WIM DELVOYE'S ARGOTH

BERNARD MARCADÉ

I embrace the negative![1]

The sun, too, shines into cesspools
and is not polluted![2]

THE BIRTH OF ART

Wim Delvoye began his career in 1968, at the age of three. He created drawings and collages that might have remained what they were, i.e. a child's drawings, had the young Wim not grown up to be Wim Delvoye, which is to say, a major contemporary artist. It was not by chance that the artist exhibited these drawings in 2005 at Geneva's MAMCO under the title *Early Works, 1968–1971*.[3] In doing so, Delvoye reclaims them as works of art, even though there is nothing to distinguish them from what we generally associate with children's artwork. In fact, it is difficult to discern the roots of the future artist in these images of snowmen, religious scenes, birds and flowers. Claiming them as artworks is a gesture that is at once ironic and serious. Dubuffet, Klee, Kandinsky and Picasso elevated children's drawings (like 'primitive' drawings or *art brut*) to an exalted status of aesthetic freedom and spontaneity. Delvoye does not share this philosophy (a view that influenced even the most radical avant-garde movements) that understands childhood as the realm of 'original purity'. Instead, he prefers to show that an oeuvre is more closely connected to an artist's choice (to his or her decision to *act*) than to a quality that is inherent in art itself. Delvoye is an artist by choice, not by vocation ('Each of my pieces demonstrates that to be an artist is a choice'). In this respect, his oeuvre can be understood as a series of decisions: to become an artist at the age of twenty, to become an entrepreneur and to tattoo pigs at thirty, to invent a 'shit-making machine' at thirty-five, to create an offshore pigsty in China and to sell shares in his work on the stock market at forty, etc.

Wim City, www.wimdelvoye.be
screenshot

A PRAGMATIC UTOPIA

Delvoye's fundamental approach is driven not by the forces of inspiration, but invention: he is totally consumed with the idea of following a programme. This programme is not solely artistic, it's a way of life. In this way, Delvoye, in a circumlocutory and oblique fashion, draws on the avant-garde relationship between art and life. Although his thought and action take place in a *post-utopian* epoch (the end of the 'grand narratives'), Delvoye nevertheless displays an energy reminiscent of the great early twentieth-century utopias, without necessarily adhering to their inherent ideologies. Delvoye doesn't believe that art can change a person's life. Rather, it's life that compels art to transform itself. 'Art implies changing what one expects from art. Art is what one does not expect from art.'[4]

Delvoye is not an artist of fine sentiments. He has learned from the shifting ideologies of Western art in the 1970s. A good or beautiful idea doesn't necessarily produce interesting work. 'There were so many good social projects camouflaging a kind of visual poverty… Art is not by definition morally good. I've never believed in justifying one's good heart or intelligence through art.'[5]

What the artist has retained from his childhood is the ability to naively invent worlds (by both artistic and economic means). 'I am a boy and I am not ashamed of what I am made up of: science, trucks, cars, models, and to a certain extent my aggressive side.'[6] But Delvoye's dreams don't linger in the ethereal realms of childhood tales: his is a fundamentally pragmatic utopia. It concerns the state of the world as much as the state of art; Delvoye refuses to elevate either one. 'To try and separate

art from the market is an error; I don't know a single buyer who wants to own a bad painting! To try and separate one's life from one's work is also a false dichotomy.'[7] Wim Delvoye is an artist, designer, architect, graphic artist, businessman, farmer, dealer and adman – with no shame or hang-ups.

The artist's website exemplifies this viewpoint. The home page features an axonometric map (drawn in Hergé-like 'clear lines') of a town with monuments and buildings that, when clicked on, take the visitor to Delvoye's different 'worksites'. One finds Kwatrecht Castle, which the artist purchased in 2008 (he plans to make the park a place for all his hybrid sculptural-horticultural creations). There is also a pig farm, a church (for his 'Gothic' works), a mosque (Delvoye wants to build one in a Persian Gulf State), the *Towers* building that contains his 'erectile' works, a garage for his sculpted tyres, a jeweller's for his 'Double Coccyx' and twisted crucifixes, a bank for corporate bonds in the artist's various companies, a foundry for his bronze sculptures, a cinema where films and videos are shown, a tattoo parlour, a library, a toilet containing his 'Anal Kisses', the 'Cloaca Faeces' and the 'Mosaics', and even a cemetery for discarded works.

Wim City cannot be compared either to the Bauhaus or to Monte Verità. Delvoye's approach is fundamentally an individualistic one, even though he calls upon numerous outside collaborators. In this sense he is closer to Martial Canterel's 'bachelor's' park as described in Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus* (1914), in which we find – among other devices – a huge glass diamond filled with water in which float a dancing girl, a hairless cat, and the preserved head of Danton. It is also reminiscent of the 'statue made of whalebone corset stays, riding on rails made from calves' lungs' from Roussel's *Impressions of Africa* (1910). *Wim City* is even closer to being an ultra-contemporary version of Ferdinand Cheval's Ideal Palace (begun in 1879). In the pediment of this composite structure – which brings together the traditions of the peasant world, secular education and Catholicism[8] – Cheval inscribed the motto: 'Where dreams become reality.' Wim Delvoye could use the same motto, expressed in a more contemporary manner. Delvoye's utopian pragmatism is an amalgam of the Situationist battle cry of the late 1960s ('Be realistic, demand the impossible!') and an entrepreneurial spirit. This unnatural union is evidently annoying to those who espouse a kind of aesthetic puritanism along the neo-Kantian lines of Clement Greenberg. There is no shortage of them, although they are cloaked in the flashiest and most up-to-date contemporary aesthetic discourse.

Raymond Roussel and Ferdinand Cheval are only peripherally and by default 'surrealist' through their abuse of power (the surrealist ideology advocated by André Breton). In the same way, Wim Delvoye is not a 'contemporary' artist in today's meaning of the word. Nevertheless, there are discernable connections that could superficially link him to what might academically be termed 'surrealist' (René Magritte), 'conceptual' (Marcel Broodthaers) and 'eclectic' (Pop art and other object-oriented strategies). His art and his viewpoint, however, resist categorization, endlessly blurring any influences or affiliations.

His incongruous use of Gothic shapes and references thwarts all contemporary expectations. In Delvoye's mind, this is not a contradiction.

Chantier VI, 1996
ceramics, metal, 194 × 320 × 465 cm
Wim Delvoye, 1996, Galerie Ghislaine Hussenot, Paris

I am interested in the Gothic vision, which is not incompatible with the contemporary. For example, one can be a Romantic and yet have no desire to return to the nineteenth century and fight the Turks alongside Lord Byron. I began by studying Gothic forms, and I recreated them much like tapestries, using a laser. Next, I researched Gothic architecture – vaults, cupolas and flying buttresses. Lastly, I began looking at towers, with the dream of one day building a real, inhabitable Gothic tower. I started where the Gothic left off, with the idea of pushing its boundaries even further. Building a tower in Venice, Paris or Brussels is disturbing to people in an interesting way. Because a work of art is only interesting if it disturbs the viewer.[9]

VERNACULAR, PROVINCIAL AND SUBURBAN

The objects that Delvoye foregrounds primarily reference his immediate surroundings: a post-rural world of shopkeepers mixed with the middle-class tastes of the Catholic *petit bourgeoisie*. This is set against the prestigious historical background of the Northern Renaissance, which was heavily influenced by late Gothic. Even his recurrent theme of scatology is in line with the work of Flemish and Dutch artists such as Bosch, Bruegel and Rembrandt.

Delvoye derives added artistic value from his geopolitical position. 'I'm like a double agent: I have one ID card for art and another for the suburbs. I know tattooed truck drivers who live in houses with Delft decoration. But I also know the art world. I play ping-pong with myself. I hedge my bets; I play both sides of the field.'[10] This is not cynicism, but rather sharp irony mixed with a dimension of self-criticism, in the Belgian tradition of Broodthaers. In the 1970s, the mussels and

Love Letter 1, 1998–9
cibachrome prints, plexiglas, variable dimensions
Serendipity, 26.06.1999 – 5.09.1999, Douviehuis, Watou

French fries of Marcel Broodthaers were considered an ironic and provincial antidote to Pop art's images of Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, but they were also, at the same time, emblematic of a European refusal of all forms of artistic heroism and imperialism. 'In the 1960s and 70s, we rediscovered regionalism. It was the end of the great internationalist discourse on art. I also delved into my own environment and celebrated my origins. I am Belgian and I wield these weaknesses as a form of power.'[11]

Stained-glass football goals, cement-mixer furniture, Gothic trucks, ironing boards emblazoned with provincial Belgian coats of arms, Delft-patterned gas canisters, marble floors literally made out of cold cuts of meat, scatological ceramic tiles, heraldic shovels, tattooed pigs, arabesque tyres, sado-masochistic birdcages sit cheek-by-jowl with Gothic chapels made from Corten steel, pornographic stained-glass windows, crucifixes twisted like strands of DNA, and so on.

'Susan, out for a pizza. Back in five minutes. George': a message in Roman capitals carved into the rock face of a mountain, the domestic triviality of the information contrasted with the idyllic and sublime cast of the landscape. Delvoye's entire method is summed up in this juxtaposition. He likes nothing better than to place himself in the 'suburbs' of art and culture. His art aims at leading great art astray into realms that are considered mediocre (sports, tattooing) or undermined by aesthetic norms (craftsmanship, technology and advertising). He seeks to undercut it with the extremely trivial (pigs, pornography, scatology, etc.). And

Installation of 17 gas canisters, 1987–8
metal, enamel paint, variable dimensions
Confrontatie & Confrontaties, 18.09.1988 – 27.11.1988, Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent

this is clearly done with pleasure. In comparison to Broodthaers, who made his peace with poetry in order to devote himself to the visual arts, one finds no trace of melancholy in Delvoye. Rather, there is a genuine pleasure in manhandling the borders between genres, and in transgressing the most deeply rooted moral and aesthetic taboos. Delvoye's art is one of affirmation, rather than negation. Marcel Broodthaers wondered, with a tinge of regret, whether art could exist 'anywhere but on the plane of the negative'. Wim Delvoye 'embraces the negative'; he makes it his own, turns it into something positive and masters it with alacrity and gusto.

EMULSIONS

Behind his works from the 1980s and 90s, we find Delvoye's concept of 'emulsion', which is not the same as *mixture*. 'Coffee and milk, sugar and water can be mixed. But with an emulsion, the elements must be shaken for them to unite: as with oil and water, for example.'[12] Instead of an aesthetic of 'mixing', an ideology from the 1990s closely associated with music, Delvoye's method is drawn from the worlds of physics and chemistry. All his works from this period experiment with polarities between two heterogeneous economies (material and symbolic). Examples of these include stained-glass football goals, gas canisters decorated with Delft motifs and shovels adorned with coats of arms. Instead of mixing two formal cultural realties, they enter into a state of emulsion. The 'Gas Canister' series are '100% gas canister and 100% Delft'. The conception and creation process is such that each system involved remains identifiable in itself. 'The ingredients of this emulsion retain their original properties.'[13] To make a football goal where the nets are made of stained glass (as in the *Penalty* series, 1990–2) is to present an incompatibility without creating a mixture, a salmagundi. The violence

Penalty III, 1992
stained glass, metal, enamel paint, 300 × 100 × 200 cm
Castle De Bueren, Kwatrecht, 2012

of football and the fragility of glass are two elements that cannot be mixed. 'Placed together, they make up an image that is nearly normal, almost logical.'[14]

The arabesques that playfully adorn the thirty-six panels of *Love Letter* (1998) seem entirely normal, until one realizes that potato peelings have been used to recreate a letter from a man named Mohammed to a woman named Caroline, drawn in Arabic script and photographically re-transposed by the artist. This work, originally designed for the meeting room of the Flemish Community Commission in the Belgian Parliament was not accepted. No doubt it offered a sufficiently 'impure' vision of the world, enough to offend the 'noble political sentiments' of those who had commissioned it.

