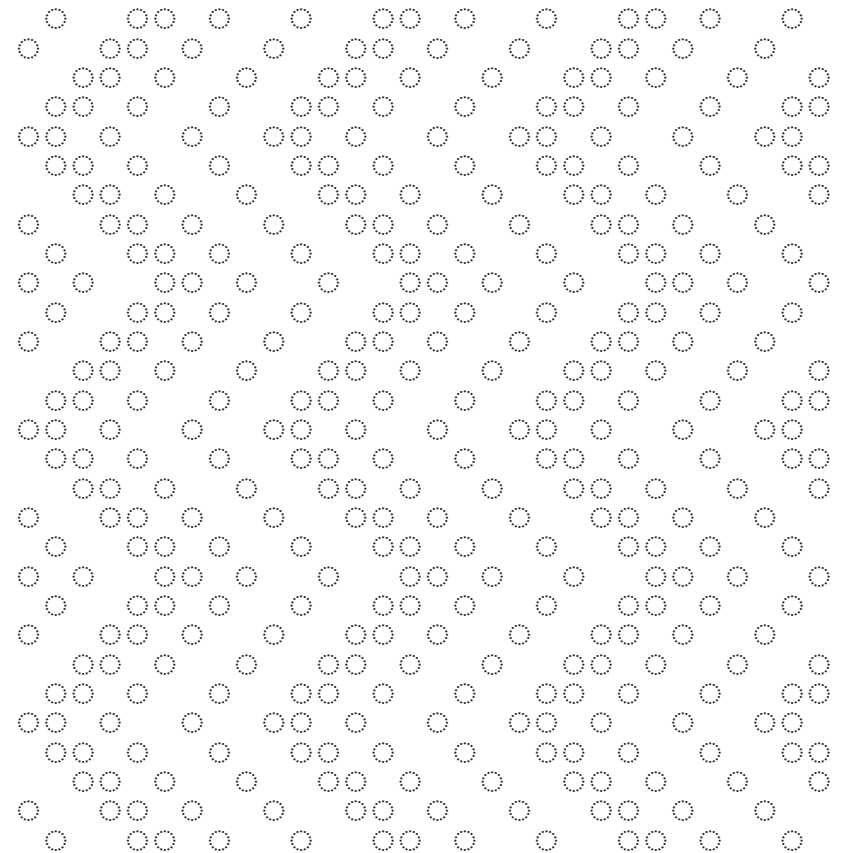


METATEXILE
IDENTITY AND HISTORY
OF A CONTEMPORARY ART MEDIUM
EDITED BY TRISTAN WEDDIGEN
EDITION IMORDE



Textile Studies 2
Herausgegeben von Tristan Weddigen

Publiziert mit Unterstützung des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds
zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung

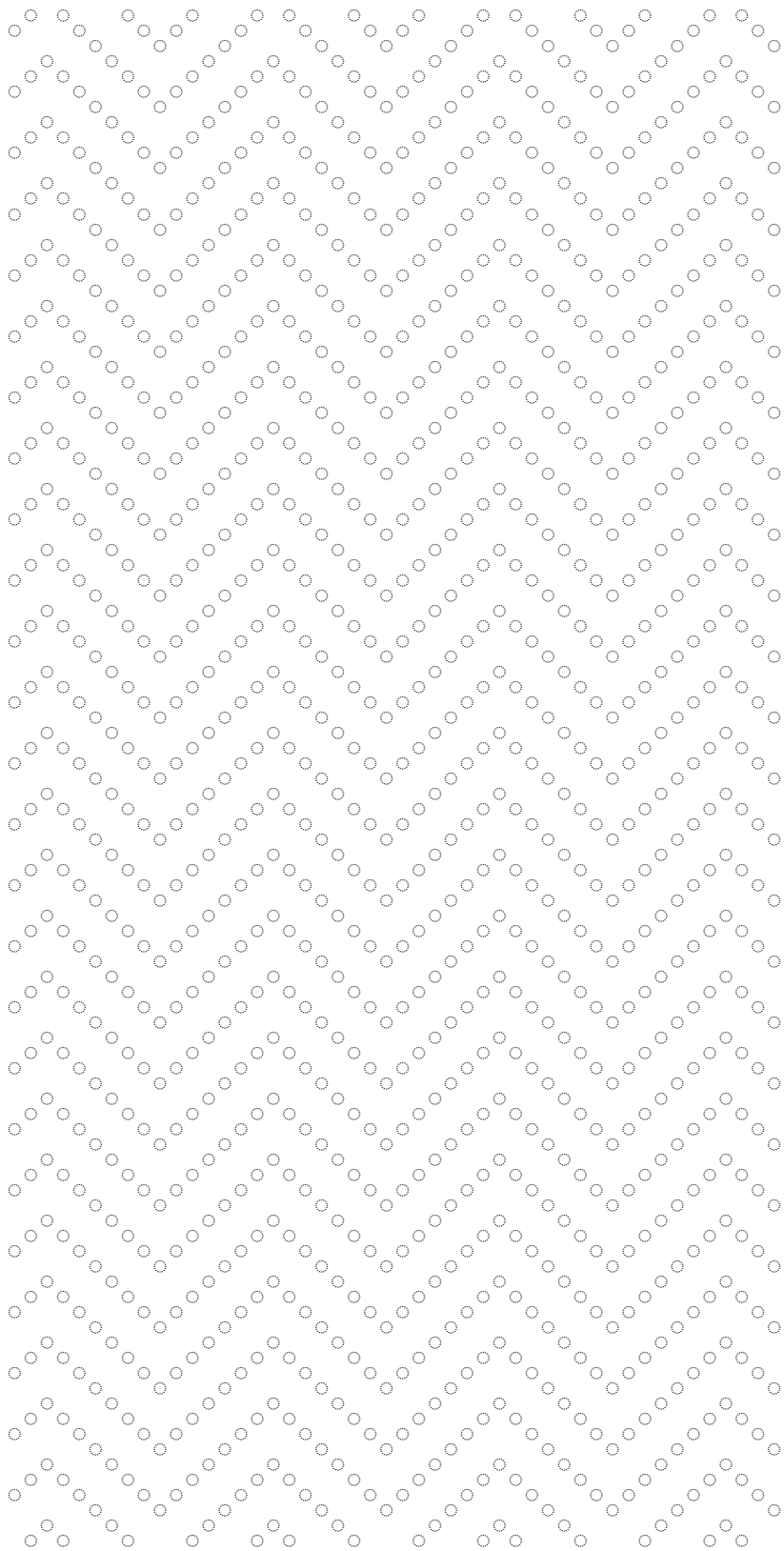
Edition Imorde, Emsdetten/Berlin 2010
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliographie: Detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet
unter <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar

