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The Borders of Painting – Limiting the Unlimited

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Introduction

According to Jacques Derrida, painting is neither an instance of language nor philosophy. Or, if painting has some grammar, this grammar is always ungrammatical and too singular to form a discourse. Therefore, it does not yield any model for formulating new paintings or even a painterly language. Each painting is unique for Derrida; therefore, painting as a practice is finally irreducible to language. As Derrida claims, however, painting embodies the possibility of repeating painterly signs and gestures; without such repetition, there would not exist a practice that is recognizable as painting. Painting is therefore comparable to what he calls 'writing' or 'text': a structure of differences and traces. The meaning of text is never permanent nor fully present. Instead, it belongs, from the very beginning, to another context in which its meaning appears. In accordance with this thought, the identity of painting is differentiated for Derrida: like any kind of communication, it appears as reproducible, never fixed and unalterable (*Limited Inc* 5).

The singular and alterable identity of painting gives me the motive to examine also the recent expansion of the practices of painting. During the past few decades, the practices of painting have assumed a variety of unforeseen dimensions: painting has detached

from its earlier Modernistic presuppositions, such as flatness, framed form and the use of conventional materials. The identity of painting has proved more and more variable and negotiable. There is not – and perhaps has never been – one “Art” nor one “Painting”, but painting and art as a whole appear as fields of constant experiments.

In the light of Derrida’s thinking of painting without essence, I will inquire about what forms the relation between painting and thinking. In which way is painting beyond concepts? To explore this, I’ll examine two distinct and yet intertwined aspects in Derrida’s theory of painting. First, an irreducible concreteness belongs to the nature of painting. Derrida locates the concrete nature of painting especially in the use of colours that seems to form the absolute condition of painting. The material character of colour is what makes painting the most evasive among arts in terms of philosophical inquiry. The effect of colour is something that cannot be reduced to any scheme, which makes it like an untranslatable idiom of language. For Derrida, colour is absolutely concrete in that it has a texture and weight of its own. In addition to this, colour would not exist without a ground. Therefore, the thought of a purely conceptual painting – one that could be turned into a discourse – is hardly possible. At the same time, the way in which colour works in a painting is close to what he understands as the pure production of difference, creating relations within a painting.

My second perspective is that the scope of painting is conceptually unlimited. This is due to both its changing practices and the changes in contexts in which a thing is defined as painting. Thus, painting tends to exceed the available theories or ideas of what counts as painting. Yet, on a larger scale, painting is part of Derrida’s scheme of ‘writing’: the creation and functioning of processes of differences, repetition and references. Within the space of painting, these references arrive from anywhere, and they occupy an imitable place. Thus, in their locality, they are untranslatable like idioms of language. (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* esp. 1–13).

Considering the contemporary forms of painting, I inquire about the import of Derrida’s claim that painting is neither comparable to a logical argument nor does it fit into any discourse. What does it mean that painting works, however, with its grammar without grammar, for otherwise it would not be a painting?

Derrida’s thinking of painting is motivated by the question whether painting possesses an identity that differentiates it from other areas of fine arts. He goes even further and asks whether painting has, in fact, ever had such an essence. Derrida’s doubt towards any essential thinking on painting is grounded in his idea that painting, as all arts, is a form of writing and text that can be examined by employing deconstructive strategies. By this, he refers to the analysis of the differences, references and traces that produce a textual structure to the non-linguistic or “silent” works of art also – a statement that raises the question of the nature of textuality in works of art (Brunette and Wills 15–16).

It is obvious that Derrida’s aim (*Penser à ne pas voir*, 233–235; cf. Michaud 259) is not to reconcile his exploration with any form of iconographic discourse, such as ‘representation’, or painting being either ‘figurative’ or ‘abstract’. Instead, the challenge that his theory makes visible is the question of how to speak of painting, or of any art, without adhering to the earlier discourses of painting. How to respect painting that is itself silent, without words, by responding to its appeal for words, and, at the same time, to resist the allure of naming and describing it? On the other hand, is it possible to speak of the singularity of the painting and allow its discursive framework to remain unlimited, to expand this framework without being constrained by earlier categories, either conceptual or practical?

