



TYPE: Article

Title: The Work of Art in the Age of Alien Reproduction

Author(s): Gregg Lambert, Jorge Sicre

Source: Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (JCRT)

Published by: Whitestone Publications

Stable URL: <https://jcrt.org/archives/01.1/lambert/>

DOI (newest version): [10.17613/61cgt-9hh87](https://doi.org/10.17613/61cgt-9hh87)

Copyright © held by the author(s). All rights reserved. This text may be used and shared in accordance with the fair-use provisions of U.S. copyright law. Any use of this text in other ways requires the consent of the author and the publisher, the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, and must cite publication in this journal.

<https://jcrt.org/copyright/>



Lambert - The Work of Art - JCRT 1.1

Gregg Lambert

Syracuse University

Accompanied by reproductions of original artwork by Jorgé Sicre. Used with permission from the artist. All images © Copyright Jorgé Sicre

After the brief period of a century's reorientation, the weight of accumulated endeavors of global memory, endeavors caused by the attraction of memory itself, conceal the exact meaning of evolution and now returns us to the point where we suddenly recognize ourselves as the immediate predecessors of the painters of Lascaux.

--A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Le Geste et la Parole*

Kant and Extra-Terrestrials

In 1755, nearly thirty years before *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant published a little known treatise on Newtonian mechanics and cosmology called *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*.¹ It represents one of those oddities one runs into now and then, like finding an old photograph of oneself in the embarrassing tuxedo before a senior prom. It portrays the immature mind of the philosopher and demonstrates the tenor and range of any number of academic philosophers of Kant's time all engaged in heady explorations of the universe guided by the principles first charted by Newton. (The subtitle reads "*An Essay on the Constitution and Mechanical Origin of the Entire Cosmic-Edifice treated according to Newtonian Principles.*") Odder still is the appendix of the third part, "Of the Inhabitants of the Planets" (pp. 183ff) where, as the title promises, Kant takes up a philosophical discussion of extra-terrestrials. Of course, no "Theory of the Heavens" worth its weight in star-dust would leave out a section that speculates on the physical probability of other life forms than the human species, and here we already see the inclination toward what the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze would later call Kant's "Copernican turn."² However, Kant's exposition is not so subtle and scientific concerning the existence of extra-terrestrials. Their existence, for Kant, is proven by mathematical certainty, and his discussion would have a closer resemblance today to those Web pages that contain ample information and data concerning the different species of extra-terrestrial beings, along with de-classified photos of the pyramids on Mars and instructions on how to build your own tele-porter or flying saucer. "At any rate," Kant declares, "most planets are certainly inhabited, and those that are not, will be one day" (Kant 186).

which live in the forests on the head of a beggar, had long since considered their location an immense ball, and themselves as the masterpiece of creation, when one of them, endowed by Heaven with a more refined spirit, a small Fontenelle of his species, unexpectedly became familiar with the head of a nobleman. Immediately he called together all the witty heads of his quarters and told them with excitement: 'We are not the only living beings in nature; see, there, that new land, more lice live there' " (Kant 185)

Because, according to its belief, nature is infinitely well adapted to its existence, the insect holds as irrelevant the entire remainder of nature which does not imply a direct

¹Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, trans. Stanley L. Jaki (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981).

²Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

reference to its species as the center of her aims. Man, standing immensely removed from the uppermost ranks of beings, is indeed bold to flatter himself in a similar delusion about the necessity of his own existence. (Kant 185)

If one wants to look for impediments, which keep human nature in such deep abasement, it will be found in the crudeness of matter into which his spiritual part is sunk, in the unbending of the fibers, and in the sluggishness and immobility of the fluids which should obey its stirrings. The nerves and brain deliver to him only gross and unclear concepts, and because he cannot counterbalance in the interior of his thinking ability the impact of sensory impressions with sufficiently powerful ideas, he will be carried away by his passions, confused and overwhelmed by the turmoil of the elements that maintain his bodily machine. (Kant 187)

That the excellence of thinking natures, the promptness of their reflections, the clarity and vivacity of the notions that come to them through external impression, together with their ability to put them together, finally also in the skill of their actual use, in short, the whole range of their perfection, stands under a certain rule, according to which these natures become more excellent and perfect in proportion to the distance of their habitats from the sun. (Kant 189'emphasis in original)

The Extra-Terrestrial in Modern Art

The Artist in the Caves of L.A.: Jorg' Sicre and the Extra-Terrestrial

"Ahura Mazda", by Jorge Sicre

"Sphinx of the East and the West", by Jorge Sicre

All Images ©Copyright Jorge Sicre

"Magus", by Jorge Sicre

©Copyright Jorge Sicre

"Encounter", by Jorge Sicre

"Horus and Isis", by Jorge Sicre

"Martyrs", by Jorge Sicre

All Images ©Copyright Jorge Sicre

"Tree of Knowledge", by Jorge Sicre

©Copyright Jorge Sicre

"Riverhood", by Jorge Sicre

©Copyright Jorge Sicre

"Portrait of a Western Man", by Jorge Sicre

©Copyright Jorge Sicre

-
3. In the introductory part of his exposition, Kant confronts the "sheer madness" of those that deny this fact with a charge of hubris that is illustrated with an anecdote taken from a certain "witty writer from The Hague"³: "Those creatures," says he,
 4. By analogy, Kant refutes Man's comparative certainty concerning his own state of perfection in the universe.