Gesamtgestaltung, Satz und Litho: blotto Design, Berlin
Gesamtherstellung: blotto Services GmbH, Berlin
Druck: Agit Druck GmbH, Berlin
Etikett: Glücksband Roth GmbH & Co. KG, Göppingen-Ursenwang
Papier: Gardapat Kiara, 115 g/m²
Schriften: Fago und Skolar

Printed in Germany
ISBN 978-3-9809436-9-7

Contents

- 7 Marco Costantini and Tristan Weddigen **Introducing Metatextile**
- 13 Philippe Kaenel **Le voile imagé** *La vera icon de Claude Mellan à Elisabeth Ohlson*
- 29 Mateusz Kapustka **Folded Memory** *Clothes in the Art of Christian Boltanski and the Impossibility of Evidence*
- 41 Anna Lehninger **Embroidered Identity** *Textile Autobiographies in Art Brut and Beyond*
- 51 Thomas Röske **Krankheitssymptom oder kritisches Aufbegehren?** *Stick-, Näh- und Häkelwerke aus der Psychiatrie*
- 63 Florence Charpigny **Hantaï, Deschamps, Dolla** *Le textile à l'œuvre*
- 75 Ursula Helg **Das Textile und sein Schatten** *Zur Konstruktion von Identität in der zeitgenössischen afrikanischen Kunst*
- 85 Stefania Caliandro **De l'œuvre d'art comme texte à la texture des œuvres** *Trames et parcours relationnels dans la création contemporaine brésilienne*
- 95 Marina Giordano **The Wefts of Intimacy** *Textile Art in the Feminine: Individual Identity and Collective Memory in the Work of Marisa Merz*
- 105 Birgit Schneider **Textile Codierungen** *Mediale Übersetzungen von Material und Struktur bei Elaine Reichek, Patricia Waller und Ingrid Wiener*
- 117 Verena Kuni **«SoftwAreZ»** *Of Moths and Micro-Revolts*
- 129 Merel van Tilburg **Rethinking the Carpet Paradigm** *Critical Footnotes to a Theory of Flatness (Yayoi Kusama, Mai-Thu Perret, Louise Bourgeois)*
- 141 Stefan Neuner **Bild und Segel, Teil 2** *Momente eines nautischen Nachlebens der Malerei bei Broodthaers, Buren und Rauschenberg*
- 165 Ole W. Fischer **Structural Ornament and Ornamental Structure?** *Notes on the Textile Origins of Modern Architecture*
- 175 Nina Zschocke **Berühre mich!** *Textilrepräsentation als Aufforderung*
- 187 Credits



First, there is the smell. As we enter the dark, gloomy interiors of Christian Boltanski's installation *La Réserve du Musée des enfants* (1989) at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris (fig. 1-2), we immediately perceive the disturbing odour of old clothes, an indefinable trace of their former, now absent wearers.¹ But the vague thought that these clothes really might have been worn by someone immediately gives way to an irritating feeling produced by the lack of that very bodily presence initially suggested by these very garments. Such an olfactory notion of the human body does not belong to the ordinary museum experience. Thus, Boltanski's simulation of intimacy and its instantaneous denial are intensified within a very short moment, between smelling and seeing the work. The uniformity and anonymity of a common human odour arising from used things blurs the identity of their former owners, hitting our olfactory organ even before we apprehend the visual topography of the installation and actually see its constituents.



