Painting with Desire: Color after Collectivity, 1972-1974

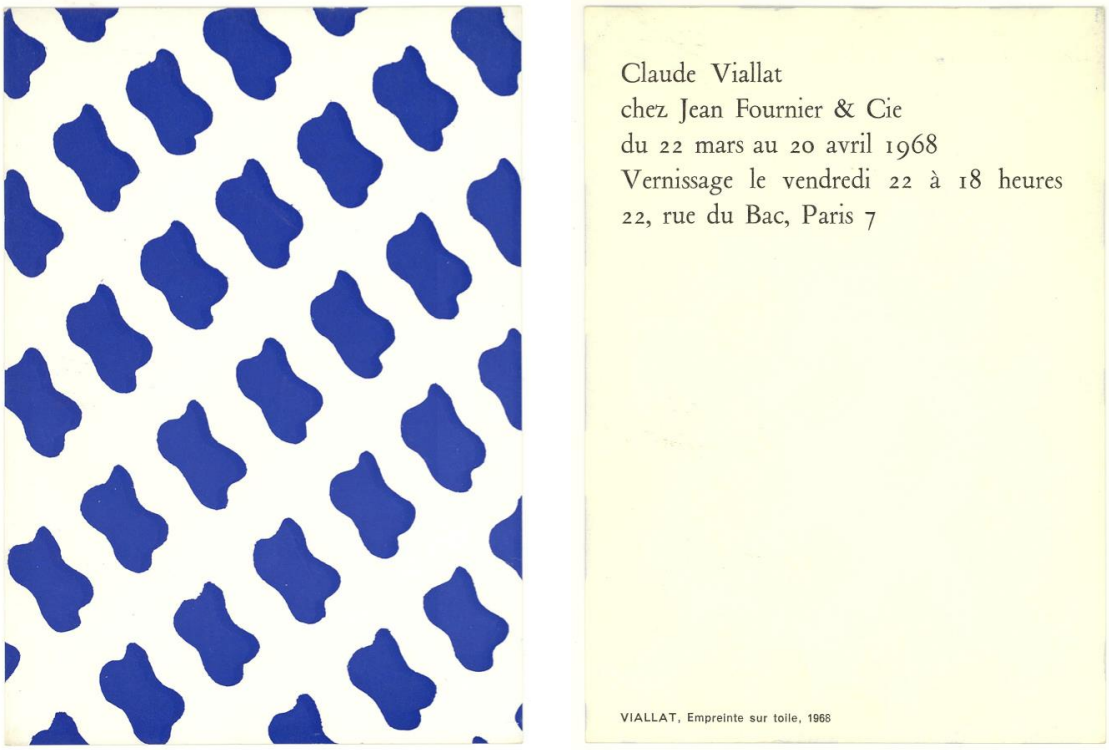
Jenevive Nykolak

On March 22, 1968, a group of students occupied the administration building of the Université Paris Nanterre.[1] The Mouvement du 22 Mars, as it became known, played a catalyzing role in the subsequent events of May–June 1968. Influenced in part by the critique of bureaucracy developed on the noncommunist Left during the preceding years, student militants emphasized spontaneity and principles of direct democratic self-organization.[2] This embrace of immediacy became a major theme during May '68 and its aftermath, dovetailing with a broader ethos of personal and sexual liberation. The momentous agitation on the suburban campus couldn't seem further removed from the *vernissage* held at the Galerie Jean Fournier in the seventh arrondissement, where the painter Claude Viallat made his Parisian solo debut, also on March 22 (fig. 1). Viallat's large, unstretched canvases hung, free, in great swags from the picture rails, like flags or festive bunting. Colored blue or red or left raw, the surfaces were patterned by a repeated biomorphic shape, soaked directly into the weave of the fabric.[3] The

[1] I would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewer for their comments, as well as Douglas Crimp, Rachel Haidu, Timothy Scheie, Zach Rottman, Jamin An, and Boris Atrux-Tallau for their feedback on earlier versions and aspects of this research. I am grateful for the generous support of the Chateaubriand Fellowship in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the assistance offered by Galerie Jean Fournier, Galerie Ceysson & Bénétière, Louis Cane, and Claude Viallat. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French are the author's own.

[2] On the diverse constitution of militant groups active at Nanterre, see: Jean-Pierre Duteuil, "Les groupes politiques d'extrême gauche à Nanterre," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 11-13 (January-September 1988), 110-15, discussed in: Isabelle Sommier, "Les gauchismes," in *Mai-juin 68 dans le siècle,* ed. Frédérique Matonti, Bernard Pudal, Dominique Dammame, and Boris Gobille (Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2008), 297. On the particular influence of ideas formulated by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and the Situationist International in these quarters, see: Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 44-56, and Richard Gombin, "The Ideology and Practice of Contestation seen through Recent Events in France," *Government and Opposition*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1970), 420-23.

[3] A detailed description of the show is given in: Marcelin Pleynet, "Disparition du tableau," *Art International*, vol. 12, no. 8 (October 1969), 45-8. The motif, initially based on the shape of a painter's palette, is frequently likened to a *haricot,* or bean. Viallat has often insisted on its abstract nature, most recently comparing it to Leonardo da Vinci's famous stains and the inkblots of the Rorschach



1. Announcement postcard, Claude Viallat, Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris (March 22-April 20, 1968).

resulting chromatic contrasts—between red and navy or sunny Mediterranean blue and the off-white surface of raw canvas—were vivid. Recalling the "buoyant effect" of the exhibition, Yve-Alain Bois suggests that Viallat revived the then-forgotten tradition of what he calls Matisse's "expansiveness," referring not simply to the cliché of Matisse as a hedonistic colorist, but to the visceral potency of his approach to color, to the pulsating force and dynamism of the surface of his paintings.[4] This chromatic intensity set Viallat's canvases apart from the more austere and disciplined paintings shown the previous year by Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni as part of a series of high-profile Parisian *manifestations*.[5] These performative events featured canvases with severely reduced patterns

test. Claude Viallat, interview with Michel Hilaire, in *Viallat: Une rétrospective* (Montpellier: Musée Fabre, 2014), 12.

[4] Yve-Alain Bois, "Les Années Supports/Surfaces," *Artforum*, vol. 37, no. 4 (December 1998), 119. An extended discussion of Matisse's "expansiveness" appears in: Bois, "On Matisse: The Blinding: For Leo Steinberg," *October* 68 (Spring 1994), 60-121.

[5] Viallat began using this motif in 1966, the same year that he showed with Buren, Parmentier, and Toroni in the exhibition *Impact I,* which he co-organized with Jacques Lepage at the Musée de Céret. Prior to this, Viallat and Parmentier had known one another from their time studying at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris in the early 1960s. See the discussion of this context in: Daniel Buren, interview with Charles Le Bouil, Bernard Mazaud, and Patrick Jude, "BMPT n'a jamais existé!!," *Toponymies* 4-5 (1980), 5-7, reprinted in Buren, *Les Écrits 1965-2012, Volume 1: 1965-1995* (Paris: Flammarion/Centre national des arts plastiques, 2012), 713-20.

of stripes, spots, or circles, which were marshaled in a critique of both the medium of painting and its institutional supports. Buren, for his part, would later criticize Viallat's relative indulgence: his work "was far too retinally pleasurable (I speak of the 1968 years) and that involved a certain danger."[6] What was the risk posed by pleasure, at least in hindsight, circa '68? What could be so dangerous about color?

The aftermath of '68 saw a swell in artistic as well as political forms of collectivity in France. Viallat would soon be associated with a group of artists that began exhibiting together as Supports/Surfaces in the fall of 1970, united by an interest in returning to the history and practice of painting by way of the anatomization and eccentric proliferation of its physical components. As I argue elsewhere, Supports/Surfaces emblematized the reinvestment in collectivity that took hold more broadly following the events of '68—just as the artistic, theoretical, and political divisions that almost immediately began to rupture the group indexed the difficulties and tensions that beset this impulse.[7] Following Viallat's defection in May 1971, a scission rent Supports/Surfaces in two in June; by the end of the summer the "Parisian" wing of the group had claimed legal use of the title under the 1901 *Loi d'association*. The representatives of this faction, Vincent Bioulès (who was, in fact, based in Montpellier), Louis Cane, Marc Devade, and Daniel Dezeuze, were joined as the editors of the journal *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* (1971-85), which had launched its inaugural issue at the Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris on June 8, 1971.[8] The group splintered further until it was reduced to just Cane and Devade, who continued editing *Peinture* while exhibiting their work individually. In the throes of the dissolution of Supports/Surfaces between 1972 and 1974, Cane and Devade each developed a new body of paintings that emphasized the vivid, visceral intensity of color. They narrated this shift using a distinct psychoanalytical vocabulary of bodily drives, instincts, and libidinal intensities: what I will refer to as "painting with desire."[9]

This essay contends that the theory and practice of painting with desire figured the political danger that pleasure represented circa '68. While Cane and Devade were separated from Viallat by considerable aesthetic and political distances (as well as personal and geographical ones), painting with desire represented the culmination of a set of problems already intimated at the time of Viallat's Parisian debut. The threshold of 1972 marked a turning point of the five years of intensified militancy that had followed '68 in France, as the

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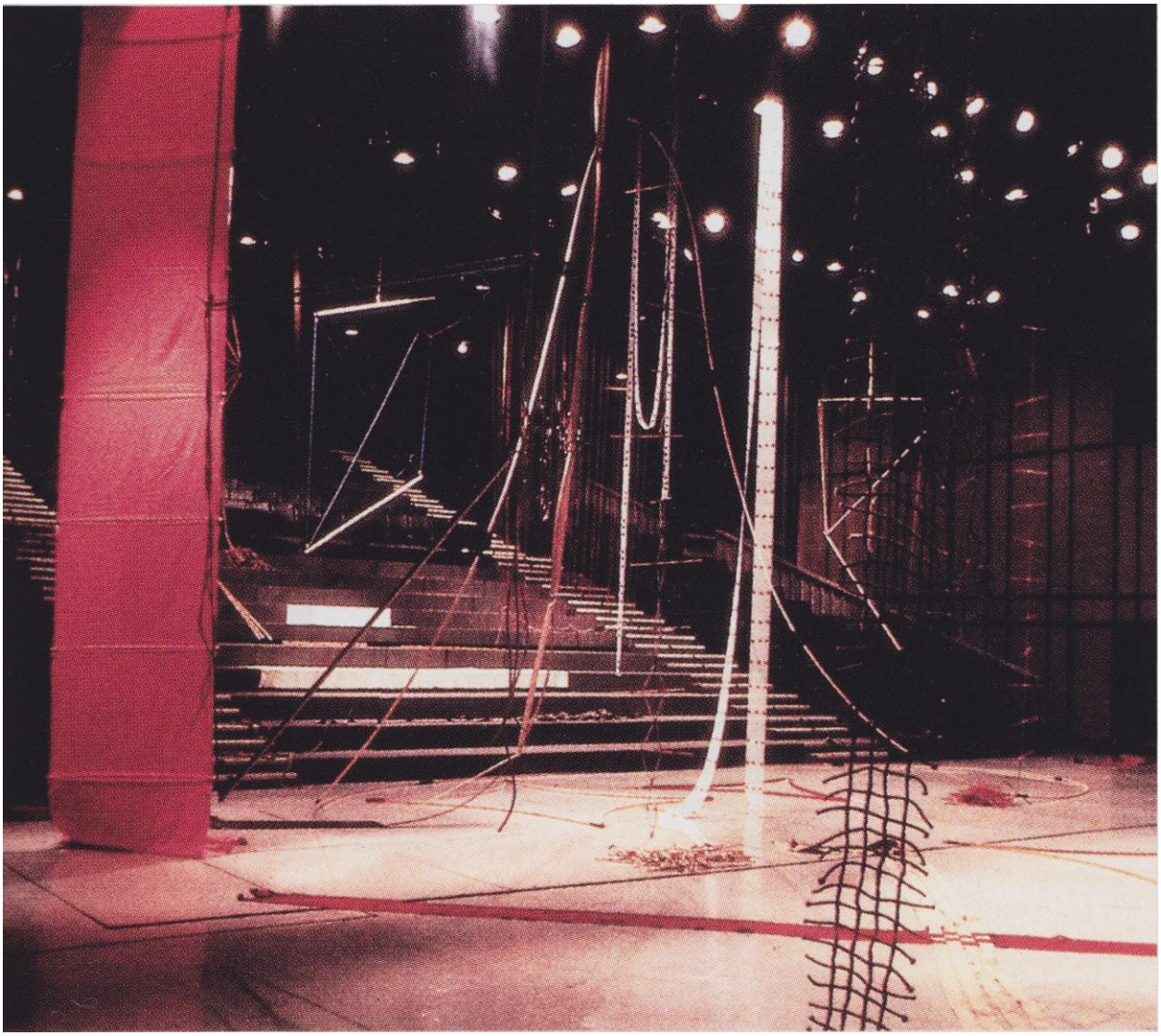
[6] "Après le travail de Toroni que je connaissais évidemment très bien, il me semblait que Viallat avait compris, mais que son travail sur le plan visuel et esthétique était beaucoup trop agréable rétiniennement (je parle des années 68) et que cela comportait un certain danger." Buren, 714. This assertion appears to reference Marcel Duchamp's famous opposition to "retinal" art.