³I have not been able to locate the source of Kant's citation.

5. Given Kant's certainty concerning the ontological question of extra-terrestrials, the only question for him to speculate about is the organization of their perception-consciousness system, since their "manner of operating and feeling is bound to the condition of the material with which they are connected and also depends on the intensity of impressions which the world evokes in them according to the properties of the relation of their habitat to the center of attraction and heat [i.e., the sun]" (Kant 184). In other words, Kant's primary concern is mechanical and concerns how the mind and body are linked or coordinated in extra-terrestrial life-forms; how perception, feeling, and representation (sensation_) are variously "co-ordinated" within different environments. Kant's early focus in this text already foregrounds the primary thesis that will appear in *The Critique of Pure Reason* concerning the distinction between the matter and the form of sensibility, and the divisions between the external senses (which are conditioned by objects in space), and the "subjective" (or inner senses) senses which are determined by their existence in time, by the "affect" of affection (*Gem't*) itself. Thus, according to the later critical thesis, which we can already see a primitive sketch of here, sensibility defined as the "character of receptivity" is dependent for its "quality" (its *quale*, which can be defined as its intensity or reality) on the way in which the subject is capable of being modified by the object in general_. Consequently, in the speculations concerning the corporeality of extra-terrestrials, we have a vivid illustration concerning how the differential characteristics of the "object in general" (the manifold, or the a priori intuitions of space and time) would at the same time create different "co-ordinations" of the faculties that are dependent on the former for their subjective and objective unity.
6. Following Kant's example, let us simply concede to the existence of extra-terrestrials. Accepting this fact, a question would eventually concern us: what is an extra-terrestrial art? This amounts to the same question Kant first raised concerning the organization of the faculties in different material universes. In attempting a description, I will have to be rather threadbare in sketching its possible axioms or its principles of composition (material, aesthetic, political, etc.), since I cannot refer to any manifesto, any monograph, any existing group, or colony. It is not "a movement" in the strictest sense. Consequently, the conception of such an art must remain a kind of *presentiment*, without demonstration *here and now*, in part, due to the current limitations of sensibility among terrestrials, the so-called "human beings." The limit of the sensible conditions which may today prevent the reception of an extra-terrestrial art can be represented by factors that are temporal, material, or cultural, and even bio-physical and organic (i.e., the limits imposed on human reception by the organic coordination of the "senses," what Kant called the *sentendum*). These are the three principle causes of the insensible which roughly approximate the conditions or limitations imposed by time (past, future and otherwise), place (culture and experience), and form (human or in-human).
7. "In short," Kant writes, "the body is indispensable for thinking" (Kant 186). Consequently, since the discussion of extra-terrestrials is itself part of a larger "theory of the heavens" according to Newtonian principles, the question of gravity will play a paramount role in determining the "matter of sensibility" which, in turn, will determine the quality of perception-consciousness that belongs to different worlds. At this point of his exposition, Kant adapts the ancient traditions of the theory of angels and spiritology to a Newtonian cosmology; the planets further from the sun where gravity and heat are less a factor are likely to produce the condition for a finer sensibility and for sublime thought among the inhabitants. Thus, Jupiter and Venus are perhaps at an adequate distance to support a degree of perfection that is impossible on Earth or Mars. Aside from the surprise of this theory, it is significant to note that it provides a scientific rationale for what I referred to above as Kant's "Copernican turn." There is even a certain prejudice detectable in Kant's preference for the colder planets, which

could echo his preference for his own native K'nigsberg; however, the major significance here is the reversal of heliocentrism that has been dominant in the philosophical tradition since the pre-Socratics, at least certainly, since Plato first linked the system of ideas to an invisible sun that represents a higher universe that governs the universe of appearances.

