of works that were, more or less tentatively and at different points in the process, considered for inclusion in the respective sites.

The conceptual notes which were included in these different lists and whose final versions would eventually appear as introductions on the *Inventaire* sheets for the respective sites, expose the gradual evolution of the concepts of the sites. The short texts served as a curatorial tool, a conceptual handle through which Lyotard and Blistène defined and distinguished the themes. They thus also provided criteria for selection or rejection, as well as a description. This familiar curatorial principle establishes a circular and in some way tautological structure: step by step, the exhibition becomes congruous with the written concept, as both – the selection of exhibits and its conceptual foundation – are gradually approximated and assimilated to each other.⁴⁷

In qualification of the chapter title above, we find no indications of an explicit ‘program’ that determined the elaboration of the ‘visual arts sites.’ The available documentation rather gives the impression that the curators departed from a more general interest to see how some of the core themes related to the *immatériaux* (language, signification, body) were articulated in the field of the visual arts. This also implied that some works were selected or placed due to partial aspects. For example, Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961) was shown in the site *Odeur peinte* because of its reference to the theme of smell, even though the piece could equally have been presented as part of *Négoce peinte* where it would have referred to the aspect of the commercial value of artworks. Such ambivalent

⁴⁵ The following analysis largely draws on a comparison between the final composition of the ‘visual arts sites’ as they are documented in the *Inventaire*, with the planning documents from April 1984 (CGP-AP 1994033W241_010) and September 1984 (CGP-AP 1994033W233_022). Both of these documents contain several mis-spellings in the names of artists, making it likely that they were composed by members of the CCI team on the basis of oral presentations, and edited without direct intervention from Blistène. The works are here generally listed according to the sequence in which they appear in the *Inventaire*, or other lists.

⁴⁶ An important contribution in that direction has been made by Wunderlich 2008, in the section entitled *Phénoménologie de la visite* (p. 105-250). An edited translation into English of Wunderlich's description is forthcoming.

⁴⁷ The *Petit Journal* visitor guide, in its short conceptual texts, summarises the *zones*, and comprises excerpts from the *bande-son* for each zone; it is a less pertinent source for understanding the conception of the individual sites, though it is interesting to see that the perspective of the content and sequence of the zones (as an intermediate structure between *mât*-paths and the individual sites) was taken as a significant structuring feature in this main didactic medium intended for the visitors.

decisions led to a conceptual blurring which may have added to the confusion of the visitors about the presence and the status of artworks in the exhibition.

As a basic criterion for the selection, Lyotard emphasised that the artworks would have to bear the juxtaposition with exhibits from a variety of different, often non-artistic contexts. In the interview with Blistène conducted during the preparations, Lyotard stated that, "any art object that may find a place next to the other elements of the exhibition will have to be compatible."⁴⁸

Some of the questions that the following analysis of the 'visual arts sites' seeks to address, are:

- What is the specific correlation between the themes of the 'visual arts sites' and the artworks selected for them? Why were these particular themes deemed to be most appropriately articulated through artworks? How did the curators arrive at these particular themes to frame the inclusion of artworks in the exhibition?
- How do the works in this set relate to the artworks and projects by contemporary artists in other sites? Is there a conceptual or other form of coherence, or is this set perhaps characterised mainly by the (rather formal) fact that it was the contribution by the MNAM? Would it have been recognisable as a set only from the perspective of Blistène, or the MNAM, and would it for everyone else just blend in with the rest of the exhibition? Was this 'diffusion' another reason for the MNAM colleagues' disapproval, namely the "invisibility" of the museum's perspective and curatorial authorship?
- Is it possible to characterise Blistène's particular contribution to *Les Immatériaux* in his dialogue with Lyotard?

The standard passage through the exhibition would take the visitor from the *Théâtre du non-corps* at the southern end of the *Grand galerie* on the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou, to the *Labyrinthe du langage*, at its northern end. Between these two poles, there was a maze of small spaces, organised into five paths that were intersecting and occasionally interrupted, jumping to another position a bit further down, so that the theoretically preconceived, thematic passage from the physical presence of the body to the dematerialised presence of language could only be felt, but barely navigated, or even recognised consciously by the visitors. On the "first," the eastern path defined by the term "*Matériau*," highlighting the material support, the raw material, the visitor would first encounter a number of sites relating to the human body, its physical presence, structure, and transformability. Then, in the middle of this path – given the openness of the overall architecture, even in the dark, visitors may here have felt the equidistance of the *Théâtre* and the *Labyrinthe* – there was a site, its space not bigger or smaller than others, which was noticeable mainly because of the particular ephemerality of the exhibits. While many other sites clearly showed 'something,' this one showed very little: some scribbled words on snippets of paper in a plexi showcase (Marcel Duchamp), some drawn sketches (Yves Klein), a video monitor displaying the almost completely white image of a female figure, slowly fading into and out of visibility (Thierry Kuntzel), and a slide-projected word, "visible," that could only be seen when the body of another visitor passed through the projection beam (Giovanni Anselmo). On encountering this site, it would have been easy to think that there was 'almost nothing' to be seen.

⁴⁸ Blistène (1985) in Lyotard 2020, p. 83. – In the selection, the question of the gender balance of represented artists appears to have been of no concern. Among the seven 'visual arts sites,' only one, *Lumière dérobée*, included works by two female artists, compared to works by a total of thirty male artists in these sites. In contrast, in the rest of the exhibition the situation was a little bit more mixed with works by around ten different female artists.

Explanation of codes used in the site overviews

- ^{4/84} = mentioned in planning document, April 1984
- ^{9/84} = mentioned in planning document, September 1984
- ^{1/85} = mentioned in Vigoureux's production notes, autumn/winter 1984/1985
- ^{lr} = lending request for work not mentioned in list '1/85'; ^{lr/r} = refused; ^{lr/a} = accepted
- * = (see specific explanations in the text)⁴⁹

"Infra-Mince"

- **Yves Klein: Maquettes, souches et chèques pour les Zones de sensibilité picturale immatérielle (1959)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Marcel Duchamp: "Différentes photographies et documents dans lesquels Marcel Duchamp élabore la notion d'Infra-Mince"** ^{9/84, 1/85}
- **Thierry Kuntzel: La Desserte blanche (1980, video installation)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
- **Giovanni Anselmo: Invisible (1969)** ^{9/84, 1/85}

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- Duchamp, *The Blindman* ^{4/84}
 - Duchamp, *Elevage de moutons* ^{4/84}
 - Duchamp, *Why not sneeze?* ^{4/84}
 - Duchamp, *A bruit secret* ^{4/84}
 - Jannis Kounellis, *Sans titre (Marguerite de feu)*, 1969 ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - Dan Graham, [without work title] ^{1/85}

It is one of the paradoxes of the exhibition as a whole that this site which is perhaps the closest to the conceptual core of *Les Immatériaux*, was more or less hidden by the unobtrusiveness of its exhibits. Its title, "*Infra-mince*", was taken from Marcel Duchamp who jotted down his thoughts about this concept in multiple notes and short texts.⁵⁰ The word means "ultra-thin" and refers to the status of immateriality in a dual sense, namely as 'almost nothing,' and as an 'in-between,' pointing to a zone of indeterminacy and semiotic indistinction. The site thus hinted at two important aspects of the exhibition, namely at the status of materiality, and at the theme of encounter and translation.

The preparatory documents show that the decision to include a site of this title was already taken early on – like for many other of the site titles –, and they indicate that the curators wanted it to specifically feature Marcel Duchamp. The first list of works planned for this site, from April 1984, includes four works by Duchamp, suggesting that the curators intended a focus on his work. Lyotard had published his book on Duchamp already in 1977, and we can surmise that this was a terrain where Lyotard felt most safe in terms of his knowledge and judgement in the wider field of modern and contemporary art.

Another artist who is already mentioned in the first preparatory list is Yves Klein, and he is even already there with the artwork that will be in the exhibition, while the pieces by Duchamp that will eventually be shown are different from the works first mentioned: instead of a number of sculptural objects, Lyotard and Blistène decided, by September 1984, to exhibit a selection of Duchamp's notes from the *White Box* and the *Green Box*, and other documents that explain the notion of the *infra-mince*. In our attempt here to gain a deeper understanding of the curatorial process, it is interesting to consider this specific constellation: It seems that the piece by Klein – drawings and paraphernalia of a

⁴⁹ The respective documents in the Archives publiques (CGP-AP) are: 84/4 = 1994033W241_010; 84/9 = 1994033W233_022; 85/1 = 1994033W235_001.

⁵⁰ Wunderlich 2008, p. 136–139. The title of the site was an exception in that it used quotation marks.

performance – was recognised early on as serving to articulate this crucial, Duchampian concept. In retrospect the first list of works by Duchamp appears rather haphazard – and may thus also not have convinced the curators themselves. It reflects the initial impulse to show artworks proper, an impulse that was later corrected in favour of a more conceptual approach, leading to a site in which, for both Duchamp and Klein, the exhibits are classified in the *Inventaire* not as artworks, but as "documentation."⁵¹ Moreover, the pieces by Duchamp and Klein were presented together in one relatively small Plexi glass showcase.

Yves Klein had worked, around 1960, on the concept of the "immaterial" in several texts and projects, including the performance *Zones de sensibilité picturale immatérielle* (1959) of which sketches and other documents were on display in the site "*Infra-mince*". In this project Klein reflected on the notion of ownership and the ephemeral value of artworks, as well as on the impossibility of representing forms of art that manifest as events, rather than as material objects.⁵² In the context of the preparations for an exhibition about "im-materials," this project by Yves Klein would have easily come to mind, not least because only a year earlier, in spring 1983, the MNAM had hosted Klein's work in a retrospective exhibition that had previously been shown in the USA.

The curatorial shift, from April to September 1984, towards a more conceptual approach in articulating the notion of *infra-mince* in the exhibits by Duchamp, went along with the addition of the works by Giovanni Anselmo and Thierry Kuntzel, both responding to the dichotomies of visibility and invisibility, appearance and apparation, in a more concrete and 'obvious' manner – visually in the case of Kuntzel, and both visually and corporeally in Anselmo's work. Thierry Kuntzel's video installation *La Desserte blanche* (1980), which was borrowed directly from the Paris-based artist, is usually set in a white-painted space, including white benches for the audience to sit on, and white neon tubes at the ceiling; a video monitor is mounted inside the facing wall, playing a video which shows faint still images, continuously fading into and out of total whiteness. The entire setting of the installation is designed to make it hard to discern what these screen images show.⁵³

Giovanni Anselmo had previously done a whole series of works playing with the prefixes of words, using slide projectors as well as metal casts, among them several works employing the term "in/visible."⁵⁴ The MNAM bought other works by him in 1980 and 1985, while *Invisible* (1969), the piece that was shown in *Les Immatériaux*, was borrowed from the collection of the artist through the Galerie Durand-Dessert. The visibility and legibility of the word "visible" was conditioned on the presence of the audience, even of two visitors at the same time, since one could easily miss the projection if it fell on one's own body. At the same time, the projection rendered the respective body of a visitor "visible," highlighting his or her physical presence in an exhibition environment that was otherwise designed to obfuscate the contours of the moving and perceiving bodies.