[7] Jenevive Nykolak, "Supports/Surfaces, Scission, and the Structure of the Avant-Garde," *Art History,* forthcoming.

[8] Announcement postcard, Folder "Cartons, 1970-1979," Dossier documentaire Louis Cane, Centre de documentation et de recherché du musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

[9] I take this phrase from: Louis Cane, "Painting: Answers to Questions Put by Dr. Michael Pauseback," in *Louis Cane: 1968-1978: The First Ten Years of a Painter* (Jerusalem: Central Press, 1978), unpaginated.



2. Installation shot, "Supports/Surfaces," exhibition, Théâtre de Nice, June 15-20, 1971.

collective energy released by the events reached an impasse. This shift registered punctually in the realm of theory, unfolding more gradually in that of political action as militants confronted state repression as well as a series of contradictions, disappointments, and partial victories, eventually leading important groups and organizations to dissolve by the mid-1970s.[10] The events of May rested on an uneasy but explosive combination of traditional revolutionary demands and forms of political organization with a more "liberational"

[10] For example, the prominent Maoist group Gauche prolétarienne decided to disband under the weight of internal critique and external repression in 1973. This reflected frustration with the level of mobilization following the killing of the Maoist militant Pierre Overney by a security guard at the Renault-Billancourt factory in 1972, as well as the group's interpretation of their own limits following the worker-led experiment with *autogestion* (self-management) at the Lip watchmaking factory in Besançon in 1973. (Christofferson, 62-64.)

orientation epitomized by the Mouvement du 22 Mars.[11] The contradictions internal to this synthesis culminated in the radicalization of these liberational aspects into broad *désirant* sensibility and, by 1972, a more narrowly defined body of thought sometimes known as the "philosophy of desire." Representatives of this current insisted that desire itself be placed at the center of militant thought and action, challenging the privileged role that class struggle, the seizure of state power, and the vanguard party-form had long played for French leftists. These positions had their roots in longstanding debates on the noncommunist Left and intersected with the questioning of revolutionary organization central to tendencies within French Maoism that gained prominence in the early 1970s; they also anticipated the ascendance of discourses of antitotalitarianism, dissidence, and human rights by the second half of the decade, as individualism was increasingly judged to be the true legacy of '68, despite its collectivist pretensions.[12] In what follows, I locate painting with desire with respect to these political and intellectual shifts. This essay therefore also identifies the series of paintings that Cane and Devade realized between 1972 and 1974 as a distinct phase within what is typically generalized with an undifferentiated reference to *les années Supports/Surfaces.*[13] By establishing the formal and conceptual contours of this body of work, I position the rise of a libidinal orientation in painting within the aftermath of '68 and the demise of the mode of collectivity that Supports/Surfaces had, until that moment, struggled to embody.

Painters of "pulsionism"[14]

"Painting allows me to see a femininity that comes to me from colour."[15] "Painting consists of bringing into play, through color, all the drives that run through one's own body and this through paintings, which are 'bodies without organs.'"[16] This is how Louis Cane and Marc Devade, respectively, spoke about the new body of work that each premiered in 1972: Cane

[11] The split between this liberational current and an essentially Leninist one was influentially identified in: Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai 68: L'héritage impossible* (Paris: La découverte, 1998). Le Goff's formulation of this tension echoes that made in Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli's *Les intellectuels en France: De l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1986).

[12] See: Kristin Ross, "Establishing Consensus: May '68 in France as Seen from the 1980s," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 650-676.

[13] *Les années Supports-Surfaces dans les collections du Centre Georges Pompidou* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou/Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1998).

[14] The term "pulsionism" is applied to the body of work here in question, by way of a reference to Jean-François Lyotard's 1973 collection *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, in: Jean Clay, "Painting in Shreds," trans. Daniel Brewer, *SubStance*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1981), 54.

[15] "Peindre, ça me permet de voir une féminité qui me vient de la couleur...." Louis Cane, "L'hétérogène sans gêne" (dated 1975), *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 12 (February 1977), 48.

[16] "La peinture consiste à mettre en jeu à travers la couleur toutes les pulsions qui traversent le corps propre et ceci à travers des peintures qui sont des 'corps sans organes.'" Marc Devade, interview with Catherine Millet, *Art Press* 9 (February 1974), 14.

at the Galerie Yvon Lambert on June 14, Devade at the Galerie Daniel Templon on June 20. For both artists, these solo exhibitions marked the beginning of a series of paintings emphasizing the flows and intensities of pure color, which each would pursue for the next two years.[17] The 1972 paintings represented a break not only within each artist's own practice, as I will show, but also signaled the pair's growing distance from the aesthetic ground staked out in the exhibitions held under the banner of Supports/Surfaces during the previous two years (fig. 2). Following the initial split within the group in 1971, Cane and Devade harshly criticized their former associates for fetishizing painting's physical means: "canvas, stretcher, wood, cord, etc...."[18] The pair rehearsed this laundry list of studio bric-a-brac—what they called a "materialism of materials"—as they strove to differentiate their new position. Here is Cane, in 1973, eschewing "canvas, stretchers, strings, sticks, ropes, etc...."[19] And Devade, in 1974, spurning the display of "bits of canvas, rags, ropes, knots, wood, and other materials."[20] In contrast to this "mechanistic" materialism, Cane and Devade came to describe their own work as a properly materialist return to the history of modern painting, which they identified as the line extending from Cézanne and Matisse to the "great American colourists of the 1950s and 60s, [Jackson] Pollock, [Mark] Rothko, [Barnett] Newman, [Morris] Louis, and others."[21] If applying pigment to rectangles of canvas had appeared regressive in light of the anatomization of painting carried out under the auspices of Supports/Surfaces—and overly reliant on the model of American modernist abstraction—Cane and Devade insisted on the radicality of their more nearly traditional paintings on different grounds. By returning to the historical sequence opened by what they described as Cézanne's "break" with perspective, and anchored by Matisse's radicalization of color, they asserted a disavowed history of the chromatic, centering on questions of subjectivity and sexuality made available through the insights of psychoanalysis.

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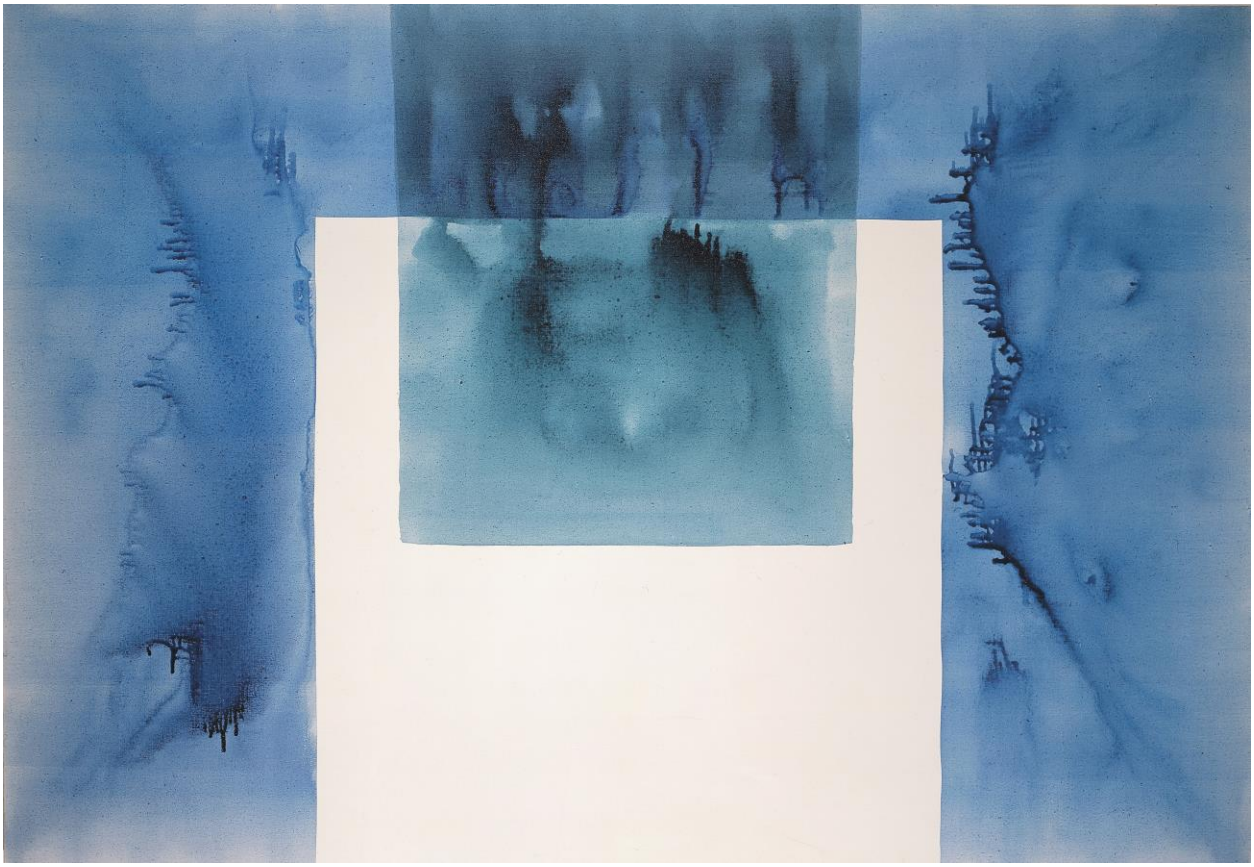
[17] Both artists continued to work roughly in this vein for some years, but focused on a distinct body of work between 1972 and 1974. After this period, Cane returned to making what he calls *les toiles découpées,* while Devade began a series based on a regular, H-shaped composition. Early English-language accounts of this general period of each artist's work are given in: Claire Stoullig, "Louis Cane," *Cimaise* 117-8 (May-August 1974), 66-75, and Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, "L'effet Devade," *Cimaise* 125-6 (January-April 1976), 58-64.

[18] Cane and Devade, "The Avant Garde Today," *Studio International*, vol. 186, no. 959 (October 1973), 146. The artists date the text March 1973.

[19] "C'est 'tout naturellement' que je faisais du 'matérialisme du matériau' (prendre les moyens matériels—toile, châssis, ficelles, baguettes, cordes, etc...—qui servent à faire de la peinture pour la *matière* de la peinture)...." Cane, interview with Catherine Millet, *Art Press* 3 (March/April 1973), 7.

[20] "Il y avait dans Support/Surface, comme dans tout groupe, deux lignes: l'un matérialiste mécaniste (c'est-à-dire idéaliste), des bouts de toiles, chiffons, cordes, nœuds, bois et autres matériaux, l'autre qui tenait et tente d'analyser la peinture sur la base du matérialisme historique, du matérialisme dialectique et de la psychanalyse...." Devade, interview with Millet, 16.