Fig. 1a Christian Boltanski, *La Réserve du Musée des enfants*, 1989, mixed media, Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, temporary version

From this experience we may infer that we see what we have beforehand felt, and that this first sensory encounter with Boltanski's clothes is not accompanied by an analytical look or strictly rational thought. Indeed, visual artefacts might find a particular advantage in not being preceded and obfuscated by preconceptions, but in being announced, as in this case, almost *a priori* by an irresistible sense of intimacy.

Admittedly, a second deeper look at and consequent comprehension of the clothes partly deliver us from that initial overwhelming impression. Their appearance, however, does not reduce previous ontological uncertainty. These old clothes have been thoroughly washed, folded, and randomly laid on shelves illuminated by simple lamps, deprived of their original shape, and they now form a colourful mass of anonymous fabrics exposed to the gaze. Thus, their common smell corresponds to and precedes the visually perceivable loss of individuality. Boltanski's oscillation between presence and absence by the means of clothes once worn by real, but now forgotten and anonymous persons, and his <animated> garments recalling body shapes, or representing carefully folded and scattered daily remains of human life, have become a *topos* of contemporary art. It addresses the current issue of the persistence and the vanishing of memory and expounds the problem of individual identity and its historical ambivalence.² Moreover, the artist has repeatedly explicated the role of piled-up clothes in his work, convincing his interviewers of the purposeful ambiguity of presence which is evoked by displaying clothes as material relics or covers, once enshrouding real bodies, most of which seem to have decayed: «These people are gone, forgotten. [...] I indeed often use jackets and other pieces of clothing as objects equipped with a remembrance of the subjects.»³



Fig. 1b Christian Boltanski, *La Réserve du Musée des enfants*, 1989, mixed media, Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, temporary version

For this reason I would like to focus on another, more specific aspect that has so far been ignored by critical analysis of Boltanski's *oeuvre*: the systematic interdependence of folded clothes and photographic portraits, a dialogue of media echoed in several of his installations. This raises the issue of the fragile and deceptive nature of memory evoked by things, especially textiles, also relating to the limits of visual representation in general. I would like to argue that this might be one of the main questions Boltanski addresses by using clothes as a medium, exploring a kind of imagination's last barrier. Although he ceased painting in 1967, Boltanski still defines himself as <painter>.⁴ His installations therefore may be considered as a reflec-

tion on the core aims of visual art as a way of – traditionally speaking – <depicting> things, and be seen as an endeavour to examine the limitations of artistic statements. If we regard his textile arrangements not only as exhibited things charged with memory, or as archives as they have usually been understood, but as images, their hermeneutic gravity becomes much more discernible. At least some of Boltanski's unusual combinations and permutations of clothes and photographs, such as *Reliquaire*, *Les Vêtements* (1996), reveal clear pictorial intentions (fig. 3).



Fig. 2 Christian Boltanski, *La Réserve du Musée des enfants*, 1989, mixed media, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, present state

In Paris, Boltanski's permanent installation (fig. 2) today consists of three rooms. After experiencing a taste of confusing intimacy in the room of clothes, we may follow the path leading to the next two rooms and study their exhibits separately: in the middle room, enlarged photographic portraits of children displayed under lamps as a compound *tableau*, and, in the third chamber, telephone directories from all over the world, shelved in alphabetical order.⁵

The photographic images represent a direct pendant to and an *ex post* commentary on the scattered clothes displayed at the beginning of the installation. Examining them brings us closer to Boltanski's textile language. The multiple anonymous photographs are arranged the way Boltanski often does when he uses them as main element of his work, as for instance in *Monument: Les Enfants de Dijon* (1986) or *Réserve: Les Suisses morts* (1990). The accumulation of unsigned and unnamed portraits can be seen as contributing to the theoretical debate on the nature of photography, which is said to capture the moment, thus visualising death or «letting things disappear», as Jean Baudrillard wrote.⁶ This issue, inspired by Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, still prompts discussion on the resemblance, authenticity, identity, and memory of the image in relation to death.⁷

As Boltanski often underscores in interviews, it is less death or the preceding suffering that concerns him, but rather the fact of becoming anonymous and untraceable, the consecutive loss and disappearance. According to Boltanski, photography visualises the loss of one's subjec-

tivity and one's transformation into an object: everyone's definite loss of childhood is presented by Boltanski in children's photos as an irreversible fact, proving ongoing and perpetual dying. At the same time, the artist uses photography and art in general as a remedy against death, thus trying to retrieve childhood by means of visual remembrance. Yet, as he seems to suggest not without bitterness, this strategy fails insofar as it does not allow one to become a child again, not even by experiencing material and visual remains from one's childhood. Therefore, in this anti-Barthes stance, the image strengthens the impression of inevitable death and provokes the additional feeling of alienation. To describe his photographic installations as <modern altars>, <modern relics> or <liturgical> sets – religious terms frequently used by Boltanski's interpreters following the titles of some of his works – means to strictly comply with the artist's private fears and intentions, his struggle with the passing of time by means of art.⁸ The attempt of treating these photographs, together with used clothes and metal cookie-tins, as simulated and anonymous, but also auratic <relics> or <reliquaries> of an archived <secular religion>, assumes a proportional connection between the artist's expressed intent and the art's agency and treats them as means to fixing images of memory. Moreover, if Boltanski expresses his own fears within the sacralised space of an art museum or gallery, then his work is not only dealing with memory and loss, but also with the artist himself. That the artist calls his own works <altars> is equivocal, especially when we remind ourselves of Boltanski's pre-division for culturally motivated contradiction:

In Jewish culture, I'm attracted by the possibility of saying one thing and its opposite at the same time, or this way of responding the question with another question and constantly mocking what one has done.⁹

Therefore, seen from this perspective, the tight relation between Boltanski's clothes and photographs, arranged as though they were forming a sacral ostension of holy remains, should not only be interpreted as a visualisation of loss and hopeless disappearance. This relation might also be understood as a provocation aimed at broaching the problem of self-reflection of and through art and of the limits of communication. Boltanski defines this relation very briefly, as if he wanted to set a trap of literalness:

For me, clothes are strongly connected with photography – a piece of clothing is, like a photo, an object of recollection of a subject. There is a smell, there are folds, it is like a hollow mould in comparison with a photo. I am always interested in a mass. There are always thousands of things which I bring together, or thousands of people.¹⁰

The photographs and clothing that I am working with now have this in common: they were both objects and souvenirs of subjects. Exactly as a cadaver is both an object and a souvenir of a subject. Clothing reminds you of the person who was in it. We have all had the experience when someone in the family dies. You see their shoes and you see the form of their feet as a hollow image of the person, a negative.¹¹

In the first place, this statement about <mass> suggests an associative search for a particular motif of a singular piece of clothing within a jumble of textiles. However, imagining a specific person as its wearer – as proposed by Gerhard Theewen – ignores the fact that it is really a stack, an indefinite mass of things.¹² Secondly, we might ask: what does the artist's term of <hollow mould> or <hollow image> imply? Is this structurally motivated comparison suggesting that photographs and clothes are <forms> of memory, guaranteeing some imaginary filling of the <mould>? Do they provide an effective remembrance of a long gone subject, even if they mournfully signify its inevitable loss at the same time?

Boltanski's statements define photography as a deceptive medium that only claims to be a true souvenir, but in fact shows an illusionary image of the untraceable past. It negates the subject while making an effort to preserve and fix it as a visual form, an act of <rape> as proposed by Baudrillard.¹³ Boltanski describes portraits of children presented as a scenario of death: «Photography is used as a proof, and proofs are always false.»¹⁴ Accordingly, with the recent psychoanalytic interpretation of Boltanski's work, the term of <screen> has been proposed for his photographs to denote an equivocal place of both projection and disguise.¹⁵ Taking into account Boltanski's parallel between photographs and clothes, I would argue that not only their status as remains and <hollow moulds> partly or even totally hinders reconstruction of the past, but so do the inherent differences between these two media that create their interdependency. The difference lies in the surface: whereas the photographs – here arranged as <screens> of transparent glass panels (fig. 1b) – offer visual information generated, reproduced and projected automatically, clothes, on the other hand, are material objects whose shallow form evokes a portion of corporeality. Their surface constitutes their individual body, ready to generate the visually perceptible shape. So, according to this medium-related asymmetry, the role of Boltanski's photographic portraits as souvenirs is once again questioned. What matters is their status as <screens> that retain only their visual shape, thus hiding the subject in its bodily condition. Moreover, the grainy, blurred surface of the blown-up portraits visualises the innermost conflict of the visual medium by revealing its own structure instead of detailing the features of the depicted. In other words, they present themselves as <screens> protecting the beholder from intimacy, which thus eventually turns to be a deceit of temporal appearance. The enlarged, blurred portrait explicitly loses its indexical features and presents itself as a photograph, as an iconic image. The more we gain in visuality, the more the photograph becomes an object. The subject we want to approach by gazing at a photo thus dies a second time.

Boltanski often increases this inversion of subjectivity by adding lamps or bare light bulbs, the same as those illuminating the shelves filled with clothes (fig. 4). These installations are usually interpreted as staging the interrogation of suspects, as it were, thus introducing the notion of the victim which the artist himself sometimes puts forward.¹⁶ However, these lamps could be understood rather as purposeful disquieters, obstructing our view by exposing the electric infra-

structure that is supposed to enhance visibility. In his thoughts on the portrait, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that not only does the depicted <looking countenance> of a portrayed person accumulate the potential of subjectivity in its image. Rather, the whole portrait itself becomes a <gaze> in that it demands a dialogue with the beholder as a composed visual structure. In this way, an interactive moment of intimacy between the image and its viewer is created due to levelling of the time difference.¹⁷ This suggests that the agency of the portrait lies more in exposing its self-identity than in its facial recognition. So, if «le regard du portrait», as Nancy calls it, should be seen as image's will to communicate, turning the lamp against it – as Boltanski does – makes this <conversation> impossible and thus underlines the beholder's impotence. When Nancy analyses a portrait of a young man by Lorenzo Lotto, ca. 1506–1510 (fig. 5), a lamp partially revealed behind the curtain in the background of the image clearly attracts his attention. Nancy leaves aside the symbolic and allegorical dimension as well as its theological meaning and defines it hermeneutically as a duplication of the depicted man's gaze. This is, hence, the moment of the portrait's immanent subjectivity.¹⁸ Consequently, Boltanski's lamps in front of portraits can be interpreted as blocking the view and also as ostentation of the subject's deep concealment and perpetual inaccessibility.