⁵¹ Lyotard, in his talk at the CGP on 22.05.1985, somewhat condescendingly calls these notes and paper snippets Duchamp's "bumph" (CGP-AP 1977001W130_003, p. 30-31 (...*Duchamp avec toutes ses paperasses* ...). – In Blistène's accompanying note in the *Inventaire*, special attention is drawn to the fact that Duchamp's materials are taken from the collection of the MNAM, and that they have been edited in a recent publication, Paul Matisse: *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*. Paris, Centre Pompidou, 1980. See also <https://art.rmngp.fr/fr/library/artworks?k=Marcel+Duchamp+infra-mince>.

⁵² See D. Riout, *Yves Klein. Manifester l'immatériel*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004; C. Morineau (ed.), *Yves Klein. Corps, couleur, immatériel*, exh. cat., Paris, Centre Pompidou, 2006. See also <http://www.yvesklein.com>.

⁵³ See Raymond Bellour: "Thierry Kuntzel et le retour de l'écriture", *Cahiers du Cinéma*, No. 321, March 1981, p. 40-50 (engl. "Thierry Kuntzel and the Return of Writing", *Camera Obscura*, No. 11, Fall 1983, p. 29-59); and Thierry Kuntzel: *Title TK*. Paris: Anarchive, 2006, p. 339-344. An excerpt of the video is available at <http://www.li-ma.nl/site/catalogue/art/thierry-kuntzel/la-desserte-blanche/92>. The form of the installation in *Les Immatériaux* is not documented and can currently only be speculated upon; Blistène vaguely remembers a reduced setting in which the video monitor was suspended from the ceiling, with three white neon tubes suspended above and in front of it (personal conversation, 11 November 2021).

⁵⁴ Jean Christophe Ammann on Anselmo, exh. cat. *Giovanni Anselmo*, Musée de Grenoble, 1980, and Jean-Pierre Bordaz: "Giovanni Anselmo. Towards the Arc, Paris. The exhibition, the work and its indications." In *Parkett*, No. 7, 1985, p. 91-95.

Besides Duchamp and Klein, the initial preparatory concepts mention another artist, Yannis Kounellis. His work *Untitled (Marguerite de feu)* (1969) was considered for the exhibition throughout 1984, and was included in a lending request to the Galerie Durand-Dessert in the autumn. The work includes a black, flower-shaped sheet of metal in whose middle there is a small, gas-fired flame; this "fire marguerite" is mounted on the wall and attached through a red tube to a small gas bottle that is placed on the floor. In the conceptual notes accompanying the April list for this site, there is a phrase that can be directly related to this piece by Kounellis: "Paradoxes about the support of the artistic message: water, earth, air, fire..."⁵⁵ This phrase does not appear any more in the September concept, indicating a shift away from the classical elements as possible material supports for artworks, and towards the question of perception and presence.

Another, more mundane aspect that led to the final abandonment of this work were discussions about the potential fire hazard caused by the open flame. Among the exhibition designer Philippe Déli's production sketches for the site there are drawings that suggest deliberations about shielding the work off from the audience, and finally a note on one of these sketches by Déli, from December or January, remarking that the work has been "refused" (*refus*).⁵⁶ – By that time, the curators knew that there would be an installation by Kounellis in the site *Odeur peinte*, and that the fire-like materiality of light would be represented in the site *Peinture luminescente*, by the flickering gases in the installation *La Méduse* by Takis, making it easier perhaps to let go of the *Marguerite de feu*. But if we want to reconstruct the way in which the site "*Infra-mince*" was conceived and imagined by Lyotard and Blistène throughout 1984, it is necessary to take into account the unrealised constellation that the light, heat and sound of Kounellis' *Marguerite de feu* would have constituted with the paper notes and the ephemeral images in the other works.

There are several indications for the key role that this site, "*Infra-mince*", played in the overall exhibition, not least in the form of pointers towards other sites. The short conceptual text on the *Inventaire* sheet includes a sentence by Duchamp, taken from a graphic work reproduced on the same page: "When the tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth that exhales it, the two odors are married by *infra-mince*." (*Quand la fumée du tabac sent aussi de la bouche qui l'exale, les deux odeurs s'épousent par infra-mince.*) This doubly present phrase emphasised the *infra-mince* quality of smell, which also featured in the sites *Odeur peint*, and *Arôme simulé*.

The text for Duchamp's contribution on the verso side of the same *Inventaire* sheet also implicitly referred to the site *Surface introuvable* which lay immediately next to "*Infra-mince*" and which displayed different representations of the volume and relief of surfaces that usually appear flat to the naked eye, including sheets of paper. The text quotes Duchamp, explaining the notion of *infra-mince* in an interview: "The noise or music that corduroy pants like these make when you move around is *infra-mince*. The hollow in the paper, between the front and the back of a thin sheet..."⁵⁷ The neighbouring site *Surface introuvable* thus appears like an illustration of Duchamp's remark about the voluminosity of paper. This type of spillage between sites happened both with regard to conceptual considerations, and with regard to individual works which in the course of the planning process were shifted from one site to another.⁵⁸ The visibilities of physical bodies, their surfaces and inside structures, were also the topic of two other sites, adjoining "*Infra-mince*" and both part of the *Matériau* path: *Matériau dématérialisé*, and *Corps éclaté*. And with some interpretive license, we can

⁵⁵ (*Paradoxes sur le support du message artistique : eau, terre, air, feu...*)

⁵⁶ See CGP-AP 1995052W027_007; confirmed also by a handwritten note by Sabine Vigoureux ("*refus, ... pbe de sécu*" [security problem], 1994033W235_001).

⁵⁷ (*Le bruit ou la musique que fait un pantalon de velours côtelé comme celui-ci, quand on bouge, relève de l'infra-mince. Le creux dans le papier, entre le recto et le verso d'une feuille mince...*) Interview with Denis de Rougemont, in 1945. – Duchamp referred to the same example in a note entitled *Transparence de l'infra-mince*: "... Chercher dans quel corps de métier on se sert d'instruments à mesurer épaisseur (marchands de plaques de cuivre) qui vont jusqu'à quelle minceur ? 1/10mm = 100µ = minceur des papiers ..."

⁵⁸ This happened in two cases: works by Dan Graham and Joseph Kosuth, planned in April 1984 for *Peinture luminescente*, were eventually shown in *Lumière dérobée* and in *Mots en scène*, respectively.

also count the transforming bodies in the video clips of *Corps chanté*, and the transsexual bodies in *L'Ange*, among the manifestations of the *infra-mince*.⁵⁹

We can only speculate about the question whether Blistène also took such a perspective that transgressed the boundaries of the 'visual arts sites,' but it is clear that Lyotard was keenly aware of the ramifications that, for instance, the concept of the *infra-mince* had across the exhibition. In his talk about *Les Immatériaux* at the CGP on 22 May 1985, he spoke about "a visual arts site called 'l'infra-mince' (a word taken from Duchamp) where there is a showcase of Duchamp's papers dealing specifically with these problems [...] [of] the 'untraceable surface' ('*surface introuvable*') but approached from another point of view."⁶⁰ Lyotard here uses the title of the adjoining site, *Surface introuvable*, in order to explain the topic of the site "*Infra-mince*", associating it beyond the boundaries of the 'visual arts sites.'

ombre de l'ombre

- Joseph Kosuth: *One and Three Shadows (1965)* ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}

-
- Christian Boltanski, *Ombres (1984)* ^{1/85}

Another site that epitomised the overall concept and the semiotic program of *Les Immatériaux* with its postmodern emphasis on translation and the increasing primacy of signs over objects, *Ombre de l'ombre*, could be encountered at the beginning of the fourth path, *Matière*, which dealt with the concept of the referent of a message, the content, asking what it is that the sign actually designates. On this path, several sites addressed the problem of simulation, for instance in computer animation, and of the representation of scientific data. And the site next to *Ombre de l'ombre*, entitled *Trace de trace*, examined the referentiality of photography as a "trace" of reality.

⁵⁹ It could be argued that the medium of sound in general was another example of the *infra-mince*, even though it was not explicitly addressed as such by the curators: the sensor-relayed interactions in Rolf Gehlhaar's installation *Son=Espace* (in the site *Musicien malgré lui*) could have been interpreted as instances of such a minimal friction between two surfaces; the *Inventaire* text for the site *Tous les bruits* focuses on notation and the possibility of "inscribing" sounds and noises; and even the *bande-son* can be taken as a gesture towards the *infra-mince* in that it dissolves physical boundaries. The introductory text to IRCAM's concert series, *Sons et voix*, does not mention the *infra-mince* status of sounds and voice in general, but rather focuses on the dichotomy of the immaterial/invisible in electronic sound production on the one hand, and of the materiality of the technical hardware on the other. (*Inventaire*, n.p., *sons et voix*: "What could be more immaterial than the sounds produced without us seeing how they are made. What could be more material than the machines and the way they are handled, which are the source of these sounds. IRCAM presents four series of concerts whose works create a continuous counterpoint between sounds created artificially, without human gestures, and the sounds/interventions produced directly by instruments and voices. Between these two universes, there are continuous transformations that make the material, the immaterial." [*Quoi de plus immatériel que les sons produits sans que l'on voit la façon dont ils sont fabriqués. Quoi de plus matériel que les machines et leurs manègements, sources de ces sons. L'IRCAM présente quatre séries de concerts dont les oeuvres créent un contrepoint continu entre les sons créés artificiellement, sans gestes humains et les sons/interventions produits directement par les instruments et les voix. Entre ces deux univers, des transformations continues qui font des matériels, l'immatériel.*]). See also Broeckmann, "Sound and Listening," LIR-WP #4.

⁶⁰ CGP-AP, 1977001W130_003, p. 30-31. (... un site d'art plastique qui s'appelle "l'infra-mince" (mot pris à Duchamp) où il y a une vitrine du papier de Duchamp portant spécifiquement sur ces problèmes-là [...], sur la "surface introuvable" mais abordée d'un autre point de vue, quand on montre Duchamp avec toutes ses paperasses ...)