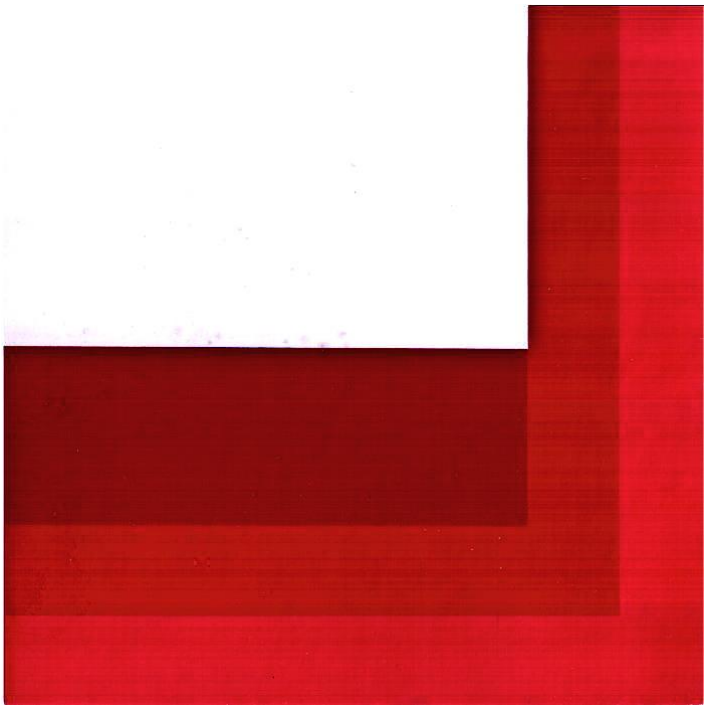
[21] Cane and Devade, "The Avant Garde Today," 145. Later in the 1970s, this "myth of a one-track modernity (Cézanne, Matisse, Americans)" would be countered by the circle of artists—close to the journal *Macula* (1976-79)—who formed the group ja-na-pa. Christian Bonnefoi, "La fonction Albers," *Macula* 2 (1977), 88-92.



3. Marc Devade, *Grand paysage chinois*, 1972. Ink on canvas. 107 x 243 cm.

In his new works, Devade applied churning washes of *encre de chine* to the taut surface of stretched canvas to produce vivid, overlapping fields of color. In *Grand paysage chinois* (1972), for example, two successive washes of blue ink form a simple arch-like figure, neatly aligned with the edges of the canvas (fig. 3). This geometric scaffolding accentuates the liquidity of the paint, which seeps unpredictably into the weave of the canvas, forming a layered network of clots, pools, and drips. The cloudy washes of color produce a sense of material depth stretching between passages of murky darkness and light airiness. While Devade's previous works had also played the specificity and variety of color against the strictness of rectilinear geometric compositions, these hard-edged abstractions had featured smooth, flat planes of color arranged into interlocking compositions (fig. 4). His new works heightened what he had previously identified as the "contradiction" between color and geometric form, replacing impersonal, uniform facture with effusions of color that evoked uncontrolled organic flows.[22] In the catalog for Devade's 1972 show at Galerie Daniel Templon, Marcelin Pleynet—a poet and critic associated with the journal *Tel Quel* (1960-82) whose art criticism had played an

[22] Devade had begun to describe this "contradiction" between color and form as early as 1970. See: Devade, "Notes pour la théorie matérialiste de la pratique picturale (extraits d'un travail en course)," in *Supports-Surfaces* (Paris: ARC, 1970), unpaginated.



4. Postcard reproduction of Marc Devade, *L'est est rouge*, 1968.

instrumental role in the reception of American modernist painting in France[23]—identified his approach to color as the source of the potentially "revolutionary" nature of his work, despite the artist's "reactionary" retention of the traditional stretched canvas. In this way, Pleynet argued, Devade revisited the sequence begun with Cézanne and Matisse, which had broken with the "repression" of color in the history of painting.[24]

Pleynet also focused on color in the essay he penned for an exhibition of Cane's new work at the Galerie Yvon Lambert. Despite abandoning the traditional apparatus of painting with his use of unstretched canvas, he argued, Cane too remained engaged with an essentially painterly problem: the "irrationality of coloristic production [*la production colorée*]."[25] Made from lengths of canvas folded and cut to extend from the wall to the floor, Cane's paintings, such as *Toile sol/mur* (1972), are enlivened by monochromatic gradients, shading evenly from light to dark to produce a diffuse glow (fig. 5). Like Devade's washes of color, Cane's luminous chromatic progressions hinge on the seemingly infinite, unnamable range of values that exists

[23] Pleynet's landmark four-part series of articles on American art, entitled "De la peinture aux Etats-Unis," published in *Les lettres françaises* in March and April of 1967, are collected in: Pleynet, *Les Etats-Unis de la peinture* (Paris: Seuil, 1986). Earlier texts on American artists by Pleynet include: "Exposition Mark Rothko," *Tel Quel* 12 (Winter 1963), 39-41, "La peinture de Robert Rauschenberg," *Tel Quel* 13 (Spring 1963), 68-69, and "Franz Kline et la tentative post-cubiste," *Tel Quel* 19 (Autumn 1964), 88-92.

[24] Pleynet, "Quelques problèmes de la peinture moderne: Marc Devade," in *Marc Devade* (Paris: Galerie Daniel Templon, 1972), unpaginated.

[25] Pleynet, "Quelques problèmes de la peinture moderne: Louis Cane," in *Louis Cane* (Paris: Galerie Yvon Lambert, 1972), 10.

5. Louis Cane, *Toile sol/mur*, 1972. Oil on dyed canvas. Wall section 243 x 243 cm, floor section 202 x 185 cm.

within a single hue. The varying density and dilution of the applied color creates a sense of material depth, even as the smooth diffusion of the paint optically produces the illusion of flux. This represented a departure from Cane's earlier works on unstretched canvas, which were generally composed of rectangular zones of flat monochromatic color, modulated only by the happenstance of mechanical procedure (fig. 6). Cane's new canvases were also patterned by the reticulation formed by folding and unfolding, and they extended outwards from the wall to enter the real space of the room. However unconventional in format, however, the *sol-mur* paintings institute a precisely measured distance from the viewer through this obstructive extension, regaining something of the autonomy associated with the medium. Caught within this structured frame, color appears as a fluctuating, dazzling intensity.

In the work that Cane and Devade each debuted in 1972, vivid chromatic effects realized on large-format canvases indexed the pair's reception of the American artists associated with Color Field painting, including Morris Louis, Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski, as well as their Abstract Expressionist antecedents, Newman and Rothko.[26] In particular, Devade's paintings are formally indebted to the "soak-stain" technique pioneered by Frankenthaler and made famous by Louis and Noland, which Clement Greenberg described under the rubric of "post painterly abstraction," linking them to Jackson Pollock's 1951 black and white paintings featuring thinned enamel paint soaked directly into unprimed canvas.[27] Cane's works, meanwhile, call to mind Olitski's spray paintings, which represented a related approach to what Michael Fried described as the "material substance" of color, "volatile, formless, spreading, penetrating, varied, and fluctuating."[28] This technical affinity speaks to the belated impact of American modernist painting in France, as well as the terms of its reception. Noland's *Turnsole* (1961) and *Resta* (1968) and Louis' *Alpha Tau* (1961) were included in the major exhibition *Art of the Real: USA 1948-1968,* which travelled to the Grand Palais in late 1968.[29] Cane and Devade were also witness to major exhibitions devoted to Rothko and Newman held in Paris in 1972, and they published some of the earliest French

[26] On the use of the term "Color Field," see: Robert Hobbs, "The Term 'Colour Field': A Reframing," in *The Shape of Colour: Excursions in Colour Field Art, 1950-2005),* ed. David Moos (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2005), 18-23.

[27] Clement Greenberg, *Post Painterly Abstraction* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum, 1964), reprinted in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969,* ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 192-96. This essay circulated internationally as: Greenberg, "Post Painterly Abstraction," *Art International* 8 (Summer 1964), 63-65.

[28] Michael Fried, "Jules Olitski," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 145. Originally published as the introduction to *Jules Olitski: Paintings 1963-1967* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1967).

[29] On this exhibition, see: James Meyer, "'The Art of the Real: USA 1948-1968' and the Reception Abroad," in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 253-61.

6. Louis Cane, *Toile découpée*, 1970. Oil on dyed canvas. 247 x 332 cm.

translations of Clement Greenberg's major essays in *Peinture* between 1972 and 1974.[30] However, as Molly Warnock has established, the American expatriate artist James Bishop played a central mediating role in the reception of American modernist painting, and of Greenberg's theorization of it, in France: his pouring technique offered a "counter-model of subjectivity," pressing questions about the embodied subject that had been foreclosed within

[30] *Peinture* published "Clément" Greenberg's writings on Picasso and Leger in 1972 and the first French translation of "Modernist Painting" in 1974, in: Greenberg, "Sur le modernisme," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 8/9 (1974), 33-40. Publications of Greenberg's work prior to this include: "L'art américain au XXe siècle," *Les temps modernes* 11-12 (August-September 1946), 340-52; "Gottlieb: École de New York" (Paris: Galerie Rive Droite, 1959); and "La 'crise' de l'art abstrait," *Preuves* 156 (February 1964), 22-24, which was a response to a questionnaire by K.A. Jelenski, "L'art informel en question," ibid., 3. In 1977, "American Type Painting," along with a dossier of Greenberg's writings on Pollock, was translated in the journal *Macula,* edited by Bois and Clay. For a discussion of the French reception of Greenberg, see Bois, "Greenberg's Amendments," *Kunst & museumjournaal*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1993), 1-9.

Greenbergian doctrine.[31] This was inflected, as Pleynet's framing of the pair's 1972 exhibitions makes clear, by an assessment of color's "irrationality" and the related notion that it had been "repressed" within the history of painting. In this way, Cane and Devade's translation of Color Field painting inscribed their own work within a set of claims that echoed the longstanding opposition between color and drawing or design prominent within traditions of French aesthetics.[32] Resting on color's ancient metaphysical association with, as Jacqueline Lichtenstein notes, "diverse modalities of temporal contingency, chance, ephemerality, and immediacy," this discourse linked the heterogeneity of color and its sensuous, material basis to a raft of associations with femininity, seduction, and the limits of rational discourse.[33]

An appeal to these facets of the chromatic guided and shaped the pair's approximation of American modernist painting and, in particular, their adoption of the technical procedures of staining and spraying. Cane and Devade's use of fluid or fading color represented a shift away from the mechanically applied fields of flat color that had marked both their previous efforts in favor of alternative modes of impersonality: just as Devade's brushwork disappears under the flow of color, Cane institutes a distance between the canvas and his hand by spraying on color.[34] The authorial gesture is mediated by the liquidity of the paint, by its flow in a particular direction and absorption into the canvas—or by its aerated application, by its dissipation into a vaporous mist. This paralleled the renunciation of a certain set of manual skills within Color Field painting. Greenberg had, for example, noted the "relatively anonymous execution" associated with the stain technique, linking this development to his earlier observation that the work of Clyfford Still, Newman, and Rothko entailed the "repudiation of virtuosity of execution."[35] However, Cane and Devade mobilized these

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[31] See the excellent discussion in: Molly Warnock, "Field Agent: The Art of James Bishop," *Artforum*, vol. 52, no. 5 (January 2014), 185-89.

[32] The "supplemental" position of color within classical aesthetics was the topic of Jean Louis Schefer's "Les couleurs renversées/la buée," *Cahiers du cinema,* no. 230 (July 1971), 28-42, and was previously examined in: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967), trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), especially 206-14. Implicitly referencing Derrida, Cane and Daniel Dezeuze pointed to the supplementarity of color with respect to the "logocentricism" of gesture in: Dezeuze and Cane, "Pour un programme théorique pictural" (May 1970), reprinted in *Peinture, cahiers théoriques,* 1 (1971), 67-81. Pleynet's general claims about the "repression" of color are criticized in: Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 279, note 149.

[33] Jacqueline Lichtenstein, "Making Up Representation: The Risks of Femininity," *Representations* 20 (Autumn 1987), 81. For an extended historical investigation into of this topic, see: Jacqueline Lichtenstein, *The Elegance of Color: Rhetoric and Painting in the French Classical Age*, trans. Emily McVarish (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[34] This use of sprayed paint had important precedents in the canvases realized by Martin Barré between 1963 and 1967 and in Michel Parmentier's works of 1966-68.