8. Taking up the first limitation, time is a strictly human perspective and we are creatures stuck to our own proximity, the present, which extends like a small islet into the whole of time. By way of an analogy, the Goldfish swimming next to me at this moment has a conscious duration of 8 seconds, so by the time he circumnavigates his small aquarium, he arrives to the same point in space, although temporally all traces of his previous circuit just 8 seconds before have been vanquished and he arrives to perceive a new bouquet of plastic kelp, and a new underwater cottage with the red door and the turning windmill. When I first learned this I realized that my Goldfish could be swimming in Lake Michigan and he wouldn't perceive the difference, and I imagine that the duration of the human being is structurally identical—it is simply a question of a different volume. Therefore, what is not perceived *here and now*, in the present, is conceived of as being *then and there*, in a future present or, indirectly, in a past present; neither of which can extend beyond the human dimension. However, in order to signal the perspective of the extra-terrestrial, we might have to concede that what is undemonstrable *here and now* may neither belong to another time sunken deep in memory (in the past) nor still to come (the future), but rather to the conditions of an experience whose roots are planted in the soil of another world, virtual and yet still impossible with our own. This dimension might refer us a present that is "Other," which cannot be defined in terms of the present we inhabit, but rather in terms of the cultural and material conditions that belong to another "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*), to employ Husserl's term, which forbid its inclusion in another world without the necessary occasion of violence.
9. Given this virulent "anti-heliocentrism" which is present in Kant's description of the relation between the planets and the degree of perfection that is obtainable for each one, how do things fair with man? Not too well, I'm afraid. "He would even become the most despicable at least in the eyes of true wisdom, if the hope for future life did not elevate him, and if a period of complete development were not in store for the faculties enclosed in him" (Kant 187). Thus,
10. Let us extend our discussion of the first limitation a bit further, since time itself will constitute the principle obstacle to our conception of art from an extra-terrestrial perspective. This is true particularly because of the economic and material determinations of time (i.e. the time of wages, of capital) upon the work of art, which transforms this *work* into a cultural value, or an ornament of class and wealth. On the one hand, these determinations have been responsible for producing a kind of vertigo of bad consciousness in the artist. Hence, the gesture of *painting a canvas* itself has been opened to scrutiny by those who assert that it has a very culturally and class determined significance. The very gesture of the painter is already a sign of culture and presupposes a leisurely duration, and therefore, expressing the possibilities of a certain social class and economic property, and limiting the formal range of perception, restricts the composition and combination of materials, and restraints the body (the body must be stationary and up-right, the hand closed around the brush like a tool). Thus, the modern painter belongs to a certain constellation of forces which determine the *work* of art in its material analogy to economic activity—even though art functions at this stage as its shadowy and unreal double. The work of art opposes the product of commerce with the infinity of an *oeuvre*, and the definite worth of labor with the eternal fluctuations of fame and obscurity of the artist's personality. Art, at this stage—and painting, in particular—redeems a vulgar determination of time by offering a metaphor of labor in the pathos of the artist's relation to a long and indefinite time of "work"; in the suffering of artist, the public finds an

infinite (and potentially “invaluable”) source of satisfaction, which is not without its hint of cruelty. The artist bends over the work of art, and the public finds this kind of work inscrutable and selfishly motivated (“and you call that work?”); therefore, the pain of anonymity and non-recognition that more often than not grip the artist and causes him or her to suffer appears as a strange form of justice from the public’s perception.

11. By contrast, the inhabitants of Jupiter are composed of much lighter and more volatile matter, “so that the weak excitation which the sun can produce at that distance may move those bodily machines as powerfully as it performs this function in the lower regions closer to the sun” (Kant 189). This leads Kant to his first major conclusion concerning the difference that the location in space (i.e., the distance from the sun) has on the “matter of sensibility” of extra-terrestrials:
12. On the other hand, the gesture of “painting a canvas” in the modern period has given way to “tearing or ripping,” “pasting,” “spraying,” which are activities that belong to a different theory of perception which can only take place in a violence performed upon the perceived, or “the consciousness of the given.” Again, let me emphasize that the sensibility that the art-work embodies presupposes a certain violence; the perception of the art-work cannot exist alongside the common and quotidian perceptions that constitute the everyday; rather it enters into battle with the latter in order to destroy and to “work-over” (similar to the function of the dream-work) the stock and clichéd sensibility. In the modern period, the “work” of art (and of the artist, in particular) no longer finds a resemblance with the duration of economic activity, but rather with the characteristic operations performed by dream work, where the visible undergoes a series of *distortions* in order to bear the perceived to the level of consciousness. In other words, all perception must be “cut-up,” “ripped open,” “destroyed and then re-constructed.” The difference between this determination of the art-work and the earlier one is that the material of perception is no longer offered a “natural” or independent perspective that the artist simply amplifies and resonates with in order to transform it into a style of a personality or genius. Rather, the material of perception is already an interpretation of a dominant perspective that organizes and directs the senses and assembles the range of materials for expression (a dominant perspective, moreover, which uses the aesthetic categories of the “beautiful,” “the pleasant,” “the harmonious,” as a means an ideological end). The formal procedures available to the artist at this stage are as infinite as materials themselves; each material component has a certain range of formal properties (density, color, texture, pliability, etc.) that determines its possibilities for expression. For example, paper has certain possibilities that are absent in plaster, but present in cloth; ink expresses certain attributes (the line, for instance), which metamorphoses in pastel or watercolors, and even more in collage, mixed media, or metal.
13. By means of this proliferation of new materials and their corresponding techniques, certain artists and works of modern art seek to liberate themselves from this economic determination of time toward which they bear an understandable allergic reaction. Thus, the work of art is not held to the limits of what is *here and now*. Rather, it creates; it busies itself with what the German painter Paul Klee called the *Zwischennwelt*, a “world between.” Art occupies this intermediate zone—where it intercepts and mediates, even translates experience between heteronomous conditions, communities, even times of reception and entire worlds. This heteronomy with which art is said to occupy itself—in order to draw from it its materials, its textures, its color, its figures—bears the conditions of an object in which we recognize something new. Of course, “We Moderns” understand this: *Art does not imitate!* This has even become the categorical imperative’i.e., “*make it new!*” of much of what we call modern art, which forms the generic trait of classification in the taxonomy of new forms. From here on, art