The Singularity of Colour

In Derrida’s essays on painting, colour appears to be the most decisive attribute. Two features characterize painting: in its materiality, each colour is singular in its place. In the painting, colours are attached to a specific ground each time in a unique, inimitable way. Colour arrives from anywhere and has no real origin; it may apply anywhere and yet it has exactly a given place within a painting.[1] Hence, it is irreducibly local and holds a unique place and appearance. It follows that the task of painting is to show its own colour, which cannot be assimilated into any discourse of art or into the language of any logical argument.

The singular locality of colour makes it resemble the idiom of language, although language and painting are incompatible, in the same manner that form and content of art (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 1). In a general sense, the word ‘idiom’ stands for a group

of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own. ‘Idiom’ may also refer to the style of expression in writing, speech, or music that is typical of a particular period, person, or group (*Cambridge Dictionary*). In painting, idiom could refer to several things: to the written words in a painting; to the artistic expression and the painter’s idiomatic trait or style; or to the specificity and singularity of pictorial art, of that “language” which painting is supposed to be. For Derrida, none of these alternatives is valid as for the idiom in painting: one may see that no one can dominate the painting, translate it, or describe it (*The Truth in Painting* 2).

Instead of having a permanent core, idea or essence, painting proves to be like an idiom itself. Therefore, it is a disseminating concept: the practices of painting diffuse into their contexts constantly. To begin from the assumption that all meanings depend on the context, it appears that in painting they depend on the use of colour in space. In Derrida’s view, colour is local, as it occupies a specific place and is surrounded by other colours that are likewise tied to their space. They are idiomatic in nature, also in the sense that within a particular painting, colour is thus attached to a concrete ground, like canvas, paper or some kind of board made of wood or plastic, for example. Therefore, as a colour requires a surface to appear: no immaterial, purely conceptual colour exists. There is no yellow “in general” or a pure idea of yellow, but we may only have in mind a specific tone of yellow. In its locality, the colour is finally unnameable like an idiom that can never be translated into another language, be it linguistic or visual.

The radical singularity of colour is a reason to think that painting is the most medium-specific among the visual arts for Derrida. There is yet another reason for this: painting always needs a ground on which a colour presents itself. It is not even possible to envision an abstract colour, since no colour exists out of concrete context. Instead, colour is necessarily attached to a particular ground of whatever quality, thus never being convertible to pure thinking.

Colour appears as a kind of *sine qua non* of painting and its minimal condition. The function of colour is to produce differences and thereby qualities in painting: with colour, “Things get complicated, they become thicker and darker, even turn black sometimes” (Derrrida, *Penser à ne pas voir* 223).[2] The complexity of tones and values as well as of

thickness implied in the use of paint makes painting fundamentally different from drawing that is associated with the production of lines and traces and the two-dimensionality of surfaces (Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir* 141–142; cf. *Of Grammatology* 108).

Namely, Derrida's question is, how to name a colour: how to speak in conceptual terms of colour, which never exists only theoretically, but appears *as* something, locally and in perception, and always brings about a material affect? This question resonates with the impossibility of naming a colour that Wassily Kandinsky sees in abstract painting: "When one hears the word red, this red in our imagination has no boundaries. One must, if necessary, force oneself to envisage them" (162). Here, one may think of a person who is born blind and has never had an experience of colours. It is questionable whether there is any adequate device to describe a colour to him or her. In this, a comparison to another thing's colour might help, but if it is impossible, we can see that, although colours may leave psychical marks on us, they have no "real" existence outside of real things and the perception of their surface and other qualities (cf. Kristeva 1981, esp. 221–222).

The colour has plastic qualities that make it different from the line of a drawing. However, the ability of colour to create differences is comparable to the difference produced by traits and traces that are the indistinguishable elements of drawing for Derrida (Michaud 233). First, the word *trait* in Derrida's parlance may either refer to 'line', in the sense of a visible mark left on a concrete ground or any kind of support. The second alternative is to conceive the *trait* as the invisible, transcendental schema behind any kind of trace. The 'line' is the visible and concrete result of the draughtsman's work, whereas the *trait*, when understood as the 'trace', never has a visible appearance as such; therefore, it resembles an idea(Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind* 2–3; cf. Michaud 233–238).

The *trait* is invisible, and it has a differential effect. This is the graphic nature [*le graphique*] of drawing; the *trait* might thus be understood as the feature that ontologically unites drawing and the trace to writing. Like drawing, painting also is a domain of differential *traits* that, as such, are imperceptible: they only allow us to see something on the surface of the work of art. In both drawing and painting, the *trait* refers to the spacing brought about by the visible marks and traces. In painting, the *traits* arise

from the coloured elements, that is, differences between the painted areas. The fact of appearing thus constitutes colour ontologically: its irreducibly sensible and material existence is necessary to the painting. From this aspect, painting can hardly be purely inappearing and belongs merely to thinking for Derrida, despite its notion that it is formed of graphic *traits*.

