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Why Luciano Fabro isn't Robert Smithson

Translated by Alan Eglinton

Until I started thinking about what to say for this paper, Luciano Fabro and Robert Smithson presented themselves separately to me. Working on the latter and confronted with the former, I realized they were born at one and a half year's interval, Fabro in November '36 and Smithson in January '38. They are of the same generation and this simple established fact convinced me to try a sort of comparative analysis. In order to define a way of speaking or writing about this "exhibited material" that modern and contemporary art principally consists of, it seems to me that, to put it briefly, either the "critic-historian" develops a neological analysis of works that are neological themselves (in which case, there's nothing to compare), or he or she focuses on following a way that offers "technically" re-usable tools in other studies and on other subjects. Positioning myself more as a "disciple of the way of re-usable criteria", the idea of comparison gradually imposed itself as putting this position to the test.

1- TWO WORKS (NEARLY) TOGETHER

During the second half of the 1960's, Fabro and Smithson "belonged" to two "cousin" movements that interacted because of the vagueness of their definition. If, a priori, none of their works were shown together while the two artists were alive, by following the details of three connections it would be possible – in a counter-natural, historical-fiction essay – to juxtapose works by both artists. Two first connections were initiated in 1969 and in 1970 by Germano Celant, the art critic who "invented" Arte Povera in 1967 (Fabro was associated to this invention). Seeking to make his initiative international, in 1969 Celant published a book both in Italian and English, *Arte Povera / Art Povera*. The Italian version is edited with an Igloo by Mario Merz on its cover whereas the cover of the English version presents Walter de Maria's Mile Long Drawing, two parallel lines traced with chalk in the Mojave Desert – Arte Povera and Earth Works share the cover. The following summer, in 1970, Celant sealed the union of these movements under the auspices of their older brother, *Conceptual Art* in the *Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Land Art* show at the Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna in Turin. Although both Fabro and Smithson each had a note in the catalogue of this exhibition, only Fabro's work was shown, namely the 1968 piece, *Three Ways of Spreading Sheets* (p. 275). A third connection can be spotted in the course of an event created in 1969 by Harald Szeemann, another great craftsman of the workings of contemporary art. This event was both spectacular and striking in those years when a turning point evolving away from modernity seemed to be emerging. Szeemann undertook the elaboration of an exhibition prototype voluntarily based on the curator's subjectivity. First in Berne and then in London, the famous *When Attitudes Become Form* was considered as the first important presentation of *Conceptual Art* in Europe. *Arte Povera* and *Earth Art* were associated to the program and were mentioned as

two possibilities amongst others concerning what can "live in your head", to quote the first part of the English title (*Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*). Only Smithson presented a piece when the event took place in London. It was his *Chalk Mirror Displacement* (p. 275), created expressly for the occasion. Even if Fabro and Smithson never exhibited together during their careers, they frequented the same "peri-conceptual" movements of the end of the 1960's and *Three Ways of Spreading Sheets* and *Chalk Mirror Displacement* seem to use the same poverty of means and the same focusing on gestures, the same refusal that also prompted *Conceptual Art* to not simply add another object to a museum space.

However, on looking closer, the resemblance remains imprecise. Firstly, there is the vagueness of definition: the definition of *Arte Povera* that was understood more for what it wasn't than for what it was affirming¹; the vagueness of definition of earth works that were barely starting to be called *Land Art*²; and even the vagueness of *Conceptual* projects, beyond the radical refusal of the object³. There then remains the vagueness of the connections between the works themselves. The arrangements of three sheets by Fabro were hung vertically on the wall of the space, showing variations of drapery frontally, whereas Smithson laid out his piece in a star shape, according to a "flatly" geometrical circularity – low, long rectangular mirrors that reflect the horizontality of the chalk deposit that kept them upright. This beginning of a formal opposition becomes radical if one observes how Smithson centred his work on structure, reflection and difference – a spatiality that insists on abstraction and on what is missing in the space⁴ whereas Fabro insists, through verticality, the use of drapery, and the familiar aspect of the object, on a spatiality related to the body and to its reality in a space dedicated to artistic experience. Apart from the fact that they were made at roughly the same time, the two works therefore share almost nothing, if not for a certain symmetry in the way they can be contrasted. Perhaps it would be worthwhile focusing on this oppositional symmetry. After all, the measurement of differences can sometimes make more sense than the observation of similarities if the base on which it is elaborated is, in return, brought into clearer focus by the motif proposed.