does not take what is merely demonstrable for its limit, but constantly seeks a presentiment of other conditions and new materials, and finer sensibilities of reception in its spectators or “public”; even though this has led to a more and more “privatized public” composed of the artists themselves, as well as other art professionals or specialists (the critic, the curator, the dealer, the corporate consumer).

14. The second major comparison that Kant makes concerns time, “the form of interiority for the subject” which is conditioned by the quicker rotation of the planets on their axes, and consequently, the briefer alternation between day and night. “We know that the need for time is something relative [. . .] Therefore, the same time, which for one creature is just a moment, may very well be for another a very long duration in which a long sequence of changes unfolds through a fast chain of efficiency” (Kant 191).
15. This last aspect bears an important reflection upon the possible ethical and religious significance of the figure of extra-terrestrial in modern art, and it is from this angle of reflection that I’d like to approach the example of the extra-terrestrial in the painting of the Cuban-American artist, Jorg’ Sicre. Sicre’s painting explicitly takes up the themes and figures of the extra-terrestrial and combines them with indigenous and cultural legends from Native-American and Mezo-American traditions in particular, and this has the effect of creating a hybrid of both primitive and modern expressions of eschatological desire. This hybridity will be discussed in terms of its ethical implications; therefore, in asking the question, “What or who is the extra-terrestrial?,” in our response we cannot be certain, except that it is both the subject of Sicre’s art as well as the community to which this art is addressed.
16. And yet, because this strikes us as nothing new, the form of “new” itself has recently been relegated to the status of a cliché—to a timelessness where art becomes undone between times, to a place that echoes out of bounds with any effective form of novelty, and to a formlessness where the art-work dissipates into a rarefied and cerebral atmosphere of self-consumption. This has led to the melancholy of much of modern art. (As a result, the shadow of its novelty, or “modernity,” falls across the blank and expressionless gaze of the spectator who, like Eurydice, grows tired of the same old song and heads for the door of the underworld, vowing to spend an eternity in hell, rather than attend another opening at the MOCA.)⁴ Is it that the event of something new has become stale? Or rather, is it that what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called our *sentendum*, our feeling for the new itself is a category of a tradition that is already in the process of evolving and growing old? Therefore, what we have called a feeling of *presentiment* can only take place when it is subtracted from the aesthetic and aesthetic-political programs that have sought to represent it (e.g. Surrealism, Dadaism, Cubism, etc.). These programs have only discerned its form early and placed their signature upon it in the manner of Duchamp. And it may now be the place to question whether the “new” also bears the signature of a culture that seeks to establish and authorize it as a distinct “spiritual property” that expresses the *genie* of a nation or a race. (After all, it is not simply by chance that the so-called primitive painters at Lascaux were also primitive Europeans and, first and foremost, primitive French.)
17. But what conclusions can we draw from this, in some ways, very 18th century piece of science fiction? On the one hand, Kant seems to hold out for the possibility that as human nature moves further from the sun, by some form of migration that he would later describe as Nature’s design in the essay “On Perpetual Peace,” the matter of sensibility will undergo modification and a greater degree of perfection. Is Kant suggesting that this is the future that lies in store for the “full development of our faculties”? That one day, we will become

⁴Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles, California.