In the same manner as art and language, colour and the *trait* are inseparable, and yet the "graphic apparatus" and the "gush of colour" remain autonomous (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 172). Within the painting, the colour transforms it, but "leaves the law of the trait intact in its inky light" [*laisse la loi du trait intacte en sa lumière d'encre*] (Michaud 233). It is indeed crucial to Derrida's theory that graphic trait and colour cannot be mixed. Unlike the trait that is pure difference, the chromatic difference opens up an abyssal problem. The chromatic difference itself is like a trait: not an object as such, but rather a trajectory [*trajet*] or a trace [*tracé*] that is only taking on a form (Derrida, *Penser à ne pas voir* 233, 236).

Although drawing and painting are both composed of *traits* and traces, drawing differs from painting in that in painting colour has a thickness. Colour, in its thickness, offers an example of what remains irreducibly sensible; colour is visible without exception, as a colour that would only exist conceptually is an impossibility (Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind* 55; also *Penser à ne pas voir* 143).

The meaning of colour divides itself incessantly between its concrete coloured presence and its absence: its ability to allow space for other colours and other marks on the surface of the work of art. In this network of differences, the colour and other traces and *traits* are deplaced as soon as they take a place within the painting. Colour is real, and it makes things happen: it enables the spectator to see the painting from a specific viewpoint (cf. Nancy, *Atlan: Les Détrempes*).

The inimitable yet repeatable event of painting becomes visible in the way in which Derrida describes Jean-Michel Atlan's (1913–1960) paintings. In them, painted words appear frequently. Derrida pays attention to painted words for the reason that they are located on the limit of the aesthetic and the unaesthetic: words are "outside of all representation and all anthropomorphism", and "there is perhaps something of the trait or of the letter, something that *ties* the trait *to the* coloured*letter*, literally to the letter *of*

the colour" (*Penser à ne pas voir* 223).[3] In looking at the painted letters, Derrida says, "things get more complicated, they thicken and even darken at times. There are illiterate chains of letters in Atlan's paintings" (*Penser à ne pas voir* 223). The letters join to one another, they are interlaced, but also by breaking up, by cutting up one another and by disappearing, they create anacoluthons, discontinuities in the sentences. The letters in Atlan's paintings operate by creating a space for difference, which happens in the constant division between their being a part of the visible, coloured surface of the painting and their existence as a sign.

From such differentiation and specificity arises the radical singularity of colour, either in the form of blotches of paint or embodied in inscriptions. In his essay "Les Détrempes (1941–1959)", Jean-Luc Nancy describes the effect of colour in Atlan's tempera paintings: "The colour takes shape under the pressure of the large black lines that repel and present it at the same time. Their fast and erratic trajectories, their impasto, their strong, severe mastery of space and their imperious indications, their gestures and their indisputable signs force the colours to appear in spots and smears, in touches without contours, posed, released in the infinity of a dislocated plane" (Nancy, *Atlan*). Like Derrida, Nancy discovers in Atlan's colours simultaneous dislocation and configuration that are suspended in their nascent state, in the moment when they emerge as paintings in the spectator's eyes.

It is worth considering whether painting belongs, in the final instance, to what is destined to remain outside philosophical treatment in Derrida's thinking. Is it that painting is even more radically non-conceptualizable than drawing and photography? Like drawing and photography, painting is composed of invisible differences and, due to the qualities of the coloured paint, it is more tangible than the pure production of differences that takes place in drawings. Taken to the extreme, I might suggest that painting, in its irreducible materiality, appears as the limit of deconstruction. The thickness, tones and values of paint are not only metaphorical qualities in speaking of painting, which is obvious when considering changes of colour that may vary from the use of strong impasto to the bare canvas or other ground in areas where no paint has been applied. Depending on surrounding surfaces of colour and other materials, the minimal changes of colour tones can change the appearance of the entire painting, and these changes may even be difficult to discern. Furthermore, as we have discussed, the colour does not exist without

a material support.[4]

The character of the graphic unites the ideas of drawing, the *trait*, the trace and writing in Derrida. Painting is likewise a domain of invisible, differential *traits*, but it differs from drawing in the inevitable concreteness of colour. Being irreducible to thinking, painting thus presents a “restance” in Derrida’s philosophy: that remainder cannot be reduced to the production of differences (cf. *Limited Inc* 52). This is perhaps the most crucial philosophical significance of painting. Similar irreducibility may be manifest in varieties of art that are beyond the scope of Derrida’s discussion, such as sculpture and installation art, that are often composed of a set of material elements and sources.