CARGO CULT

Delvoye's world is not the ethereal realm of art for art's sake; it is by choice vernacular, a voluntary provincialism, which can only be at odds with abstract and universal ideals that eclipse what is traditional and idiosyncratic. In this respect, Delvoye is careful to distinguish the universalist ambitions of his art from a universalist ideology: 'My alphabet refers to this realm; but my language is global, universal. Yet 70 per cent of my work could not be done in the United States. The country is far too puritanical.'[15] Fascinated by the *migration* of objects, materials and functions, Delvoye likes pitting his provincialism against the processes of globalization. In an era of economic, technological and financial globalization, we find ourselves in the presence of a sort of generalized 'cargo worship' that eliminates fixed identities. An example of this is how Indonesian artisans have retained the cabinetmaking techniques they learned from seventeenth-century Dutch colonists. 'The first tool was made of stone. The subsequent shift saw the use of iron, then bronze, a mixture of two metals.

Cement Truck 1, 1998
carved teak wood, 670 x 225 x 325 cm
Jakarta, Indonesia, 1992

This was a major development, the beginning of complexity. After that, there was concrete, plastic, mixtures. [...] We can see this same complexity in populations, in culture. [...] We all come from somewhere else, we speak several languages, we watch an American film broadcast by a German channel on a Japanese television set. [...] My work is the offspring of an interracial marriage. For me, the cement mixer is a monument to pluriculturalism.'[16]

ON PROLIFERATION

In elevating tools such as the spade, the ironing board[17] and the cement mixer to the status of decorative objects, Delvoye bypasses the modernist/Romantic notion of an oeuvre as a type of product or demiurgic activity. Delvoye replaces the heroic figure of the proletarian-artist (in the tradition of Beuys) with that of the artisan-folklorist, taking this provocative logic to the point of having some of his pieces made by craftspeople in Asia. Thus, the artist turns contemporary economic logic on its head – by deliberately aligning his work with the *object-ification of the world* and the *world-liness of the object*. Every object finds itself adrift on a floodtide of images, materials and productions that *de-territorialize* the categories and hierarchies that shape and underpin artistic theory: object/sculpture, crafts/industry, handmade/readymade, etc. The gas canisters camouflaged as Delft porcelain, the spades transformed into coats of arms, the teapots and hammers hidden in maps, the mosaics with quaint scatological motifs, the football goals dressed up in stained glass, the cement mixers changed into Baroque furniture – all these things seem as if they have always existed, partaking in a form of normalcy – or normalization – of values and forms.

SYNCRETISMS AND CREOLIZATIONS

At the end of the twentieth century, the West experienced a breakdown of the great binary narratives that had previously structured aesthetic and ethical thought (high/low, virtual/real, masculine/feminine,

Concrete Mixer (Roses), 1991
carved teak wood, 190 × 115 × 193 cm

centre/periphery, local/universal, etc.). Although today's process of globalization encourages a type of uniformity, it also speeds up cultural interactions to the point that we may speak of a genuine contemporary syncretism. Transculturations, creolizations, miscegenations, hybridizations, cross-breedings and mixings are the operative processes and configurations that make up this syncretism. They are at the heart of the most polarized cultural practices: from the West's suburban jargon to Asia's 'generic cities', from Indian information technology to Zairean rumba, from 'world fiction' to hip-hop culture, from Afghan rugs to ethnic tattoos, from Mami Wata worship to the techno scene.

Delvoye's emulsions are a part of this context of widespread and globalized aesthetic 'cross-pollination' that contrasts with values of purity and specificity. The artist's works participate in the process of *creolization* that Édouard Glissant defined as an 'interraciality that is aware of itself', referring to an 'on-going, fluid process that does not terminate in an absolute or an essence, but rather in a perpetual state of becoming'. 'The world creolizes,' Glissant adds. 'Cultures exchange in the process of changing' or 'change in the process of exchanging'.[18] Delvoye's work is thoroughly steeped in the movement of signs, materials and skills that no longer belong to a particular region, which in turn contributes to the launching of extraterritorial flows and composite intensities.

The tattoos that adorn the pigs that Delvoye raises on his farm outside Beijing are perhaps the best example of this contemporary syncretism. They are based on hundreds of Delvoye's drawings that are subsequently etched into the skins of living, sedated pigs, by professional tattoo artists and by the artist himself. They are highly sophisticated compositions that nonchalantly emulsify the sacred and the profane, but also the most antithetical styles. From this jumble one can make out skulls, roses, hearts pierced by arrows, and other decorative motifs from biker culture. There are

Art Farm China, 2003–10
live tattooed pigs
Beijing, China, 2008

also portraits of Christ wearing a crown of thorns, the Virgin Mary, pornographic reinterpretations of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio* and *Cinderella* in a pure Walt Disney style, *toile de Jouy* patterns, ethnic and geometric ornaments, figures from the Hindu pantheon, Ganesh in particular, and portraits of Lenin and Bin Laden (the latter adorned with the sacred heart of Jesus).

WORKAHOLIC

Marcel Duchamp was a discrete devotee of *farniente*, with an unshakeable belief in the 'right to idleness'. Very quickly he grafted his way of being and existing onto his way of living and thinking.[19] Thus, the *readymade* that bedecked the 'shelves of the lazy hardware store', is the radical endpoint of a thought process that fused the virtues of non-action with the luxury of *laissez-faire*. Duchamp's readymades pushed the Mallarmean experience of 'idleness' to its radical limit. Whereas Mallarmé's poetical experience was still psychological, Duchamp simply and unhesitatingly saw in this the possibility of doing away with art ('Can one make works that are not art?'). Readymade is what Duchamp called the 'artless' bomb he invented to undermine the definition of art. Thus, over and beyond the question of the object, it is the very 'being' of art itself that is under attack: 'As we know, art means to make, hand make, to make by hand. It's a hand-made product of man, and there instead of making, I take it ready-made, even though it was made in a factory. But it is not made by hand, so it is a form of denying the possibility of defining art.'[20]

The readymade is concretely a critique of two dominant aesthetic – and metaphysical – precepts: art (as something 'made' as well as a 'knowledge of making') and taste (as a value judgement that is supposed to justify the freedom of the artist or the viewer). 'The first enemy is the artist's hand, the second enemy is taste, not only for the artist but

also for the viewer.'[21] By shifting a manufactured object away from its original context, Duchamp simultaneously re-contextualizes the question of art as inextricably linked to choice, and the issue of taste inseparably connected to aesthetic choices. Henceforth the question is mental (associated with 'grey matter') and not aesthetic (stemming from the 'retina').

Delvoye has inherited Duchamp's critique of taste and art. Like Duchamp, he is building a universe that is located beyond ideas of good or bad taste and distinctions between art and non-art. Where the two artists diverge is on the question of *to make* and *to know how to make*. Delvoye is a self-proclaimed workaholic. He believes in skilled work; hence his admiration for the work of craftspeople, their relationship to 'masterpieces' and their proclivity for formal perfection. This is not posturing on Delvoye's part. He is not an artist that delegates. He enjoys learning about the various artisanal and technological processes that he uses in his pieces, going so far as to practise them himself. Thus, for the pig tattoos, he decided to roll up his sleeves for reasons having to do with the social deontology of the practice itself ('Tattoo artists are riff-raff, and the only way to earn their respect was to begin to practise tattooing'), but also out of his love for artisanry. Traditionally, there in only a fine line between art and artisanry – we speak of the 'art of entertaining' or the 'art of flower arranging', and the French expression '*dans les règles de l'art*' ('in a professional manner') is used to describe methods and procedures in professions outside the 'official' art world. 'In Flemish, when people say, "It's not an art", it means that it's not difficult to do. The yellow pages are my studio. I read: carpenter, lawyer, ceramicist, etc. I make a phone call. Sometimes I go to a workshop and I don't have any ideas. I just go because it seems interesting. I speak with the boss for half an hour, I ask him questions about his machines. How does it work? With a laser, with water? How do they drill?'[22] Delvoye does not disdain the techniques and technologies he uses. He always learns something from them that provides impetus for his work, but also for his life. 'Each oeuvre teaches me something: for example, that I could be a radiologist, without having to study until I was twenty-nine years old. I currently have an X-ray machine, and I can make diagnoses.'[23]

THE CRAFTSPERSON AS COVERT ARTIST

In the same way as he proudly asserts his origins, Delvoye is not ashamed of artisanry. On the contrary, he is aware that it is one of the most ingrained aspects of art. His use of materials (wood, steel, glass) and techniques (enamelling, stained-glass making, tattooing, ceramics, bronze casting, as well as radiography, robotics, laser cutting, etc.) are all forms of artisanry. The transformation of the impersonal industrial object into a supreme work of artisanry (the most spectacular examples being his cement mixers) allows Delvoye to juxtapose seemingly opposite values. 'In avant-garde art, it was taboo to use materials that required manual manipulation or time. In the twentieth century we have nearly always been confronted with movements that have to do with a lack of *savoir-faire*.'[24] Delvoye puts paid to the modernist tradition that

turned readymades into a quasi-mandatory part of the artistic process. In this sense, the objects created by Delvoye at the beginning of his oeuvre can be seen as hijacked readymades – or even grotesques – in that no part of the objects has been altered, and yet they seem like *monsters*, in that they literally de*monstrate* other possibilities. By bringing handiwork and artisanry into the execution of his works, Delvoye turns a critical eye on our contemporary world. 'The industrial evolution is nearly over; everything is made in other countries. Europe still has a few relics from a bygone Golden Age. In Limoges, it's porcelain. And in Indonesia, it's carved wood that is an artefact of Flemish Baroque.'[25]

BARBARIANS AND GOTHICS

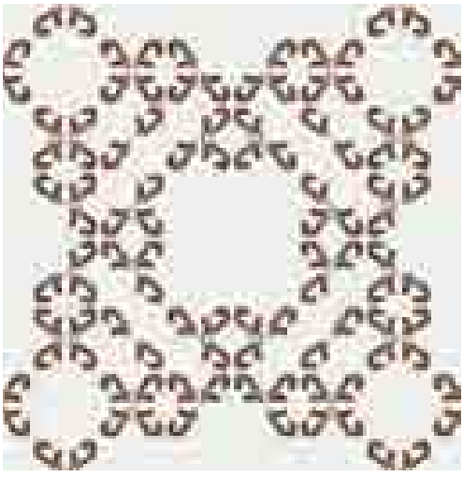
By mixing modernism with the remnants of old Europe, Delvoye short-circuits established ideological patterns. Fundamentally, industry and artisanry are part of the same nostalgic trend. It is clear that today the West is tired, and that it has nothing to cling to except 'dandyism, culture, art and the Perrier bottle…' 'We have nothing to export except an image of luxury, useless things. We have arrived at the twilight of our culture, too civilized to subjugate, to conquer.'[26] Delvoye likes to quote these lines from Constantine Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians': 'And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.'

Although he knows that he is a member of an urban, 'civilized' Western culture, Delvoye feels a strong kinship with the vestiges of 'barbarism' represented by the decorative arts, marginal cultural practices like tattooing, but also the Gothic – a once-pejorative term that, at the time of the Renaissance, was synonymous with 'barbarian'. (The Goth subculture adopted by young people is a partial revival of this understanding of the term.) Nomadic 'barbarian' cultures (Huns, Vandals, Celts, Scythians, etc.) have historically been associated with the 'decorative'. In this sense, Delvoye has inculcated the words of Adolf Loos who, a century ago, postulated the connection between ornament and crime.[27] But Delvoye does not take a puritanical, moralizing stance. He does not deny the connection between the two, but neither does he exalt it; he exhibits it – i.e. he faces it in all its complexity.