In the site *Ombre de l'ombre*, the curators presented only one work, namely Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Shadows* (1965). This decision was taken early on in the curatorial process, the title of the site and the work appearing in identical form in all versions of the planning documents.⁶¹

The installation has three parts, placed next to each other on a wall, namely the shadow of an object, a photograph of that same shadow, and a panel with a text explanation of the word "shade/shadow" from a dictionary.⁶² The work was borrowed from the Parisian Galerie Eric Fabre. It is noteworthy that Lyotard and Blistène did not select Kosuth's signature piece of the same series, *One and Three Chairs* (1965) which had been in the collection of the MNAM since 1976. This work would have equally served to articulate the intricate relation between an object, its visual representation and its verbal designation. But *One and Three Chairs* would have lacked the special "im-material" quality which the curators recognised in the threefold presence of the shadow, and which they emphasised in the April 1984 planning document: "*l'ombre = immatériau.*" We can presume that the curators took this thought more or less directly from Duchamp, who in his explanations of the *infra-mince*, after speaking about the volume of paper, had stated: "the *infra-mince* characterises any difference that you can easily imagine but does not exist, like the thickness of a shadow: the shadow has no thickness, not even to the precision of an Angstroem."⁶³

However, in the conceptual texts by the curators, the focus was placed not on the shadow as a physical phenomenon, but as a metaphor for the relationship between objects and their representations in words and images: "Reality becomes the shadow cast by that which repeats it in images and/or words." (*Inventaire*) The same conceptual gesture of semiotic reversal was also rehearsed, for instance, at the opposite end of the *Matière* path, where the site *Référence inversée* presented drawings and a model by the architect Peter Eisenman. Here, the text in the *Inventaire* stated: "The reference to the hardware [*matière*] of architecture is inverted. The building represents its representation on paper."⁶⁴

labyrinthe du langage: mots en scène

- **Ian Wilson: *There is a Discussion* (1979)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Robert Barry: *Of Course* (1979)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Joseph Kosuth: *Five Words In Orange Neon* (1965)** ^{4/84*, 9/84, 1/85}
-
- **George Segal: *United States* (1982)** *
 - **Vito Acconci: *The American Gift* (1976)** *
 - **On Kawara: *August 14/15/16, 1975* (1975)** ^{lr/a}
 - **Lawrence Weiner: *Various liquids carried by virtue on their own weight...* (1978)** ^{lr/r}

⁶¹ At some point late in 1984, Blistène additionally considered a work by Christian Boltanski, *Ombres* (1984), for this site (see 1994033W235_001). Blistène had curated an exhibition of Boltanski's recent works at the beginning of 1984, which included photographs of the *Composition théâtrale* (1981) series, precursors to the kinetic *danse macabre* of the *Ombres* series that Boltanski would realise in the following years. With hindsight, it seems apparent why this proposal was dismissed in favour of the more conceptual, less emotionally charged shadow-work by Kosuth.

⁶² See Wunderlich 2008, 193, 199-201, 203. Francesca Gallo's book, in a section on Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Shadows* (1965), provides an exemplary, art-historical contextualisation of an individual artwork (2008, p. 118-123), without however discussing the work and the site in relation to the neighbouring sites. – See also Jean-François Lyotard: "Foreword: After the Words. (On Joseph Kosuth)." [preface for J. Kosuth: *Art after Philosophy and After*. Cambridge, MA: MIT-Press, 1991] In: H. Parret (ed.), Vol. 4.2, 2012, p. 518-527.

⁶³ Marcel Duchamp: *Notes*. Ed. by Michel Sanouillet and Paul Matisse. Paris: Flammarion, 1999, p. 20-21. (*l'inframince caractérise n'importe quelle différence que vous imaginez facilement mais n'existe pas, comme l'épaisseur d'un ombre: l'ombre n'a aucune épaisseur, pas même à la précision d'un Angstroem.*)

⁶⁴ (*La référence à la matière de l'architecture s'inverse. L'édifice représente sa représentation sur feuille.*)

A third 'visual arts site,' besides "*Infra-mince*" and *Ombre de l'ombre*, that relied on pieces of conceptual art for articulating the transgressive semiotic potential of the im-materials, was *Mots en scène*, which constituted a 'visual arts' contribution to the *Labyrinthe du langage*. This major space at the end of the exhibition contained a total of fifteen, mostly screen-based projects, ranging from an online art gallery in the Minitel system, through interactive computer animations, to a video documentation of voice-based live performances. Among these exhibits, the three artworks presented under the joint title, *Mots en scène* [words on stage], stood out not only because of their peripheral placement at the exit of the *Labyrinthe*, but because in them words manifested not electronically like almost everywhere else in the *Labyrinthe*, but physically. There was a sheet of typewriter paper announcing a discussion, by Ian Wilson, a square paper work by Robert Barry, inscribed with eight short, associative words and phrases, and a phrase written in bent neon tubing by Joseph Kosuth, *Five Words In Orange Neon*. The first two came from the collection of the MNAM, while the latter was borrowed from the collection of the gallerists Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert.

The research materials for *Mots en scène* are collected in a small dossier entitled "Labyrinthe des mots," which contains photocopies related to the three artworks, presumably collected by Blistène and held together by a folded A4 paper with the photocopy of a handwritten note by Jean-François Lyotard in which he gave guidelines for the research of artworks for this site:

SITE for the *labyrinthe du langage*

- grasp the language
- no spectacular experience
- syntactic system
 - language / simulacrum of language.
 - language of ordinary life and literature
 - opposition dem / immateriality.⁶⁵

The last phrase is particularly interesting from an art-historical perspective, given that it pinpoints the distinction between the notion of "dematerialisation" that was so prevalent in conceptual art since around 1970, and the notion of immateriality (*immatérialité*) proposed by *Les Immatériaux*. The works should, Lyotard suggested, not so much display the non-materiality of language in art, but at its precarious and transformational status as ephemeral light, as documentary trace, or as sematic intimation.

This curatorial concept for the *Labyrinthe du langage* was not yet worked out in April 1984 and, like most of its other projects and sites, a reference to *Mots en scène* only appears in the September concept. From that moment on, the three works recur in the consecutive planning documents, as a stable constellation. However, there are indications that several other works were also under consideration for this site during the second half of 1984. One of these, by George Segal, appears in the research materials collected by Chaput's team, while for a number of other works, by Vito Acconci, Lawrence Weiner and On Kawara, lending requests were made to the MNAM's own collection.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ CGP-AP 1994033W223_020 ("*SITE pour le labyrinthe des mots ; - saisir le langage ; - pas d'expérience spectaculaire ; - système syntaxique ; langage / simulacre du langage. ; langage de la vie ordinaire et de la littérature ; opposition dem / immatérialité.*")

⁶⁶ The compilation of notes by Toutcheff has a cover page entitled "arts plastiques;" all five works (Acconci, Barry, Kosuth, Segal, Wilson) are mostly also marked "Blistène," indicating that among all the other projects for the *labyrinthe*, Blistène was responsible for these, and carried an additional note saying, "probabilité de présentation: certain". (CGP-AP 2009012W006_023)

A photograph of the installation by Segal, entitled *UNITED STATES* (1982), had appeared on the cover of *TIME* magazine's "Machine of the Year" issue of 3 January 1983, and besides a photocopy of the respective article the archive preserves various pieces of correspondence about the possibilities of presenting the installation in the *Labyrinthe du langage*.⁶⁷ The installation included two of Segal's typical, life-size human figures made of white plaster, each seated in front of a computer terminal. The research materials and occasional reference in the minutes of team meetings indicate that the installation was under discussion throughout 1984. However, Bernard Blistène has affirmed that this "home computer still life" was, for him, an impossible candidate of an exhibit and that, like with regard to the paintings by Monory, he himself steered clear of Segal's work.⁶⁸ Among the preparatory sketches and handwritten notes of Nicole Toutcheff, the project manager in Chaput's team who was responsible for the production of the *Labyrinthe du langage*, there are suggestions for how the work could be presented.⁶⁹ It may well have been the case that, for a while, the theatricality of the scene depicted by Segal resonated with the plans that were taking shape for the *Théâtre du non-corps*, at the other end of the exhibition. And it is noteworthy that Lyotard did not share Blistène's apparent outright rejection, but was willing to keep Segal's work on the long-list of potential exhibits.

In contrast, three other works were temporarily considered for *Mots en scène* on the initiative of Bernard Blistène, a fact which indicates that Blistène was in fact independent in proposing works to Lyotard. They were Vito Acconci's *The American Gift* (1976), Lawrence Weiner's *Various liquids carried by virtue of their own weight from various points to form a pool of various liquids at a point of accumulation* (1978), and On Kawara's *August 14/15/16* (1975). For each of these three works a lending request was issued to the MNAM collection in November 1984, even though neither of them was shown eventually.⁷⁰ The date painting by On Kawara was possibly deselected because it would have duplicated the paradigmatic self-referentiality that also characterises the *Discussion* piece by Ian Wilson. Analogously, the wall text of Lawrence Weiner's project would have redoubled the reference to the gallery wall that was already topical in Kosuth's *Five Words in Orange Neon*.

Finally, Acconci's *The American Gift* is an audio work of ca. 43 minutes length that combines sound samples from US American popular culture, with a dialogical English lesson in which common phrases are translated into French.⁷¹ One reason for the deselection may have been that, as testified by the site's concept text in the *Inventaire*, Lyotard and Blistène wanted to place an emphasis on written text, which precluded the spoken words, music and other sounds so prominent in Acconci's piece that would have taken the visitors into a zone decidedly "beyond (written) language," and towards the "spectacular" which Lyotard sought to avoid. Another possible reason why Acconci's piece was not chosen can be deduced from the overall selection that Blistène and Lyotard made for the 'visual arts sites,' something that will become more evident in the following analysis of the other sites: The rather passionate and in part explicitly political soundtrack of Acconci's work went against the deliberately

⁶⁷ CGP-AP 1994033W223_021.

⁶⁸ Bernard Blistène, personal conversation, Paris, 7.9.2020.

⁶⁹ In addition to a short description, Toutcheff jots down: "*Un programme différent se déroule sur chaque écran. Ambiance cozy.*" (CGP-AP 2009012W006_023)

⁷⁰ Acconci's work was, alongside the others, requested from the MNAM collection on 20 November 1984, and its availability confirmed on 23 January 1985 (MNAM, AM 1979-71; CGP-AP 1994033W223_027_bis) In Toutcheff's notes, it is erroneously referred to as "Choses Vues, Choses Dites." – The works by Weiner and Kawara were also on the list with lending requests to the MNAM of 20 November 1984, but both of these were crossed through on the copy of the request list that was returned to the CCI, suggesting either that they were not available, or that the requests had meanwhile been withdrawn. In this request list, they are not connected to any site in particular, however, given their form and content, it seems likely that they were also considered for *Mots en scène*.

⁷¹ A sound recording of *The American Gift* (1976), 42:36 min, is available from: <http://www.ubu.com/sound/acconci.html> and http://ubusound.memoryoftheworld.org/acconci_vito/Acconci-Vito_The-American-Gift_1976.mp3 (an excerpt can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm7HSugLqRs>); information on the MNAM website: <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cbqrG8R/rEy8B6> ("Réalisé pour l'exposition *Identité/Identification* à Bordeaux en 1976"); and an interpretive text here: <http://www.newmedia-art.org/cgi-bin/show-oeu.asp?ID=15000000027016&lg=GBR>

"cool" and socio-politically detached style that we find not only in the 'visual arts sites,' but in the whole of *Les Immatériaux*. Where there was a choice to be made, it seems that the curators went for the cooler, the less emphatic, less agitating option, – and not for Kounellis' open fire ("*Infra-mince*"), not for Hans Haacke's sharp irony and not for Joseph Beuys' passionate analysis of capitalism (both considered but deselected for the site *Négoce peint*, see below).

Instead, the three artworks chosen for *mots en scène* emphasised the relation between the sign and the referent, between words and their meaning on a rather more conceptual level, inviting the visitors also to reflect on their own role in this relationship of sense construction. Whereas Joseph Kosuth's neon words display their self-referentiality and semantic closure in the mode of an aggressively coloured glow, the work by Ian Wilson points the recipient to a potential discussion, his or her potential involvement, here or elsewhere or at some other time, and Robert Barry's associative terms suggest the invitation to openly and unpredictably continue their phrases. Positioned right in front of the exit corridor, both of the *Labyrinthe du langage* and of the maze of *Les Immatériaux* as a whole, the visitors were thus discharged on a cool note, instead of being thrown into the hot, excited and critical transatlantic discourse that Acconci's audio track would have opened up.