1. For all of the information on *Arte Povera*, cf. the 2001 catalogue published on the occasion of the show at the Tate Modern and at the Walker Art Center, particularly Robert Lumley's article, *Spaces of Arte Povera*, pp.41-62; *Zero to infinity: Arte Povera 1962-1972, cat.*, Walker Art Center/Tate, Minneapolis/London, 2001.

2. Smithson never or very rarely used the term; if Celant used it, Szeemann stuck to the term "earth art" which was probably more widespread at the time; to emphasize the vagueness of these designations, we can mention a "semi-general public" article by Walter de Maria, another one of other figures in *Land Art's* "founding trilogy" along with Michaël Heizer, in the issue of *Time of May 2, 1969*. The article focuses on the definition of "minischools" ("minimal", "optional", "danger" art as was qualified the piece on show at the Dwan Gallery) of which the earthworks were part of ("High Priest of Danger", author not mentioned, which may be consulted at: www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,900818,00.html).

3. For an in depth study of this problematic, cf. Jeff Wall, *Kammerspiel de Dan Graham*, Daled-Goldschmidt Editions, Brussels, 1988.

4. Anticipating his "Site/Non-site dialectic, Smithson simultaneously lays out the same circular installation of mirrors in Yorkshire (Oxted) quarry where the chalk came from.

2- CONVERSIONS

Continuing according to the simple historical facts used as a starting point in our comparison, while remaining within the framework of a "life", which has represented the basic unit of the discipline since Vasari, and following the rule of separation that structures the history of art in its classical moment, another biographical detail – apart from the proximity of their dates of birth – could constitute a connection between Fabro and Smithson. This connection would be their passage from beginnings in painting to a productive "maturity" as (non)sculptors. That being said, the vectorial community of a derivative of the "artistic trajectory", this common "conversion" from painting to sculpture, may only broaden the field of opposition that is our hypothesis. A first opposition would primarily be "historical-documentary". For Fabro, this conversion was quick and he explained it succinctly. For Smithson, it was apparently longer, more painful and complex, as well as being the subject of more detailed commentary in an abundance of documents left behind – in addition to a considerable amount of texts already published – after Smithson's accidental death. Having started to paint during the 1950's, Fabro encountered the progress of the artistic experimentations of the period at the 1958 Venice Biennale and then was to be "influenced", after moving to Milan in 1959, by Luciano Fontana's spatialism and the radical, nearly Minimalist or prematurely Conceptual approach of Piero Manzoni (with whom he was friends until Manzoni's death in 1963). Having started in the 1950's with a "luminous and dense pictorial matter" that was organized according to a "dynamic composition", his painting then explored until 1961-62 "the different attitudes adopted by avant-garde artists". Even so, after the fall of the "figurative fortress" and once he'd assimilated the lesson of Informal Art, Fabro founded his practice again by abandoning the pictorial category and all formal choices or fixed themes to the advantage of a "new logic" that he established in his 1963 "manifesto", *My Certainty: My Meaning for My Action*⁵. He describes an attitude based on observation, reflection, causality, the particular and an efficiency derived from the body. Here there is something of the practical engineering geared towards knowledge as one can imagine it was practiced during the Renaissance and as it may "survive" in Italian art, or, more deliberately – if we follow the reference in the text to Sir Francis Bacon's philosophy – something of the modern questioning of the conditions of possibility of an empirical attitude. It is according to this new logic that Fabro began the singular, open and unpredictable "sculptural", or three-dimensional, practice that was to remain his own.