Are we not always 'barbarians' to someone? For a long time, weren't the Flemish considered more 'barbarian' than the Walloons? The football fan more barbarian than the tennis lover? 'Barbarian' is synonymous with otherness, strangeness and marginality – but also powerlessness[28] (barbarians are thought to confine themselves to 'lower' forms having, we imagine, no access to culture and great art). 'With the porcelain pieces and the football goal, the gas canister and the wooden cement mixer, I force myself to face the inability to use an ordinary object to get across an elevated message. […] I try to make all my pieces heroic, but each time I renounce the attempt. The coats of arms are heroic, but they are on ironing boards…'[29]

GENEALOGY IN HERALDIC FORM

By transforming an ironing board into an escutcheon, by tattooing a pig or a chicken, the artist is not



Mosaic (90-196-DEM), 1990
printed and glazed tiles, 280 × 280 cm

merely producing a provocative work of art. These gestures create a space for meaning, they materialize the unimagined aspects of forms and functions exhausted through their usage. Thus the football goals fitted with stained glass worthy of a brasserie or a church underscore the quasi-religious nature of football, as well as the goals' sexual dimension ('This goal is for penetrating') and their eminently political nature. *Finale 1* depicts a bakery scene whose style is pure Flemish *petit bourgeois*. Delvoye entitled a previous series of football goals with similar iconography – *Panem et circenses* – thus underscoring the alienating nature of sporting rituals.

Delvoye's project can be understood as having to do with a *genealogy* of forms and values. (The word should be understood in its Nietzschean sense: it refers to a careful method that, rather than returning to the historic sources of morality, examines how the values that compel us – such as good and evil – are connected to the history of a power struggle between defiled and clean, base and noble, mundane concepts essentially connected to the individual or the social body.)

Delvoye's scatological *Mosaic* (1990) is, of course, an ironic allusion to the sculpture by the American minimalist sculptor Carl Andre. Here Delvoye pushes Andre's logic to an absurd extreme. If, with Andre's work, it is possible to walk on top of a sculpture, then we must also imagine the possibility of encountering human excrement on our way! A number of Delvoye's pieces make reference to American minimalist ideology, to its implicit puritanism as well as to its explicit efficiency. Delvoye is quite taken with the efficiency, pragmatism and frontality of American art. But he does not espouse its implicit values of heroism and sufficiency (read self-sufficiency), nor, as we shall see, its endemic puritanism.

TACTICAL CONFORMITY

Right from the start, Delvoye's art aspired to be simple and efficient – 'almost normal'. He did not strive for novelty or, in a godlike manner, to create a 'new world'. Rather, he preferred to align himself with a shared, and communicable, imaginative universe. 'When I use an image, I count on the fact

Installation of 5 shovels, 1990
enamel paint on shovel, variable dimensions

that everyone has already seen it, as well as the ideas associated with it.'[30] Having absorbed the lessons of Magritte, Delvoye restricts himself to a type of visual convention. His references are always simple and identifiable: they belong to the most mundane parts of everyday life. Football goals, ironing boards, gas canisters, shovels, saws, watering cans, mopeds, bird cages, lorries, cement mixers, bulldozers, etc. Later he will bring into his work live pigs, models of Gothic churches, stained-glass windows, his mother's crucifix – i.e. symbols connected to the personal, social and geographic life of the artist.

This seeming conformity (Magritte spoke of 'tactical conformity') allows Delvoye to introduce shifts and diversions that are all the more effective in that they take place in known territory. By employing existing objects and structures with a specific use value, the artist can tinker with their inherent logic, defuse their functions and give rise to another meaning. By transforming a mechanical shovel into a medieval escutcheon, by tattooing the skin of a pig, by transfiguring a cement mixer into a piece of Baroque furniture, by disguising a tractor as a Gothic structure, Delvoye is not simply being provocative. These actions open up a space for a reinterpretation of forms and functions that have been worn out through use.

When looking at Delvoye's works from the 1980s and 90s, which the artist terms 'democratic objects', we are struck by a sort of paradox – they appear at once 'normal' and 'suspicious'. 'Normal' because the form of the objects remains unchanged, and 'suspicious' because at the same time these objects have become 'alienated'; that is, they have become estranged from themselves.

Therefore, without seeming to, Delvoye insidiously introduces his sidesteps and diversions. 'I think I want to be critical of society, if you wish, but not in a transparent and direct manner, as I find is often the case in art. You see, many works of art could easily be replaced by a message scribbled on a wall. This doesn't interest me, it is too clear, too obvious and therefore not clear at all.'[31] Delvoye distrusts *transparency*, a state dictated by our contemporary ideology. This 'desire for clarity' is a trap and, as we shall see, a power play.

Delvoye's art operates by infiltration rather than by confrontation; it stealthily insinuates itself into the normality of our world in order to undermine it from the inside. Art clouds rather than clarifies.

THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

Delvoye's *Atlas* (1999) literally plays with this concept. Initially, the maps seem to respect cartographic conventions to the letter. The artist also uses classifications from geography manuals (relief map, political map, maps of individual countries and continents, index of place names, etc.). Upon closer inspection, however, the countries, oceans and place names do not correspond to any known territory or language. We are in Tlön, an imaginary country invented by idealistic conspirators (under the influence of Bishop Berkeley's subjective idealism) who are natives of Uqbar (itself an improbable territory roughly located along the borders of Iraq or of Asia Minor), whose language and culture were fully described by Jorge Luis Borges. The

Aodonica, 1989
acrylic on canvas, 156 x 182 cm

'metaphysicians of Tlön seek not truth, or even plausibility – they seek to amaze, astound. In their view, metaphysics is a branch of the literature of fantasy.'[32] Borges is clearly a touchstone for Delvoye: he uses an extract from *The Maker* (*El Hacedor*, 1960) as an epigraph to his *Atlas*. 'A man sets out to draw the world. As the years go by, he peoples a space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, bays, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, and individuals. A short time before he dies, he discovers that that patient labyrinth of lines traces the lineaments of his own face.'[33] And indeed, the configurations of the countries and continents in this fantastical atlas form a portrait of the artist. We can make out barely disguised elements from his iconographic and domestic repertoire – a hammer, saws, erect and flaccid members, keys, a telephone, a teapot, shoes, eyeglasses, an umbrella, a pipe, a snowman, an elephant, a squirrel, etc.

Delvoye's *Atlas* is a visual ode to *deterritorialization*. The map, according to Deleuze and Guattari's astute analysis, is not the territory; it is itself the most explicit criticism of territoriality. 'The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a meditation.'[3]

In 1975 Marcel Broodthaers published *The Conquest of Space: An Atlas for the Use of Artists and the Military*, in which the outlines of thirty countries are printed at the same size, rather than on the same scale (thus Lichtenstein is as big as Australia and the United States), defusing at a stroke the geopolitical hierarchies of today's world. This map could be seen as a critique of 'The Surrealist Map of the World', which appeared in 1929, whose 'inverted' hierarchy

Art Farm China, 2003–10
live tattooed pigs
Beijing, China, 2006

greatly expands territories such as Russia, Alaska, New Guinea and Easter Island, in relation to Western Europe and the United States, which are tiny. Delvoye's *Atlas* is closer to the nonsensical spirit of Lewis Carroll ('There are many words and captions in a map. I invent words and spend a great deal of time checking that they don't really exist'[35]). This is also, however, another pretext to address the question of painting (each map is also painted in acrylic on canvas). 'In fact, *Atlas* is also an alibi that permits me to paint in a classical manner – these colours and shapes on canvas are reminiscent of Jasper Johns. *Atlas* allows me to link Jasper Johns and Land Art.'[36]

STREET CREDIBILITY

Delvoye never makes fun of the popular realm that is often the source of his work. He remains captivated by the poetic and imaginary potential found in practices that do not claim to be overtly artistic. This does not mean, however, that he tries to give such practices aesthetic 'added value'. On the contrary, he seeks in this world a source of energy capable of reanimating an art that has, since the 1970s, been lost in the tautological and narcissistic dead ends of its own self-definition and self-glorification.

'Everyone knows what a football goal or a gas canister looks like. These are objects with "street cred". Cocaine, on the other hand, is very expensive. I would like art to be like cocaine. If it has a lot of value in museums, it should have the same value on the street.'[37] Delvoye admires the *Manneken Pis* and the Statue of Liberty, seeing them as visual events that far outstrip their status as mere works of art. His goal is for his own artwork to enjoy the same quasi-anonymous status.

PIRACIES

Wim Delvoye's initials are the same as those of Walt Disney. What, then, could be simpler than for

Art Farm China, 2003–10
live tattooed pigs
Cloaca Quattro, 12.05.2007 – 26.05.2007, Xin Beijing Art Gallery, Beijing

him to borrow the Disney logo, and substitute his own signature for that of Mickey Mouse's creator (whom he considers to be as important an artist as Andy Warhol and Rubens)? He did the same thing with the Warner Brothers logo: the band crossing the shield perfectly masks the substitution of the D for the B. Delvoye's oeuvre is filled with all sorts of logos that appear on the artist's communication media and spin-off products – letterhead, books, brochures, children's toys, crayon boxes, etc.[38] One of the most emblematic logos is that for *Cloaca* – a cartouche based on the Ford and Coca-Cola logos is grafted onto a central image of Mister Clean combined with an anatomical drawing of intestines – a graphic reminder (to put it mildly) of the nature of the work.

The universality of the source images is such that Delvoye's act of piracy goes almost unnoticed – such is his ability to interfere with the emblems of a showy, business-obsessed society. Here we come face to face with Delvoye's ambiguity: the artist is aware of the visual noise that these adverting images represent ('Big companies pay taxes to the government for the right to visually pollute the atmosphere'), but he also acknowledges their power and their impact on the public. Here, Delvoye's method echoes Guy Debord's Situationist method of *détournement*, which consisted of taking 'prefabricated aesthetic elements' (taken from the cinema, comic books, literature and advertising images) and subverting their original purpose in order to evoke a critical examination. A sort of visual aikido, Delvoye's repurposed advertising uses the effectiveness of an image's message against itself, undermining the referent from the inside.

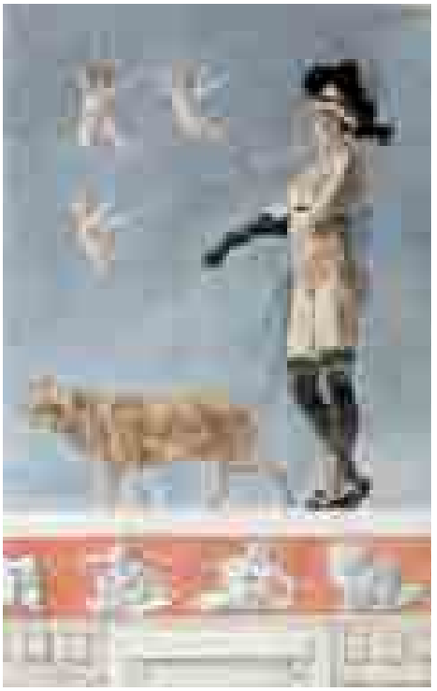
Art Farm China, 2003–10
live tattooed pigs
Beijing, China, 2005

Mr. Cloaca, 2005
tattooed pig skin, 155 × 123 cm

It is fairly logical, then, that Delvoye's logo piracy should, since 1995, find fertile ground in the tattooed skin of pigs – a 'natural' yet grim way to make these marketing insignia wallow in the mud of the sty.

Marcel is the famous pig that was tattooed in 1997, whose exploits were celebrated in *The Adventures of Wim Delvoye*, a graphic novel by Xavier Löwenthal and François Olislaeger published in *Le Soir*. It is, of course, a knowing reference to Duchamp.[39] However, Marcel is also the 'living billboard' for two of the artist's emblems: *La Vache qui rit* (Delvoye has the world's largest collection of Laughing Cow cheese labels) and *Harley Davidson*, the internationally known motorcycle manufacturer (the insignia of the eagle with spread wings, to which a stylized intestine has been added, was used as the logo for Delvoye's *Cloaca-Turbo*).