Painting: Writing beyond Discourses

The contemporary practice of painting shows that the variety of works which are referenced as paintings today is wider than it used to be a few decades ago. There may be no paint or colour applied by the artist at all, for example in cases where the work is made of fabric or exists only in the form of digital algorithms. The medium becomes the focus of attention if the coloured material has a shape other than a conventional flat, two-dimensional painting, like a sculptural figure or a work that is made of plastic and pieces of wood, metal or readymade objects. As a practice, painting has become disseminated.[5]

Derrida’s inquiry into the material conditions of painting leads to questions on its concrete conditions. These questions are especially critical when thinking of contemporary practices of painting and other art forms that seem to become more conceptual and philosophical and less medium-specific than before. In Derrida’s thinking, the existence of the ground assures the inimitable singularity of the painting and all its details. However, the question of the ground is probably a more complex matter than in traditional practices of painting, as the material conditions of painting create the need to examine the identity of their material support. Is there still a material basis from which the painting or any work of art would be undetachable, in a way that would prevent it from being assimilated into language? How to describe the ground of painterly presentation?

Philosophically, Derrida's theory of painting is above all associated with deconstruction and its aims. Art, understood as a variety of writing, is his primary source of interest. Te assumption that art is writing means that art presents itself as aprocess of infinite referring, never arriving at meaning itself. Although he considers art to be a sort of writing, it differs from others due to the heterogeneity of its instances, *e. g.* its use of specific media and means of expression. Works of art form series that produce repetition, and they are thus textual in form. Yet, the repetitive features present themselves singularly. It is possible to think that works of art are writings on writing, a kind of second-order writing. The grounds for this is Derrida's account that the visible implies a relation between the legible and the visible [*le lisible et le visible*], that, as it seems, may be found at the point where there is the abyssal contact between the sensible and the insensible (*Penser à ne pas voir* 248; cf. Michaud 230). In Jean-Luc Nancy's interpretation, language and the visual, the insensible and the sensible, are inseparable in their separation when they touch one another in the visible: "there is something legible in visibility of and for itself", and "there is in painting, in the non pictorial at the very heart of painting, a certain writability or scripturability" (*Multiple Arts* 151).[6] Nancy thus advances the point that painting itself writes about painting, or produces the practices of painting. This is something that makes painting itself possible, and not the fact that it would fulfill any extrinsic demand applied on painting as a genre.

Although the forms and practices of painting have continued to expand after Derrida, his theory of painting still offers an insight to the situation in which the discourses on art appear, and have long appeared, to be insufficient to clarify what differentiates painting from other forms of visual arts. At the same time, the need to define painting has shown to be less and less relevant after the time of Modernism. Modernist theoreticians, Clement Greenberg among them, claimed as their task to determine painting and its essence so that the work of art would correspond in the best possible way to the potential of the medium and comment on and renew the concept of 'art' ("Modernist Painting"). Afterwards, artists have discarded the requirement to follow the possibilities of a single medium and develop them. According to the Modernist notion, the work of art depended on the specific medium and the qualities that appeared to be essential to it. Purity was the ideal state of medium-specificity, which meant the work should be uncontaminated by the influence of other media. The thought was that the concept of

‘painting’ would somehow be completed by using its autonomous force that communicates nothing outside of its self-contained properties. This idea has later been contested by several theorists. Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell, for example, argues that painting is dependent on language without exception: representational painting involves a narrative, whereas abstract painting has historically been dependent on theory (11–15). To explain the picture, words are thus always needed; following Richard Rorty, Mitchell calls this development “the linguistic turn”, or the emphasis on discursive representations of the world. According to Mitchell, “the linguistic turn”, however, is connected to and conditioned by what he calls “the pictorial turn”, something that he claims to have taken place in the postmodern reality: the shift to the nonlinguistic, to images, visible symbols and material traces.[7] Although Mitchell perceives a rift between the linguistic and the pictorial, these spheres are profoundly inseparable from each other (12). In this sense, his view corresponds with Derrida’s, as well as Heidegger’s, ideas on relation between the discursive and the visible.