[35] Greenberg, "Post Painterly Abstraction," 196, and Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International,* vol. 6, no. 8 (October 1962), 24-32, reprinted in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 131. Fried references the rejection of painterly touch within stain painting, but emphasizes its illusory reestablishment. Michael Fried, "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski,

techniques to ends substantially different from those theorized within the precincts of American modernism. For Greenberg, the paintings of Louis, Noland, and Olitski broke with the gestural mannerism of the "Tenth Street Touch," while demonstrating continuity with the achievements of the strand of Abstract Expressionism represented by Newman and Rothko in their clarity and openness. This point was refined by Fried, who famously argued that the painting of Louis and Noland produced a purely "optical" space, despite the fact that the stain technique "identifies the painted image with its woven canvas ground," highlighting rather than hiding the weave of the canvas.[36] By contrast, Cane and Devade harnessed these impersonal techniques to produce what I have described as material depth. The thin application of dilute paint in Cane's paintings accentuates the weave of the canvas, registering the shifting density of the gradient; similarly, Devade's inky washes sink into their substrate, forming overlapping, layered passages of concentration and dispersal. This materiality is retained as depth, pace Fried, through each artist's restriction, for the most part, to a monochromatic palette in which transitions from light to dark are softly continuous, as if spanning an infinite and imperceptible range of chromatic differences.[37] In Devade's paintings, this motion takes the form of the flow of ink, while in Cane's paintings it is realized in the flux created by the clashing directionality of the gradients. In other words, the material constitution of the paintings is not annulled, even as these passages come to allude to or even to produce the illusion of movement. In both artists' work, color is distributed and modulated so as to suggest its operation as a dynamic, material force.

This formal difference was pressed to distinguish Cane and Devade's work from painting directed to "eyesight alone," from what Pleynet criticized as the "fragmented body" of modernity, "with the top separated from the bottom (intellect from sexuality) but also with the various dissociations of smell, hearing, sight, gesture, and so on."[38] For Cane, this meant addressing the unresolved limit "at the level of the subject" within American modernist painting, in relation to the "treatment of color/sexuality."[39] With respect to subjectivity, Cane

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Frank Stella," in *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1965), reprinted in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 231.

[36] Fried, "Three American Painters," 230. The French translation of Fried's essay, with an introduction written by Louis Marin, appeared in "Peindre," special issue, *Revue d'Esthétique* 1 (1976), 240-338.

[37] A number of Devade's paintings from this period consist of fields of different colors; however, I would argue that the modulation of color within each field, especially in the form of puddles and drips, remains central to their effect.

[38] Pleynet, *Painting and System,* trans. Sima N. Godfrey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 31. Originally published as *Système de la Peinture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977). "Le système de Matisse," the essay in which this passage is found, first appeared in Pleynet's *L'Enseignement de la peinture* in 1971.

[39] "Je crois que cette histoire de l'abstraction américaine marque une limite, que, au niveau du sujet, chez certains particulièrement, peut s'illustrer par le mot de *rétention.* Remarquer dans cette peinture les effets peints ou les effets manquants dus à cette 'attitude' du sujet-peintre, nous reporte dans le questionnement du rapport traitement de la couleur/sexualité (dans le sens où couleur est un *moyen*

invokes color and sexuality interchangeably: he likens the intensity and modulation of color to the irruptive force of bodily drives. Recall Devade's assertion that "painting consists of bringing into play, through color, all the drives that run through one's own body." In the same interview, conducted with the critic Catherine Millet in 1974, Devade insisted that his work was not centered on any given hue, but rather on "the *jouissance* that it produces at a given moment of its treatment," that is, "the process of the transformation of color by its work."[40] Devade had already, in 1970, suggested that color might be poised to play such a role, describing "the active operation of colour that is produced by the pulsion of labour in pictural production."[41] With such claims, Cane and Devade proposed that, rather than expressing the artist's preexisting subjectivity, color is a force that confronts and dynamically constructs the subject.

This premise, at the heart of painting with desire, emerged in dialogue with the theorization of subject formation that Julia Kristeva developed during this period.[42] Reemphasizing Freud's theory of the drives, Kristeva argued that these preverbal instinctual energies persist within language as what she called the "semiotic," in the form of rhythm, tone, timbre, and other modes of musicality. Language, for Kristeva, is comprised of the semiotic together with what she calls the "symbolic," that is, the dry structures of communicative meaning. The ongoing oscillation between the two forms the very basis for meaning: the semiotic undercuts the stability and rationality of the symbolic, but it also, crucially, provides for its force. At the heart of Kristeva's project is the idea that the semiotic does not simply refer to bodily drives but actually "discharges" them; for this reason, poetic language can serve to "reactivate" these drives and disrupt the normal functioning of language. The *sujet en procès* (subject-in-process/on trial) is thus continually formed and transformed in and through language. This understanding of subject formation was of considerable interest to Cane and Devade, underwriting their contention that the drives could be made

signifiant d'une problématique picturale matérialiste)." Cane, interview with Millet, 7. Emphasis in the original.

[40] "Bleu, rouge, vert, jaune, cela n'a pas d'importance, ce qui importe c'est la jouissance qu'elle produit à tel ou tel instant de son traitement; c'est lui qui importe, ou plutôt le processus de transformation de la couleur par son travail...." Devade, interview with Millet, 13.

[41] Devade, "Chromatic Painting: Theorem Written Through Painting," in *The Tel Quel Reader,* ed. Patrick ffrench and Roland-François Lack (New York: Routledge, 1998), 192. Originally published as "D'une peinture chromatique," *Tel Quel* 41 (Spring 1970), 72-88.

[42] The following précis draws on: Kelly Oliver, "Introduction: Kristeva's Revolutions," in *The Portable Kristeva,* ed. Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xi-xxix. Kristeva's account of the semiotic and the *sujet en procès* receives its fullest elaboration in *La révolution du language poétique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974), but these themes are explored in earlier texts, including "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes," *Tel Quel* 29 (Spring 1967), 53-75; "La sémiologie: Science critique et/ou critique de la science," in *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968), 83-96; "Le sujet en procès," part 1, "Artaud Bataille," special issue, *Tel Quel* 52 (Winter 1972), 12-30; "Le sujet en procès," part 2, *Tel Quel* 53 (Spring 1973), 2-38.

manifest in the work of color—and that painting actively produces the subject.[43] There is a clear parallel, for example, between Kristeva's schema and Devade's claim that "the infinity of colours perverts the code that it methodically plays on. This infinity is both the possibility of and the cancellation of the code."[44] The alignment of the chromatic and semiotic with respect to the economy of instinctual drives was also a subject of Kristeva's own speculations.[45]

Starting from this basic premise, Cane and Devade foregrounded the act of painting as a systematic process that structures the unpredictable, irrational productivity of the chromatic. In the catalog that accompanied his 1972 show, Cane describes the realization of his canvases through three successive steps, indicated in the title of his essay: "Sur le sol, pliée, avec la couleur" (On the ground, folded, with color). [46] The first step involved spraying color on a length of unfolded canvas resting horizontally on the ground. The next step entailed folding the canvas lengthwise and cutting out a rectangular flap. The third and final step consisted of intervening into the product of these actions by altering the final composition by hand: the decision to continue painting—and then to stop. Cane makes much of the embodied operations of folding and cutting, which had notable precedents in the work of Simon Hantaï and Matisse, respectively, as well as the Pollockian resonance of working on the ground. Cane simplified and recapitulated this descriptive account the following year: "The canvas is first rolled out lengthwise on the ground; I paint it, fold it in half, color facing inwards, cut it, unfold it and continue to paint."[47] In a 1974 interview, Devade gives a similar step-by-step description of his working process, a series of operations he describes as "adjustment, spreading, puddles of contrasts, puddles of emphasis, reversal."[48] The meaning of these actions, and the significance of their bodily basis, is clarified in the series of photographs that accompanied the interview (fig. 7). Surrounded by a grid of paintings propped up facing the wall, Devade crouches over his work, leaning and stretching over its surface to reach the

[43] Devade cites Kristeva's "Le sujet en procès" in his "La peinture vue d'en-bas," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 8/9 (1974), 25, and in *Passages* (Paris: Galerie Daniel Templon, 1974), 3. Prior to this, he referred to Kristeva's *Sémeiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969) in his "Notes sur une peinture operant dans de beaux draps," in: *Louis Cane* (Paris: Daniel Templon, 1971), 6. Cane and Dezeuze also cite Kristeva's "À propos de l'idéologie scientifique," *Promesse* 27 (Spring 1969), 53-77, in their "Pour un programme théorique pictural," 77.

[44] Devade, "Chromatic Painting," 191.

[45] Julia Kristeva, "Giotto's Joy," in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 221. Kristeva's essay was originally published as "L'espace Giotto," *Peinture* 2/3 (1972), and was collected in *Calligram: Essays in New Art History from France,* ed. Norman Bryson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[46] Cane, "Sur le sol, pliée, avec la couleur," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 6/7 (April 1973), 24-36. The text is dated November 1972 and was originally published on the occasion of Cane's solo exhibition at Galerie Daniel Templon in 1973.

[47] "Le toile est d'abord étalée sur le sol dans toute sa longueur; je la peins, la plie en deux, couleur à l'intérieur, la découpe et la déplie et continue à peindre." Cane, interview with Millet, 7.

[48] "Réglage, épandage, flaques de contrastes, flaques d'accents, renversement." Devade, interview with Millet, 14.

7. Photographs of Marc Devade painting, from: Marc Devade, interview with Catherine Millet, *Art Press* 9 (February 1974), 13-17.

interior of the canvas. Starting from a predetermined schema, he divides its surface using a ruler suspended just above the surface. He then pours out pools of ink, which he spreads with a brush. While the canvas is still wet, he rotates it, causing the color to run. Working multiple layers in this manner, he creates a sense of material, chromatic depth while preserving the directionality of each step. For both artists, the act of painting proceeds by the execution of a set of choreographed operations.

Within this regular, methodical framework, the application of color is presented as contingent upon an embodied gesture, yet subject to impersonal forces and unpredictable in its impact. Such an understanding of the chromatic is evident in the line drawings that Cane and Devade published in catalogs for exhibitions at Galerie Daniel Templon held in 1973 (fig. 8) and 1974 (fig. 9). Cane outlines one of his *sol-mur* paintings, sketching how the outer layer, cut and folded, frames the painting's vertical expanse and unfolds over its bottom "lip" to extend horizontally. Devade diagrams the division of a canvas into three horizontal bands, indicating the directionality of the flow of ink outwards from the central void. The function of the drawings is somewhat obscure: Cane described them as an expansive "counterpoint" to his own words, while Devade wrote that the drawings produce or "program" his paintings, but are surpassed by the work of color to which they give rise.[49] These schematic drawings indicate the format or composition of the paintings to which they relate, but can only approximate the specific turns taken over the course of the embodied execution of the work, serving as placeholders for the impact of color (fig. 10). Color is understood here, on a practical level, according to Matisse's dictum (which Devade quotes) that "the quantitative relations of colours used freely determine their quality."[50] Cane also repeatedly referred to Matisse's related assertion that "one square centimeter of any blue is not as blue as a square meter of the same blue."[51] Whereas for Greenberg this formula—rendered as "more blue simply being bluer than less blue"—secured the purity and intensity of what he called "color-space," for Cane and Devade it anchored the claim that color exceeds any predetermined, projected measures, and that it can only be known in and through the embodied act of painting.[52]

Looking back from the vantage of 1981, the art historian Jean Clay derided the painters of "pulsionism," writing that the "lettered braying about 'drive' or 'color drive,' which the muezzins of our 'institutional avant garde' are still trying their hand at" merely rehashed the

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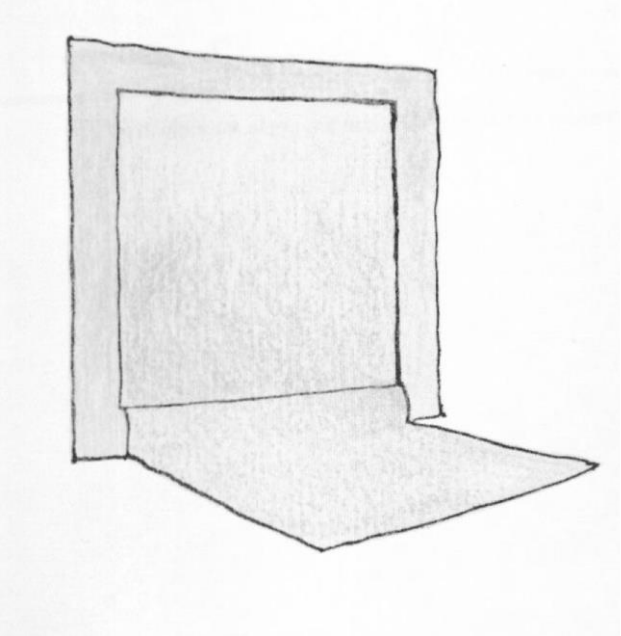
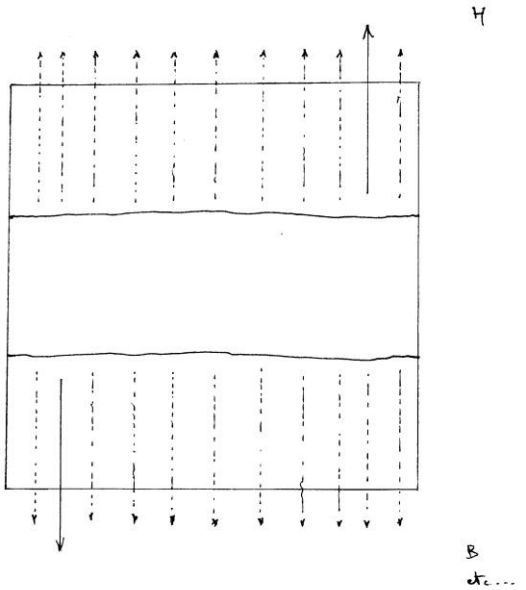
[49] Cane, "Sur le sol, pliée, avec la couleur," 25, and Devade, *Passages*, 23.