Debasing brand images by the use of pigs reached its peak when the famous Louis Vuitton insignia was tattooed on swine at Delvoye's Beijing-based *Art Farm*. In 2008 the animals were banned from SH Contemporary, the Shanghai contemporary art fair, at the request of the owners of the gallery where they were going to be exhibited live. Of course, Louis Vuitton was behind the censure; the firm is extremely touchy when it comes to counterfeits. But this isn't exactly a case of counterfeiting, as there is no attempt to foist off fake merchandise (pigskin, which is easily recognizable, is not part of the range of 'noble' leathers). The gallery no doubt gave in to pressure from the brand, which sought to take possession of the skins by any means possible. Even today, Delvoye is prepared to go to court.

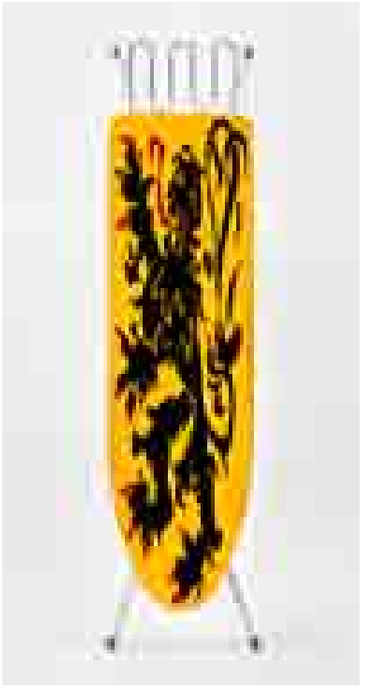


Félicien Rops, Pornokratès, 1878
Musée provincial Félicien Rops, Namur

If it came to a litigation I would have found it intellectually enjoyable. It would be in everybody's interest whether I won or lost: it would make a case for all artists. The work I was doing never resulted in any confusion between the two products. My second argument was that after a while, [a logo] becomes a part of collective [memory]. If you are so omnipresent in the city streets, then you have to take a joke.[40]

PIGSKINS

When Delvoye had his pigs tattooed, he was taking a very literal approach to the parallel that Adolf Loos drew between criminals' tattoos and ornament. 'Tattooing is special, it is truly an anti-class act, except among criminals.' This 'original impurity' is redoubled in Delvoye's work in that the pig is itself a taboo animal, the very symbol of uncleanliness in many monotheistic faiths. The artist does not let contradiction stop him: a vegetarian, he has raised pigs in his *Art Farm* in China since 2003. There is, of course, the sly desire on Delvoye's part to 'artistically' breed this emblem of barnyard bestiality and abjectness – and of a certain kind of pornography (see the drawing *Pornokratès* by Félicien Rops, 1871). To tattoo a pig is to surreptitiously undermine the age-old opposition between humanity and animality, to lend credibility to the very symbol of ignominy – and to demolish human vanity with respect to good taste and decorum. The pigs tattooed with the Louis Vuitton monogram point up a glaring hypocrisy. What, after all, is the difference between cowhide or sheepskin and pigskin, if not a distinction of class? And it is this *distinction* that is intensified by the act of tattooing. 'The difference between tattooing and a work of art is social class, period. A picture on a canvas [or, one could add, a luxury handbag!] has an exchange



Framar IV, 1988–9
enamel paint, 140 × 35 × 5 cm

value; when it's on a skin, it doesn't.'[41] The 'Vuitton Affair' exposed the class distinctions implicit in questions of taste – or, for that matter, art. 'The history of art is the history of what the rich like to purchase to set themselves apart from the other classes.'[42]

A PROSTITUTIONAL EXCHANGE

Delvoye's pigs caused a commotion around the world, not only among animal rights activists, but puritans of every stripe masquerading as humanists. The next logical move for Delvoye was to use the human body as a canvas for his tattooed inscriptions. In 2006 he convinced Tim Steiner, a Swiss musician living in Zurich, to have his back tattooed with one of Delvoye's drawings (an image of the Virgin Mary surmounted by a death's head and surrounded by African and Asian ritual symbols). In 2008, Steiner's tattooed skin was sold to a German collector (who will take possession of it after the owner's death). Delvoye, Steiner and the gallery that negotiated the sale shared the proceeds equally among themselves. The sale contract contains the following clause: at the collector's request, Steiner must make himself available three times a year to be shown at public and private events. After Steiner's death, the skin will be removed from his back and preserved. The contract also states that the collector is free to resell the piece.

This work astutely raises the question of the artist's moral and artistic responsibility. Who is the author? The one who conceived the piece and convinced Steiner to have himself tattooed? Or the one who agreed to be tattooed and to 'sell the skin off his back'?

Helix DHAACO 90 (detail), 2009
patinated bronze, 470 × Ø 82 cm

This is clearly a collaboration, a composition for four hands, with the gallery and collector also playing their roles. It uses the absurd to express the prostitutional basis of all artistic transactions. The Latin word *prostituere* means 'to place before, to expose publicly'. And, indeed, we are dealing with an agreement between four separate compass points: the artist/pimp, the model/prostitute, the collector/client and the gallery/brothel-keeper. But there is also a veiled religious dimension to this arrangement. Leaving aside the fact that Christianity was historically tolerant towards prostitution,[43] Steiner calmly accepted every stage of the transaction. His behaviour is reminiscent of classical stoicism, Zen Buddhism and above all 'Christian sadomasochism'. In this respect, Steiner represents a *Christ-like figure*, which, in Delvoye's logic, is as it should be. The artist maintains an open, non-ironic connection with the Christian faith (although it is Christianity's syncretic and paradox-laden complexity that interests him, rather than its belief system). Delvoye's churches and Gothic spires that have sprung up on every continent are signifiers of Christianity, of course, even though Delvoye's project, which *is* ironic, is to create a 'Cloaca religion'.

JESUS AS LOGO

Since 2005, Delvoye has been creating spiralling crucifixes (in polished and patinaed bronze or Berlin silver), all of which have their roots in the artist's mother's crucifix: a simple, unpretentious object with only sentimental value. The digitally generated contortions and distortions serve to heighten, without pathos, Christ's suffering. 'In this work, half of my interest concerns geometry. This involved quasi-scientific research into space,

Tim, 2006–8
tattooed skin, life size

helixes, circles and Möbius strips. [...] As for the other half, these works address the symbol of Jesus, which is so well known that he has become a logo; we no longer grasp that this is a man who is in pain, with a handsome physique.'[44] Here we are not dealing with an Expressionist, doloristic view of the Crucifixion. Christ's suffering is amplified and compounded by geometric deformations, rather than by an artist's illustrative, navel-gazing proclivities.

DISSIMULATIONS AND CAMOUFLAGES

Do the heraldic emblems disguise the ironing boards, or do the ironing boards conceal the heraldic emblems? This strategy of camouflage is reminiscent of animal mimetism caught in the flow of becoming, rather than condemned to a specifically imitative process. As Deleuze and Guattari have stated, 'The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the colours of its surroundings.' In the same way, Delvoye's cement mixers do not imitate Flemish furniture. The cement mixers become furniture and the furniture become cement mixers; the art *object-in-process* here overlaps with the artist's *animal-in-process-of-becoming*.[45] The contagion operates in both directions, upending the 'correct' order of things.

Delvoye's art is very much one of camouflage; it does not give in to the cult of transparency so prevalent in today's democratic societies. The same is true for the artist's philosophy of life – Delvoye is a master of dissimulation. Socio-economically speaking, for example, one could say that he is at once a Marxist disguised as a liberal and a liberal in Marxist drag.

The artist makes use of two ideas from Marxist theory – the central role of the economy[46] and the class struggle (his work is permeated with this conflict, in which the question of taste is fundamental)[47] – while liberalism has fed his spirit of ambition and entrepreneurship. Thus Delvoye can state that *Cloaca* is a 'socialist machine' (we are all equal before shit) and create a pig farm in the People's Republic of China – a country that blithely combines the authoritarian mistakes of communism with the social violence of capitalism.

A reader of Adam Smith and Marx, Delvoye sees the economic and social paradox that is central to art:

We make art that's unsellable, but it grows and it shows, in an ironic way, how investment works. Like the economic principles of Adam Smith: the idea of how capital operates with interest and yields and margins. That idea of harvesting is really interesting. The art farm plays into that glorious capitalist metaphor of growing paintings. I never heard of any collector rushing to an art show because the paintings were going down in price. Even the most notable collector, who sees himself as a museum, is speculating, somehow. If he's not speculating for monetary value, he's certainly speculating for social and symbolic value.[48]

This paradox is also germane to the question of the artist. Delvoye is interested in the point Hans Abbing, a Dutch artist, economist and sociologist (and follower of Pierre Bourdieu) raised in his book *Why Are Artists Poor?*[49] 'A good question, given

Dick 3, 2000
cibachrome on aluminium, 125 × 100 cm

the prestige enjoyed by artists and the money that is flung around them.'[50]

There is an on-going dialectic in Delvoye's work between his interest (both social and cultural) in luxury and his relationship (both ethical and political) to poverty. His art is constantly creating exchanges between luxury and poverty, and it provokes mutual contamination of both. His cases *Etui pour une Mobylette* (2004), *Etui pour un Diable* (2005) and *Etui pour un Arrosoir* (2007) are the most striking examples of this. 'I have always challenged luxury objects [...] I enjoy transforming my art – which essentially consists of "poor subjects" (excrement, cement mixers, blackheads, etc.) – into objects of prestige [...] But these same luxury objects are difficult all the same.' Even in a high-quality case, a watering can is still a watering can, and a Peugeot scooter is a Peugeot scooter.

BECOMING A BRAND

In this way, Delvoye is a descendant, a few generations removed, of such Mannerist and Baroque moralists as Torquato Accetto,[51] Baldassare Castiglione[52] and, naturally, Baltasar Gracián,[53] all of whom, working within ethical and aesthetic boundaries, turned concealment into a way of life (as well as a weapon) to help them survive the harsh, violent world of their time. As an artist devoted to dissimulation (rather than to simulation),[54] Delvoye feels a kinship with the artist Andy Warhol. Warhol was as opposed to the notion of 'art for art's sake' as he was to the modernist belief in the autonomy of the work of art. He continually corrupted art with values that are supposedly foreign to it – money, advertising and daily banalities. In the public eye, *mondain* and overexposed, Warhol also tried hard to disappear, to blend into

Andy Warhol, Self portrait with camouflage , 1986

the background of his life and work, to achieve a kind of invisibility. This professional voyeur had only one obsession and one pleasure in life – to let the whole spectacle of life unfold as if he were not there.

Warhol continually refused to impose his subjectivity on either his art or his life. As an artist/voyeur, his relationship to the world was highly passive: he absorbed, inhaled and drained human beings, images and situations. However, this absorption and vampirism only served to increasingly erase his presence in the world. Warhol literally emptied himself into his images to such a point that he himself became pure representation. It was as though the superficiality of his images mimetically covered over the artist's own personality and substance, leaving him even more elusive and translucent. 'Some critic called me the Nothingness Himself and that didn't help my sense of existence any. Then I realized that existence itself is nothing and I felt better.'[55]

Even if he acknowledges that he is deeply 'megalomaniacal', Delvoye is himself inhabited by this desire for anonymity. By disappearing behind his logos, Delvoye is signalling the primacy of the signifier over the overblown and subjective presence of the artist. The use of a signifier, as Jacques Lacan showed us, sets in motion a reality devoid of any content except itself, a pure emptiness. Even though he is unwaveringly opposed to the concept of 'art for art's sake', Delvoye is aware that art is fundamentally without purpose (as we shall see, *Cloaca* is the perfect allegory for this).