Besides these three sites of "*Infra-mince*", *Ombre de l'ombre* and *Mots en scène*, which strongly drew on conceptual artworks, the other four 'visual arts sites' that Blistène and Lyotard collaborated on referred more to visual art forms like painting, sculpture, and photography: *Lumière dérobée*, *Négoce peint*, *Odeur peinte*, *Peinture luminescente*. The explicit reference to "painting" in several of the titles is not to be taken literally, but reflected Lyotard's extended conception of "painting" which basically encompassed the "visual arts" in general, i.e. all sorts of artworks that are not literature, and not cinema.⁷² Paintings did however play a significant role in these sites. Remarkably, the only site in whose title the word *peint/peinture* did not feature (*Lumière dérobée*) was full of paintings, whereas the three other sites, which also contained light art installations, objects, and holograms, each had only one painting proper as a conceptual anchor piece (Metsys, Chardin, Ryman).

⁷² See for instance, *Que peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren. What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren.* (1987) (Ed. Herman Parret) Leuven University Press, 2012; and "Notes préliminaires sur la pragmatique des oeuvres (en particulier de Daniel Buren)," *Critique*, No. 378, Paris 1978. – See also Hudek (2009/2015, p. 81); Hudek's text focuses on Duchamp, Monory and Buren; somewhat strangely it first makes it sound as though Buren was presented in *Les Immatériaux* with artworks, like Duchamp and Monory (p. 87); Hudek later acknowledges that this was not the case (p. 89) and speculates that Lyotard left Buren's work out deliberately (rather than, as Buren said in November 2015, that he did not want to participate with artworks, but rather in the *Epreuves* experiment); Hudek employs a strangely paradoxical rhetoric that refers to the significance of Buren by way of his absence ("removal") from the show.

lumière dérobée

- **Simone Martini: *Annunciation* (1333) (reproduction)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Georges Seurat: *Poseuse assise, vue de dos (étude pour les Poseuses)* (1887)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Giacomo Balla: *Lampadaire (étude de lumière)* (1910)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Michail Larionov: *Paysage* (1905)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Natalia Gontcharowa: *Construction rayonniste* (ca. 1913)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
- **Sonia Delaunay: *Étude pour les prismes électriques* (1914)** ^{1/85}
- **Kasimir Malevich (Casimir Malevitch): *Composition suprématiste* (ca. 1915, 1917, 1920)** ^{1/85}
- **Robert Delaunay: *Une fenêtre* (1912-1913)** ^{1/85}
- **Robert Delaunay: *La femme et la tour* (ca. 1925)** ^{1/85}
- **Larry Bell: *Sans titre* (1966)** ^{1/85}
- **Dan Graham: *Two adjacent pavilions* (1978), *Cinema* (1981), *Present continuous past(s)* (1974)** ^{1/85}

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- **Michel Larionov, *Impression de Cinéma*, 1907 (MNAM)** ^{lr/r}
 - **Nathalie Gontcharova, *Lampes électriques*, c. 1912 (MNAM)** ^{lr/r}
 - **Kasimir Malevich, *White Square*, 1918 (MOMA)** ^{4/84, lr/r}
 - **Robert Delaunay, *Formes circulaires*, 1912-1913 (MNAM)** ^{9/84, lr/r}
 - **Sonia Delaunay, *Le Bal Bullier*, 1913 (MNAM)** ^{lr/r}
 - **Sonia Delaunay, *Prismes électriques*, 1914 (MNAM)** ^{lr/r}
 - **Sonia Delaunay, *Contrastes simultanés*, Paris 1912 (MNAM)** ^{4/84, lr/r}
 - **Sonia Delaunay, *Etude de lumière boulevard Saint Germain*, 1912 (MNAM)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Sonia Delaunay, *Etude de foule boulevard Saint Germain*, 1912 (MNAM)** ^{9/84, 1/85}

Two of these sites, *Lumière dérobée* and *Peinture luminescente*, dealt with the topic of light, both as a medium and as a subject of art. The short conceptual texts that accompany their respective entries in the planning documents are rather similar and contiguous, making a general claim, for both sites, about the evolution from light as topic to light as medium. In the *Inventaire*, the text reads:

The painter's problem: how to illuminate the subject (the 'content [*matière*]' to which the painting refers) when the only means available are those of chemical colour? Solution: make light at once the subject (the content [*matière*]) of the painting and the means of painting it. Works about light, made of light. Their content [*matière*] is their raw material [*matériau*]: the vertigo of self-reference.

This is an art-historical argument that is also reflected in the separation of works between the two sites: while the works in *Lumière dérobée* employ the historical materials of oil paint, ink, crayon, and glass, most works in *Peinture luminescente* use more recent technical media, like electrically charged neon tubes, and holography.

From the preparatory lists it is clear that the core of the works in *Lumière dérobée* would be drawn from artists of the classical avantgarde, including Giacomo Balla, Michail Larionov, Sonia Delaunay

and Robert Delaunay, all of whom extensively explored the luminosity of paint in their works.⁷³ Many of the proposed works came from the collection of the MNAM, suggesting that even more than the other sites, this one was also intended to point to the wealth of this collection. When the requests for several of these works were rejected by the collection management, alternative works – mostly of a more humble format that matched the limited available space – were requested instead.⁷⁴

As historical precursors, there was a Pointillist painting by Georges Seurat (borrowed from the Musée d'Orsay), and the reproduction of a medieval altarpiece by Simone Martini (original in the Uffizi in Florence).⁷⁵ Much effort was made to obtain the painting of the *Poseuse* by Seurat, probably because with this work the historical shift from a utilitarian employment of paint and colour to a conceptual one, could be articulated most poignantly.⁷⁶ This early Pointillist work exemplifies the dissolution of the representation of the human figure into an almost technical pattern of luminous colour, engaging the beholder to engender the colour perception and thus to actively instantiate the depicted elements.

In contrast, the inclusion of a photographic reproduction of Simone Martini's 1333 altarpiece, reduced to less than a third of the original size, appears less obvious.⁷⁷ While the interest in gold as a pictorial medium is comprehensible, it seems curious that the curators decided to show a photographic reproduction which, from a technical perspective, was incapable of achieving the intended effect. In this respect, the use of a photographic reproduction had a different impact in the second case, i.e. of the painting by Quentin Metsys, *The Money Changer and His Wife* in the site *Négoce peint*, because here the focus was on the depicted scene, and not on the material support of the depiction. – Was the inclusion of the Simone Martini reproduction a deliberate and ostentatious gesture? What did the curators intend with it, beyond the rather didactic art-historical reference to the use of gold as a sign for "metaphysical light"? And wasn't it this flippant, somewhat frivolous deployment of artworks as mere illustrations or conceptual pointers, that made the exhibition as a whole so difficult to stomach for some of Blistène's peers from the museum world?

A second peculiarity of curatorial decisions for *Lumière dérobée* concerns the inclusion of works by Larry Bell and Dan Graham. The untitled work by Bell is a ca. 50 x 50 cm cube of coated glass in a metal frame on a pedestal, that had been in the collection of the MNAM since 1981 and that was apparently first proposed at the beginning of September 1984.⁷⁸ In contrast, Dan Graham's name had already been mentioned in the April 1984 document, in the context of the site *Peinture luminescente*. The specific works by Graham that would be shown were first listed in September, i.e. *Two Adjacent Pavilions* (model version, 1978), *Cinema* (1981), and *Present continuous past(s)* (1974). The first two

⁷³ See Wunderlich 2008, 207–209. The verso page for this site in the *Inventaire* is the only one which uses a smaller font size, probably due to the exceptional overall length of the text entries about the relatively large number of works.

⁷⁴ As an exception, the painting by Balla was borrowed from the New York MOMA. When a lending request to the MOMA for Kasimir Malevich's *White Square* was rejected, a small drawing by Malevich from the MNAM collection was selected instead. Another work that was requested from the MNAM collection in November, and that is not mentioned anywhere but in this lending request, is Gilberto Zorio, *Pugno fosforescente* [*Poing phosphorescent*] (1971); considering its form – a sculpture in the shape of a human forearm, made of wax and impregnated with phosphorescent pigment that glows after having been shone upon by an integrated set of lamps – it may have been regarded as too weak a candidate for *Lumière dérobée*.

⁷⁵ During a meeting on 2 April 1984, Blistène also mentioned Piero della Francesca, Caravaggio, and a "Nativity by Tintoretto" (see the handwritten notes by Sabine Vigoureux, 1994033W232_002).

⁷⁶ A lending request, signed by François Burkhardt, for this work was sent to the Louvre on 24.09.1984, followed up by a phone call by Blistène and another letter on 12.12.1984.

⁷⁷ In a technical planning document ("PH.D/K.L 17.01.85"), the size of the photo panel is given as "120 x 090 (Simone Martini)"; the original altar piece is 305 x 265 cm.

⁷⁸ Larry Bell: *Sans titre* (1966), AM 1981-253; among the planning documents (CGP-AP 1995052W027_043) there is a list jotted down by Délis, dated 11 September 1984, which includes the artist names as they are mentioned in the planning document from September 1984, in addition to "Larry Bell," suggesting that his work was only brought into the discussion between the editing of the document (in which it was not yet included) and the meeting on 11 September.

of these were borrowed from the Galerie Durand-Dessert, while the latter had been in the collection of the MNAM since 1976.⁷⁹

The miniature cinema space of Graham's *Cinema* (1981) with its interactive component, involving the exhibition visitor as potential screen actor, sat somewhat obliquely to the conceptual framework of the site *Lumière dérobée*; and the model version *Two Adjacent Pavilions*, dealing with mediated visuality and with the reflection and absorption of light, appears conceptually suitable to the notion of the "stolen light" (*lumière dérobée*), but is also rather similar in appearance to the piece by Larry Bell, so that a more rigorous curation might have opted for one or the other, and not both. And Graham's *Present Continuous Past(s)* – a mirrored space equipped with a video camera and a monitor, set up with an eight-second delay between the recording and the image presentation on the screen –, rather than dealing with light, is especially a play on time, a work that focuses on the presence and the participation of the visitor – the only aspect that is highlighted in the *Inventaire* text by Blistène about Graham's contributions. However, this aspect of temporality and presence was the theme of the installation by Catherine Ikam in the site *Temps différé*, a time-delay corridor not dissimilar to *Present Continuous Past(s)* and other works by Graham.

It is not entirely clear from the available documentation, how Dan Graham's works were actually exhibited. There is a note in the *Inventaire* which suggests that at least the installation *Present Continuous Past(s)* would be on display in the permanent collection of the MNAM on the fourth floor of the Centre Pompidou, and only from May onwards, six weeks after the opening of *Les Immatériaux*.