[50] Devade, "Chromatic Painting," 192. The citation is from Matisse's letter to Alexandre Romm of January 1934.

[51] For example: Cane, "Marc Devade: Plongée dans la couleur," *Art Press* 9 (February 1974), 13. This quote, which derives from Louis Aragon's *Henri Matisse, roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), appears in *Henri Matisse: Écrits et propos sur l'art* (Paris: Hermann, 1972), 129. The English translation is given in: Aragon, *Henri Matisse: A Novel*, vol. 2, trans. Jean Stewart (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 308.

[52] Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," 131. This formulation is recalled in: Fried, "Jules Olitski," 145, note 5. Cf. Bois' discussion of Matisse's words in: Bois, *Painting as Model*, 22. An extensive treatment of Matisse's writings on color is given in: Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, "Les textes du peintre," *Critique* 324 (May 1974), 400-33.



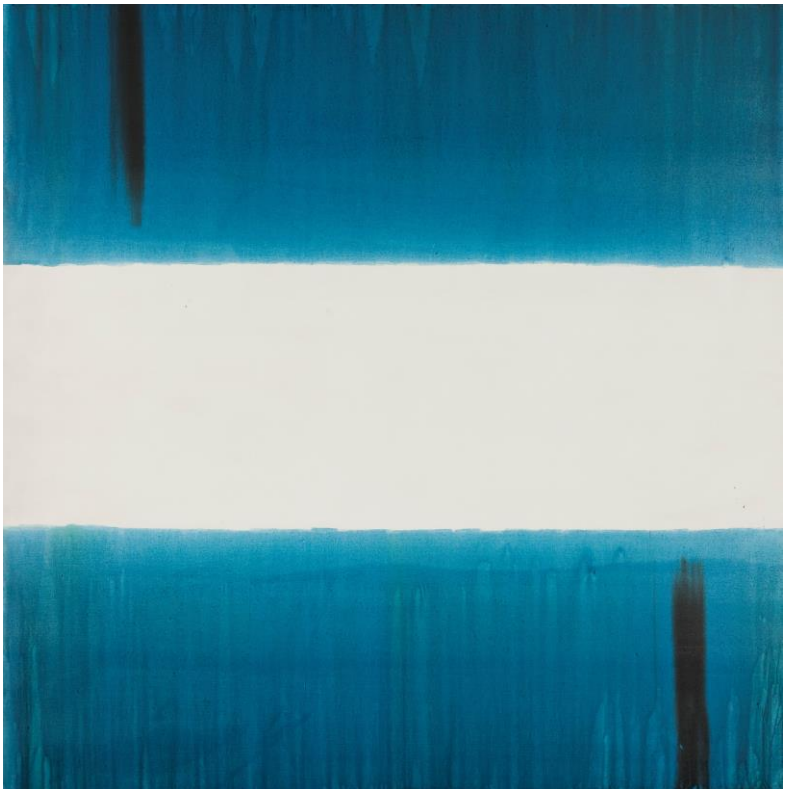


8 (left). Louis Cane, drawing from "Sur le sol, pliée, avec la couleur," in: *Louis Cane* (Paris: Galerie Daniel Templon, 1973), unpaginated.

9 (right). Marc Devade, drawing from: *Passages* (Paris: Galerie Daniel Templon, 1974), 22.

expressionist paradigm famously described by Harold Rosenberg as "action painting."[53] While the turn to color was certainly a return to the subject, the project of painting with desire was resolutely directed against such a model of expressivity. Instead of painting being the expression of a preexisting subject, the encounter with the chromatic, routed through the technical procedures of cutting, folding, pouring, and spraying, was taken to *produce* the subject. However, the most vivid evidence of this production lay not in the paintings themselves, in the flow and flux of their chromatic effusions, no matter how evocative of discharged drives. It was, rather, located in the artists' own increasingly baroque descriptive accounts of their studio practice. For example, in the second issue of *Peinture*, Cane's "Le peintre sans modèle" set forth a hallucinatory narrative of his process, associating the canvas with the maternal body, the gestural "mark, slit, gash" (*trace, fente, entaille*) with castration, and color with ejaculate. He cites the impotence of the gesture, its blind discovery of the material substrate: "Absurd paintbrush that gesticulates on the surface of the canvas, useless

[53] Clay, "Painting in Shreds," 54. Rosenberg's influential 1952 essay appeared in French as "Les peintres d'action américains," in: Rosenberg, *La tradition du nouveau,* trans. Anne Marchand (Paris: Minuit, 1962). The theatricalization of *informel* painting at the hands of Georges Mathieu and then Yves Klein during the 1950s and 1960s is key to the French reception of Abstract Expressionism; see: Warnock, "Displace, Disclose, Discover: Acts of Painting, 1960-1999," *Artforum*, vol. 51, no. 2 (October 2012), 260-61.



10. Marc Devade, *Sans titre*, 1973. Ink on canvas. 200 x 200 cm.

testes, you can see that color is 'inside.'"[54] Sentences such as this one, which is filled with untranslatable internal rhymes, embrace those musical aspects of language that Kristeva called the "semiotic." The energies of desire are evoked in the form as much as in the content of Cane's belletristic profusions. He continues on in this vein, describing painting as aggressive: "Passed through by sado-urethral drives, color is a dangerous substance, it penetrates to erode, soaks to mark, seeps in to poison, is incorporated to consume."[55] Similarly, in "Comment me vient la peinture" (1973), published in *Promesse,* a poetry review edited by Jean-Louis Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta former Parti communiste français (French Communist Party) militants active in the circle around *Tel Quel*, Devade breathlessly describes painting as being "driven by color," seized by the paraphernalia of the medium as one is "'seized by debauchery,' debauchery of *jouissance,* 'infinity of *jouissance*.'"[56] Recalling

[54] "Pinceau ridicule qui gesticule sur la surface de la toile, testicules inutiles, la couleur tu le vois bien est 'dedans.'" Cane "'Le peintre sans modèle,' note pratique sur une peinture," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 2/3 (1972), 100.

[55] "Passé par les pulsions sado-urétrales la couleur est substance dangereuse, elle pénètre pour ronger, s'imbibe pour marquer, s'infiltre pour empoisonner, s'insère pour brûler." Cane, "Le peintre sans modèle," 101-2.

[56] "...comme on dit 'saisi par la débauche,' débauche de jouissance, 'infinité de la jouissance.'" Devade, "Comment me vient la peinture," *Promesse* 34-35 (Spring 1973), 109-12, reprinted in Camille Saint-Jacques, *Marc Devade: Peintre théoricien* (Paris: Lettres modernes, 1986), 121.

the '68 slogan, "Sous les pavés, la plage!" (Under the cobblestones, the beach!), he describes conjuring form and color from the blank canvas: "Under the square, right-angled cobblestones, beaches, the pencil raises white beaches by dividing the square, the rectangle; on the beaches, second operation, tidal wave of colors. Tidal wave that crashes upon, spreads in the white, retreat, and then return of another color by waves...."[57] Devade envisions painting as a "sexual dance," in which one is roiled by this swelling and ebbing of color. In these and other texts, the chromatic encounter is narrated through highly personal, literary attempts to describe painting as a libidinal activity. As such, these colorful accounts serve to document the overcoming of the limits of American abstraction—and to measure the distance between a group of well-mannered paintings and the increasingly flamboyant declarations of desire that they occasioned.

"Under the *langue du bois,* desire!"[58]

A photograph taken at the opening for Marc Devade's 1972 exhibition at the Galerie Daniel Templon shows the artist and key members of the circle around *Tel Quel*—Marcelin Pleynet, Julia Kristeva, and Philippe Sollers, the co-founder of the journal and Kristeva's partner—standing together in front of one of Devade's canvases (fig. 11). The image attests to the intellectual and social hothouse that incubated the rhetoric of painting with desire, fostering its ambitions as well as its excesses. Kristeva is squarely framed by the vibrant red rectangle at the composition's center, which is edged by fields of coral pink flowing into a deep maroon. As a backdrop for the assembled group, the red painting is resonant. It recalls the saturated covers of *Peinture,* apparently colored red at Sollers' suggestion as a token of the group's shared enthusiasm for the Chinese Cultural Revolution.[59] After '68, Cane and Devade had followed the editors of *Tel Quel* in aligning and then, in June 1971, breaking with the Parti communiste français (PCF) in favor of a Maoist position, a process that strengthened the bond between *Tel Quel* and *Peinture*.[60] Shades of red also adorned the breakout canvas from

[57] "Sous les pavés carrés, rectangles, les plages, le crayon soulève des plages de blancs divisant le carré, le rectangle; sur les plages, deuxième opération, les lames de fond des couleurs. Lames de fond qui s'écrasent sur, s'étalent dans le blanc, recul, puis retour d'une autre couleur par vagues...." Devade, "Comment me vient la peinture," 122.

[58] "Sous la langue de bois, le désir." Daniel Cohn-Bendit in: Maurice Dugowson, "Histoire d'un jour: Paris, 20 mai 1968," television documentary, 1985, quoted in Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 189. As Ross notes, Cohn-Bendit's revision of the famous slogan—"Sous les pavés, la plage!"—declared personal liberation the true meaning of the *langue du bois* of '68.

[59] "Philippe Sollers insista pour que la couverture soit rouge. Nous étions dans l'ébullition (différée) de la Révolution culturelle chinoise et (présente) de l'après Mai 68." Dezeuze, interview with Gérard-Georges Lemaire, "*Peinture, Cahiers théoriques,*" *La revue des revues,* no. 57 (Spring 2017), 32.

[60] This particular shift emerged around a contretemps involving the possibility of selling Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi's pro-Maoist book *De la Chine* (1971) at an annual communist gathering. Cane funded the bulletin that emerged around this controversy, *Mouvement du Juin 71,* further cementing the relationship between the two journals. See: Philippe Forest, *Histoire de* Tel Quel*:*

Devade's debut show, held in 1970 at the Galerie du Haut Pavé, *L'Est est rouge* (1968). The painting (which entered Sollers' own collection) was released as a limited edition poster, with a smaller serigraph reproduction available, for an additional five francs, in the catalog, which also featured texts by Pleynet and Sollers.[61] That same year, Devade, who first contributed poetry to *Tel Quel* in 1964, published his essay "D'une peinture chromatique" in the journal; he would go on to join its editorial committee in 1971. Roland Barthes, who was close to *Tel Quel,* seemed to have these associations in mind when he wrote, in the journals he kept during his trip to China in 1974 (with Sollers, Pleynet, Kristeva, and François Wahl), the enigmatic formula, "A large red rectangle.** Support Surface."[62] This context of intellectual ferment and exchange would be formative for the theory and practice of libidinal aesthetics that Cane and Devade set out in the wake of the collapse of Supports/Surfaces in 1971, even as their project soon exceeded these bounds, flowing into the wider currents of desire of the *après-Mai*.