For his part, Smithson made the transition from one medium to another more slowly, navigating through the abundance of experiments of the time in New York and recycling certain formal and thematic characteristics such as the spiral or blinding. Alongside his drawings, which tended towards something more literary, his somewhat Pop collages and a few "embryonic installations" of scientific inspiration, his paintings from the beginning of the 60's were made with what looked

5. All of the quotes in this "beginnings" summary (like most of this article's quotes) come from the Centre George Pompidou catalogue; Luciano Fabro, coll. *Monographies*, published on the occasion of the Luciano Fabro (Habitat) show organized by the MNAM, CGP, Paris, 1996.

like thick and energetically applied materials, as "dark" as Fabro's can be "luminous". They have the energy of Abstract Expressionism while developing figurative subjects, most of them religious. For example, the 1961 *Creeping Jesus* (p.278) that was perhaps shown the same year in the gallery the collector George Lester inaugurated in Rome by presenting a young and still unknown American artist. For someone who was already a great traveller (under the influence of his family and then of the Beat generation), this show allowed Smithson to do his "tour" of Italy and to dream – at a distance from the New York scene – of affirming and changing the thinking that surrounded an "ageing" Abstract Expressionism. Through contact with art still "in situ" in churches and palaces, he questioned (in a letter to Nancy Holt, his future wife) the gallery space as a given that draws (excessive) attention to the work and thereby takes away all its "mystery"⁶. In 1961 or 1962, in *The Iconography of Desolation*, his first truly "critical" text (different from the poems that had been accompanying his paintings for quite a while), Smithson is concerned with the "active" working of iconography, beyond the simply referential level to which Naturalism and a certain applied distortion – Cubist, for example – of the avant-gardes seemed to him to limit themselves. In spite of the lack of impact of the experience in Rome, he continued painting during 1963 with the aim of participating in an important first major show (or at least intended as such), *The Responsive Eye*, organized at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1965 but announced from Autumn, 1962. His works were not selected by the organizer William Seitz, who was working along a more purely "optical" line that Smithson's paintings, with their titles tinted with Pop resonances, did not correspond to. Following this second failure, in accordance with an inclination for geology that he'd kept up since childhood, Smithson abandoned the pictorial for the crystallographic, and surface for structure. He undertook a three-dimensional work, which, if it still staged an optical ambiguity, did so according to a non-eloquent theatricality similar to emerging Minimalism, which he was seeking to get closer to. The appropriately named 1964 *Eliminator* (p.279), by spasmodically lighting lightning-shaped neon tubes reflected in mirrors placed almost in contact with them at a narrow angle, seems to dissolve all the old paintings as well as any possible coherent perception on the part of the viewer. Also, notably through contradictions in perspective, in a play on mirrors and a specific installation in the white space

6. Smithson tells us, already with irony: "According to the way I feel now, I'd prefer people looked at my paintings with a flashlight in a room barely lit by a purple light and of which the atmosphere would be full of the smell of cherry-pie and jasmine. As a soundtrack, a light drumming of tambourines could add a certain note for a selected audience." both quoted by Crow (Tomas Crow, Robert Smithson, cat. *The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004, p.42*) and by Reynolds (Ann Reynolds, Robert Smithson, *Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere, Cambridge (Ma.) and London, The MIT Press, 2003*). The first focuses on the Italian episode whereas the second demonstrates in detail the following moment, associated with *The Responsive Eye* show.

7. Robert Smithson, *Robert Smithson : The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996, p.283. Detailed and systematic, made for the American Art Archives of the Smithsonian Institute, a sort of forerunner of the enormous estate that will join them thereafter, this interview with Paul Cummings remains one of the main source of quotations for studies of Smithson. It uses a sort of nearly amused, casual and cool tone, as if from the "eternal species" of the artist's archive paradise.

of the gallery, Smithson recycled through the entropic motor of his "minimal sculptures", the exhibitional, thematic and "temporal" worries that clogged up his paintings. He declared in a 1972 interview that these were his first accomplished works, the end of his "fumbblings" and the beginning of his "working as a conscious artist".