From a specific angle, the notion of a pictorial turn also belongs to Derrida’s theory in that he emphasizes the existence of material traces in the different fields of writing. This is essential in order to understand Derrida’s relation to the realm of the aesthetic and it shows his inclination towards an ontological account of art: the mere reference to the senses, such as vision, does not suffice to account for the experience of art that is always “blind”, nor is it enough to construct an ontology of art.

Despite the fact that the requirement of the purity of the medium and medium-specificity is no longer valid for a large number of artists and theorists, it is true that many artists still concentrate on a particular medium – such as painting. Yet, the difference from the former ideas is that after the theoretical and practical changes in the 1960s, the purity of the medium does not provide a condition for what is conceived of and presented as painting. Examples are provided by the work of artists from the early 20th century to the present: Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Mike Kelley, Sophie Calle, Olafur Eliasson, Tino Sehgal, among numerous others. Examples include works of art realized in collage techniques, assemblages, the mixing of artistic techniques such as printmaking, sculptural pieces and colour, the addition of different kinds of material on canvas, such as plastic, metal or wood, or the fabrication of coloured surfaces in whatever material. Although painting has taken on new forms, there still exists a practice

called “painting”. In the continuous process of expansion, the questions of “what is painting?” or “what is art?” still may be largely approached from the point of view of art, its practices, contexts and experience. However irrelevant the questions aiming at defining art may be from Derrida’s perspective, it seems that they hold an implicit position in his philosophy. Even if it proves to be impossible to speak *of* works of art, it is nevertheless possible to discern the frame, namely the discourses that surround painting, or any kind of work of art, in a specific situation.

Art is a primary example of what exceeds any given concept; for Derrida it may be the most important example of this (Michaud 255, 258ff). The fundamental disparity between the visible and the verbal is reflected on the contemporary notion of “expanded painting”, which, as I see it, has adopted the excess of its concept – painting – as its *raison d’être*. In a Romantic fashion, each work of art that is being produced seems to proceed beyond its earlier phenomena and principles. Expanded painting concerns painting as a practice that is increasingly difficult to define.

In painting, the iterability of signs is necessary, for without the quality of being repeatable, there would not be signs. The graphic and rhythmic regularity produces the semantic continuity in painting (Nancy, *Atlan*). These regularities stem from repetition that is required from a system of writing and from variation of themes or patterns demanded by the idiosyncrasy of a gesture. We cannot tell how to name this mixture of figures and letters in paintings of Jean-Michel Atlan; it is the mixture of ideograms and hieroglyphs.

According to Derrida, there is an incompatibility between language and painting, between the form and the content of art (*The Truth in Painting* 1–2). In painting, it leads to a situation that no one can dominate, translate, or describe: the painted surface consists of figures that only exist at the place that they occupy. As figures, they are exemplary, but they present examples exactly of their own figure. Their syntax is therefore of an idiomatic order: it does not allow us to identify its rules, which are at the same time all given and exposed in the painting, and evasive, impossible to extract in order to form a grammar (cf. Nancy, *Atlan*).[8] Yet there is grammar because there are cross-references, connections, frequencies and regularities. Such grammar is, however, agrammatical because it allows no one to form new sentences; it does not prescribe

anything. The painting is therefore like a complete sentence itself, a unique one, exposing everything that is to be said in its own language. In speaking this unique language, painting remains silent. Instead, it shows itself powerful for what it is and refuses to declare anything, refusing even to reflect on any kind of argument.

Conclusion

The underlying ethos in Derrida's discussion of painting's singular, idiomatic expression seems to be focused on painting's ability to surpass its own limits. This happens both within the painting itself in how the spectator receives and completes its withdrawing coloured appearance, and in the larger context of painting as a practice with a fleeting identity. Painting, as it appears in Derrida's *Truth in Painting* that was first published in 1978, refers to a time when it is not anylonger as regulated and institutional as it used to be. Experimentation is typical of practices such as expanded painting and installation art, in which invention and the search of a novel form are central. Part of the problem of the avant-garde art is thus involved in these concerns: as soon as anything that relates to the aesthetics of experimentation is presented, does it lose its experimental status? Can a work of art be novel and groundbreaking after it has assumed a certain artistic figure, in a situation when it has made its contribution to the new understanding of what, for example, 'painting' and 'installation' are? This question raises the general problem inherent of avant-garde art, namely does every presentation related to "experimental aesthetics" finally assimilate the revolt in itself, and is there a possibility for artistic presentations to maintain their novelty as soon as the revolutionary expression has assumed a definite figure – as soon as they become accessible by words?