The logic of painting with desire tracks closely to a theory of painting set out by Pleynet, first in a two-part essay published in *Art International* in 1969 and then in a collection of his essays that appeared in 1971. In the article "Peinture et réalité" (1969), Pleynet drew on Louis Althusser's influential notion of "theoretical practice" to argue that with the "epistemological break" effected by Cézanne's rupture with the perspectival code, painting had become an "object of knowledge," rather than a "real object," that is to say, a luxury item bought and sold on the market.[63] Painting was therefore claimed as a provisional, knowledge-

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1960-1982 (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 423. While Simon Leys's *Les habits neufs du président Mao* was published in 1971, the broad enthusiasm for the Chinese Cultural Revolution and China more generally was sustained in the years that followed: *Tel Quel* released a blockbuster double issue devoted to "Chinese Thought" in Spring 1972, coinciding with a special section on "textes philosophiques de Chine Populaire" in *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 4/5 (Spring 1972). In 1976 Sollers disavowed the journal's Maoism, justifying it as an instrumental position taken to break with the PCF, in: Sollers, "A propos du 'Maoïsme,'" *Tel Quel* 68 (Winter 1976), 104.

[61] Galerie du Haut Pavé inventory list entitled "Exposition de PEINTURES—MARC DEVADE," Dossier 1970-72, Fonds Marc Devade, Archives de la critique d'art, Rennes, France.

[62] "Un grand rectangle rouge**. Support Surface." Barthes, *Carnets du voyage en Chine* (Paris: C. Bourgois éditeur/IMEC, 2009), 21. Translated as *Travels in China,* trans. Andrew Brown (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 7. The asterisks indicate Barthes' own annotation of the text, reading: "two green shrubs in front of it." For a discussion of the group's engagement with China, see: Lisa Lowe, "The Desires of Postcolonial Orientalism: Chinese Utopias of Kristeva, Barthes, and *Tel Quel,*" in *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 136-89; and Eric Hayot, "*Tel Quel*," in *Chinese Dreams: Pound, Brecht,* Tel Quel (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 103-75.

[63] Pleynet, "Peinture et réalité," *Art International*, vol. 12, no. 1 (January 1969), 24-6, and "Peinture et réalité (suite)," *Art International*, vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1969), 59-63. The articles were written on the occasion of the exhibition *The Art of the Real, USA 1948-1968,* held at the Grand Palais in Paris in 1968. The real object/object of knowledge distinction is central to Louis Althusser's *Lire le Capital* (Reading Capital), which was based on a seminar held at the École normale superiéure in 1965 and published as: Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Jacques Rancière, and Pierre Macherey, *Lire le Capital,* vols I and II (Paris: Maspero, 1965). A pocket edition was released in 1968.

11. Opening for *Marc Devade*, exhibition, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris (June 1972).

producing activity or, to use Althusser's terminology, a science. With this, Pleynet hewed to the model of Althusser's *Lire le Capital* (1965), which located the passage from ideology to science in the fact of such an "epistemological break."[64] Facing what he considered to be the "theoretical void" at the heart of the PCF, Althusser sought with this framework to rehabilitate Marxism as a philosophically rigorous science, steeling it against Stalinism, which had slowly been discredited in France after 1956, as well as against the humanist "revisionism" associated with this process of de-Stalinization.[65] With "theoretical practice," Althusser affirmed theory as concrete, ongoing intellectual labor: a specific practice with its own "raw materials" (the products of other social practices or earlier phases of theory) and "means of production," the "product" of which serves as "raw material" for further thought. While Althusser's concept of ideological interpellation perhaps casts a longer shadow in American art history, his notion of practice was pivotal for a range of artists and thinkers in France during the late 1960s and 1970s.[66] It was, in particular, foundational to the calculated embrace

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On Pleynet's text, see: Howard Singerman, "Noncompositional Effects, or the Process of Painting in 1970," *Oxford Art Journal,* vol. 26, no. 1 (2003), 146-8.

[64] Etienne Balibar, "From Bachelard to Althusser: The Concept of 'Epistemological Break,'" *Economy and Society,* vol. 7, no. 3 (August 1978), 207-37.

[65] For an excellent treatment of this context, see: G.M. Goshgarian, "Introduction," in Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings* 1966-67), ed. François Matheron (New York: Verso, 2003), xi-lxii.

[66] See, for example: Sami Siegelbaum, "The Riddle of May '68: Collectivity and Protest in the Salon de la Jeune Peinture," *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2012), 53-73.

of the specificity and political significance of work on "signifying practices" at the heart of *Tel Quel*'s project.[67] *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* also adopted this premise, although the editors insisted on the unique problems posed by paintings, which, they pointed out, are "overdetermined economically" and "highly endowed with sexuality inasmuch as these objects are most often objects of fetishism."[68]

In Pleynet's hands, the particular task of painting, as a science, was to work on the code of perspective and what escapes it: color and gesture.[69] This charge was immediately taken up by the artists who would go on to form Supports/Surfaces as a way to reject the ideological operations of individualism, creativity, and expression associated with the medium. However, while the "interpenetration color-support-gesture-texture" was emphasized, for example, in the proto-Supports/Surfaces exhibition *La peinture en question* (1969), the problem of color that Pleynet identified was largely sidelined as an explicit and systematic concern during the height of the group's activity between 1970 and 1971.[70] Cane would go so far as to claim that color was "repressed" within his own practice during this time, pointing to the coincidence between "May '68 and a kind of 'hibernation' of color."[71] Instead, the group focused on how painting, imagined as an object of knowledge, contested the "bourgeois" conception of art, which centered the individual creator of fetishized works. Redefined as "theoretical research and collective labor," painting was claimed as a form of work, rather than a luxury item—and the individual subject of artistic creation was temporarily supplanted by a collective one.[72]

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[67] On the coherence of this underlying position and the aesthetic and political trajectory of *Tel Quel* see: Danielle Marx-Scouras, *The Cultural Politics of* Tel Quel: *Literature and the Left in the Wake of Engagement* (University Park, Penn: The Pennsylvania State University, 1996), and more recently: Boris Gobille, *Le Mai 68 des écrivans. Crise politique et avant-garde littéraires* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2018).

[68] Editorial, *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 1 (1971), 7, translated in "Extracts from *Peinture: Cahiers Théoriques*," trans. Jonathan Benthall, *Studio International* 185, no. 953 (March 1973), 110.

[69] Pleynet, "Peinture et Réalité (suite)," 62. Althusser considered art to be a technical, not theoretical, practice and therefore an ideological rather than scientific activity. Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic: On the Unevenness of Origins," in *For Marx,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 171, note 7. See further comments in: Althusser, "A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre" (1966), in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 241-2, and discussion in: Warren Montag, *Louis Althusser* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 37.

[70] Dezeuze, Cane, Patrick Saytour, Viallat, *La Peinture en question* (13th Salon de peinture de l'union havraise des arts plastiques, 1969), reprinted in: Dezeuze, *Textes, entretiens, poems, 1967-2008* (Paris: Beaux-Arts de Paris éditions, 2008), 63-65.

[71] "Mai 68 et une sorte de 'mise en sommeil' de la couleur." Cane, interview with Millet, 9.

[72] Supports/Surfaces, "Positions du groupe Supports/Surfaces," flyer released for the group's exhibition at the Théâtre de la cité internationale in Paris, April 19-May 8, 1971, reprinted in *Le Moment Supports/Surfaces,* ed. Déborah Laks and Bernard Ceysson (Saint-Etienne: Ceysson Editions d'Art, 2010), 296. On the issue of painting's status as a luxury object, see the debate between members of the Front des Artistes Plasticiens, members of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, and Supports/Surfaces (Cane and Devade), February 16, 1972, Paris, in: "Révolutionner la peinture ou peindre la révolution?" *Bulletin paroissial du curé Meslier* 4 (1972), 1-11.

It was only with the breakdown of the group and the publication of Pleynet's *L'enseignement de la peinture* in 1971 that color reemerged as a central concern. A collection of recent critical essays, *L'enseignement de la peinture* focused on the place of the subject within modern art. The status of biography played a crucial role in the book's longest essay, "Le système de Matisse," which developed a psychoanalytic reading of the painter drawing on Freud as well as Melanie Klein to establish "the *material ground* of the sexual drives" in a section entitled "Color/Flavor."[73] With this reading of Matisse, Pleynet extended his previous account of Cézanne's "rupture" with perspective to include what he described elsewhere as a "non-illusionist *depth* based on the infinite dimensions provided by the drive of color."[74] In her essay "L'espace Giotto," which was published in *Peinture* the following year, Kristeva praised Pleynet for demonstrating "the connection between chromatic experience, relation to the mother, and above all, the oral phase of infantile eroticism" in relation to the development of what she calls the "artistic function."[75] Pleynet's turn to part-objects and bodily drives in his rereading of Matisse anticipated the feminist reception of Kleinian psychoanalysis in the 1990s.[76] However, the line that Pleynet draws from Cézanne to Matisse (and from there to American modernist painting) reinscribed an already canonical narrative of modernism as a parade of individual, masculine achievements, albeit on different terms.[77] Kristeva's own essay sketched a pre-history of this development, taking up chromatic experience well before Cézanne by considering Giotto's "translation of instinctual drives into colored surface."[78] Her exploration of this fourteenth-century "signifying economy"—which she correlates to its ideological context with a gesture to Frederick Antal's 1947 history of Florentine painting (not translated into French until 1991)—was explicitly aimed, however, at the "contemporary production" of painting: presumably Cane and Devade themselves, whom she tasked with grasping the historical articulation of the physiological forces of the chromatic in relation to their own practices.

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[73] Pleynet, *Painting and System,* 52-55. Emphasis in the original. Pleynet's application of a psychoanalytic framework to Matisse is criticized in: Bois, "Matisse: The Blinding," 99-100.

[74] Pleynet, "Painting and *Surrealism and Painting*," trans. Paul Rogers, *Comparative Criticism* 4 (1982), 50. Emphasis in the original. See the introduction written by Stephen Bann on this connection (31-34). Pleynet's essay is dated 1971 and was originally published as "La peinture et *Le surréalisme et la peinture*," in *Art et littérature* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), 366-86.

[75] Kristeva, "Giotto's Joy," 234-35, note 10. See the dialogue between Kristeva, Bann, and Adrian Rifkin on this topic in: Bann, "Three Images for Kristeva: From Bellini to Proust," *Parallax*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1998), 77.

[76] See: Annette Michelson, "'Where Is Your Rupture?'" Mass Culture and the Gesamtkunstwerk," *October* 56 (Spring 1991), 42-63; Mignon Nixon, "Bad Enough Mother," *October* 71 (Winter 1995), 70-92; Helen Molesworth, "Introduction," in *Part Object, Part Sculpture* (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005), 19-26; and Nixon, "Editor's Note," *October* 119 (Winter 2007), 3-5.

[77] On this paradox, see: Bann, "Marcelin Pleynet and the System of Painting," *Parallax*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1998), 62.

[78] Kristeva, "Giotto's Joy," 210.

The pair quickly took up this charge. Indeed, Cane had already championed Pleynet's essay for revealing "how the painter (Matisse) sublimates his drives and his incest in the 'tableau', transforming the libidinal motivity of the body of/for painting in full force."[79] In the next issue of *Peinture,* Devade would similarly assert that Pleynet "sets up the instinctive basis of color, thus elaborating the scientific, materialistic system of the process producing both painting and subject."[80] (Pleynet, for his part, references his "La système de Matisse" in the essays that he penned for both Cane and Devade's 1972 exhibitions, and in a short essay he contributed to an issue of *Peinture* that same year.)[81] In this way, Pleynet's account of Matisse grounded the artists' approach to painting as a libidinal practice, in which color is tied to the instinctive drives of the painter. In a co-authored essay appearing in the March 1973 issue of *Studio International*, Cane and Devade programmatically declared their work on "gesture and color," reviving the terms of Pleynet's earlier account of painting as an object of knowledge, as the true vanguard of pictorial practice. *L'enseignement de la peinture,* they claimed, allowed them to understand painting as a "practice of a biographical subject having a subconscious and instincts that manifest themselves in his painting."[82] Pleynet's example, moreover, provided a basis for describing these processes discursively. Cane credited the book with "finally allowing a painter to speak of his work."[83] Devade echoed this verdict, declaring it essential for "every painter having to think through his practice."[84] This process of speaking and thinking was, as I have already charted, carried out at length in the essays that accompanied the bodies of work that each artist debuted soon thereafter.