Fig. 3 Christian Boltanski, *La Réserve, les Vêtements*, 1996, mixed media, 91 × 91 × 31 cm

Having examined the delusive visual dialogue in Boltanski's photographs, we may now return to the clothes as a rhetorical counterpart. The portraits, although blurred and mechanically obstructed, still show our hopeless attempts of memory to frame the countenance. Thus, we still try to individually name the subject we intuitively long for and let these images < speak >. The files and stacks of anonymous clothes, instead, do not leave any illusion about the effectiveness of this operation. Folded or irreverently scattered without almost any order which could suggest assignment or identity, they utterly negate the subject and show pure amorphousness and abandonment. The metal shelves in the Paris installation, dividing the exhibited mass of textiles into sections and assembling an archive (*réserve*), invert the

photographic *tableau*, thus perverting the image's communicative potential. These clothes form an <image>, though a rather self-negating one which instantly unmasks the deceptiveness of its own power of reference. A step-by-step analysis of the display at the Musée d'Art moderne denounces the power of images as successful tools of memory since they become casual things despite their visual resemblance. They become ordinary objects which depict people as other objects. After the power of images and clothes has failed, we can still look up the telephone numbers in the directories presented in the third room. Even so, we do not even know if the people listed in the directories are still alive or if anybody would answer.¹⁹ Here, the tension between mass and individual, often evident in Boltanski's works, reaches its apex: almost every visitor to this last chamber looks for his or her own phone number first.



Fig. 4 Christian Boltanski, *Autel Chases*, 1987, mixed media

This inferred association between folded clothes and framed photographs is particularly visible in Boltanski's installations *Réserves: The Purim Holiday* (Marian Goodman Gallery, New York) and *Untitled Réserve* (Rubell Family Collection, Miami) (fig. 6). Here, the artist leaves behind the spatial continuity of the Paris *Réserve* and broaches the issue of the loss of imaginative memory with the help of a single <image> of photographs and clothes. Here, as these different media are together installed on the wall, Boltanski presents himself as a <painter>.²⁰ The manifold colourful pieces of clothing, compressed into a compact rectangular form like industrial scrap, reveal nothing. An invisible argumentative framing of this <image>, accompanied by electric wires of the lamps, once again signals the contradiction between photographs and clothes as the main meaning of this visualisation. In this way, they show the inner antinomy of images, which we still hopelessly try to see as suitable tools for evocation of memory. The division between the visible and the tangible – both building the basis of per-

ception in relation to the body and consciousness in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology – is the purpose of this <image>. In his photographic and textile works, Boltanski establishes a rhetorical juxtaposition: on the one hand, the portrait <screens> as visually working, but untouchable, images, and on the other, the empty clothes – tangible remains deprived of their shape. What for Merleau-Ponty and his <intertwining> epistemologically defined the laws of perception,²¹ is here contrasted with and distinguished by the same ineffectiveness of reference. Both images and clothes try to recall, but both fail and only relate to each other in this respect. In 1990, Boltanski elaborated upon this project of sensual alienation in another *réserve* by arranging the sections of folded garments as separate <photographs> on the wall, lit by lamps (fig. 7). This may be seen as a kind of self-commentary upon his earlier photographic *tableaux*.



Fig. 5 Lorenzo Lotto, Portrait of a Young Man, ca. 1506–1510, oil on panel, 42.3 × 35.8 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum

In their capacity as media, Boltanski's textile and photographic compositions do not bear evidential testimony to past reality. Instead, they deliver a self-reflective message in their own contradictory language, and thus actually explain art's inability to speak. Pointing to these coordinates of a language of failure, we are in a position to respond to the basic question repeated in most investigations on Boltanski's *oeuvre*: photos and textiles as reminders of the Holocaust.

Some of Boltanski's irritating jumbles of clothes are named *Canada* (1988–1989), clearly referring to the term for the storage houses in Nazi concentration camps. But this simple association would be both unbearably linear, even distorting Boltanski's statements:

My art has an awareness of Holocaust – it is not the art that has the Holocaust as its theme or explains it, but, instead, it explains itself, because there was Holocaust. It is the art afterwards.²²

These words create no simple self-definition of the artist's programme. Rather they refer to the problem of art as a matter of consciousness.

Thereby, the French artist positions himself within the debate on the Holocaust memory and the possibility of its literary and artistic representation. In this sense, his stacks of anonymous clothes can be interpreted as an idiomatic message, which puts the coherent language of art in question. Boltanski commented on Theodor W. Adorno's statement on barbarity of art after the Shoah that he is convinced of art's necessity. But, at the same time, his works show that the contemporary discourse on passing and death – collectives or individuals – cannot exist without referring to the Holocaust. His *oeuvre* matches the philosophical and literary redefinition of the Enlightenment's narrative structure and Immanuel Kant's theory of the sublime, after the Holocaust. He points to the decomposed structure of language after the dehumanisation caused by the Nazi genocide, to our inability to experience formless transcendence as the Unrepresentable and thereby to evoke the higher feelings of pain and pleasure. The presence of the subject in Boltanski's works, which is simultaneously and consistently hidden, untraceable and deleted from the evidence within uncountable folds of scattered clothes, cannot be reconstructed. Moreover, it cannot cause any individual affect, any empathy on the part of the beholder, whether this disappeared subject is a child, or grownup, man or woman, victim or committer.