The background for Derrida's discussion is indisputably philosophical and motivated by the purposes set by the tradition of deconstruction. However, his ideas on painting are also relevant if we look at the situation of the time of publication of *The Truth in Painting*, the 1970s, and afterwards. This time is marked by the growing need to create theories of art that would respond to the development of painting and other fine arts: unlike in Modernism, a painting is often no longer a delimited object with a recognizable "painterly form" or identity that would belong exclusively to painting. The concept and practice of painting have constantly expanded since the 1960s. The current term "extended

painting" refers to the broadening of the scope of painting by adopting unconventional techniques and materials that often are not compatible with the Modernistic idea of flatness and framed surface. What is called painting may resemble a sculpture, installation, made of textiles or maybe of words on the internet. This extension gives a challenge to philosophy and theories of painting; how to deal with painting that is more and more multi-faceted.

More than defining objects produced with similar conventions, 'painting' perhaps nowadays implies a strategy of working that benefits from conventions of painting according to the artist's choices, like the spreading of colour, and employs them by combining them with other techniques. As a name for an artistic technique, painting today is probably a more metaphorical expression than ever before, and it is prone to experimentation on its formal conditions. Therefore, limit-cases of painting abound in contemporary art, as methods of painting are joined with different kinds of materials. It is evident that the Modernistic ideal of "purity" is, and has long been, a thing of the past among varieties of painterly expressions, which is now a changing praxis rather than a more or less single technique.

As it seems, Derrida raises the thought whether there is anything that would belong exclusively to painting which he understands to be a variety of text that is always tied to a number of specific contexts. Therefore, to give painting any minimal essence proves to be difficult as well as even unnecessary. In the deconstructive view, painting resembles writing – writing that is neither properly linguistic, nor is dictated by grammatical rules. It is rather a composition of traces that cross the borders of other traces; it gives them a rhythm and overwrites them, or limits the relations between colours. The painterly trait is graphic in a double sense; it is at once a sign that designates another thing, referring both beyond itself, and to itself, being undetachable from its material qualities such as colour. These traces give rise to a new syntax beyond syntactical rules; a synaesthesia, a synergy between forms, movements, balance and tensions. Painting is therefore beyond all logical arguments. In Derrida, the external form of the painted sign or trace cannot be distinguished from its sense.[9] Every act and trace of painting divides incessantly between two senses: the abstract, signified sense and the concrete, tangible figure of the trace, with its singular thickness and shades.

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1 It could be said that they exist as if they were thrown into the world in the same way as Heidegger's *Dasein* (*Being and Time* 320–322). Therefore, they have the character of the Heideggerian *unheimlichkeit* or uncanniness, which produces a certain groundlessness within the painting.

2 "Les choses se compliquent, elles s'épaississent, s'assombrissent, elles se noircissent même parfois."

3 "[I]l y va peut-être du trait ou de la lettre, de ce qui *noue* le trait *à la lettre* de couleur, à la lettre *de la couleur*."

4 Like painting, also the *parerga* – the frames and contexts of painting – are not purely ideal for Derrida, but have a necessary thickness: "a surface which separates them not only from the integral inside, from the body proper to the ergon, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung, from the space in which statue or column is erected, then, step by step, from the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced" (*The Truth in Painting* 61).

5 Derrida characterizes dissemination as follows: it is "the critique of the transcendental signified in all its forms; deconstruction, the displacement and subordination of effects of sense or reference along with all that would preside over any logocentric, expressive, mimetological concept and practice of writing; the reconstruction of the textual field out

of the workings of intertextuality or of infinite referral from trace to trace" (*Dissemination* 43).

6 Nancy's reference here is François Martin's *Air Show* paintings (1978–1979).

7 Also Rosalind Krauss, among others, takes a stand against medium-specificity in her influential essay *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*.

8 For Nancy, this order is not only idiomatic: in its absolute singularity, he claims, the grammar of paintings presents itself even as "idiotic".

9 This is what Derrida's analysis of the *trait* tells us (*Memoirs of the Blind* 2–3).