Cane would later distance himself from the verbal excesses of painting with desire, insisting that "if I have used this vocabulary it was specifically in order to go beyond the formalist discussions of art critics, especially the Americans."[85] While undoubtedly of instrumental value in this regard, the currency as much as the extravagance of this language cannot be understood outside of the intellectual and political embrace of desire in France after '68. Jacques Lacan's "return" to Freud had been important to intellectual life prior to the events, attracting Althusser as well as the circle around *Tel Quel*; Lacanian psychoanalysis was, for example, key to the project of *Cahiers pour l'Analyse* (1966-69), a journal published

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[79] "Il nous est ici montré comment le peintre (Matisse) va sublimer ses pulsions et son inceste dans le 'tableau,' transformant la motricité libidinale du corps en force de la/pour la peinture." Cane, "Pourquoi lire et travailler 'L'enseignement de la peinture,'" *Combat,* January 17, 1972, reprinted in *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 2/3 (1972), 66.

[80] Devade, "La peinture et son double," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 4/5 (October 1972), 49-81, partially translated by Kate Linker as "Painting and its Double," *Tracks: A Journal of Artists' Writings*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1976), 61.

[81] Pleynet, "Pourquoi la peinture," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 2/3 (1972), 53-56.

[82] Cane and Devade, "The Avant Garde Today," 146.

[83] "Le livre de Marcelin Pleynet...permet enfin à un peintre de parler de son travail." Cane, "Pourquoi lire et travailler 'L'enseignement de la peinture,'" 66.

[84] Devade, "Painting and its Double," 52.

[85] Cane, "Painting: Answers to Questions Put by Dr. Michael Pauseback," unpaginated.

by a group of Althusser's students.[86] Psychoanalysis had also formed an important plank of *Tel Quel*'s project since the late 1960s, although the journal's engagement with Lacan can be characterized as fragmented and largely unsystematic.[87] However, the events of '68 catalyzed a surge of popular interest in psychoanalysis, particularly the "Freudo-Marxism" of Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich.[88] For many, the revival of Surrealist themes evident in the graffiti of May—"Under the cobblestones, the beach!" or "Take one's desires for reality"—signaled the realization of Surrealism's "politics of Eros."[89] In this context, the question of the subject came to occupy an increasingly prominent role for *Tel Quel*, driven by Kristeva's work on pre-linguistic drives. The colloquium "Artaud/Bataille: Vers une révolution culturelle," held at Cerisy-la-Salle in 1972, was a watershed for the journal's evolution on this front, occasioning Kristeva's formulation of the *sujet en procès* and a deepening turn towards the corporeal register of transgression.[90] Whereas the Lacanian conception of desire rested on a constitutive lack, the theories that took hold following '68 were eclectic, tending towards a vitalist view of desire and subjectivity.

While the logic of painting with desire was closely aligned with Kristeva's reworking of the Freudian theory of the drives, Cane and Devade's descriptions of painting as a form of sublimation or the manifestation of subconscious instincts also recall standard Freudian tropes. Cane, for example, cites the indispensability of "Freudianism" to "decoding" the drives and interpreting color, which he likens to a dream.[91] Acknowledging the ground shared with Surrealism on this count, Devade nonetheless attempted to differentiate his own project, claiming that whereas the Surrealists approached the unconscious as a theme or substance to exploit, his "work on color" is a continual practice of bringing this "repressed" and "censored"

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[86] On this project, see: Peter Hallward, "Introduction to Volume One: 'Theoretical Training,'" in *Concept and Form, Volume 1: Selections from the Cahiers pour l'Analyse,* ed. Hallward and Knox Peden (New York: Verso, 2012), 1-55.

[87] Patrick ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of* Tel Quel *(1960-1983)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 125-40.

[88] On the post-'68 "alliance of Marx and Freud," see: Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy,* trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 171-86. See also: Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), and Elizabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 478-546.

[89] Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 205-215.

[90] ffrench, *The Time of Theory*, 177. Kristeva's two-part essay "Le sujet en procès," published in *Tel Quel* in 1972 and 1973, was based on her participation in the conference (June 29-July 9, 1972) and was collected in *Artaud: Actes du colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973). Devade was in attendance; according to one eyewitness account, the artist, who was scheduled to give a paper entitled "Van Gogh, le suicide de la Société," decided to remain silent, provocatively "commenting that he had nothing to say." Marilyn August and Ann Liddle, "Beyond Structuralism: The Cerisy Experience," *SubStance,* vol. 2, no. 5/6 (Winter 1972-Spring 1973), 229.

[91] Cane, "Pour le nouveau," *Art Press* 6 (September/October 1973), 8.

ground to light: "It is obviously much more complex than 'that,'" he quipped, "but there is only one way to learn more: read Freud and Lacan at least...."[92] Alongside such classic references, the pair introduced a labyrinthine range of psychoanalytic touchstones, reflecting the expanded enthusiasm for psychoanalysis in the *après-Mai* as well as the proliferation of new theories of desire. In his introduction to the French translation of "Modernist Painting," for example, Devade counters the evolutionary logic of Greenberg's formalism, situating painting within an economy of shit and gold, the eye and the anus, the archaic drives and the genital stage, "sadomasochistic, homosexual indifferentiation" and "sexist, hysteric-obsessional compulsion."[93] Also in 1974, in the catalog for his show at Galerie Daniel Templon, which he describes as reading notes for the past two years, Devade adds Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to his repertoire, referring to concepts such as the body without organs, the paranoid/schizoid distinction, and lines of force.[94] Meanwhile, Cane's evocation of the "pulsional" basis of color in 1974 advanced the vague but expansive claim that when "painting displays color, the painter discovers himself faced with his sexuality."[95]

The heterogeneity, even incoherence, of these evocations of desire suggests that the purchase of this vocabulary—and the pressure to which it was subject—was a function of the broader turn towards desire in the aftermath of '68. While some leftists intensified their investment in traditional revolutionary categories and structures following the events, others increasingly sought to dissolve these terms in favor of a more immediate focus on everyday experience, subjectivity, and desire. Uninterested in the seizure of power, representatives of the so-called *désirant* current pursued what the historian Jean-Pierre Le Goff describes as "the liberation of desire, the blossoming of individuals," focusing especially on the "'non-work' [*hors-travail*] questions that the revolutionary organizations of the extreme Left considered to be 'secondary fronts.'"[96] In his comprehensive account of this context, Julian Bourg describes the broad cultural celebration of desire in a variety of sectors, from the anti-psychiatry movement and the women's and gay liberation movements to the specific body of

[92] "C'est évidemment beaucoup plus complexe que 'ça,' mais il y a un seul moyen d'en savoir plus: lire au moins Freud et Lacan..." Devade, interview with Millet, 16. Devade's phrasing appears to be a play on Freud's "Es" (Id), which is conventionally translated as "ça" in French. See: Alexandre Abensour, "Es," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon,* ed. Barbara Cassin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 292-94. The continuities and divergences with Surrealist appropriations of psychoanalysis and notions of desire for artists in the milieu of *Tel Quel* is a complex issue, deserving of a fuller analysis outside the scope of the current essay.

[93] Devade, "La peinture vue d'en bas," *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 8/9 (1974), 25.

[94] In *Passages*, Devade refers to the "corps sans organs" and "moment paranoïde/moment schizoïde" on page 11 and "lignes de force" on page 16.

[95] "Ce qui veut dire qu'en même temps que la peinture expose la couleur, le peintre se découvre, face à face avec sa sexualité." Cane, "Marc Devade: Plongée dans la couleur," *Art Press* 9 (February 1974), 12.

[96] "Il s'attaque à la morale et aux institutions au nom de la référence à la 'vie,' de la libération du désir, de l'épanouissement des individus...Il s'intéresse avant tout aux questions 'hors travail' que les organisations révolutionnaires d'extrême gauche considèrent comme des 'fronts secondaires'...." Le Goff, 267.

thought that he identifies as the "philosophy of desire."[97] With the breakdown of the synthesis between the essentially Leninist and liberational currents that had defined '68, and the increasingly pressing need to confront the apparent failure of the events, desire itself emerged, transformed, at the center of the militant imagination.

At the core of this shift was a foregrounding of the positive, productive work of desire, most influentially explored in Deleuze and Guattari's signal rejection of the Lacanian definition of desire as lack in their *L'Anti-Oedipe*. Released in March 1972 to immediate acclaim, the book was popularly understood as "valorizing desire's rebellion against normative constraints in general."[98] (Kristeva would note its importance, in passing, a few months later in her essay "Le sujet en procès.") The authors famously criticized the Oedipal complex—both its expression in the organization of the nuclear family ("familialism") and its conceptual centrality to psychoanalysis—for artificially constraining the flows of desire. Though its reception in the United states was somewhat delayed, appearing in translation in 1977 to coincide with a special issue of *Semiotext(e)* entitled "Anti-Oedipus: From Psychoanalysis to Schizopolitics," its argument was forged out of the specific experience of the impasse of '68. Begun shortly after the events, *L'Anti-Oedipe* sought to explain how the forces of desire "liberated" by the events, as Deleuze and Guattari saw it, had been contained within militant organizational structures—which then reproduced the rigid hierarchies they had sought to contest.[99] Anchored by this signal tome, between 1972 and 1974 the philosophy of desire was expounded in texts including Jean-Paul Dollé's *Le désir de révolution* (1972), Guy Hocquenghem's *Le désir homosexuel* (1972), and Lyotard's *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (1973) and *L'économie libidinale* (1974). Dollé, for example, celebrated an apparently innate "desire for revolution" as the primary driver of struggle.[100] Also positing desire as a positive force, Hocquenghem argued that "revolutionary demands must be derived from the very movement

[97] Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGilll-Queen's University Press, 2007), 105-111.

[98] Ibid., 121.

[99] This concern emerged from Guattari's ongoing inquiry into group dynamics and questions of political organization; see, for example: Guattari, "Nous sommes tous des groupuscules," *L'idiot liberté* 1 (December 1970), translated in: Guattari, *Psychoanalysis and Transversality: Texts and Interviews 1955-1971*, trans. Ames Hodge (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2015). See discussion in Deleuze, "Preface: Three Group-Related Problems," in Guattari, *Psychoanalysis and Transversality,* 7-22.

[100] See discussion of *Le désir de révolution* in: Peter Dews, "The *Nouvelle Philosophie* and Foucault," *Economy and Society,* vol. 8, no. 2 (May 1979), 132-33. Jean-Paul Dollé was an alumnus of the Maoist Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes, known as UJC(ml), and the group Vive la révolution! He later became associated with the New Philosophers. This latter current came to prominence with the publication of "Les Nouveaux Philosophes," a dossier edited by Bernard-Henri Lévy in *Les nouvelles littéraires* (June 10, 1976), featuring Jean-Marie Benoist, Dollé, Michel Guèrin, Christin Jambet, and Guy Lardreau. André Glucksmann's *Les maîtres penseurs* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1977) is a key text in their critique of Marxism in particular, and revolutionary ideologies more generally, as inevitably totalitarian.

of desire," advocating a rethinking of the traditional "content" of revolution.[101] Lyotard made an even starker pivot from orthodox Marxism in his *L'économie libidinale,* hailing the force of desire against the order of capital and leftist politics alike.[102] Taken as a whole, this cluster of texts articulated a broader shift away from what was thus characterized as the self-sacrificing culture of the Left. Shedding *ouvriériste,* or workerist, attachments to the figure and sphere of labor that had remained strong during and immediately after the May events, as well as the organization and discipline of the Leninist party-form, the philosophy of desire stressed the immediacy and intimate workings of power. However, even as this project vitally confronted the failures of '68, it appeared to some as a way station to the complete abandonment of Marxism, and indeed any collective political project, by the end of the decade. As early as 1975, Alain Badiou forecast this eventuality, reproaching "saint Gilles (Deleuze), saint Félix (Guattari), saint Jean-François (Lyotard)" for their assertions that "the 'movement' is a desiring urge, a flux that spins out...that it is necessary to substitute all organization, all hideous militancy, for the self-consumption...of the pure movement."[103]

Painting with desire was calibrated to this political and intellectual climate. The *désirant* turn lent currency to Cane and Devade's project and accounted for its fluctuating and inconsistent claims, particularly the coexistence of old ideas about repression and sublimation with new, heterodox emphases on the persistence of pre-Oedipal energetic economies and "anti-Oedipal" conceptions of the priority and productivity of desire. Equally incommensurate, and indicative of the contradictions of this moment, is the pair's evocations of femininity and homosexuality in relation to color in the absence of any engagement with the burgeoning movements of women's and gay liberation that emerged in aftermath of '68.[104] The impact of these broader shifts in shaping the formulation and reception of painting

[101] Guy Hocquenghem, *Le désir homosexuel* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972). Translated as *Homosexual Desire,* trans. Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison & Busby, 1978), 121. Hocquenghem was affiliated with the Trotskyist Jeunesses communistes révolutionnaires (JCR) between 1965 and 1968, after which he joined Vive la révolution! and helped found the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire in 1971. For an account of this trajectory, see: Hocquenghem, "La révolution des homosexuels," *Le nouvel observateur,* January 10, 1972, 32-35, and Ron Haas, "Guy Hocquenghem and the Cultural Revolution in France after May 1968," in *After the Deluge: New Perspectives on the Intellectual and Cultural History of Postwar France,* ed. Julian Bourg (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004), 175-195.