the inhabitants of Jupiter and Venus, and enjoy a greater agility in body and mind? Perhaps. And yet, in the present, according to the current conditions that bind each inhabitant to the matter that corresponds to its habitat, there is no possibility of occupying the same moment, since the “inhabitants of the earth and Venus cannot exchange their habitats without mutual destruction” (Kant 188). Consequently, although the teleology of a Divine or cosmic plan of the colonization of the planets is interesting, it comes to an impasse precisely around perhaps Kant’s greatest insight which is already foregrounded in this early speculation: the a priori relationship (even inter-dependence) of matter and sensibility. And yet, following the trajectory that Kant himself takes to resolve a similar impasse that appears after the first two critiques, there is a space “in-between” where the human and the extra-terrestrial can, even if only provisionally, encounter one another. The space of aesthetics, and in particular, of the art-work. That is, as Kant discovered later in the third critique, *The Critique of Judgment*, it is through the aesthetic medium alone that we might have the possibility of escaping the confinement that determines the current arrangement of our faculties; thus, art is more *receptive* to different arrangements as well as to the possibility of another “form of sensibility” which, using the above comparison already established by Kant, could be likened to the “subjective” perspective of an extra-terrestrial.

18. What was just outlined corresponds to our second limitation, that of place. It is because the cultural and economic forces that condition human perception belong to this limitation that time, from this perspective, shapes and establishes our perception of the new itself; a perspective which provides a fundamental obstacle to our *presentiment* of the event or ad-vent of the extra-terrestrial in modern art. Therefore, an art that seeks to “represent the new” is not yet the art of presentiment; it is not an extra-terrestrial art. It is for this reason that the artist of presentiment must always seek to invent—simultaneously, so to speak—both the conditions of the object that he or she presents as well as the community of its reception. (This may occur without regard to whether his or her subjects, or the materials or techniques he or she may employ, are recognized by the representatives of a reigning definition of culture.) It is in this sense that the art-work might appeal to or evoke another nature in the community it addresses—a nature that might appear to human sentiment as something monstrous or in-human—a community that may or may not yet exist in this world, or whose existence may only be discerned in the traces of what remains in the passing of another.
19. “The most amazing thing that has come down to us from the pre-historic human is presentiment,” Chicaro said, “and it will always continue.” However, in Sicre’s painting, the *pre-* of sentiment no longer shares the same root in the unconscious as that of pre-history. At least, it is not the pre-history represented by the “archetype” which is reduced to a sentimental communion with the primitive emotions—that is, to feeling which operates by mythic analogy along the ancient but familiar contours of human emotional perception. If the archetype is retained by Sicre in his painting, then it is only as a figure for researching a more unnatural nuptial of memory, which destroys the relation of mythic forms to the habit (*habitus*) of the human form. Again, this aspect of seeking the “inhuman” (Lyotard) recalls one of the themes of the late Nineteenth century, the “non-reproductive” function of the art object. In other words, before this aspect of the modern work of art, a Culture would no longer find “a second life,” so to speak, in the art-work which redeems it and offers it absolution for its quotidian violence; the art-work itself no longer seeks to present the reflection of a culture, a nation or a state, a race, a dominant ethnicity, or even gender. The art-work’s resistance to immediate consumption by a dominant culture which signals a “non-reproductive” spirit is one of Sicre’s most recurrent themes. It is often figured by the encounter between Oedipus and the sphinx; however, for Sicre, the sphinx and her question are situated in relation to the recent discovery