Reacting to and distancing himself from an Abstract Expressionist or Spatialist "accomplishment" (or opening) that would broaden or cut the space of the canvas that modern painting had unceasingly deconstructed, detaching himself from the "medium" to be able to explore its conditions of existing (by questioning gesture, the relationship to the body, perception, the category of the exhibition space), both of them seem to have sought to paradoxically go beyond the radicalism of the avant-gardes. For Fabro, the "conversion" took place in the direction of stylistic indetermination and evokes the gesture of rupture that was designated as "tabula rasa" by modernity. Or rather, by a sort of concern for a legacy of an absence of legacy, Fabro seemed to want to "reduce" the abstract and ideological impact – abstractly ideological in the sense of a representation separated from the body – of the tabula rasa in favour of an empirical obviousness related to the gesture and to the case. Such a work of reduction sought to remain, whatever the complexity of the elements at stake, on the level of a perceptive simplicity that avoided a priori the conceptual sophistication of the "work of Modern art": thus at the time Smithson's "Eliminator" was pulsing its retina-burning bolts of lightning, Fabro made a play between mirrors and transparency that disincorporated the plane and resolved itself in the focus of an opening or hole that was to be called, simply, Hole (p. 279). Symmetrically, Fabro sought to start directly with the measurement of the gap between corporal experience and concept, in order to avoid the "meta-semiotic excess" that the relationship to Modernism would induce (for example, the paradoxes related to the notion of tabula rasa if one attempts to repeat it). Smithson, on the contrary, seemed to want to take this excess into account to the maximum of its ambiguity; first of all on a perceptive level (the optical experience pushed to the point of being blinding) and soon in the visual and/or literary documentary game that accompanied each of his "sculptures". He played on the literary as a play on genres, to the point of confusing the roles of the text and the visual, exchanging the readable for the perceptible to a vertiginous extent, making the tabula rasa no longer the starting point but an entropic outcome. If Fabro seemed to enact a certain rupture and a passage towards pragmatic and programmatic "simplicity", which presented itself as stopping short of a fixed conception of the role of the avant-garde, Smithson seemed, in his multidimensional works, to redefine, according to a sort of complex structural synthesis, the problems that arose in his confrontation with the ferment of New York. Each of them transformed a certain handicap of the body or the point of view within the experience of modernity, into "raw materials".

7. Robert Smithson, Robert Smithson : The Collected Writings, edited by Jack Flam, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996, p.283. Detailed and systematic, made for the American Art Archives of the Smithsonian Institute, a sort of forerunner of the enormous estate that will join them thereafter, this interview with Paul Cummings remains one of the main source of quotations for studies of Smithson. It uses a sort of nearly amused, casual and cool tone, as if from the "eternal species" of the artist's archive paradise.