We're left with the impression that there was a strong interest to include Dan Graham in the exhibition with several works. Instead of deselecting *Two Adjacent Pavilions* (because of Larry Bell's glass cube), and *Present Continuous Past(s)* (because of Catherine Ikam's *Temps différé*), and then also dropping *Cinema* for being off-topic, all three of his works remained on the list for *Lumière dérobée*. We might here see an instance where Blistène prevailed over Lyotard who, according to a rare note by Sabine Vigoureux, actively opposed the inclusion of *Two Adjacent Pavilions*.⁸⁰ We have few documents of such disagreements, but in the exportation of Monory's paintings into their own site, *Peintre sans corps*, on the one hand, and in the inclusion of Graham's works as part of the site *Lumière dérobée* but outside of the *Immatériaux* exhibition space proper on the other, we can see that both Lyotard and Blistène found their ways of skirting potential conflicts by shifting the debated works onto 'neutral' territory.

⁷⁹ Graham's *Cinema* (1981) was bought by the MNAM five years later (AM 1990-362). See also Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (ed.): *Dan Graham. Video – Architecture – Television. Writings on Video and Video Works 1970–1978*. (1979) Zurich: Lars Müller Publ., 2013.

⁸⁰ On her production document for the site, there is an unusual, handwritten entry by Sabine Vigoureux, in the margin, connected by a dotted line to the title of Dan Graham, *Two Adjacent Pavilions*, saying "*JFL n'en veut pas*" ("JFL does not want it"), 1994033W235_001.

peinture lumineuse

- **László Moholy-Nagy: *Licht-Raum-Modulator* (1922-1930) (réplique 1930)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Lucio Fontana: *Ambiente* (1967)** ^{4/84, 1/85}
- **François Morellet: *Parallèles de néon 0°, 45°, 90°, 135° avec quatre rythmes interférents* (1963)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
- **Takis: *La Méduse* (1980)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Dan Flavin: *To Donna* (1971)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Sam Moree: *Cartesian Memories* (1981)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
- **Robert Ryman: *Midland I* (1976)** ^{1/85}

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- **Dan Graham, *Vitre et miroir*** ^{4/84} [*Two Adjacent Pavilions, will be in lumière dérobée*]
 - **Kossuth, *Five Words in five orange colors*** ^{4/84} [*Five Words In Orange Neon will be in mots en scène*]

The art-historical argument from *Lumière dérobée* was continued in the site *Peinture lumineuse* – even though it would have been difficult for the visitors to make that connection, given that both sites were placed in quite distant parts of the exhibition, and on different paths.⁸¹ *Peinture lumineuse* comprised pieces of kinetic light art including László Moholy-Nagy's *Licht-Raum-Modulator* (1922-1930, a replica from 1930 borrowed from the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven), François Morellet's *Parallèles de néon 0°, 45°, 90°, 135° avec quatre rythmes interférents* (1963), as well as *To Donna* (1971) by Dan Flavin and *La Méduse* by Takis (1980, the latter two both from the collection of the MNAM), and a holographic installation by Sam Moree, *Cartesian Memories* (1981).

The problem of light spillage between the different works, and from the site into its surroundings, appears to have been a major issue before and during the installation phase of the exhibition. The *Licht-Raum-Modulator* by Moholy-Nagy was presented in a sort of ante-chamber, separated from the main space of the site by a wall, in order to protect it (and the adjoining projection space of *Matériau dématérialisé*) from being inundated by diffuse light from the coloured neon tubes in Dan Flavin's work, and by the rhythmic flashing of Morellet's geometric blocks of neon lights. Because of the density of luminescent sources, the brightly glowing and nervously flickering installation by Takis was moved away from the site to an empty corner – not far away, but practically into another path, and without a direct access from the site proper.⁸² A light installation by Lucio Fontana, that would have required a darkened, separate space, was omitted from the selection for the site altogether.⁸³

⁸¹ For *Peinture lumineuse*, see Wunderlich 2008, 144-146.

⁸² The documentation photos show that *La Méduse* was shown in a space at the end of the *Matériel* path, between the site *Creusets stellaires* and the *Labyrinthe du langage*'s section *Mémoires artificielles* (whose reverse side we can see in some of the photos of *La Méduse*). Moving Takis' installation, which manifested the physicality of the gaseous light medium by applying various kinetic and magnetic elements, may have had the added advantage that it was now also placed into a direct relation with the astronomical images in the site *Creusets stellaires* which pointed to similar, interstellar and inter-material interdependencies.

⁸³ The preparatory documents and the *Inventaire* mention Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente* (1967); it was to be borrowed from the Musée des Beaux Arts, Lyon, but was cancelled at a late stage, in February or even March 1985, possibly because of the impossibility of installing it adequately (see the handwritten note by Sabine Vigoureux in her production document for the site: "*pbe : ou met-on le Fontana*", 1994033W235_001; see also Gallo 2008, p. 84, fn. 5). On the *Inventaire* sheet for the site, there is an explanatory text (verso) and a caption and figure "2", but no respective illustration of this work (recto), suggesting that the work was dropped well into the production phase of the catalogue.

It was a daring curatorial gesture to introduce a visually delicate work like Robert Ryman's *Midland I*, a white painted surface of 122 x 122 cm owned by the MNAM, into such a diverse and luminous environment. It seems hard to imagine what motivated the decision for this work, apparently brought into the curatorial discussion only at the last minute at the beginning of 1985, when the challenging lighting situation in the site must already have been obvious. The caption commentary in the *Inventaire* only states: "Ryman identifies the materiality of painting. He names it."⁸⁴ If this reference to painting proper, and the form of the work itself, would have made it a candidate for the sibling site, *Lumière dérobée*, placing it here can be understood as a deliberate, if hard to discern act of bridging between the two sites.

Presumably the motivations for such difficult curatorial choices were quite diverse. As we can tell from the list of owners, the ready availability of the different works in Paris, or even in the collection of the MNAM, was an important, though not always decisive factor for certain selections.⁸⁵ In contrast, the inclusion of a holographic work by Sam Moree, *Cartesian Memories*, resulted from a long-established contact with the London-based gallerist Eve Ritscher with whom Thierry Chaput had already been in contact since 1982, and who also provided a number of other holographic works for the exhibition. Lyotard shared Chaput's fascination with the luminous ephemerality of hologrammes, and in this particular case the work also offered a reflection on the materiality and the boundaries of what constitutes a 'picture.' For this reason, and perhaps also out of loyalty towards Chaput's commitment to Ritscher, Lyotard defended Moree's work against Blistène's resistance, who perhaps reciprocated the challenge with the late inclusion of another radical 'picture' in the form of Ryman's *Midland I*, providing another example of a disagreement between the two curators, and of their strategies for avoiding conflicts.⁸⁶

odeur peinte

- **Yannis Kounellis: Senza titolo [Pesons de café] (1969)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - **Piero Manzoni: Merda d'artista (1961)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Marcel Duchamp: Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette (1921)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - **Marcel Duchamp: Torture-Morte (1959)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - **Jean Siméon Chardin: Trois pommes d'api, deux châtaignes, une écuelle et un gobelet d'argent dit Le Gobelet d'argent (n.d. / late 1750s)** ^{4/84*, 9/84*, 1/85}
-
- **x, Vanité (baroque)** ^{4/84}
 - **Gérard Titus-Carmel, Forêt vierge / Amazonie, 1971** ^{4/84}

Besides the three sites dedicated to conceptual art, and the two sites dealing with the representation and mediality of light, there were two further 'visual arts sites' which each dealt with the visual representation of something that is hard to represent visually: one of these was smell (*Odeur peinte*), and the other the act of trading and the exchange of values (*Négoce peint*).

⁸⁴ (*Ryman décline la matérialité de la peinture. Il la nomme.*)

⁸⁵ Two works mentioned in the first list for *Peinture luminescente*, in April 1984, and not eventually shown here (Kosuth's *Five Words*, eventually in *Mots en scène*, Graham's *Pavilions*, in *Lumière dérobée*), were directly related to the Galerie Durand-Dessert to which Blistène underheld an active, collaborative relationship.

⁸⁶ Blistène clearly disengaged himself from Moree's work; in a note dated 23 January 1985 and addressed at Chaput and Délis, in which Blistène provides various technical details for the installation of works by Flavin, Kuntzel, Morellet, and others, he makes it clear that he is not responsible for Moree's work. ("*Sam Moree: je ne suis pas à même de vous renseigner mais je vous rapelle ici que l'oeuvre se trouve liée à ce site.*") (1994033W223_027_bis)

The first, *Odeur peinte*, was again positioned quite detached from the other 'visual arts sites,' though it was part of the same *Matière* path as *Lumière dérobée*, investigating the aspect of the referent of a message or of a representation. Here, in *Odeur peinte*, it was the aspect of smell, as one of the forms of bodily sense perception.⁸⁷

The selection of artworks for this site was unusually complete even in April 1984 – four out of the five works were already specified: two pieces by Duchamp (*Torture-Morte*, 1959, and *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 1921), a still life painting by Chardin (*Le Gobelet d'argent*, n.d. / late 1750s), and a sculptural object by Kounellis (*Senza titolo [Pesons de café]*, 1969). Only Piero Manzoni's *Merda d'artista* (1961) was added to the list by September.

The work by Chardin would have been dear to Lyotard who frequently mentions the artist as an example of sensuous 18th-century painting in his writings on art. The initial lending request to the Louvre asked rather generically for "a still life that testifies to Chardin's preoccupation with the olfactory," so it was not this particular artwork, but the theme and its treatment by this artist that motivated the selection.⁸⁸

The work by Yannis Kounellis was a similarly obvious, thematic choice, given that here the smell was not represented but concrete. It is a sculptural work in which a series of ten small metal scale pans are suspended, one underneath the other, from a hook in the wall, each of the pans carrying a small pile of freshly ground coffee – due to be replaced regularly. The work was borrowed from the collection of the artist through the Galerie Durand-Dessert which also arranged the loan of the piece by Piero Manzoni from the collection of the artist François Morellet.⁸⁹

In 1961, Manzoni made a total of 90 tins which were labelled "Artist's Shit" ("*Merda d'artista*") and supposedly contained the artist's own faeces. The relation to the theme of the site *Odeur peinte* was only tentative, since the physical smell was not represented but only imaginary, and not really the work's most important aspect. Since the late 1950s, Manzoni had realised a number of projects, also including for instance "Artist's Breath," all of which dealt with the products of the artist's metabolism as artworks, combining discourses of body art with those of the institutional critique of the art system. In the case of *Merda d'artista*, Manzoni coupled the price of the individual tins to the price of gold, selling the tins for the price of 30 grams of gold and insisting that, also in the future, they should be traded according to the equivalent value of the weight in gold. With this reference to the art system, *Merda d'artista* could also have been in *Négoce peint*, where – next to works by Andy Warhol, Philippe Thomas, and again Duchamp – it would have added the dimension of the artist's corporeal existence to the discourse on value creation through symbolic exchange.

However, instead of highlighting the abject dimension of the relation between gold, money, and shit, the curators focused on the olfactory, titillating the visitor with an imaginary abject smell. Here, as in some of the other works in this site, the selection appears somewhat anecdotal. We can glean a certain detachment also in Blistène's text entries for the works in the *Inventaire* (verso), all of which do not focus on (or even mention) smell, while the short captions (recto, by Lyotard) attempt to emphatically relate the works to the topic. While *Merda d'artista* is, verso, contextualised art-historically and described as an Artaudian "supreme waste" (*déchet supreme*), the recto caption draws a more immediate connection to the site's declared theme, describing Manzoni's piece as an "An echo of the *Paris Air* bottled by Duchamp, scentless and tasteless."⁹⁰ Similarly, Lyotard reduces the conceptual play of the two works by Duchamp to the aspect of smell, a perspective that diminishes their complexity, while Blistène altogether ignores it.⁹¹

We get the impression that the relatively disimpassioned selection of works in the site *Odeur peinte* is due to a strategic rather than a more specific, dedicated curatorial composition. In the overall context of *Les*

⁸⁷ See Wunderlich 2008, p. 214–216.