- of a pyramidal system on the surface of Mars, beneath a red and breathless sky that is no longer the same atmosphere that supported Oedipus when his answer defeated the sphinx.
20. Why this art might appear monstrous can be addressed under the third limitation, the organic relationship of the art-work to the current arrangement and coordination of the senses. According to this aspect, the art-work often appeals to what lies beyond a normal human sensibility, to another "form of sentience." This is why the modern art-work often appears as excessive, producing in the consciousness of the spectator an affect which can be likened to a drug which causes a new organic coordination of the visible. This final limitation revalorizes a certain organic determination of the work of art, although in a non-romantic or transcendental sense. In other words, it reattaches the notion of the organ, or the *ergon*, to the *work* of art. The image that appears on the canvas, or the form that is made up of plaster and metal, functions as an external and added sense-organ that supplements and expands the rather finite inventory of human sensibility. The impressions caused by the work in the body of the spectator become part of the artist's materials, by which the art-work itself heightens and increases the inventory of the body's possible affects. Only in this way can the art-work itself discover what the body can do by the invention of new and finer perceptions, different and variable emotions, and ways of perceiving and thinking that have been yet unknown, un-thought or imperceptible. The spectator before the painting might respond: "What is this feeling, this emotion, this thought that is racing in my veins and which threatens to overcome me, or is filling me with an uncontrollable desire to look away?" Of course, not all responses need be violent. They seem to be dependent upon individual predisposition, or upon the severity of the constraints upon expression by the culture in which the spectator's encounter with the work of art unfolds. Given the right conditions, however, some responses may take the form of an inexplicable calm and serenity, or the perception—perhaps hallucination—of an object that the spectator cannot name, a color or texture that has never been seen before on earth. These impressions (visual, tactile, ideational or symbolic) can only be accounted for by the addition and amplification of a new organic coordination of the human senses that the work of art itself embodies. Hence, the canvas stretches to form a second skin on the body of the spectator; at the same time, it unfolds impressions upon a surface which belongs neither to the object of the spectator's perception nor to the spectator himself or herself, but rather to a surface of perception that maps the human nervous system onto the duration that unfolds before the spectator's gaze. Only in this manner, can the artist simultaneously discover the material of perception as well as the conditions of reception sensibility by stimulating a new coordination of the visible, the palpable, the perceptible and the thinkable.
 21. The face that silently stares back at us from the surface of Mars is not the face of Oedipus, and the sphinx will not be so easily vanquished with a cunning response, since this time, she never poses a question to Oedipus, but rather seems a bit bored by his presence. It by the presentiment of such an encounter that Sicre might question whether the painters of Lascaux belong, in fact, to the narrative of our evolution. Of course, Sicre is not alone in this feeling. Burroughs knew very well about extra-terrestrials, and often wrote about them; Bacon painted their portraits.
 22. As an aside, probably no artist has understood this better than Paul Klee, who developed a theory of colors based upon the physical effects of how colors mix in the eye of a spectator. Consequently, he abandoned any linear conception of color (represented by the natural phenomenon of a rainbow) and, along with it, any pathetic conception derived from the domain of the human, the higher animal, with its tragic struggles between the body and the soul. In place of this, he constructed a series of six colors, grouping them in three couples, or opposing diameters, running back and forth from red to green, from yellow to violet, and

from blue to orange; all three diameters fixed at a point (the center of the chromatic circle) which expresses what he named *le point gris*. Klee proved his theory of color by conducting an experiment in which he observed that the effect left upon the retina by the sudden withdrawal of red after a long exposure was not red, but green (hence the couple red-green will constitute one of the three diameters); thus proving that there are two complementary colors alternatively engendered in the eye, and between them, the point gray where they are equally mixed. Gray is not a color, then, but the expression of the principle of homeostasis, and represents the balance movement and counter-movement along each diameter. "The reciprocity or alternation of the scale red-green returns us to the pendulum between movement and counter-movement. It also recalls the mobile balance which will finally immobilize itself at the intersection of the gray. This in no way signifies that red and green are captured in a static representation, with all the red on one side and all the green on the other. Such a representation would not suggest the simultaneous alternation, since it would be necessary to pass by leaping from one term to the other by a principle of construction."⁵

23. For Sicle, this face to face encounter situates the question of "the human" in a different, non-anthropological, dimension; one that shares the same continuum as a kind of secrecy which cuts across several discontinuous presents-species, sexes, groups-only a few of which the human can occupy and still remain within the margins of its former habitat. Presentiment, then, is a moment which is found to be anterior to every apparatus of communication, a moment that is incommensurable, but present all the same. If it takes the form of a secret, this is only due to an inadequate organization of the human *sensorium* in the present, to the constraints of a notion of community which excludes what is alien and which figures secrecy and monstrosity together as the two hidden faces of the unknown and the imperceptible. Yet, there are some that share a secret yet to be invented, outside of and irreducible to the conspiratorial art of governments, of secret agencies, of the state. It is a secret which is necessarily too large for them, since it cannot be filed. If there is any destination for the political, and for the extra-terrestrial, in contemporary art, here it is represented by the presentiment of a secret and alien sentience—a shape of feeling, a way of thought, formed by another form of intelligence—opposed to the traditional forms of human rationality. Here, we have breached the response to the question—"who or what is the extra-terrestrial?" The extra-terrestrial is, literally, *extra-terrestrial*: one who has no space, no time within the world; who approaches from the outside invoking wonder or disgust, at times even horror. For such a being, there is no memory of the earth, no genealogical filiation with habitus, no ethos, or ego-system supported by its hereditary branches and genetic flows. Perhaps this forms a problematic resemblance, even alliance, between the extra-terrestrial and the terrestrial alien, which may account for the hybridity in Sicle's art. One could probably say that the first extra-terrestrial registered in the census of European consciousness was the figure of the post-Diaspora Jew. In America, the alien would trace an essential relation with the cultural memory of the Native American. Thus, the pre-historic relation to the alien is figured, at one level, as that of the ghost: an earlier *ethos* of a people, a nation, or race that was over-written by the arrival of another group whose sedentary consciousness and notion of property reversed the priority of habitation. But there is a difference between the ghost and the phantoms of *ethos*, and the figure of the alien who approaches from outside the possibility of memory or race, in another rhythm than the one that runs between species and genus. Popular culture still tries to interpret the alien (the future) in terms of its own ghosts (its past), as the community assembled from the dark and secret lives of its victims. In response to these forms of cultural abjection, Sicle traces,

⁵Paul Klee, *Theory de l'art moderne* (Geneva: Editions Gonthier, 1920), p. 56-69.

within the continuum that is marked in popular culture by the secret visitations of U.F.O.s, another encounter of an alien still un-mapped in contemporary geo-politics.