3- THE POP EXPANSE

By following the argument of a very detailed recent essay concerning Smithson, it may be possible for us to determine a zone of analysis where both he and Fabro react to a question of the same order: symmetrical reactions to a set of givens that would be primarily "socio-geographical". An anthropological and historical statement that postulates the context as non-indifferent, is demonstrated through what comes up in the study. In the introduction of her "cultural history" essay, Robert Smithson, Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere, suggesting a morphological parallel between the historian and the artist's work, Ann Reynolds emphasizes that Smithson's originality was not so much in the choice of his "sources" as in how he used them, without ever finally letting go of a question studied and transformed through the filter of his self-taught bulimia. Yet if the "sources" Smithson used prove to be not as original as one would think in view of the singular character of his works, the remarkable nature of his interventions, as Reynolds insists, resides not so much in the isolation of the process according to which an artist's character takes shape (that we then oppose with another) as in the presence of an extraordinary development, precisely that of a base of common concerns, now forgotten and deformed, yet very much shared and historically recognizable. Defining⁸ this common field in a synthetic way, Reynolds evokes a road and/or highway culture, an acceleration of the media (a proliferation of printed documents and of photography in particular) and the formalization of a "counter-culture" (arts, music, sexuality, drugs) and its codes. What was noisily presented under the Pop banner, hid the extent of its sources by showing them with too much success. The essential of these representations depict American society and art in the 60's: from the articles on Jackson Pollock published on glazed paper in popular weeklies, to the what now seems awkward merchandising of flower power in the wake of the recent success of rock. And it is this sort of American cultural homogeneity that, even if it had a violent and visual impact in Europe (particularly in England, the American "aircraft carrier" during the Second World War where Pop Art was invented as early as the second half of the 50's) did not engulf it completely. Thus an Italy both rapidly modernized, and still probably quietly "traditional" in many aspects of daily life. It seems to me that the fundamental divergence that saw Fabro positively exploring the demonstrative possibilities of the exhibition space, whereas Smithson questioned the relevance of the separation museum/reality (the latter seemed to him as full of the same deadly qualities as the first) was not based on the difference of an "ethical choice" concerning the function of the work of art. Their difference was rather based on the same feedback, on the same reaction to a "modern environment", which was defined according to the still unfinished course of "globalization", of the beginning of the generalized definition of marketing that the Pop movement illustrated. Fabro and Smithson simply weren't on the same sides of the globe when the Pop tide was mounting. While the latter had to react to the danger of drowning and draw the

8. Robert Smithson, Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere, op.cit.; in his introduction, before focusing on much more detailed case studies.

necessary conclusions from his "oceanic" situation⁹ in a nearly completely homogenised communicational world, the former stood on the still firm ground of a vital connection to the avant-gardes, to a place where the distance between artistic experimentation in the exhibition space and daily life still made sense. It is on the basis of this social-geographical gap of permeability in the exhibitional membrane that a pertinent basis of comparison between the two major notions developed by each could emerge. To say this in an elliptical manner, "habitat" according to Fabro would allow for retreat and the possibility of preserving meaning while the "site/non-site" dialectic according to Smithson would recognize and play on the irreversibility of the depressurization of signification.

4- FOR AN INCOMPLETE THEORY OF THE WORK OF ART

Using writing, Fabro tended towards a didactical simplicity in accordance with his project, while Smithson complicated his ideas until arriving at the (recomposed) corpus he left us. But once again, whatever their stylistic opposition, they both affirmed the importance of the artist's role: not so much in the aim of assigning him or her a place or an explicit political function (which the protestations of the New Left tried to describe at the end of the 1960's) but more to (re-)affirm the singularity of their tasks and the particularity of their solutions. Rather than follow the thread of their declarations on this subject, it would perhaps be simpler to maintain our comparative approach and stick to the notion of the work of art. Being attached to gestures, Fabro stopped short of the "deposition" of the artwork in favour of the object whereas Smithson, who diversified his practice, escaped fixed identification. Thus two works made with an interval of fifteen years refer, in very different ways to the concept of the work of art: firstly, the conception and making of a work by Fabro in 1984 that plays on the form of arche – or proto-type of a column and secondly an "explanatory table-corner drawing" done and signed by Smithson on a sheet of graph paper according to a centred circularity that evokes the Albers projection ("seen from above") of the representation of the globe.

Fabro presented a column, the general shape of which revealed the three roughly superimposed sections that composed it, while the details of the flutes on each section followed the irregular patterns of the marble. The title of the work, in French to show its reference to Pascal, is also divided: *Esprit de géométrie, esprit de finesse* (p. 285)¹⁰. The composition of Smithson's work, *A Surd View for an Afternoon* (p. 285), also wavers between finesse and geometry. This panorama-diagram "un-explains" his works in the course of a conversation that was all the more seminal in that it was disjointed. Fabro specified that making the flutes run along the veins of the marble was equivalent to the sort of retreat provoked by the absence of external measures according to which you fit in the ornament, as is done architecture when regularities are slightly distorted in

9. Assumed and developed in his reading of Ehrenzweig (Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art, A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination*, Paladin Editions, 1967 for the American version)