⁸⁸ See the request, signed by François Burkhardt, dated 24.09.1984; follow-up letter on 12.12.1984 (CGP-AP 1994033W669_147).

⁸⁹ Kounellis' work was bought by the MNAM in the year of the exhibition, in 1985, AM 1985-178.

⁹⁰ (*Echo de L'air de Paris mis en fiole par Duchamp, inodore et sans saveur.*)

⁹¹ *Inventaire*, recto (Lyotard): "*La voilette et la violette, Belle Hélène et haleine belle = les transformations du champ olfactif*", and verso (Blistène): "*Duchamp, en elegante, sur une bouteille de parfum Rigaud.*"

Immatériaux, the site is part of a longer sequence of exhibits that address questions of representation, virtuality and simulation. The short conceptual justification of the site in the *Inventaire* emphasises this general, semiotic aspect of the works on display here:

The artwork represents scent [*arôme*]. It becomes scent. The raw material [*matériau*] becomes the content [*matière*] of the work. The work represents itself.⁹²

The use of the term *arôme* instead of *odeur* suggests that the site *Odeur peinte* was deliberately conceived in relation to the neighbouring site, *Arôme simulé*, which included a computer animation of a virtual fruit basket, echoing Chardin's painting. Together the two sites formed audio zone 20, in which a text excerpt by Jean Baudrillard could be heard, about the concept of the simulacrum.⁹³

Odeur peinte also formed an art-historical prelude to a series of sites that each dealt with an aspect of simulation: *Arôme simulé* (smell), *Visites simulées* (travel and human encounters), and *Profondeur simulée* (holographic space). Each of these referred to a potential reality that was not verifiable – like the malodorous content of Manzoni's tins, or, as Lyotard's caption (recto) for Duchamp's *Torture-Morte* read, "A foot, some flies, and the smell of a corny joke."⁹⁴

Another site, besides *Odeur peinte*, that addressed the problem of representing non-visual phenomena in the visual arts, was *Négoce peint*.⁹⁵ It dealt with the topic of trade and exchange in general, and with value creation in art in particular.

The consecutive text sketches that Lyotard noted for the exhibition concepts in April and September 1984, and then on the *Inventaire* catalogue page for the site, is exemplary for the dynamics of curatorial conceptualisation. In April 1984, the yet tentative circumscription of the site's title was:

Site of the painted trade and the traded painting or the trade in the painting or the money in the painting.

The enclosed conceptual sketch focused on the conflation of representation and value:

From the painted representation of the trade to the written representation of the trade of the painted representation. Value of the painting = its circulation.⁹⁶

⁹² (*L'oeuvre représente l'arôme. Elle se fait arôme. Le matériau devient la matière de l'oeuvre. L'oeuvre se représente elle-même.*)

⁹³ Another indication for the strategic considerations around this site can be gleaned from one of the works mentioned in the April 1984 planning document, namely Gérard Titus-Carmel, *Forêt vierge / Amazone* (1971), an installation, owned by the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, with three humidifiers emitting different smells related to the primeval forest. This work could probably not be realised in *Les Immatériaux* because it requires a larger and separate space. It uses a technical system though that was similar to the one employed in the following site, *Arôme simulé*: the emission of individual smells for the audience to experience and compare, – an installation that possibly even adopted Titus-Carmel's technical concept. – The other proposal dropped from the April 1984 list for *Odeur peinte* was an unspecified "Baroque painting on vanity."

⁹⁴ (*Un pied, quelques mouches et l'odeur du calembour.*)

⁹⁵ See Wunderlich 2008, p. 239-244.

⁹⁶ See concept April 1984, p. 4. ("*Site du négoce peint et de la peinture négociée ou du négoce dans la peinture ou de la monnaie dans la peinture*"; "*De la représentation peinte du négoce à la représentation écrite du négoce de la représentation peinte. Valeur du tableau = sa circulation.*")

In the rendering of the concept sketched in September 1984, there is no explicit reference to money or value, but only to trade and circulation as formative for the status of artworks:

A written and painted representation of the trade whose circulation becomes (the work?) itself. – Passage from the visual to the readable pictorial. Opening up to the conceptualization of representation.⁹⁷

In contrast, the introductory text to the site in the *Inventaire* emphasises the commercial aspect of artworks in a broader, economic perspective:

Paintings have represented commerce in all its glory and all its shame. The artist may signify that the work itself is also (perhaps above all?) an item of commercial value, subject to prostitution. Is the market of pleasures the mother of the arts?⁹⁸

négoce peint

- **Quentin Metsys: *Le prêteur et sa femme* (1514) (reproduction)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - **Simon Vouet: *Jeune homme faisant la figue* (n.d.)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Raoul Hausmann: *L'Ésprit de notre temps* (1919)** ^{1/85}
 - **Marcel Duchamp: *Obligation pour la roulette de Monte-Carlo* (1924)** ^{4/84, 9/84, 1/85}
 - **Andy Warhol: *Dollar Sign* (1981)** ^{1/85}
 - **Philippe Thomas: *Sujet à discrétion* (1985)**
-
- **Andy Warhol: *Two Dollar Bills* (1962)** ^{4/84, 9/84}
 - **Hans Haacke: *Manet Projekt '74* (1974)** ^{4/84}
 - **Hans Haacke: *Tiffany cares* (1977-1978)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Malcom Morley: *Regatta/Cheque No. 85* (1972)** ^{9/84, 1/85}
 - **Marinus van Reymerswaele: *Les deux collecteurs d'impôts* (ca. 1540)** ^{1/85}
 - **Greco (or Jordaens), *Jésus chassant les marchands du temple*** ^{4/84}
 - **(Éthique bourgeoise XIXième)** ^{4/84}
 - **Joseph Beuys: *Das Kapital* (1977)** ^{9/84*, 1/85}

It is interesting to note that in this last rendering of the concept the historical dimension suggested in the first version ("from ... to") was replaced by a description that put the works from different historical periods on a par. A key artwork which appeared already on the first planning document and for whose provisioning the curators made major efforts, was a painting by Quentin Metsys, *The Money Changer and His Wife* (1514). The central element of the picture is a small scale, held by the money changer to weigh a number of coins. The scale is observed both by him and his wife who is seated next to him and holds a page of an open, illuminated prayer book. The painting addresses questions of

⁹⁷ See concept September 1984, p. 6. ("*Représentation écrite et peinte du négoce dont les circulations devienne [l'oeuvre?] elle même.*" – "*Passage du pictorial visuel au lisible. Ouverture vers la conceptualisation de la représentation.*")

⁹⁸ See *Inventaire*, 1985, n.p.. ("*Le tableau a représenté le commerce dans sa gloire et dans sa honte. L'artiste peut signifier que l'oeuvre est elle-même (avant tout ?) une valeur commerciale, livrée à la prostitution. La mère des arts est le marché des plaisirs?*")

weight and value, justice and equilibrium, and displays a complex set of relations between economic and religious values.⁹⁹ Despite repeated attempts to borrow the original painting from the Louvre, the loan was rejected by the museum, arguing that the value of the painting and the insufficient conservational conditions in the exhibition prohibited its inclusion in *Les Immatériaux*.¹⁰⁰ After the loan of the Metsys painting was rejected, the curators requested Marinus van Reymerswaele's *The Two Tax Collectors* (ca. 1540) instead, but the Louvre denied this alternative loan, too. It must have been upon this second rejection that Lyotard decided to present the painting by Metsys in the form of a photographic reproduction, a fact that points to the significance of the motif over the requirement to present the original. And it may well also be that the curators (or at least one of them) were enticed by the idea that the reasons for not being able to show the original, namely the excessive value and delicacy of the work, were in themselves a conceptually consistent hint at the reflections on value and circulation that the site sought to initiate.

Another work that was already on the first planning list for *Négoce peint* was Marcel Duchamp's *Obligation pour la roulette de Monte-Carlo* (1924), a hand-painted certificate which Duchamp produced in order to raise money for his scheme to win the bank in the Casino in Monte Carlo. It was borrowed for the exhibition from the collection of Jean-Jacques Lebel. While in the painting by Metsys the artistic reflection of economic value was largely symbolical, here the approach to value and its creation was concrete: The artwork is a piece of graphic in the style of a bond in which the artist promises a 20% yield on the price of 500 Francs. The 'deal' between the artist and the buyer of the artwork is not a bet on the future symbolical value of the artwork and the artist's fame, but it is represented as a guaranteed investment.

Another artist whose work was discussed for this site was Hans Haacke, especially his *Manet Projekt '74*, and *Tiffany Cares*. Both works did not deal with the generation of value on the art market and might therefore have been dropped from the list eventually, independent of their availability. In *Manet Projekt '74* (1974), Haacke disclosed the consecutive owners of Edouard Manet's painting *Asparagus* (1880), and the prices for which it had been traded between them. But more importantly, the project denounced the role of the banker and museum board member Hermann Josef Abs in the dispossession of Jews in Nazi-Germany.¹⁰¹ In turn, *Tiffany Cares* (1977-78) was Haacke's sarcastic answer to an advertisement by the Tiffany luxury goods company, in which excessive wealth had been exonerated for its presumed service to society. The inclusion of either of these works would have introduced a political tendency to *Les Immatériaux* which would have deflected from the more sober, conceptual and semiotic investigation that would in the end rule the exhibition. The same goes for another work that was under discussion in 1984, namely the installation *Das Kapital Raum 1970-1977* by Joseph Beuys, a major installation with multiple black boards, film projectors and other objects that derived from Beuys' performances and lectures on the notions of capital, value creation and the social sculpture.¹⁰²

Instead of such socially engaged artworks, the pieces further selected for *négoce peinte* were the painting of a *Dollar Sign* by Andy Warhol (1981), and the work *Sujet à discrétion* (1985) by the young French artist Philippe Thomas.¹⁰³ Warhol's painting of a dollar sign that covered the entire surface of the canvas, was an

⁹⁹ See Holger Kuhn: *Die leibhaftige Münze: Quentin Massys' Goldwäger und die altniederländische Malerei*. Paderborn: Fink, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ See the request for the Metsys painting to Louvre-director Rosenberg, dated 6.2.1985, CGP-AP 1995025W155_003. See also fn 39, above, on the respective letter by Louvre curator Jacques Foucart to Blistène.

¹⁰¹ Among the artists who protested the exclusion of Haacke's project from the *Projekt '74* exhibition at the Wallraf-Richard-Museum in Cologne, was Daniel Buren. See T. A. Gronberg: *Manet, a Retrospective*. New York: Levin, 1989, p. 345.