24. "Visitation," however, is not an event which arrives, which happens, to a people or to a sedentary subject; neither does it arrive to any apparatus of property and identity which could accept it—which could "welcome the alien"—without undergoing a fundamental metamorphosis, a loss of previous identity, and a positive molting of sexual and ethnic attributes, speech, habit and habitat. Perhaps this is why such encounters have been reported as only happening in places where the forms and techniques of community are vacant or have not yet occurred, thereby linking the site of aboriginal and primitive to the hyper-futural, or to cyber-space. These places are often represented in film by the under-developed rural sites of the civilization, in deserts, or on vast and unpopulated stretches of the ocean; any place that is not yet inscribed and organized by the systems of culture and the State, or where material flux is in excess of the forms that discipline it. The extra-terrestrial seems to be drawn precisely to these points as to a medium which could accommodate its nature. Thus, the visitation often happens far outside the city, deep in the caves, in places where there will be few witnesses, or nobody outside the person who is immediately caught up in the encounter—who is, in turn, immediately alienated from the community to which he or she formerly belonged. From that point on, he or she must decide whether to live out his or her life in the solitude of this experience, telling no one, or join those who would accept this—and who would, in turn, "welcome the alien." Such a being is on the border between his or her own "experience" and the impossibility of its communication, since its immediate communication already presupposes the derisory status of its representation by a larger culture who cannot receive it without doing violence to its form (an experience for which German feminists in the 70's adopted the word *Sprachlosigkeit*, speechlessness).
25. At the center of Sicro's depiction of the figure of the extra-terrestrial is what philosopher Emmanuel Levinas describes as the "face to face" encounter between the human being and that which is beyond or otherwise than human (*Autrui*), which bears the implicit allusion to the figure of theophany. The "face to face" encounter multiplies and populates all of Sicro's paintings like an *id'e fixe*, or like a weed, or a virus. Each encounter (or "visitation") represents a virtual presence of a conversation without idiom, a mutual regard without eyes or ears, or a kind of intercourse between the human and in-human that unfolds and swells in the telepathic nature of a strange and discontinuous collective experience. These encounters are the lapidary signs of a community who barely exists on this earth. It is a sign exchanged between those have become alienated, whose former affiliations have been dissolved as a result of their "abduction" by an encounter which has carried them away from their former kind and caused them to enter into the movement of "becoming-alien," either alone or collectively with others. And yet, it must be emphasized that the term alienation is a movement toward the exceptional, the extra-terrestrial, and is no longer a term belonging to any existentialism. I must stress that there is no hint of existentialism in Sicro's painting; much less does his work express any of the nostalgic form of "other-worldliness" that Surrealism represented for Europe. Let us be suspicious of this European metaphor for the event and advent of the "new," and be wary of the status of any group that proclaims itself the representative of a cultural avant-garde. Here in the caves of L.A., which are no longer the caves of Lascaux, within a situation we could roughly call multi-cultural, there could only be several avant-gardes, and no longer *one* which could ever lay claim to the event and ad-vent of the new as its exclusive "property."
26. In place of an avant-garde with its *artist-genius* (the figure of a dark and latent Christian theology that still haunts European aesthetics), Sicro revises the primitive cultural figure of *artist-shaman* (or artist-medium), to artist as extra-terrestrial, both the sender, yet strangely,

also the representative subject of the community that is being addressed. We have here a form of artistic communication that can no longer be comprehended by the bi-polarity of the instances: the addresser-artist and addressee-spectator, or "public." Therefore, not only does the encounter outlined above become an explicit subject of many of Sicro's paintings, where it unfolds within a fluid continuum of different plastic and cultural representations, but it situates the very position of the spectator before the work of art as a moment of this encounter between human and what is beyond or otherwise than human. For Sicro, then, the art-work itself occupies the position of the extra-terrestrial in the "face-to-face" encounter with the human; that is, "it faces" the spectator and communicates an event that is in some ways "unspeakable" and "unpresentable" from the perspective of the normal organization of human sensibility. At the same time that the event of this encounter with the art-work represents an "alienation" of normal sensibility, however, it also invites the spectator to enter into relationship with this experience and undergo a transformation of the sensibility that the experience of the artwork engenders—in short, to "welcome the alien," the extra-terrestrial.