10. *Geometrical spirit, spirit of finesse.*

order to amplify effects¹¹. To the "classicism" and/or the ancient appearance of the column, is added an architectonic deficiency that the disorder of the ornamental pattern illustrates – a type of disorder that seems to contaminate the status of the object. For his part, Smithson's drawing mapped out the logic of his work according to poles that were evoked during quite informal conversation sessions in order to reveal the irrational aspect¹² that guides a connection of raw material with mental experience. As they weren't intended for publication, the interviews were less «polished» than usual, on both a graphic and literary level. As a result, they are harder to «grasp» and "closer" to a hypothetical source of signification or inspiration in their very disorder. Pascal discusses two sorts of behaviour in our way of representing ourselves and reacting to the world. Briefly, the first is attached to the intuition of the detail and the singularity of the articulation of things, whereas the second follows the logic of vaster and more abstract organizational diagrams. It would be too easy to associate Fabro with finesse and Smithson with geometry: the former addresses the whole of the question through the title of his work while the latter drew its pattern to delimit the contours of its logical disintegration. So what finesse? What geometry? How can one understand and escape the labyrinth of the work that becomes more and more intricate as you are attempting to understand it?

After studying biology and mathematics, Gregory Bateson passed from anthropology, where he prefigured the structural effort, to psychiatry, where he developed notions such as the "double blind" and finally attached himself to epistemological questions, the persistence of which conditioned the diagonal trajectory of his career. He also provided us with a small theory of art and artworks, that takes into account the incompleteness in definition that all theories of art, dreams and rituals encounter¹³. This incompleteness is part of the integrated communicational condition of the animal-mammal-human, of this outgrowth more inexplicable than the subconscious (according to the economy of which all organisms operate): the conscious (or the wording of the conscious). For Bateson, this surplus defines but also disintegrates the human exception, by depriving us and by making us run after, that lost character that God(s) and animals possess, that quality perceptible across cultural borders and the borders of species that Aldous Huxley called "grace". Because the work of art can just as well deal with its presence as its absence, it is not really this general and alluring term that concerns us here. It is more the study of a scientific-animal-mammal-human that it implies, who is also confronted with a lack of grace or of integration: he or she who studies is the bearer of the defect that is the condition

11. CGP catalogue, op.cit., p.252.

12. Surd, in the mathematic meaning of the word, according to the English translation of a reference borrowed from Beckett's *The Unamable*. The transcription of the conversations can be found in *The Collected Writings*, op.cit., pp.196-233.13. An incomplete theory itself in the manner of a metalogue, according to the definition given to us by Bateson on paradoxical discourses of which the content reoccurs in the shape. Cf. "Style, Grace and Information in Primitive Art" in Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*, Paladin Books, 1973.

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of what is studied. Just as it is certainly necessary to separate for a moment the observer from the observed when one is dealing with any scientific practice, this very thing proves impossible concerning certain objects in the history of art or anthropology. The work (or the dream, the ritual or drunkenness) is fabricated in the place of its definitional imperfection, its existence is attached to the singular possibility of its integration. It possesses its own form precisely because it can't be enunciated more simply. Therefore, Bateson evokes Pascal's well-known formula, insisting on reality and on the mathematical¹⁴ signification of these terms according to each of the differentiations: "the heart has its reasons that reason doesn't know of". Could geometry or finesse be ways of expressing the mathematics of these unknown "reasons" that preside over the fabrication of the work and determine its understanding? The irrational, mapped out over the course of several afternoons' conversations seems to evoke this difficulty and its moment. Just as the functional retreat of the ornament to the play of the material it is applied to, underlines the quality and faults of the integration of an element recuperated, outside the "museum", in a Postmodern architecture applied to suburban pavilions.