Thus, Boltanski's rejection of emotionality in his combined photographic and textile <printed images> and his consequent reduction of the power of memory may be even treated as an artistic answer to



Fig. 6 Christian Boltanski, Untitled Réserve, 1989, mixed media

Jean-François Lyotard's philosophical challenge. Lyotard, proposing a reinterpretation of the Enlightenment's sublime in his well-known postmodern concept of <le différend>, formulated a negative statement of limits of imagination. He suggested that the artists should expose their inability to represent the Unrepresentable in lieu of remaining completely silent.²³ The visualisation of vanishing and delusion of the

archive by means of blurred photographs and used clothing is an idiomatic action, because it generally exposes the unreliability of the narrative attempts of evidence. The damage of the Holocaust is «a damage accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage», to quote one of the most known statements by Lyotard.²⁴ Accordingly, Boltanski seems to use somehow the self-negating means of cognition of apophatic theology: namely, he works with simple visual associations in order to demonstrate their role as «dissimilar symbols» in the age after the Shoah, as forms used to signal the Unrepresentable by means of contrast. He does this in order to make us deeply aware of images' dissimilarity, inadequacy and inability.

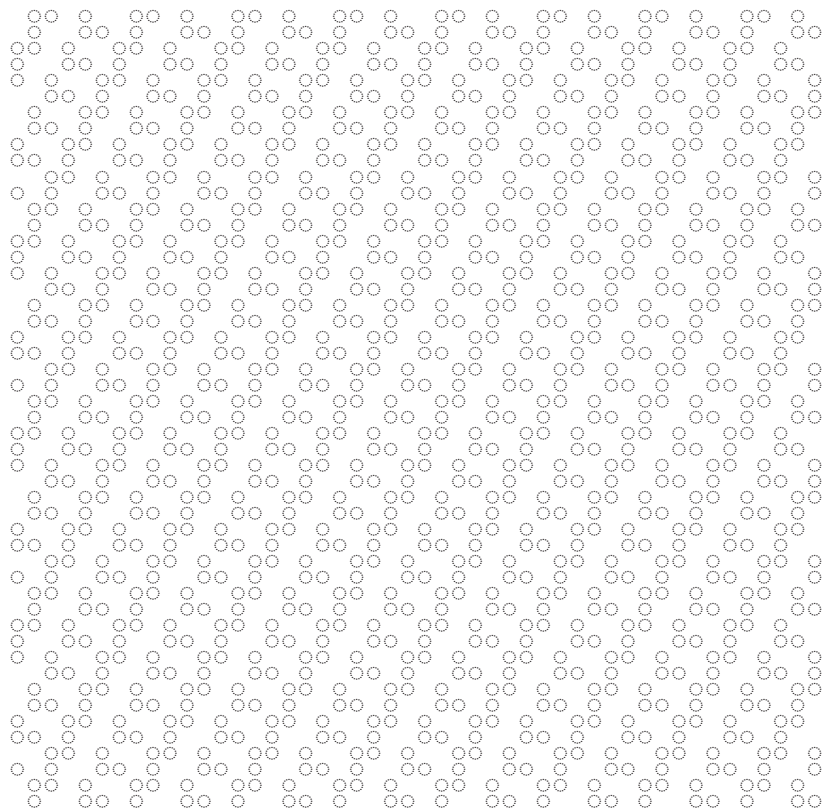


Fig. 7 Christian Boltanski, *Réserve*, 1990, mixed media

Therefore, the literal and visual associations with storage facilities in Nazi camps and blurred documentary photographs of freed prisoners, often proposed in studies on Boltanski, are only a first step in transcending the limits of the visual. This also implies that the impossibility of the evidence changes our mourning from an incorporative and emotional action into an «introjective» one, so that we ourselves become aware of our status as imperfect media of memory. Thus, he makes us mourn our impossibility to mourn the individuals, as proposed by Andrea Liss in her book about memory, photography and the Holocaust.²⁵ In this way, Boltanski does not try to rescue the images of memory, but rather creates a higher level of comprehension, which transcends the codes of language and allows us to judge only beyond the speakable and verifiable criteria. In the light of the artist's statement that, «for me, emotions of the first level are important», his stacked clothes can be treated as a demonstration of his helplessness, of his difficulties in communicating by art. In these terms, his textile arrangements deny any affective experience of the sublime.²⁶ The garment as a usual means of distinction loses itself completely in a dehumanised mass of fabric. The once-worn clothes again become only pieces of raw material.