27. Finally, we must ask what collective form do these presentiments take? What is their shape, or collective sentence? Why does this encounter between the human and the extra-terrestrial art-work necessarily imply the presence of another rhythm or atmosphere of presentation, the demand of another sensibility that is set over against the human habit of thinking and feeling? We have already traced the outlines of both Sicro's subject and his audience in the form of communication that takes place around the cultural narratives of the "visitation." We can find a further glimpse of what this "public" might look like and how they communicate in the painting "The Tree of Knowledge," where we see the diagram of this alien intelligence in what could be called the tendril-head system. This is a more crepuscular translation of the human cerebral cortex outside the "mental space" of the cranium. It involves the metamorphosis of the hair into the extension of the nerves and maps a new apparatus of communication-receptivity of thoughts, feelings, and affects which dissolves the significance of the voice. The hair, in Sicro's painting, points to a finer system of communication than the human has, as of yet, invented. This immediately invokes the image of a more complex and supple collectivity than ours (no longer formed from the segmentation between the individual and the group, or between the artist-sender and the public-receiver), as depicted here in the exfoliation of the rings into faces and limbs.
28. Here, we might see that the importance of the face and the hand for Sicro points to the continuum of the encounters mentioned above. Every face necessarily implies the presence of another, who is facing, but not necessarily seen. The face in the encounter, the face to face of the visitation, implies either the meeting which takes place apart from others, or the meeting of an individual with an other who represents another collectivity, or the fluid form of such meetings which unfold in a community. This anomalous collectivity of the face exfoliated in the gesture of greeting, is heightened by the specifically human obsession with the face: whether in the mask worn by the lover, the face in the distance whose detail is still beyond the circumspection of recognition, a group which collates its possible forms of expression in a serially facial traits. Here, the face unfolds quasi-organically out of the encounter, becomes multiple. The other face, however, the one not presented, stares back from its place of vision, where it looks on, blank, expressionless, serene; either the trace of an ancient community, or a sign, a mirror, between us and a future which moves away at the speed of light. It is not surprising to see here why art has always been obsessed with such encounters, and it would not be too difficult to detect an alien presence even in the landscapes of Cezanne. *Nothing but extra-terrestrials! Nothing but U.F.O. s* (and even before the invention of science fiction where the alien suffers a particularly derogatory representation similar to that of the native in

Victorian novels or American Westerns). Thus, behind every encounter, of which the art-work itself is a sign, there is another collectivity of which the encounter itself is only the event, or the trace, of its arrival. Such encounters have always happened, and they are happening *here and now*.

29. In a conversation, Sicre once explained the procession of these encounters in his work as the transmigration of souls in a culture where the soul is a component of its physical science and not, as in ours, a metaphysical expression of time—something we perhaps are approaching in the unified field theories of contemporary physics. *So the neighboring could include the furthest dimension which arrives by an un-heard of velocity.* This announces the arrival of another perspective that, up until today, has been too large to be contained in our time. All time, up till now, and including the work of Heidegger, is homocentric, based upon the embryonic nuclear clock of one species as subjective form of experience. The ad-vent of an extra-terrestrial perspective, however, is the dis-orientation of human time by the concrete duration crossed in welcoming the alien. Again, this proposes the riddle of the sphinx under alien perspective, since we are still creatures stuck to our proximity, who calculate the distances only in resemblance, and whose conception of the neighboring could only be the nearest group, the closest nation, the proximate race, the identical sex, the same species, and so on. From this angle we could question a presentiment as the relation of velocity and no longer of form: it is no longer the shape of the river, but its speed, that dissolves and carries along the forms within it. A human, particularly in its evolution, moves by accretion at a slow and laborious pace as if weighed down by the viscosity of its centuries. So it happens that a being who approaches from a different composition of light and gravitation and speed, would appear to be anomalous—perhaps a strange and unequal hybrid of sexual and racial traits—made up of an impossible, almost unbearable, remoteness. Outside our *sentendum*, what was formerly called the unconscious, now finds a different speed and another point of origin.
30. I have traced only a few components in Jorg' Sicre's painting of the encounter and the presentiment of community that is still impossible under the current conditions of communication (i.e. the system of human receptivity). It is for this reason, that the nature of this encounter, like those reported in popular literature of the U.F.O., can only take place in a certain relation to the secret. It is for this reason that we still must be circumspect, cautious of "publicity" (as Kant called those forms of openness which necessarily require an obsessive vigilance of the police). The reason that speaks to Sicre, somewhere in the caves of L.A., tells him to record the history of the human from the perspective of the extra-terrestrial, or of the in-human. Perhaps we have here the figure of a new Oedipus who wakes up under an alien sky, and having forgotten the question, smiles and reaches over tenderly to remove a few strands of his hair that have fallen into the sphinx's eye.

Notes