THE TYRANNY OF SEEING

Warhol once stated that he preferred the sexuality of flowers to human coitus, thereby distancing

himself from the topic usually associated with his work ('Everything is sexual to Andy without the sex act actually taking place' – Charles Henri Ford). Delvoye has a anomalous relationship to sex. He is particularly horrified by how omnipresent sex is in contemporary society – how it reaches into every area of the arts. He sees the 1980s as symptomatic of this proliferation. 'The art world was filled with penises and sexual organs. It was so trendy! For me, sex is less important than religion, shit, the market, the economy, etc. These "subjects" are so much more taboo today.'

Here Delvoye is close to the ideas of Michel Foucault, though he arrived at them by other means. In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault showed how difficult it is to make sexual repression the compulsory element of bourgeois ideology. He demonstrated that the supposed 'sexual liberation' of the period (he was writing in the 1970s) was a figure of submission to 'the secular injunction to study sex'.[56] 'What is characteristic about modern societies,' Foucault wrote, 'is not that they wanted sex to remain hidden, but rather that they wanted it to be eternally discussed, as if it were the *only* secret.'[57]

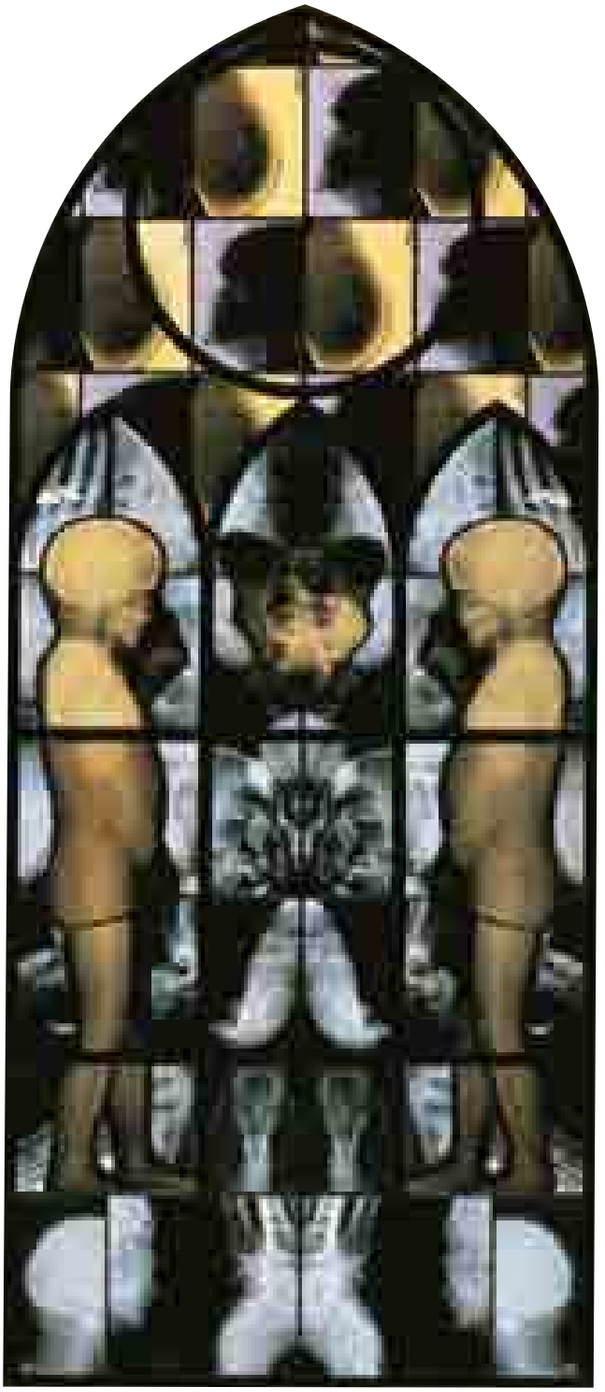
Henceforth, we must *say* and *know everything* about sex, and to transform our desire into discourse. This significant constraint, which consists of having to talk about sex, means that sex becomes an arena of public power. It thus enters into the critical relationship between the State and the individual – hence a power issue. The drive for transparency is particularly suspect in that it co-opts a supposed 'secret', which can only ever be an open secret!

Foucault's position clearly took aim at Freudian ideology (in its Lacanian version, thus dominated by language). Delvoye himself has a very dim view of psychoanalysis. He considers it at best a matter of 'nineteenth-century literature', and thinks that 'one can still take an interest in it for fun, as one would with tarot cards and astrology'.[58] Delvoye is above all a visual artist: the image ultimately resists attempts to make it subservient to a discourse of drives and unconscious phenomena.

This 'will to know' must be understood in the same context as the will to *show everything*, to *display everything*, which pornography demands. The will to know and the will to show are connected by the same *panoptic* drive to control. Even though pornography is perhaps not even where the 'will to know' would like it to be! Today, it is not so much the 'literal' pornographic image that is at stake, but the overall 'politics' of the image (linked to the fantasy of 'displaying everything') that is globally pornographic.

Transparencies and Opacities

Delvoye distrusts artistic messages that strive to be clear and transparent. And yet, *Cloaca* is a machine that presents a form of transparency. It is intended to show, to highlight the mechanisms of digestion and defecation. Moreover, it is possible to see this machine as an attempt to *lay bare* the process that ordinarily remains hidden within the folds of the human body. There is a reference here to Duchamp's *Large Glass*: the famous *Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*. Despite the glass, transparency here is clearly a trap, a snare for the gaze. Duchamp's



March, 2001
steel, x-ray photographs, lead, glass, 244 × 104 cm

Cloaca Original, 2000
mixed media, 270 × 1,157 × 78 cm
Castle De Bueren, Kwatrecht, 2012

'painting of precision' foils every attempt at elucidation. We will never really know about the circulation of desire, which – we learn from the *Notes* about the artist – constitutes the work's core, its central nervous system. The clearest proof of this opacity is the multiple, contradictory commentaries, the endless glosses that *Large Glass* elicits.

Similarly, *Cloaca* offers us merely a technologically sophisticated device that, at the end of the process, produces excrement. This machinery that supposedly lays open the mechanisms of digestion brings us face to face with our all-too-human obscurity. Delvoye clearly has no intention of showing, of revealing the *truth* of how digestion works: he is too much of an artist to do that. What matters to him is that the machine really produces excrement and that the technology that makes this possible is visible. That is all. Like most artists, Delvoye refuses to take a psychoanalytical approach to his own process.[59] Psychoanalysis, as it is commonly understood, attempts to shed light on our unconscious make-ups. This is incompatible with the processes employed by art. The unconscious in art must remain that way (Louise Bourgeois would defuse any attempt at explaining her work with a wonderful phrase, 'The unconscious is my friend'). The outlandish claim that one can reach 'the truth' is like the traditional philosophical discourse that eternally attempts to master the 'mysteries and obscurities' of art.[60]

THE SKELETON AND THE GHOST

Delvoye's pornographic x-ray stained-glass windows also play with this ambiguity. Stained glass is *the* art form of transparency and light. x-rays penetrate the body's density; they explore the shadows of our organism, albeit in a paradoxical manner: x-rays make muscles and bones appear superimposed, creating confusion for the layperson (only a trained medical eye can read – 'unscram-

Cloaca Professional, 2010
mixed media, 275 × 710 × 175 cm
Permanent collection, 2010, MONA, Hobart

ble' – the images produced). All of this takes place against a black background that heightens the image's 'secret' dimension. Delvoye takes what should remain a medical secret and, by including it in a stained-glass window, exhibits it in a sacred, not to say holy manner. In emulsifying stained glass and x-rays, the artist is performing a visual short-circuit, as the language of stained glass refers to a world of transcendence, whereas the x-rays in Delvoye's work thrust us into our most mundane, but also comical immanence.[61] Delvoye's x-ray windows are, strictly speaking, visual oxymorons.[62] They are descendants of Corneille's famous 'dark light' oxymoron. They are also a particularly acute reference to Baltasar Gracián's elegant expression 'policy of the inky cuttlefish'.

In these works, Delvoye clamps the lid down even tighter, because what is being x-rayed is not an immobile human body, but postures and positions inspired by pornographic imagery (with a marked focus on fellatio, sodomy and zoophilia).[63]

A double emulsification process is at work here – stained glass is combined with x-ray technology, and medical imagery is combined with (x-rated) pornographic imagery. These emulsions cancel out what they supposedly display. We find ourselves confronted with forms that are part skeleton, part ghost. We do not recognize the people being x-rayed, but we do, on the other hand, take note of their accessories (rings, earrings and dildos), which emerge like so many other trifling fetish objects from their 'shadowy' domestic background. The pornographic x-rays do not reveal anything that is hidden; rather they display the relationship between sex and death, transforming these works into *vanitas*. Vanity of art, vanity of the artist who can only depict life, movement and sex through the ghostly means of phantasmagoria and the *danse macabre*.

Sybille II (stills), 1999
video installation

'I believe only in what I can see. In my universe there is no soul, and there is no love. [...] I have never seen the soul and I have never seen love. With the x-rays, I saw skeletons, teeth, penises, lungs. I never saw love.'

MOVEMENTS AND DIGESTIONS

Delvoye is an artist of movement. In all its meanings. Movement of shapes, of materials, of skills. But also movement in the everyday and intestinal meaning of the term. *Cloaca* is, in this sense, the major, one might say visceral, work of Delvoye's art, because it perfectly crystallizes the inherently *digestive* and *assimilative* nature of his work. (The *Anal Kiss* series, 1999–2000, prints of the anus made with lipstick on writing paper from hotels visited by the artist, show more explicitly the short-circuit between the two extremities of the digestive system, taking at face value his *statement*: 'I kiss the down-side.')

The ability to digest the most disparate data from the world is the mark of this gluttonous and generous, vampire-like and prodigal approach. With *Cloaca* we leave the realm of *emulsion*, a feature of his plebeian subjects, in order to reach the realm of *assimilation*.[64] Delvoye is passionate about biology and genetics: 'I am enthusiastic about our century. I am fascinated by genetics, transgenics, hybrids, science... I want to include everything that is new in my work.'[65] However, this enthusiast for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution has no illusions about promoting a new world. *Cloaca* is a monument to the unnecessary. It is a metaphor for Delvoye's work, and also a metaphor for art in general.

ET IN CLOACA EGO
POETIC, UNNECESSARY AND DEMOCRATIC MACHINERY

The fact that certain species possess a cloaca – i.e. a single opening for the intestinal, reproductive and urinary tracts – creates a kind of vagueness, an abolition of hierarchies between the functions.