1 This *Réserve*, first shown in 1989, has been rearranged and can now be seen in Boltanski's permanent exhibition in the basement of the museum. I am referring here to the present installation. On the 1989 version cf. Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski*; Paris, Flammarion, 1994, p. 126–128. 2 See Aleida Assmann, «Die Furie des Verschwindens. Christian Boltanski Archive des Vergessens»; in: *Boltanski. Zeit*, ed. by Ralf Beil; Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz, 2006, p. 89–97. 3 Gerhard Theewen, *Confusion – selection. Gespräche und Texte über Bibliotheken, Archive, Depots ...*; Köln, Salon Verlag, 1995, p. 20. All the fragments on and by Boltanski originally published in German are cited in this article in my English translation. 4 In his «anti-minimalistic» attitude, Boltanski compares colourful clothes scattered on the floor with stains of paint: «Musée de nous-mêmes. Christian Boltanski zu seiner Installation *Réserves – La Fête de Pourim*. Gespräch mit Joerg Zutter»; in: Christian Boltanski, *Réserves. La Fête de Pourim*; Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1989, p. 55; exhibition: Basel, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 28. 1.–27. 3. 1989. Gumpert 1994 (cf. note 1), p. 171–172. Doris von Drathen, «Der Clown als schlechter Prediger. Interview mit Christian Boltanski (Paris, Dezember 1990)»; in: *Gedächtnisbilder. Vergessen und Erinnern in der Gegenwartskunst*, ed. by Kai-Uwe Hemken; Leipzig, Reclam, 1996, p. 241–242. 5 This third part is called: *Les Abonnés du téléphone* (2004). 6 Jean Baudrillard, «Denn die Illusion steht nicht im Widerspruch zur Realität...»; in: *Der zweite Blick. Bildgeschichte und Bildreflexion*, ed. by Hans Belting and Dietmar Kamper; München, Fink, 2000, p. 263–272, here p. 264. Jean Baudrillard, *Car l'illusion ne s'oppose pas à la réalité*; Paris, Descartes & Cie, 1998. 7 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, transl. by Richard Howard, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981. 8 Günter Metken, «Was wir brauchen, sind Reliquien»; in: *Christian Boltanski, Inventar*; Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, ed. by Uwe M. Schneede, Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle 1991, p. 23–33; exhibition: Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, 12. 4.–9. 6. 1991. Éliane Burnet, «Dépouilles et reliques. Les *Réserves* de Christian Boltanski»; in: *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, 1997, nr. 62, p. 50–73, esp. p. 61–65, 68–69; Thomas Lentz, «Liturgien des Verschwindens. Materialreferenz in Kunst und Religion»; in: *Signal – Christian Boltanski*, ed. by Bernhard Jussen; Göttingen, Wallstein, 2004, p. 59–82; series: *Von der künstlerischen Produktion der Geschichte*. 9 Christian Boltanski in an interview with Delphine Renard in 1984, see: Brett Ashley Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty. Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*; Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2006, p. 136. Cf. «Christian Carrion, Clown and Jew. Christian Boltanski Interviewed by Georgia Marsh (Revised by Christian Boltanski)»; in: *Christian Boltanski, Reconstitution*; exhibition: Eindhoven/London/Grenoble, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum/Whitechapel Art Gallery/Musée de Grenoble; 1990, S. I., p. 8: «What artists do is closer to the little stories, the parables that mean something afterwards, than something as precise and explicative as the philosophers. It's something more open, that was more than one exit, more than one interpretation.» 10 Von Drathen 1996 (cf. note 4), p. 238. The interview was published earlier in: Boltanski 1990 (cf. note 7), p. 52–76. 11 Boltanski 1990 (cf. note 9), p. 3. Cf. 1989 (cf. note 4), p. 54–55. 12 Christian Boltanski, «Auf der Suche nach den vergessenen Namen»; in: Theewen 1995 (cf. note 3), p. 23. 13 Baudrillard 2000 (cf. note 6). 14 Adela Abella, *Christian Boltanski: Remembering, Repeating and Working Through in Contemporary Art*, paper presented at the congress of International Psychoanalytical Association in Berlin 2007, published as online resource on <http://www.ipa.org.uk>, last access on 19. 8. 2009. Cf. Boltanski 1990 (cf. note 9), p. 30 (Boltanski concerning false proofs in context of his own biography). 15 Abella 2007 (cf. note 14). 16 See his most known *El Caso*, suggestively confronting the victims' photos with folded white cloths as their supposed coverings: Christian Boltanski, *El Caso*; Madrid, Ministerio de Cultura, 1988, exhibition: Madrid, Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 26. 5.–5. 9. 1988. This catalogue shows only black-and-white photographs of places of crime – «escenarios del crimen» – preceded by a colourful close-up photo of folded clothes on the front page. 17 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le Regard du portrait*; Paris, Editions Galilée, 2000. 18 Nancy 2000 (cf. note 17), p. 62–65, here p. 63: «cette lampe, peinte à même la toile dont le découverturement du fond n'est lui-même encore que la surface, est elle-même matériellement, c'est-à-dire picturalement, l'éclat de l'intimité dont il s'agit. Cette flamme dans l'ombre double le regard du jeune homme, formant elle-même le regard du tableau. Ainsi, loin de seulement nous conduire symboliquement hors du tableau dans le tréfonds d'une âme, elle nous ramène aussi bien à l'immanence de la toile et de la peinture.»; 64: «Le portrait ne rappelle pas une présence éloignée: il s'appelle dans une absence rapprochée, si proche que son appel est silencieux. Jamais âme ou esprit ne fut si proche de soi et de nous, jamais elle ne se rappela autant à soi aussi bien qu'à nous.» Cf. Martta Heikkilä, *At the Limits of Presentation. Coming-Into-Presence and its Aesthetic Relevance in Jean-Luc Nancy's Philosophy*; Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 2008, p. 223–229. 19 Boltanski introduced such a direct simulation of absence in 1993 in the