¹⁰² See the production notes by Délis (CGP-AP 1995052W027_039), and Sabine Vigoureux's meeting notes (CGP-AP 1994033W232_002). Bernard Blistène remembers that it was he who advocated the inclusion of the Beuys piece (personal conversation, 7.9.2020). – Two other options for works that were mentioned only in the April 1984 list, were a yet unspecified 16th or 17th century representation of "Christ driving the money changers from the temple," and a representation of "19th-century bourgeois ethics."

¹⁰³ Another work that was under discussion, the painting *Regatta/cheque No. 85* (1972) by Malcolm Morley, would have reiterated the theme of the "painted money" and was possibly listed as a potential alternative to the

obvious choice, for it matched the hypothesis of the conflation of representation and value in artworks, and it did this in a gesture of 'representation' that was not dissimilar to that in the painting by Metsys.¹⁰⁴

In contrast to the world-famous Warhol, Philippe Thomas was a young Paris-based artist who Blistène had first met a year earlier, in 1983. Blistène introduced Lyotard to the work of Philippe Thomas who, as a member of the artist group IFP, Blistène had included at the last minute in the exhibition *ALIBIS*, curated by Blistène at the MNAM in the summer of 1984.¹⁰⁵ Thomas's work *Sujet à discrétion* (1985) consists of three identical, framed colour photographs of the sea. While one of them is unsigned, one is signed by the artist, and one is signed by the collector, the ensemble offering a reflection on the question of authorship, ownership and creativity that formed a core theme of the *Maternité* path in which this site was presented in *Les Immatériaux*.¹⁰⁶

In contrast to such poignant works that served to articulate the concept of the site, two less obvious choices were a work by the baroque painter Simon Vouet, *Jeune homme faisant la figue* (n.d., ca. 1615), borrowed from the Caen Museum and possibly selected for its grotesque and transgressive motif,¹⁰⁷ and a sculpture by the German Dada artist, Raoul Hausmann, which was in the collection of the MNAM, entitled *Spirit of Our Times (Mechanical Head)* (1919).¹⁰⁸ In view of the conceptual consistency of the works by Duchamp, Warhol, and Thomas, and the thematic suggestiveness of the painting by Metsys, the inclusion of these two pieces appears quite puzzling. In the *Inventaire*, there are no explanatory notes by Blistène (verso), and only terse and conceptually vague notes by Lyotard (recto), accompanying the image captions: "The enigma and the sense" (*L'enigme et le sens.*) (Vouet), and "The spirit of a time that is still our own." (*L'esprit d'un temps qui est toujours le nôtre.*) (Hausmann).

Perhaps this apparent dilution of the curatorial concept is itself significant here: like the site "*Infra-mince*", *Négoce peinte* was located half way down the *Grand galerie*, this time on the fifth path, mirroring the central position of "*Infra-mince*", half way down the way from the *Théâtre du non-corpse* to the *Labyrinthe du langage*. We saw that one of the aspects of the *infra-mince* is to act as a medium of im-materialities, as in the composite smell of a breath. However, here in *Négoce peinte* with its focus on trade, commerce, and value, this mediality is not physical, but symbolical. The key issues here are the conditions of valuation, and the question of how these conditions, enacted in a trade, can be represented. This thematic focus made perfect sense in the logic of the *Maternité* path which, in the immediate neighbourhood, investigated questions of origin and authorship with regard to the generation of value on the financial markets (*Monnaie*

works by Duchamp and Warhol, and perhaps only acted as a "contrast medium" in the curatorial selection process.

¹⁰⁴ A series of works of the same title, *Dollar Sign*, all dated 1981 and all showing the same, bold dollar sign in varying colours, had been shown at Gallery Leo Castelli in New York in January 1982, and at Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris in March 1982; besides various large versions (229 x 178 cm) there were also smaller canvases (50 x 40 cm), one of which was included in *Les Immatériaux*. (Blistène vaguely remembers "a clear, somewhat vulgar green;" personal conversation, 11 November 2021.)

¹⁰⁵ IFP (Information Fiction Publicité), whose members at that moment were Jean-François Brun, Dominique Pasqualini and Philippe Thomas, contributed a project for the *couverture* of the catalogue of *ALIBIS* (see above, fn 21); they are not listed among the artists for the exhibition, but there is a special three-page insert at the end of the catalogue from July 1984 (p. 117-119, printed white on black). – Bernard Blistène had contributed a text on the IFP project *Ligne Générale*, to *Flash Art*, French edition, No. 2, winter 1983/1984. See also the interview with IFP members, "Répliques – Ligne Générale," in *Conséquences*, No. 2, Winter 1984, and the IFP publicity in *Artistes*, No. 24, December 1984.

¹⁰⁶ See Hanna Magauer: "Vollkommen isoliert, an die Gesellschaft gebunden. Überlegungen zu Meeresmotiven bei Philippe Thomas." In *Texte zur Kunst*, 11 July 2019; <https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/vollkommen-isoliert-die-gesellschaft-gebunden/>; see also the concept and sketches (CGP-AP 1994033W223_018), and the material in the Fonds Philippe Thomas, THO 20.1, Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky: „Série de photographies de la mer Méditerranée, à partir desquelles sera tirée la photographie de la mer pour l'œuvre ‚Sujet à discrétion‘ prises par Philippe Thomas et un photographe [non identifié] à partir d'un bateau au départ de Marseille: négatifs originaux (44 vues, 1 f. manuscrit)“.

¹⁰⁷ See <https://mba.caen.fr/oeuvre/lhomme-la-figue>; in the lending request of 20.11.1984, Blistène emphasises that the painting was described "dans un article de la revue du Louvre par Monsieur Jean-Pierre Cuzin, conservateur au Département des Peintures du Musée du Louvre." (CGP-AP 1994033W669_011)

¹⁰⁸ Hudek (2009/2015, p. 81) writes that one of the subtitles considered for *Les Immatériaux* was "L'Ésprit du temps".

du temps), the originality of building materials in architecture (*Terroir oublié*), and literary authorship and copyright (*Tous les auteurs*).

While being part of this constellation of *Maternité* in the exhibition parcours, from the perspective of the ensemble of the 'visual arts sites,' *Négoce peinte* was one of the sites with themes related to the specific questions of conceptual art. This one dealt with the status and economic value of the art object, while the other two focused on representation with regard to the role of language – *Ombre de l'ombre* and *Mots en scène* – the latter of which the visitors would have encountered soon after seeing *Négoce peinte*, a bit further down the *Maternité* path and just as they entered the *Labyrinthe du langage*.

Like "*Infra-mince*", and more than many other sites, *Négoce peinte* forms a crossing point for multiple lines of the curatorial argument of *Les Immatériaux* in general, around presence and absence, representation and authenticity, value and meaning. It is noticeable that *Manet Projekt '74* by Hans Haacke was considered for this site for a while, which would have further emphasised the politics of trading in artworks. At the same time, the works by Yves Klein (*Zones de sensibilité picturale immatérielle*, from "*Infra-mince*") and Piero Manzoni (*Merda d'artista*, from *Odeur peinte*) could easily also have been presented here. We can only speculate about the motivation for the specific composition of works as they eventually appeared in the exhibition. Was it a strategic move (perhaps by Lyotard more than by Blistène?) to dilute the strong conceptual engagement with the crucial role of the artist as author of the artwork, and as the source and guarantee of the monetary value in the works by Warhol, Duchamp and Thomas, with the rather more anecdotal works by Metsys, Vouet, and Hausmann?

Conclusion

Such speculations bring us back to the question regarding the specific correlation between the themes of the 'visual arts sites' and the artworks selected for them.¹⁰⁹ We can see that most of the themes of these sites were developed from the perspective of the specific contribution that certain artworks could make to aspects of *Les Immatériaux*. Conspicuously, the site whose theme derived more from the narrative logic and sequential necessity of the exhibition, rather than from the artworks shown there, namely *Odeur peinte*, contained perhaps the least pertinent selection of works. With some sites, the choice was first for the artists or for specific artworks, and the themes of the sites were actually derived from these works, like "*Infra-mince*" (Duchamp, Klein) and *Ombre de l'ombre* (Kosuth). Here artistic positions that had developed since the late 1950s, especially in the field of conceptual art, played a significant role, notably in the reference that the site *Mots en scène* made to the discourse around the 'dematerialisation' in art. In contrast, for Lyotard the theme of light as an *immatériel* may have derived not only from the art-historical discussion with Blistène, but also from the scientific consultations, so that the presentation of the artworks in *Lumière dérobée* and *Peinture luminescente* was a welcome compromise between the MNAM's wish to present works from their modern collection, and Lyotard's ambition to highlight the special, yet complementary ways in which artists researched topics of scientific relevance, as testified by the juxtaposition of these sites with exhibits of hologrammes, the laser experiment in *Espace réciproque*, or the large multimedia display of *matériau dématérialisé*.

In order to approach the question of the particular contribution that Bernard Blistène made to *Les Immatériaux* in his dialogue and collaboration with Lyotard, it is interesting to take a brief look at some visual arts contributions that were selected directly by Lyotard, and that were, like Sam Moree's *Cartesian Memories*, explicitly not handled by Blistène. The first is a work by Jacques Monory whose

¹⁰⁹ We will here not elaborate on an analytical dimension that was mentioned with regard to the consideration of Kounellis' *Marguerite de feu* for the site "*Infra-mince*", namely the impact of the works that were planned for certain sites but finally not shown there. Such works and artists – like the examples mentioned earlier, Hans Haacke, Joseph Beuys, Lucio Fontana, George Segal – must have at least partially influenced the way in which the curators thought about specific sites, their deselection at times leaving conceptual gaps, at other times clarifying the respective curatorial program.

four-part series *Explosion* (1973) was presented as the sole work in the site *Peintre sans corps*.¹¹⁰ Given that Lyotard had written about Monory's work as an example of postmodern painting on several occasions, and given that they were friends, Monory's participation in the exhibition was a *fait accompli* even before Blistène joined the project.¹¹¹ But for Blistène the choice of Monory was an unacceptable blunder and he made it clear that he wanted nothing to do with the presentation of *Explosion* in the exhibition.¹¹²

In contrast, Monory's works not only shaped Lyotard's understanding of what constituted a contemporary form of 'painting,' but they also influenced the way in which the philosopher thought about the position of painting in the field of the *immatériaux*. In the parcours of the exhibition, Monory's work was placed right next to *Peinture luminescente*, emphasising the technical medium of painting which, in Monory's case, was highlighted by the juxtaposition of parts of the surface covered by regular paint, while other parts had been treated with photo-sensitive emulsion and projected upon. In terms of this questioning of artistic authorship, the work could perhaps also have been in the *Maternité* path, but with its focus on the (absent) body of the artist, it was perhaps more appropriately placed on the path that also contained *L'Ange*, *Corps éclaté*, and "*Infra-mince*".¹¹³

A second example of an artwork that was included in the exhibition without the direct involvement of Blistène was Catherine Ikam's video installation of a time-delay corridor, constituting the site *Temps différé*, at the very end of the exhibition, behind the *Labyrinthe du langage*. As we mentioned earlier, an appropriate work by Graham was perhaps not available for the full duration of the exhibition, or it may be that Lyotard and Chaput were looking for a custom-made solution, one that could more easily be provided by Catherine Ikam who had previously produced a major video installation with the Centre Pompidou's audiovisual service in 1979/1980.¹¹⁴ Only a part of Ikam's original installation was used for *Temps différé*, one that was not exactly typical of her lifelong artistic engagement with identity and fragmentation. Instead, at this strategic position of the parcours, also served Lyotard and Chaput as a demonstration of the modification of conceptions of time and space through electronic media which the exhibition sought to

¹¹⁰ See Wunderlich 2008, 146–147; Gallo 2008, 111–114. See also Jean-François Lyotard: *L'assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture, Monory (The Assassination of Experience by Painting, Monory)*. [first publ. 1984] (Ed. Herman Parret, Vol. 6) Leuven University Press, 2013. – The work was borrowed from the collection of Adrien Maeght.