Sybille II (stills), 1999
video installation

Cloaca is the machine that 'suspends all quarrels between the masculine and feminine, the problems of class and gender and also racial and ethnic distinctions'. In 1992, for Documenta IX in Kassel, Delvoye created a mosaic decorated with pieces of excrement. 'This idea of poo comes from a different story: I had discovered that it was the best way of guaranteeing equality. I was always talking about equality; it was my period of "democratic subjects". Plebeians. Proletarians.'[66] This position of course led me to think about Montaigne's famous quotation: 'Even on the most exalted throne in the world we are still only sitting on our own bottom.' As guarantor of equality, shit is also what is most universally shared. 'Human excrement is the most cosmopolitan image, even more universal than Jesus and Coca-Cola.'[67]

The *Cloaca* project, begun in 2000 but conceived as early as 1992, so far comprises a series of ten machines (*Cloaca Original*, *Cloaca New & Improved*, *Cloaca Turbo*, *Cloaca Quattro*, *Cloaca No. 5*, *Personal Cloaca*, *Mini Cloaca*, *Super Cloaca*, *Cloaca Professional* and *Cloaca Travel Kit*). Each time it consists of a computer-controlled technological digestive tube, a robot, whose temperature is maintained at 37.2° C, which circulates food ingested twice a day for twenty-seven hours and which at the end of the cycle produces excrement. 'The machine is the star. They're a bit shocked about the contrast of the professionalism, the machine is very expensive, and the work is really, really labour intensive [...] All for nothing. You know, it's like golf. In order to hit a ball across a golf course, buildings are removed, money is raised, real-estate deals are made, you know, to have this ball there, but it's so futile; the futility and the professionalism.'[68] For Delvoye, *Cloaca* has reached the status of a star, rather than a work of art. A star that owes its reputation to nothing other than the uselessness of what it produces, i.e. excrement. 'I have looked for a complicated thing, difficult to do and expensive, which doesn't lead anywhere.'[69] Even more than a

Reiterstandbild aüs Nasenpopeln, 1995
pencil on paper, 65 × 50 cm

work of art, *Cloaca* is a business, which creates an excremental product that is then vacuum-packed and stamped with a logo, making a clear reference to 'Mister Clean', 'Ford' and 'Coca-Cola' all at once. This is because, in fact, the *Cloaca* business has a brand image implicitly contained in its name. 'Every reptile or bird has something called a cloaca, which is actually one hole, and the vagina is included. My machine is only concentrated on the gastrointestinal system, we call it cloaca but we also call it *Cloaca* because it refers to a make of car. For example, at the time that I started working on it, Renault had a new model called Laguna. So *Cloaca* sounds like a new model for a car. That's why I chose cloaca as a reference to the anus, but it doesn't say anus, cloaca is more poetic.'[70]

GENEALOGY OF THE MORA(ANA)L

Delvoye's 'scatological' works are related to a strand of modern thought that, from Artaud's 'search for the faecal' to Bataille's 'base materialism', is part of the great history of the thinking of sublimation/desublimation. The evacuation tubes attractively presented on ceramic pedestals (*Chantier IV,* 1994 & *Chantier V*, 1994–5) are an obvious echo of Duchamp's 'plumbing'. His *Rose des vents* (1992), made up of four characters in a ring with eyes closed, their bodies pierced from anus to mouth by a telescope, makes explicit reference to the 'intestinal' relationship of the organ of sight with the oral and anal impulses. *Sybille II* (1999) is a video filmed in close-up; at first, it is possible to see only an innocuous scene (a landscape? a documentary?), everything accompanied by romantic music, until we realize that these are blackheads being squeezed to expel pus. How can we not see, just beneath the surface of *Anal Kiss* (carefully dated, classified in a framework), an image not a million miles away from a 'rose-bud kiss', or in scientific terms, anilingus? Even his twisted Gothic spires, placed end to end (*Suppo*, 2010), do not escape this scatological dimension, which in our contemporary world does not dare to speak its name.[71]

These works replace *genealogically* the question of judgement and taste in the sphere where it physically belongs: that of the body, and even more specifically, in those orifices deemed to be most shameful, the place where the great humoral immune battle of the 'noble and the ignoble' takes place.[72] Because if the normative values of 'beautiful' and 'ugly', of 'truth' and 'lies' remain in operation up to the present day, how can we fail to distinguish behind these avatars of 'good and evil', the spectre of the direct confrontation of 'dirty and clean'? We know that the Western primacy given to the visual began by the suppression of the olfactory sense.[73] *Cleanliness*, *order* and *beauty* are indeed, by this logic, civilization's 'conquests' of the excremental messiness of the body. However, this 'messiness' keeps on coming back, most often in the same place as where it was evacuated, or sublimated, i.e. where it can be seen.[74] This is the funny and forceful meaning of *Rose des vents* which replaces *voyeurism* within its original context.

Delvoye's scatological works make explicit reference to the 'fundamentals' of civilization which is unconscious of itself, by dint of having been overcome-subliminated-elevated into a so-called

Cloaca Faeces, Antwerp, 21.09.2000, 2.15 pm
plexiglas, vacuum-packed faeces, 21 × 4.5 × 17.2 cm

'adult' order of genital sexuality. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari showed in their *Anti-Oedipus*, how the privatization of the anus (placing it 'outside the social sphere') is a model for all other privatizations of the body's organs. The 'retention' of the modernist American aesthetic (of which minimal art may be considered the quintessence) is certainly in this regard illustrative of the fact that it is 'the whole of sublimation that is anal', that 'anality is greater when the anus is given less attention'. Delvoye's approach is part of a heated debate against this puritanical aesthetic.[75]

Delvoye's art takes both an open-minded view of the world and is self-sufficient; it takes its nourishment from the world and nourishes itself by continually recycling its own products/evacuations. *Cloaca* is part of the great genealogy of 'celibate machines' (in the spirit of Lautréamont, Kafka, Villiers de L'Isle-Adam and, of course, Duchamp). Originally, Delvoye was thinking of making a machine that did not produce anything, a 'machine that serves no purpose', as in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. The fact that in the end his machine produces excrement is clearly decisive. This idea comes from his childhood: 'I always wanted to do a shit machine... you know I saw the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* as a little boy.'[76] Excrement is the undigested remains, the 'accursed share' of a general economy organized around loss and wastage. Delvoye establishes an equivalence between the economy of art (a metaphor for the economy of the world) and animal courtship behaviour. 'Imagine all these sumptuous colours in nature, all these birds that sing for no reason. The females that are going to choose the bird that sings most, or best, are acting like a kind of jury of waste. We are the result of millions and millions of acts of seduction that have had genetic success. And it is all wasted. There are millions of small things that come out of the trees, out of all the flowers. And, as humans, we have between four and six million cells to waste every day.'[77]

Cloaca Faeces, Antwerp, 08.10.2000, 2.15 pm
plexiglas, vacuum-packed faeces, 21 × 4.5 × 17.2 cm

BOGEYS AND BLACKHEADS

Georges Bataille postulated 'two polarized human impulses', which enable us to understand the division of social factors into religious and profane factors: excretion and ownership.[78] One of the major challenges of the twentieth century for the arts is indeed that of the oscillation between *evacuation* and *ownership*. Evacuation, was understood, firstly, during the time of the avant-garde, as the more or less violent dismissal of some subjects (the body, history, sex, etc.) to outside the art *corpus* and, secondly, from the 1970s, as the abandonment of some specific areas (mainly painting and sculpture) in favour of a more generic conception. Ownership, in the sense where a parallel strand of this century's art is concerned with recycling the waste – objects, materials and subjects left behind – from our civilization. Obviously, these two movements are not contradictory. From Cézanne's 'ballsy' painting to Duchamp's 'cloacal' jokes; from Fontana's 'scatological' to Manzoni's *Artist's Shit* and Warhol's *Oxidation Paintings*, artists have continually and regularly returned to their 'own' evacuations, to reclaim, by recycling them, their 'unclean, too unclean' excretions. Of course, the *Cloaca* business is a part of this genealogy, but also of less spectacular works. We think of *Sybille II* (which in its way contributes to Dali's blackhead aesthetic[79]), and also of Delvoye's plans for an equestrian sculpture that he was envisaging creating in 'bogeys' (*Reiterstandbild*, 1995). Delvoye is part of a more general economy (using both art and the body), that of 'small wasted energies' (for which Duchamp imagined a *processor*[80]), these materials, gestures and events that the body *releases*, that can become the motive force for the strongest aesthetic explosions.

ARTWORK IN AN AGE OF STOCK-MARKET COLLAPSE

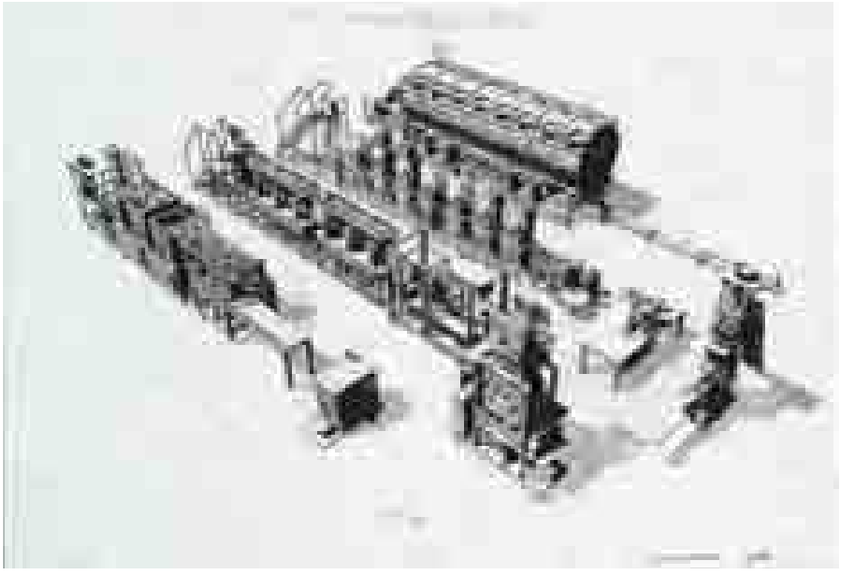
'I announced *Cloaca* as a machine, as a brand name, as a business, as a stage for a new religion even.[81] All that remained was to float it on the stock market.' The project is both ironic and serious. Ironic,

Piero Manzoni, Merda d'artista, 1961

because the farcical dimension is clearly visible, the idea of giving a value to what is considered as the last word in refuse and worthlessness. Serious, because this project forms part of the idea, formalized by Freud, that faeces are the symbolic equivalent of gold. But also, and maybe especially, it is part of an artistic tradition that thought up the circulation of art, money and shit, begun by Duchamp (using his Jarryesque formula '*Arrhe est à art ce que merdre est à merde*' – an untranslatable pun on art, deposits and shit) and developed by Piero Manzoni with his *Artist's Shit* (*Merda d'artista*, 1961), sold by weight following the value of gold.

Since 2001 Delvoye has continually consulted legal experts and barristers to arrive at his ends. In fact he considers that it is easier to collaborate with them than with the other technicians involved in his art. 'With lawyers, there were no problems of competition, like you get with potters, glassmakers, woodcarvers, even tattoo artists, who sooner or later lay claim to their "artistic side".' In the absence of shares, since 'there was not enough liquidity to get *Cloaca* quoted on the stock exchange', Delvoye fell back on convertible bonds that he issued at 3,000 euros each. These bonds earn 1.3% a year. At the end of three years, the purchaser-investor can exchange these bonds for the excrement produced by the machine. At first these 'products' are potted and also valued at 3,000 euros apiece, which obliges the buyer to choose between the hope that these 'pots' will increase in value (and subsequently the risk that they will be devalued) and the security of retrieving his initial investment, barely increased by the rate of remuneration.

These bonds are something of a gamble, like the thirty coupons of *Obligations pour la roulette de Monte Carlo,* bonds issued by Marcel Duchamp in 1924 to finance his experiments at the casino on the Côte d'Azur. In fact, Delvoye humorously comments that the owners of his bonds 'are actually well-



Untitled (preparatory drawing for Cloaca), 2008
pencil and coloured pencil on paper, 27 x 36 cm

advised to hang on to them'. 'I made great efforts on their graphic design, referring both to Duchamp's bonds (which I collect, by the way) and to the famous 1918 Russian treasury bonds which, though they're not worth anything, are very beautiful.'

But this gambling is serious, touching on a dimension of art that is rarely expressed, because it is taboo: the relationship between art and speculation. Delvoye remarked that Duchamp's bonds came several years before the 1929 stock-market crash. When he produced his first bonds in 2003 he realized that this transaction (a bond exchangeable for shit) was an ironic precursor of massive financial disasters. Delvoye even says that he hoped for the stock-market collapse, 'otherwise I would have been forced to admit that my approach was less interesting than Marcel Duchamp's, which only concerned art. Ultimately, my action with *Cloaca* goes beyond a matter of art. I am quite proud of having, in my way, heralded the collapse… And since the "crash of autumn 2008", I have noticed that the new stars of our Western world are not now disc jockeys but economists… Each one comes out with his predictions and we hang on their every word…'

One immediately thinks of Diogenes' project, authorized by the oracle of Delphi, of 'having control over the public currency (*to politikon nomisma*). Which Diogenes interprets as the right to forge money. The forging of money is immediately related to the problem of the ambiguity of the sign, and particularly the linguistic sign, because the *politikon nomisma* can mean customs and conventions as well as money. And, in fact, the actions of the cynic are more spectacular if he falsifies social values than if he simply forges currency.'[82]

Because beyond the 'stock-market' operation, Delvoye actually sees this as a humble – that is to say artistic – sapping of the foundations, both material and symbolic, of the social exchange, based on a set of hypocrisies.