Malmö Konsthall in nearly the same depressive way: Christian Boltanski, *Les Habitants de Malmö*, Malmö, Konsthall, 1993. This work, an ordinary phone book, was provided with *errata* on the front page: «You can't reach these inhabitants of Malmö on the phone any more. They died in 1993». Cf. Theewen 1995 (cf. note 3), p. 20. 20 The folded clothes presented in a tight close-up as an «image» on the front page of the catalogue precede the blurred photographic portraits of children on the next pages: Boltanski 1989 (cf. note 4), although at the exhibition, the pieces of garment were mostly scattered on the floor (cf. also note 16 in this respect). 21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, «The Intertwining – The Chiasm»; in: id., *The Basic Writings*, ed. by Thomas Baldwin; London/New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 247–271. 22 Von Drathen 1996 (cf. note 4), p. 236–238. Cf. Boltanski 1990 (cf. note 9), p. 10: «I have never used images from the camps, it would be impossible for me [...] My work is not *about* [the camps – scratched in Boltanski's revision; note M. K.], it is *after* [the camps – scratched in Boltanski's revision; note M. K.]. It was an event so important, so strange, that a part of art, my art, is no longer possible after that.» Boltanski 1989 (cf. note 4), p. 54. Cf. Angeli Janhsen, *Kunst sehen ist sich selbst sehen. Christian Boltanski – Bill Viola*; Berlin, Reimer, 2005, p. 45–77. Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows. Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust*; Minneapolis/London, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 50–51, here p. 48: «He opts instead for shrouding the unimaginable and keeping it almost secretive by relying on the site of the museum as a sacred place.» Brett Ashley Kaplan, «Aesthetic Mourning: Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, and *Light Pulsing Through Ash*»; in: id., *Unwanted Beauty. Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*; Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007, p. 107–149. 23 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute*, transl. by Georges Van Den Abbeele; Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988. Cf. Stephen David Ross, «Lyotard and Disaster. Forgetting the Good»; in: *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg; Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1998, p. 287–302. I am not referring here to the details of the elaborate debate on the representation of the Holocaust that arose again after the latest publication by Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, Paris, éd. De Minuit, 2003 (English edition: *Images in Spite of All. Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, transl. by Shane B. Lillis; Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008). 24 Lyotard 1988 (cf. note 23), p. 5. 25 Liss 1998 (cf. note 22), p. 43. 26 Von Drathen 1996 (cf. note 4), p. 240. Cf. Liss 1998 (cf. note 22), p. 49.



One of the delights of embroidery lies in the simplicity of the materials and the lack of complicated equipment and techniques. Fabric, threads, needles and a simple frame, together with time, practice and patience, are all that is needed to create beautiful embroideries.¹

Mary Thomas

The materiality and textuality of embroidery is topical not only in discussions on contemporary art but also in those on Art Brut, and more specifically, in respect to psychiatric inmates' works that form a large part of this category of objects. Personal memory and identity are key topics in Art Brut, especially in art from psychiatric institutions. However, art history has often neglected works of psychiatric inmates. As Gemma Blackshaw has stated in the recent publication *Madness and Modernity* on the discourse of psychiatry and the visual arts in Vienna around 1900, there were only «brief moments of access to the voices of those suffering from mental illness through letters, writings, objects and images preserved in archives and ephemeral publications».² In the course of the 20th century, certain aspects of art related to psychiatry were noticed, but these mainly corresponded to Expressionism, Dada, or Surrealism.

Art Brut is a section of art that since its «invention» in 1945 has repeatedly raised the question of the boundaries between the «inside» and the «outside» of «art». The term was coined to designate Jean Dubuffet's own collection of works of art from social outsiders, thus also labeling both the artists and their works as being «outside» art historical canons and cultural traditions. Upon closer inspection, many drawings, writings, and textile works speak a different language. In addition to their reference to the medical institution where they were created, they also point to historical and political issues from the world outside the asylum walls and are linked to the aesthetic trends of their times. Many embroideries reflect the artists' lives outside and within the institution and have to be seen in an autobiographical context.

Next to knitted and crochet works and self-sewn dresses, embroideries form a significant part of Art Brut. In collections such as Jean Dubuffet's in Lausanne or the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg, such pieces have rarely been exhibited and taken seriously by art historical research. Only lately have exhibitions brought them to wider attention, focussing on the material aspect of the textile objects that were usually made by women.³

Embroidering Identity Particularly for female inmates of psychiatric institutions in the late 19th and early 20th century, drawing, writ-