¹¹¹ See Sarah Wilson: "Lyotard/Monory: Postmodern Romantics." In: Jean-François Lyotard: *The Assassination of Experience – Monory*. [1984] (English and French edition). London: Black Dog Publishing, 1998. – It is worth keeping in mind though that there were also other artists who Lyotard had recently written about, but whose work was not shown in the exhibition. An interesting borderline case is Ruth Francken, a Paris-based artist who Lyotard was in contact with during the preparation phase of *Les Immatériaux* and about whom he wrote the biographical text "L'histoire de Ruth (The Story of Ruth)." [1983] In: H. Parret (ed.), Vol. 2012, p. 370–399; see also "La brûlure du silence. (Sear of Silence. On Ruth Francken)." [1991]; publ. Magdeburg 1994, *ibid.*, p. 400–423. Francken had developed a series of works, *Mirrorical Return*, which comprised "portraits" of artists and intellectuals including Beauvoir, Beckett, Beuys, Butor, Cage, Kagel, Lyotard, and Tinguely, in the form of collaged, layered, cut and torn photographs. One work from this series, the triptych *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1979) was not shown in the exhibition but was used to illustrate the *Inventaire* page for the site *Tous les auteurs* (cf also Gallo 2008, p. 116).

¹¹² Personal conversation, 7.9.2020.

¹¹³ The conceptual note by Lyotard, in the April 1984 document, though referring to a different painting by Monory ("*Claude*, 1973, *ou : x*"), also focussed on the supersession of the body: "*A la place de toile, pâte et pinceau, projection du motif sur toile sensible. Élimination du corps du peintre. La facture passe dans la photo.*" (p. 2)

¹¹⁴ *Temps différé* showed an element of *Dispositif pour un parcours vidéo*, a larger installation project that Ikam had realised at the Centre Pompidou, commissioned by Alain Sayag of the MNAM with the assistance of Hamid Hamidi and the Centre Pompidou's audiovisual service, and exhibited from 23 January to 3 March 1980; it was subsequently shown in Charleroi (1982), La Villette, Paris, and MOMA, New York (both 1983), and at the CAVS, MIT, Cambridge Mass (1985). See exh. cat. *Catherine Ikam: Dispositif pour un parcours vidéo*, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980; and Pierre Restany (ed.): *Catherine Ikam. Le Grand Jeu [...]*. Nîmes, Chapelle des Jésuites, and Paris, Éditions Adrien Maeght (exh. Paris 2–7 May 1991), 1991, p. 22–31, and <https://www.ubikam.org/identite-iii>. See also Gallo 2008, p. 107, who compares Ikam's piece to similar works by Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Fred Forest, and Wunderlich 2008, p. 250.

highlight.

Works like Ikam's did not so much complement or extend the program of the other 'visual arts sites,' but rather contributed to the critical, media-aesthetic agenda of the overall exhibition, whereas Monory's work appeared to directly extend the conceptual framework of sites like *Peinture luminescente* and *Ombre de l'ombre*.

In order to negotiate their different approaches, Lyotard and Blistène found a broad middle ground of works that they agreed on and that formed the spine of their collaboration. And when they disagreed about certain works, they found ways to solve these differences without discord, either by shifting works away from the shared territory (Monory's paintings into a different site, Dan Graham's installation into the museum's permanent exhibition), or by all but ignoring the choice of the other (Blistène regarding Moree's work, Lyotard turning a blind eye on Dan Graham's). Presumably there will also have been undocumented cases when one convinced the other to either embrace or discard a certain work.

In the seven 'visual arts sites,' Blistène's proposals mostly drew on a reservoir of established modern and contemporary artists who today count among the canon of the modernist avantgarde and of conceptual art, worthy of a museum's contribution to an experimental exhibition project like *Les Immatériaux*. Importantly, the modernist and pre-modern works gave an historical dimension to the *Immatériaux* exhibition whose general atmosphere was otherwise conspicuously contemporary, and presented these historical artworks as artistic exploration of "im-materials" *avant-la-lettre*.

However, this dimension of the exhibition was probably missed by most visitors for whom these artworks and sites just blended in with the rest of the show. From the perspective of the MNAM, the exhibition design created an 'invisibility' of the artworks, and of Blistène's curatorial authorship, which became another reason for the disapproval of Blistène's colleagues and peers. The scattered presentation of the 'visual arts sites' in the exhibition made it difficult, if not impossible, to perceive this particular ensemble, even though from Blistène's perspective – as it has been reconstructed here –, there was a certain level of curatorial consistency even under the condition of in-fact dispersal. For others, however, these artworks appeared thrown in with a mixed bunch of projects by artists, designers and media practitioners that populated the other parts of the exhibition, the overbearing exhibition scenography making it difficult for the visitors to recognise any particular artistic quality, especially when gaged against the type of art reception that prefers a white cube environment.

The apparently haphazard treatment of the visual artworks made it impossible to approach the ensemble co-curated by Blistène as the radical postconceptual "exhibition-as-artwork" that perhaps it was. The overall scenography afforded that the *Immatériaux* exhibition could only come into view as an *oeuvre* in its own right when the multiple other, non-artistic exhibits and sites were also taken into consideration. But in many cases these looked like scientific experiments, elaborate store front decorations and popular multimedia displays, additionally undermining the status of the artworks which, in this neighbourhood, themselves appeared as mere illustrations of curatorial or philosophical concepts. The status of the artworks was furthermore undermined with regard to their temporality. Juxtaposing them with objects that were in such an exhibition context only temporarily (like the uniforms and work clothes), or with mere display props that would be discarded after the show ended, made it difficult to discern the artworks and objects of a more extended value.¹¹⁵

Lyotard's attitude was neither ignorant of these matters, nor 'against' art, but it rather acknowledged a changing position and role of art that, as embarrassing as it may have appeared in 1985 to the other MNAM curators, has since been established as a widely held post-conceptual consensus. When Lyotard insisted on the inclusion of artworks, an insistence which even convinced the skeptical MNAM director Bozo, Lyotard's intention was not only to deploy the transgressive and expressive force of art for the "im-materialist" cause. The awkward status of objects from art, science and technics, and the incoherence of the exhibits as carriers of meaning, as signs and as mediums, was

¹¹⁵ See Beatrice von Bismarck: "Out of Sync, or Curatorial Heterochronicity. 'Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials' (1969)". In: B. von Bismarck e.a. (eds.): *Timing. On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014, p. 301–318.

programmatic: in the interview with Blistène, published shortly before the exhibition opening, Lyotard mentioned two main criteria for the selection of the exhibits:

First of all, we wanted to exhibit things that inspire a feeling of incertitude: incertitude about the finalities of these [postmodern] developments and incertitude about the identity of the human individual in his condition of such improbable immateriality.¹¹⁶

This desire to instil an "incertitude" was already present in Lyotard's first concept of August 1983, and it was adopted as a general selection criterion also by Chaput and his team for the other parts of the show.¹¹⁷ It is also consistent with Lyotard's strategy of dislodging the constitution of meaning by employing the prefix "im-", as in *Les Immatériaux*, (or "in-", as in *L'Inhumain*, a book whose chapters stem from the same period).¹¹⁸

With regard to the artworks, this dislodging was realised by firmly integrating them into the exhibition, with the explicit intention of questioning their status. Again in the conversation with Blistène, Lyotard mentioned another selection criterion which we already referred to earlier, formulated explicitly with regard to the artworks:

... any art objects that may find a place next to the other elements of the exhibition will have to be compatible.¹¹⁹

This "compatibility" implied a form of conceptual refraction that could be read as damaging for the artworks at the time.¹²⁰ Yet, for Lyotard the juxtaposition of objects from such different contexts was not a matter of contrast or dichotomy, but rather a purposeful work with the semantic transitions and interactions it entailed. More than other objects, he ascribed to art the task and the ability of bearing witness to indeterminacy.¹²¹ In the postmodern transformation of the techno-sciences, the arts are accorded an important task because of their particular relationship with the "question of matter, of material especially."¹²² The artworks in the exhibition are thus ascribed a particular power which, however, is for Lyotard not tied to a distinct form of presentation, or framing. The exhibition aims at a radical reconsideration of contemporary forms of knowledge and of technology, an investigation that Lyotard conceptualises as an "anamnesis," as a "working through" of modernity that is the genuine domain of "painting," i.e. of the visual arts.¹²³

It seems that Bernard Blistène not only accepted the uneasy neighbourhood that Lyotard invited him into, but he also accepted the challenge to the way in which art operates, and to the way in which it builds bridges between different domains of discourse and knowledge. Maybe it is time to re-evaluate the courage that was necessary for embracing this challenge, and to acknowledge the success of Blistène's 'intervention', a success which, by the very nature of the task, could not be anything but partial. What Blistène could do was to 'intervene' into an existing scenario and to carve out, in his

¹¹⁶ Lyotard in Blistène 1985/2020, p. 83.

¹¹⁷ See Chaput's interview with Radio France Culture, 29 November 1984.

¹¹⁸ See Lyotard 1984/2015, p. 34–45, for Lyotard's discourse during the preparation of the exhibition, in March/April 1984, "*Après six mois de travail*", in which he speaks about the concepts *immature* (immature), *incréée* (uncreated), *immédiat* (immediate), *imaîtrisable* (unrutable), *insexué/transsexué* (unsexed or trans-sexed), and *immortel* (immortal); see also the summary in Wunderlich 2008, p. 97–100; and the abridged version in the press dossier of April 1984 (see *Album*, p. 16–22). It seems that the conception of the "inhuman" (*l'inhumaine*) was developed by Lyotard only after the exhibition, as the double-faced figure of a dehumanisation effected by the techno-logos on the one hand, and a positively connotated understanding of infancy not yet subjected to the rules and conventions of an adult humanness (see *The Inhuman*, 1988).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Is it an accident that Catherine David, who was Blistène's colleague at the MNAM and no doubt observer of what was going on between him and Lyotard's team at the CCI, proposed a comparably transgressive model when, twelve years after *Les Immatériaux*, she gave *documenta X* such a strongly social, political and historical agenda?

¹²¹ Lyotard 1988/1991, p. 7.

¹²² Lyotard, 1988/1991, p. 44.

¹²³ Lyotard, 1988/1991, p. 56; see also Hudek, 2009/2015, p. 81.

dialogue with Lyotard, certain aesthetic and conceptual spaces for modern and contemporary artworks. As a consequence, we may also recognise Blistène's contribution to *Les Immatériaux* as one of the early examples of a 'non-exhibition' which decisively moved away from the model of the modern white cube and which, in order to do this, drew on the potentials that only a diverse material base, and an interdisciplinary working context can deliver.

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