Marcel Duchamps, *Obligations pour la roulette de Monte-Carlo*, 1924

IS WIM DELVOYE A CYNIC?

Given the spectacular, ostentatious and provocative nature of many of Delvoye's works, it is easy to describe them as part of a form of contemporary cynicism. Some journalists around the world have said as much quite specifically, and in doing so they take over from the leagues of virtue, the animal defence committees and others (amateur and professional) who despise contemporary art. Take for example, Jean Clair's description of WD's famous defecating machine shown in his exhibition at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Lyon in summer 2003:

Entitled Cloaca*, it consisted of a pump and various grinding machines that sucked up and 'digested' kitchen waste, the product of restaurants in Lyon, turning it into a brown paste like human excrement. However, contrary to the burlesque presentation in the catalogue where it said 'and it smells, it stinks, it farts', the work gave off no odour. This absence of impact on our sense of smell should have persuaded the artist, who boldly invoked major names from Diogenes to Lucien Febvre, invoked carnival, Lent and the proverbs of Bruegel, that a work that does not smell or fart does not plunge us into the animality of the cloaca which man has barely escaped from, but at most into the sanitized world of the laboratory.*[83]

Seeing a 'pump' in *Cloaca* is a clear admission that the writer had not really looked at this machine, which does not suck up a 'product' but actually *produces* it. Unless our art historian emeritus is alluding to the popular French obscenity *bordel à cul de pompe à merde* (fucking shit-pump) – though this would seem unlikely. And similarly, to say that this machine has no smell he must have deliberately held his nose when he approached the work, which all the curators and directors of galleries that have exhibited it, and the security staff who spend all day with it, specifically agree gives off a foul smell.

After having reviewed a number of works that for him share this contemporary ignominy (Gober, Serrano, Ofili, Gasiorowski, West, etc.), Clair arrives at the crux of his thesis. 'Never has a work of art been as cynical and enjoyed coming so close to scatology, dirt and ordure. And never – which is even more disconcerting – has a work been as cherished by the institutions, as in the heyday of official art. More worrying than their manufacture is the welcome that these objects have received.'[84]

As we can see, the argument suddenly changes register, and targets the institution that supposedly validates the quality of the work. In switching from an artistic criticism to a sociological/institutional judgement, Clair has avoided confronting the work visually and physically (in fact, everything in his arguments refers to matters outside the artwork: the catalogue and the alleged statements by the artist), except in vague approximations.

If Delvoye is not a cynic it is precisely because he never makes fun of the subjects that he confronts in his art. The contemporary cynic is haughty, often sarcastic.[85] He always takes up a comfortable position outside the system that he stigmatizes. Delvoye is totally immerged in the shapes and references that he handles; he is artistically and financially committed to the design of his works, and always physically involved in their construction. In

this case, his recent enthusiasm for nineteenth-century academic nude sculpture has nothing ironic or strategic about it; it reflects a real and deliberate appreciation.

I am [...] *fascinated at the moment by the nineteenth-century bronzes of Mathurin Moreau and Clodion, nude bronzes, rather Baroque and Rococo, which were enormously successful. They were the Murakamis of their time. I collect them and I like the fact that they have been forgotten. Their sculptures put what I am doing into perspective, which makes me humble and curbs any pride, any* hubris *that I might have. I am also interested in them because this nude sculpture is associated with a neo-neo-neo-Gothic fashionable in Flanders in the nineteenth century*.[86]

At the other extreme of the critical landscape, Michel Onfray considers Delvoye a *cynical artist*, in the earliest and oldest sense of the term.[87] It is true that this hypothesis operates in favour of Delvoye who in fact refers directly to the thinking of the most famous Cynic of antiquity, Diogenes, one of the great opponents of Platonic idealism, who called himself 'a dog'.[88] (The philosopher, with biting irony, once explained to Alexander who had asked him the reason for this strange title: 'Because I nuzzle the kind, bark at the greedy and bite scoundrels.'[89]). Delvoye likes to recall, in his own way, the famous episode in which, according to some hagiographers of this secular saint, he confronted Plato. 'Diogenes is very important for me because he is a philosopher who never wrote anything down. Diogenes doesn't believe in "ideas" or "souls", he only believes in life. And his life became his philosophy. When Plato defined man as "a two-legged animal without feathers", Diogenes brandished a plucked chicken in the Athens marketplace shouting: "Here's Plato's man!"'

It was, no doubt, in homage to the spirit of Diogenes that in 2000 Delvoye developed a project to have the 'image' of his face grafted onto a dog with the help of aesthetic surgery. Here the artist was crossing an 'ethical barrier'.

People make fun of pigs but love dogs... For me there's no real difference between them. I make no hierarchy between animals. In the end I listened to the people who were offended by this, and I didn't carry the project through... This is unusual with me. This wasn't for financial reasons, it wouldn't have cost much, but for moral reasons. There remain four drawings that I made in collaboration with the surgeon. I enjoyed taking on the jargon of aesthetic surgery, very precise but incomprehensible, and mixing it in with my own notations... I did these drawings to console myself in a way for not having the courage to carry it through.

Beyond any crossing of the species barrier that this piece might imply, the project plays on a double metamorphosis: the classic one of Delvoye *becoming a dog*; and the more uncomfortable one of the dog *becoming Delvoye*... Because in this instance not only are we seeing a 'portrait of the artist as a dog', but also a 'portrait of the dog as an artist'. Here Delvoye rediscovers the *nonsensical* logic of Alice in Wonderland, whose body goes 'both ways' at the same time (larger and smaller), but never the 'right way'.[90] Delvoye is not an artist of the right way, any more than he is an artist of good taste. But he is not an artist of the 'wrong way' nor of 'bad taste' either, because his work throws into turmoil

Gate, 2009
laser-cut stainless steel, 220 × 80 × 90 cm

Untitled (Planning Midface Lengthening), 2000
collage, pencil, watercolour, 70 x 50 cm

the most conventional polarities and dichotomies, catapulting them one against – and with – the other, in a joyous amalgam.

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Picasso claimed that vulgarity was an artistic driving force and stated that he wanted to 'paint with bad language'; Picabia wanted his painting to be 'idiotic' and 'likely to appeal to his cleaner'; Duchamp was a past master in raunchy and scatological jokes ('My mother loved the smell of my shit'). It fell to Delvoye to be a *slangy artist*, in all the senses, both literal and figurative, of the term. Although, conventionally, slang is the coded language of the dangerous classes (beggars, rogues, thieves, traffickers and criminals of all stripes), each subculture has its own slang. Traditionally, using slang is a way of getting round social taboos, using an enigmatic language understood only by the 'initiated' and impenetrable to 'outsiders'. This language uses neologisms or coarse words instead of words in common usage. There has been much discussion about the relationship between the slang used by the medieval Masonic Guilds of the Middle Ages and the words '*art gothique*' and '*argotique*'.[91] As we have seen, Delvoye gives great importance to the jargon of the bodies that collaborate in making his works.

Slang is not concerned exclusively with verbal language. There is also a visual slang of which coats of arms and tattooing are the two extremes; historically each refers to a secret language.

Coats of arms can be compared, although in a completely different medium, to tattoos, which is also a language made up of signs and images, and where, in the same way, their arrangement has a meaning. Both are incomprehensible for the uninitiated, and both can be read only if we know the code. [...] *Although they may belong to a 'family' or a 'house', they tell their own story, proclaim their distinctive qualities, acquired or strongly affirmed, choose for themselves a striking motto (with occasionally a pun in the form of a rebus) and, in a way that is often boastful, undertake a sort of declaration of war or claim to power. In short, they 'make a show of arms' by 'wearing their (he)art on their sleeve'.*[92]

The fact that Delvoye makes great use of those two visual disciplines is of course a relevant factor, even if those languages have nowadays become relatively esoteric. Tattoos are now fashionable, but they still retain an energy (combining both vanity and pride) related to their marginal origins. The wrought-iron gate that adorns the entrance to his workshop in Ghent can, in this light, be considered as the proud symbol of the artist's coat of arms. On it are the various parodied logos of his company *Cloaca*, along with two mottos: one borrowed from Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer: *Ars gratia artis* (Art for art's sake); the other from Dante's *Inferno*: *Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate* (Abandon all hope, you who enter here).

Alice Becker-Ho has demonstrated the ambiguity that historically lurked within the question of slang. Thieves' cant and underworld slang, in her view, paradoxically retain an energy that belongs to the feudal world of chivalry.

These classes seen as dangerous have only escaped from a society in course of creation [she refers to the transition from feudalism to the merchant middle classes] – *all of*

whose vulgarity they would crudely express – in order to defend and maintain in their own way the values and practices of another society that was becoming extinct [...] *and of which they retain a certain lyricism. In this way, by attachment to the warrior categories (and their nomadic past), they have conserved the arms, the concepts and the vocabulary, as a different way of combating the new reality of the dominant state*.[93]

The same applies to Delvoye who unceremoniously roughs up the great oppositions and dichotomies of our age: art and craft, masculine and feminine, socialism and liberalism, local and universal... We have to acknowledge Wim Delvoye's heraldry of slang (*slangaldry*?) in which he uses an apparently recognizable language (blending the triviality of our age with 'noble' references) to assert all the more strongly his *sovereignty* as an artist, and also simply as an individual.

NOTES

1 Wim Delvoye interviewed by Nicolas Bourriaud, *Bing 05*, May–September 2007, Galerie Perrotin, Paris. Statements by WD that are not referenced in the notes are taken from the author's interviews with the artist.

2 Remark attributed to Diogenes when he was criticized for visiting brothels.

3 See also Wim Delvoye, *Oeuvres sur papier 1968-2004*, galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris, 2004.

4 WD interviewed by Guy Duplat, *La Libre Belgique*, 7 October 2008.

5 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

6 Ibid.

7 WD/Guy Duplat interview.

8 See Jean-Pierre Jouve, Claude Prévost and Clovis Prévost, *Le palais idéal du facteur Cheval: Quand le songe devient la réalité*, Éditions du Moniteur, Paris 1981.

9 WD/Guy Duplat interview.

10 WD interviewed by Nestor Perkal, in *Wim Delvoye*, Musée départemental de Rochechouart, 1995, p. 29.

11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid., p. 23.

13 Ibid., p. 23.

14 Ibid., p. 23.

15 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

16 WD/Nestor Perkal interview, p. 31.

17 It is difficult to not interpret these two objects as allusions to Marcel Duchamp's snow shovel and the example he cited for the '*readymade réciproque*': 'to use a Rembrandt as an ironing board'.

18 Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde (Poétique IV)*, Gallimard, Paris 1997.

19 See Bernard Marcadé, *Laisser pisser le mérinos: La paresse de Marcel Duchamp*, L'Échoppe, Paris 2006.

20 Marcel Duchamp interviewed by George Heard Hamilton, 1959, in *Duchamp: passim: a Marcel Duchamp anthology*, Gordon and Breach Arts International, New York 1994, p. 76.

21 Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Sidney, Harriet and Carroll Janis (unpublished, for the BBC, 1953).

22 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

23 Ibid.

24 WD/Nestor Perkal interview, p. 23.

25 Ibid., p. 24.

26 Ibid., p. 24.

27 Adolf Loos, *Ornament und Verbrechen* (1908); reprinted in Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell, Ariadne Press, California 1998.