I'd like to conclude with a piece that Fabro made in 1967 and that we could (mistakenly) consider a modest attempt at interior Land Art. In a gallery, the floor's surface is carefully cleaned and covered up with newspaper to keep it clean for a while. Here Fabro was inspired by a country habit he'd observed during his childhood. Its usefulness vanishes in the gallery. It is the "technician" who takes down the show, who will "consume" a barely existing cleanliness (the art amateur's "boots" are not particularly dirty, or at least not in the literal sense). This work is called Floor (Tautology) (p. 3) and is part of a series of Tautologies developed at the same time. In a comment in 1984¹⁵, Fabro underlined the fact that the work only consists of the pleasure of having washed the floor's surface, preserved thereafter. It is a tautology because it is based on provocation and (like others from the same series) is dependent on the commentary it inspires. In discussing it here today, in relation to a comment made in 1984 about a work from 1967, which is shown again at the entrance of this room, we're making the piece "recede" and giving it meaning according to an axis of historical perspective. Let's consider works by Fabro and Smithson from the point of view of their near past, submitted to tensions that still inform our present: between a particular historical anchoring and a more general comprehension of a state of definitional incompleteness (that certainly carries away its own history as well), they delivered their messages according to their own economy, which interpretation, less graceful than they (in other words, less integrated), risks missing at any moment. Otherwise, their installations present just enough indications for us to continue to believe that we understand them. To end on an observation deduced from this "receding" and give it a sort of "meaning", to me it seems that it is of little importance if a work pretended to be tautological when it is not. It would be much worse if a work were, while pretending not to be. On the one hand, there is an openness and an

14. The plural "reasons" have a precise mathematical meaning that differs from the singular "reason". Furthermore, we'd have to come back here on the gap that separates our modern conception ("post-Bourbaki") of mathematics of the one that Pascal followed; a gap of the same nature as the one that Louis Marin auscultates concerning representation in his studies on Port-Royal.

15. CGP catalogue, op.cit., p.198.

articulation with reality, a relationship specific to the environment, whatever one might think; on the other hand the pretension of openness where there is nothing but a object to be manipulated – to unacknowledged or undisclosed ends – according to reasons that are not specific to the work. On the one hand, there are things which have a little more depth than they claim to have, and that carry their part of history with them; on the other, things that will only be masks or pretexts in the movement in which they declare themselves as valid according to the caricature of an all too familiar storytelling. On the one hand, a singular structure, an object that guides, restricts and weighs relationships according to its own criteria; on the other, an object of which the supposed weighing will serve completely different purposes than those to which its structure is related, that is, if it is related to anything. So a "moral" difference will emerge, in the simple sense that what is necessary to the work's survival as a "mind" – a relational system – will define the economy of its means, as well as those of its study. Between a logic of addition or one of abstraction, two ways of "profiting from" the specificities of the work.

LIST OF WORKS

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Comparison 1

Luciano Fabro, Tre modi di mettere le lenzuola (*Three Ways of Putting on Sheets*), 1968.

Wood, bedding. Each sheet: 200 x 250 cm.

Robert Smithson, Chalk and Mirror Displacement, 1969.

Six mirrors, chalk from quarry in Oxted, England. Each 38 x 13 cm (overall 304 cm).

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Comparison 2

Robert Smithson, Creeping Jesus, 1961. Photo collage and gouache on paper. 46 x 36 cm.

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Comparison 3

Luciano Fabro, Buco (*Hole*), 1963. Reflective and transparent crystal. 120 x 80 cm.

Robert Smithson, The Eliminator, 1964. Steel, mirror, neon. 51 x 51 x 46 cm.

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Comparison 4

Luciano Fabro, In cubo (*In the Cube*), 1966.

Wood, canvas, chromite. Interior side: 185 cm. Copy belonging to Luciano Fabro.

Robert Smithson, installation view of Robert Smithson à la Dwan Gallery, New York, 1966.

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Comparison 5

Luciano Fabro, Esprit de géométrie, esprit de finesse (*Geometrical Spirit, Subtle Spirit*), 1984. Marble.

Robert Smithson, A Surd View for an Afternoon, 1970. Ink on paper. 21.6 x 27.9 cm