28 See WD/Nestor Perkal interview, p. 28: 'Many people talk about the surrealist side of Belgian art, its ironic side. But what people never talk about is its powerlessness. It's like Panamarenko: he wants to fly, but he can't.'

29 Ibid., p. 28.

30 Ibid., p. 23.

31 See Luc Derycke, 'A Conversation with Wim Delvoye' in *Wim Delvoye: Volume 1*, Delfina/Luc Derycke, London and Ghent 1996, p. 81.

32 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1940) in Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley, Penguin, London 1999, p. 74.

33 Quoted in Wim Delvoye, *Atlas*, FRAC des Pays de la Loire/Michel Baverey Editeur, Nantes and Paris 1999; see Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph: Including the Prose Fictions from 'The Maker'*, trans. Andrew Hurley, Penguin Classics, London 2000, p. 183.

34 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (1980), published in English as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 1987, pp. 13–14.

35 WD quoted by Gilles A. Tiberghien, 'Une autre manière de faire des mondes' in *Wim Delvoye: Fabrica*, exh. cat., Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecchi/Rectapublishers, Prato and Ghent 2003.

36 Ibid.

37 WD interviewed by Geneviève Breerette, *Le Monde*, 26 August 2005.

38 On this point, see Catherine de Smet, 'Logos' in *Wim Delvoye: Fabrica*, exh. cat., Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecchi/Rectapublishers, Prato and Ghent 2003.

39 See Stijn Huijts, 'UBN 2408356 or Marcel's Song' in Louis Camnitzer, *Wim Delvoye: Pigs*, Cultureel Ambassadeur van Vlaanderen, Brussels 1999.

40 Kisa Lala, 'The audacious exploits of Wim Delvoye: an interview with the artist', *Spread Artculture*, 12 April 2011.

41 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

42 Ibid.

43 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.' (Matthew 21:31).

44 WD interviewed by Guy Duplat, *La Libre Belgique*, 16 October 2010.

45 See Pierre Sterckx, *Le Devenir-cochon de Wim Delvoye*, La Lettre volée, Brussels 2007.

46 See the WD/Geneviève Breerette interview: 'I am unbiased. I am Belgian, I am Flemish. I have nothing to gain by taking sides. I have no opinion. Moreover, what kind of opinion can one have about something that is present, everywhere, like God: our economy. Everything is economy. Perhaps it was always this way.'

47 See the WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview: 'I have a very Marxist interpretation of art, it is impossible for me to look at a painting without thinking of the social conflict that engendered it.' Also see note 45.

48 Robert Enright, 'Vim & Vigour: An Interview with Wim Delvoye', *Border Crossings*, 96 (1 November 2005).

49 Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2002.

50 WD/Geneviève Breerette interview.

51 Torquato Accetto, *Della dissimulazione onesta* (1641), published in French as *De l'honnête dissimulation*, ed. Salvatore S. Nigro, trans. Mireille Blanc-Sanchez, Verdier, Lagrasse 1999.

52 Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528), published in English as *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Daniel Javitch, trans. Charles S. Singleton, W. W. Norton & Company, New York 2002.

53 Baltasar Gracián, *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (1647), published in English as *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, trans. Christopher Maurer, Doubleday, New York 1991.

54 Delvoye's approach is radically different from the simulationist movement that was very much in vogue in the US in the 1980s (as practised by Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, among others), which consisted of producing works that played at being barely altered copies of pre-existing images and objects.

55 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (1975), Harcourt, Orlando 1977, p. 7.

56 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, Vintage, New York 1990, p. 159.

57 Ibid., p. 49.

58 WD/Geneviève Breerette interview.

59 Which does not necessarily mean that he refutes all psychological approaches coming 'from the outside'.

60 Nietzsche denounced this viewpoint in his preface to *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*, 1882/7): ' We now know something too well, we men of knowledge: oh, how well we are now learning to forget and *not* know, as artists! And as to our future, we are not likely to be found again in the tracks of those Egyptian youths who at night make the temples unsafe, embrace statues, and would fain unveil, uncover, and put in clear light, everything which for good reasons is kept concealed. No, we have got disgusted with this bad taste, this will to truth, to "truth at all costs", this youthful madness in the love of truth: we are now too experienced, too serious, too joyful, too singed, too profound for that… We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veil is withdrawn from it: we have lived long enough to believe this. At present we regard it as a matter of propriety not to be anxious either to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and "know" everything.' (This translation: *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Dr Oscar Levy, trans. Thomas Common, The Macmillan Company, New York 1924, vol. 10, p. 9.)

61 In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both the popular press and cartoonists seized on the scientific discovery of x-rays; the rays' ability to pass through women's clothing and thereby effect a surreptitious undressing was not lost on Duchamp and his *Large Glass*.

62 Michel Onfray speaks of 'the oxymoric of Wim Delvoye'. See note 62.

63 See Jean-Pierre Criqui, 'Sept propos sur le sexe, les rayons x et les cochons' in *Wim Delvoye*, exh. cat., Galerie Guy Bärtschi, Geneva 2008.

64 Digestion is a process that takes place in the digestive tract, during which food is transformed into nutrients that can be directly assimilated by the cells and that are absorbed into the blood after passing through the intestines. This transformation is made possible by digestive secretions and by the mechanical processes caused by the movement of the digestive tract.

65 WD/Geneviève Breerette interview.

66 WD/Geneviève Breerette interview.

67 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

68 WD interviewed by Josefina Ayerza, *Lacanian Ink*, 19: http://www.lacan.com/frameXIX7.htm.

69 WD/Geneviève Breerette interview.

70 WD/Josefina Ayerza interview.

71 See Josefina Ayerza, 'Abstracts of a conversation with the artist' in *Wim Delvoye*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 103: 'I always was fascinated that heroes never had to go to the toilet. As a kid I couldn't understand that: how could they not go to the toilet? I never saw James Bond going to the toilet while he was jumping; he's done everything except going to the toilet. He would fly helicopters and jump on fast trains… but he never went to the toilet.'

72 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes* in *Le Gai Savoir*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, trans. Pierre Klossowski, Gallimard, Paris 1967, p. 439: 'Bad smell, a prejudice. All eliminations repugnant – but why? Because dirty? Why dirty? They are harmless. Saliva, mucous secretions, sweat, sperm, urine, faecal matter, scabs, sloughed skin, snot, etc. It's misplaced! – The disgust grows in proportion to refinement. Any operations relating to them also disgusting. – Disgust understood as an urge to vomit: eliminations provoke an urge to eliminate undigested food (*like a poison*). Judgement made from the viewpoint of *edibility*: I can't swallow that! The basic judgement of morality.'

73 See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), P.U.F., Paris, 1971, pp. 49–50.

74 See Dominique Laporte, *Histoire de la merde*, Christian Bourgois Editeur, Paris 1978, p. 41: 'The primacy of the visible still requires the kitchen as its backdrop. Anything that smells muddles vision. But whatever is smelled, whatever is taken away from the visible sphere, sent to the hidden register, to the junk room, far from simply disappearing, or fading away, is called on to become a positive part of a visible economy. Suppression leads to the return of what has been suppressed.'

75 WD's 'scatological' works, in the same way as those of Paul McCarthy & Mike Kelley, Robert Gober or Gilbert & George, are taking part in an explicit critique of contemporary aesthetic puritanism.

76 WD/Kisa Lala interview.

77 WD/Nicolas Bourriaud interview.

78 See Georges Bataille, 'The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade' in *Œuvres Complètes II*, Gallimard, Paris 1970.

79 See Salvador Dali, 'Blackheads of space' in 'Aerodynamic Apparitions of "Being-Objects"' in *Oui 2: L'Archangelisme scientifique*, ed. Robert Descharnes, Éditions Denoël, Paris, 1971, p. 44: 'Understand that this apparent ultra-prosaic cleaning is nothing other than the ultra-concrete personalization of that which is most vital and lyrical in contemporary scientific and artistic moral thought.'

80 See Marcel Duchamp, *Notes*, Flammarion, Paris 2008, pp. 115–17: 'a processor designed to use the slight, wasted energies such as: too much pressure on an electric switch, exhaling tobacco smoke, hair, body hair and nails growing, letting urine or excrement fall, movements of

fear, astonishment, boredom, anger or laughter, tears falling, demonstrative gestures of hands or feet, nervous tics; forbidding glances; dropping the arms down, stretching, yawning, sneezing, ordinary spitting or spitting blood, vomiting, ejaculation, unruly hair, tufts of hair, the sound of nose-blowing, snoring, fainting, whistling, singing, sighs, etc.'

81 See WD interviewed by Guy Duplat, *La Libre Belgique*, 7 November 2007: 'I'm thinking of creating a religion, a religion kit like you get design kits, with its churches, hymns and liturgy. I'll put my *Cloaca* machines and my tattooed pigs in there. But it's dangerous to create a religion in China. In this country, if you pronounce the word religion or cult on the telephone or internet, they cut you off.'

82 Michèle Clément, *Le Cynisme à la Renaissance: D'Erasme à Montaigne*, Droz, Geneva 2005, p. 72.

83 Jean Clair, *De Immundo*, Galilée, Paris 2004, pp. 26–7.

84 Ibid., p. 29.

85 We can hear the Anglo-Saxon accents of modern contemporary cynicism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word 'cynic' as 'A person disposed to rail or find fault; now usually: One who shows a disposition to disbelieve in the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions, and is wont to express this by sneers and sarcasms [...]'.

86 WD/Guy Duplat interview.

87 See Michel Onfray, in the exhibition catalogue *Eldorado*, Mudam, Luxembourg 2006: 'The oxymoron of Wim Delvoye makes him a cynical artist, in the mould of Diogenes. To thwart the vulgar cynicism of our age – vulgar because it is liberal, commercial, consumerist, nihilist and brainless – philosophical cynicism proposes an antidote. Reflecting on the difference in degree, not in kind, between men and animals; thinking about the question of the forbidden in the Muslim religion; broaching the question of the magnificent potential of biotechnology; reconsidering anew Spinoza's question: what can the body do?; anchoring sexuality firmly in the life urge; doing all this in the style of a burst of Nietzschean laughter: that is something to be truly glad of!'

88 *Kunismos* (the Greek word from which 'cynicism' is derived) means 'dogginess'.

89 Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Vol. II, trans. Robert Drew Hicks (1925), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1972.

90 See Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1969, p. 95: 'Which way, which way? asks Alice. The question has no answer, because the nature of a way is that it has no direction, there is no "right way" but always both at once, in an infinitely subdivided and stretched past-future.'

91 This pun on the French words meaning 'Gothic art' and 'slang' has fed the most fantastic interpretations and if we indulge in it here it is, of course, because this pun allies so closely with WD's works and also to pay a kind of homage to the free spirit Raymond Hains, who by all appearances had a field day here. See, for example, Fulcanelli, *Le Mystère des cathédrales* (1926), Jean-Jacques Pauvert, Paris 1965, pp. 55–6: 'in our view, *art gothique* is a variant spelling of *argotique*. They are perfect homophones, in accordance with the *phonetic law* that in all languages and regardless of spelling, governs the traditional cabal. A cathedral is a work of *gothic art* – an *argotic work*. Now, dictionaries define *argot* as a "language particular to all those who want to communicate their ideas without being understood by those around them". In other words, a *spoken cabal*. The speakers of this argot are hermetic descendants of the *argo-nauts* who sailed aboard the *Argo*, speaking their *argotic tongue* – our *slang* – sailing off to the happy shores of Colchos to win the famous Golden Fleece. [...] All the Initiates spoke in *argot*, as did the beggars in the *Cour des Miracles* – the poet Villon at their head – and the medieval Freemasons, 'God's house builders', who built the *gothic* masterpieces which we still admire today.'

92 Alice Becker-Ho, *Du Jargon: Héritier en Bastardie*, Gallimard, Paris 2002, pp. 94–5.

93 Ibid., pp. 12–13.