[102] Lyotard had been associated with Socialisme ou Barbarie between 1954 and 1964 and then the group Pouvoir Ouvrier until 1966. See Lyotard's discussion of *L'Anti-Oedipe* in "Capitalisme énergumène," *Critique* 306 (November 1972), translated as "Energumen Capitalism," in "Anti-Oedipus," special issue, *Semiotext(e)*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1977), 11.

[103] Alain Badiou, *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: Maspero, 1975), quoted in Eleanor Kaufman, "The Desire Called Mao: Badiou and the Legacy of Libidinal Economy," *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1 (September 2007). http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/wip/issue.907/18.1kaufman.html (accessed May 1, 2014). Parentheses appear in original. Badiou extends his critique of the "theoreticians of desire" in: Badiou, "The Flux and the Party: In the Margins of Anti-Oedipus" (1977), trans. Laura Balladur and Simon Krysl, *Polygraph* 15/16 (2005), 75-92.

[104] On the "profound obsession with the feminine in the very masculine Supports/Surfaces group" more generally, see: Sarah Wilson, "Entre Matisse et Duchamp, le 'féminmasculin' de l'art des

with desire is evident in the critical response to Cane and Devade's new works. Reviewing a solo exhibition of Devade's paintings in 1974 in the pages of *Combat*, a critic parroted Devade's claims that "the dominant ideology" had refused to see "in color 'matter' loaded with all the sexual drives," and had therefore repressed "the social danger of *jouissance* multiplied, decentered onto every surface of the body become unfit for work and reproduction."[105] In the *Chroniques de l'art vivant,* the artist Hervé Fischer repeated, disparagingly, the claim that color introduces a repressed "sexual charge" into the dominant ideology, while observing that "this liberatory and revolutionary drive of color has become today in consumer society a simple selling point, color-merchandise." In just a few years, he notes, their definition of painting as "labor" had been transformed into painting as "getting off" (*prendre son pied*). "Eros," he asks, "is it of the right or the left?"[106] These observations register a transformation of the position espoused during the height of Supports/Surfaces' adhesion between 1970 and 1972, which contested painting's status as a luxury object, defining it instead as a form of labor. In grasping the work of art as *travail* rather than *oeuvre,* by way of Pleynet's Althusserian notion of painting as an object of knowledge, Supports/Surfaces spoke in the workerist tongue that would soon be discarded as the *langue du bois,* or wooden language, of '68. While Cane and Devade did not abandon the vocabulary of production, the "work" of painting was increasingly translated into a psychoanalytic register. As such, the trajectory of painting with desire followed the displacement of the traditional revolutionary bases of class struggle towards the "hors-travail," while nevertheless remaining attached to what Jean Baudrillard deemed a fundamentally "productivist" logic.[107]

In Cane and Devade's paintings, color figured an equivocal moment at the cusp of the metamorphic political and intellectual reconfigurations of the decade. Most strikingly, it disclosed a transposition of the challenge to expressive individualism that had emerged over the previous years, as the collective horizon of Supports/Surfaces was replaced by an appeal to unconscious forces. However, this exploration of subjectivity and desire under the banner of the chromatic was undertaken during an intermediate period in which collectivity was being slowly disassembled, but had not yet been relinquished. After the scission in 1971, the group held two more shows as Supports/Surfaces in France in April of 1972 and another in London in March of 1973.[108] Bioulès and Dezeuze both tendered their resignations in June

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années 70," in *Supports-Surfaces (colloque),* ed. Eric de Chassey (Paris: Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, 2000), 113. The Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) was founded in 1970, while the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) formed in March 1971, disbanding in 1974.

[105] "... du péril social de la jouissance multipliée, décentrée sur toute la surface du corps devenu impropre au travail et à la reproduction." Thierry Delaroyere, "La couleur est dans le texte," *Combat,* March 4, 1974.

[106] "...cette pulsion libératoire et révolutionnaire de la couleur, est devenu aujourd'hui dans la société de consommation, simple argument de vente, couleur-marchandise....Eros est-il de droite, ou de gauche?" Hervé Fischer, "Hygiene de la couleur," *Chroniques de l'art vivant* 49 (May 1974), 4.

[107] The latter claim is made in: Jean Baudrillard, *Le miroir de la production ou l'illusion critique du matérialisme historique* (Paris: Casterman, 1973).

[108] In April 1972, Bioulès, Cane, Devade, and Dezeuze showed as Supports/Surfaces in Strasbourg while Bioulès, Dezeuze, André-Pierre Arnal, and Jean-Pierre Pincemin showed as Supports/Surfaces

Table de repérage des pratiques gestuelles et de leurs effets.

A GESTE	B OUTIL	C MEDIUM	D SUPPORT
	B1 pinceau	C1 eau	D1 papier
A1 geste digital	B2 pointe	C2 huile	D2 toile
A2 geste du poignet	(clou, burin	C3 essence	D3 bois
A 3 geste du coude	B3 lame	C4 encre	D4 plastic
A 4 geste de l'épaule	(couteau, ci-	C5 résine	D5 métal
A 5 geste global du corps	seau, etc..)	C6 jaune d'oeuf	D6 pierre
	B4 tampon	C7 colle	D7 sol
	(sceau, pres-	C8 acide	etc...
	se, etc...)	C9 cire	
	B5 air com-	etc...	
	primé (vapo-	(la pigmen-	
	risateur, etc	tation n'est	
		pas envisa-	
		gée ici)	

E Pratiques signifiantes en combinaison avec A, B, C, D, surdéterminées par A. le geste.

la tache	l'empreinte	le trait	le point	le pli
E1 dripping	E4 imprégna-	E7 trait gra-	E12 point	E15 plissures
E2 projec-	tion	phique	graphique	E16 pliages
tion	E5 impression	E8 trait	E13 perfora-	E17 nouages
E3 vapori-	E6 compres-	gravé	tion gestuelle	
sation	sion	E9 fente	E14 perfora-	
		E10 déchi-	tion mécani-	
		rure	que	
		E11 découpage		

12. Louis Cane and Daniel Dezeuze, "Pour un programme théorique pictural" (May 1970), reprinted in *Peinture, cahiers théoriques* 1 (1971), 79.

1972, the month that Cane and Devade debuted their new paintings, followed by Jean-Pierre Pincemin in 1973; by the time the unofficial retrospective *Nouvelle peinture en France: Pratiques/théoriques* reunited the former members of Supports/Surfaces (minus Cane and Devade, who refused to participate) in 1974, there was no group left to speak of. Color resurfaced from its dormancy, refracted through the new *désirant* vocabulary, with the initial

in Montpellier. Cane and Devade exhibited under the title "Supports/Surfaces" as part of a month-long "French Programme" mounted by the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in March 1973.

splintering of the group and was elaborated over the course of its complete dissolution: this was, perhaps, the "danger" that the chromatic presaged in '68. If the original association of Supports/Surfaces embodied the renewed drive towards group structures that animated post-'68 militancy, color emerged as this collectivity broke down. The chromatic and verbal pyrotechnics of painting with desire represented not so much the failure of the political as the scintillation of its denouement.

On the Pleasures of Theory

"Dezeuze and Cane have grasped that it is necessary to criticize Freud by way of Cézanne," Jean-François Lyotard observed in 1973, but they have failed to see that "it is also necessary to criticize Marxist theory by way of Pollock."[109] This claim, appearing towards the beginning of "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up" in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels,* refers loosely to Supports/Surfaces as a whole and specifically to an essay published by Dezeuze and Cane in 1970, although it resonates strongly with the works under examination here.[110] A meditation on the introduction of "desire into the consideration of painting," Lyotard's essay takes up the redefinition of painting as "chromatic inscription," a process that he describes as making "libidinal connections with color." Praising the artists associated with Supports/Surfaces for recognizing painting's "libidinal economy," he nevertheless faults them for failing to follow this insight to its logical conclusion. Not only do they seek to retrench a medium in the process of "dissolution" into a more generalized field of inscription, but they tether it to a linguistic model in the process of "liquification." Lyotard is referring to the high structuralist style of a table of "signifying practices" proposed by Cane and Dezeuze in 1970 (fig. 12), but the charge easily encompasses the group's wider theoretical ambitions, especially as they were pursued in the pages of *Peinture*. For Lyotard, in failing to heed the deliquescence of painting and language alike, what these artists fail to keep pace with is coterminous with the flows of capital itself: his complaints presage the rejection of critical language tout court in his *Économie libidinale* in 1974 (and the distrust of master narratives at the core of his 1979 *La condition postmoderne*). The failure to render a Pollockian critique of Marx circa 1973 amounts to the ambivalence of painting with desire, poised as it was between the political

[109] Jean-François Lyotard, "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*, ed. Keith Crome and James Williams (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 307. Lyotard's essay was originally published as "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal," in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 237-80, but was omitted from the second edition of the book published by Galilée in 1994. It originated as a paper given in 1972 for the Groupe de recherche sur la théorie du signe et du texte, founded by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, in Strasbourg (April) and at the Centro Internazionale di Semiotica e di Linguistica in Urbino (July). This line resonates with the ground covered in his essay "Freud selon Cézanne" (1971), in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels,* 71-94.

[110] Lyotard repeats the reference to "the group 'Support-Surface'" in his *Économie libidinale* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974), translated by Ian Hamilton Grant as *Libidinal Economy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 246. Lyotard's engagement with the group's positions has not been systematically analyzed in the considerable literature devoted to his aesthetics.

commitments of the *après-Mai* and the ultimate collapse of French Marxism, and collective political projects as such, by the end of the decade.

It is indeed difficult to correlate Cane's radiant monochrome portals or Devade's overlapping fields of blooming, flowing ink to the overheated extrapictorial claims that accompanied them. The sheer extravagance of this discourse suggests its symptomatic role. It served to affiliate *and* differentiate their canvases from those of the American modernist painters that had inspired them—and to assert the radicality, with respect to the question of the subject, of the return, more or less, to painting's traditional format. But the evident gap between work and words, and the feverish inflation of the latter, points to a deeper tension, also suggested in Lyotard's critique: the contradiction between the pre-linguistic value attributed to the chromatic, its much-touted irrationality and hostility to the orders of representation, and the heightened recourse to language that accompanied this turn to color. All the sane, painting with desire, in all of its prolix excess, held out the possibility of undermining the apparent strictures of collectivity without giving up the critique of individualistic myths of expression and creativity, at least for a time.

By 1979, the theoretical engagements of the early years of the decade appeared hopelessly dated. The exhibition *Tendances de l'art en France, 1968-1978/79, 1: Les partis-pris de Marcelin Pleynet* (September-October, 1979) at the ARC (Animation – Recherche – Confrontation) department of the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris included many of the artists formerly associated with Supports/Surfaces, including Cane and Devade, alongside a host of major abstract painters active in France during the previous decade.[111] The featured paintings were surrounded by vitrines displaying, as one viewer recalled, "the leading works in philosophy, anthropology, literary criticism and psychoanalysis published in France over the past two decades or so," along with books and periodicals including *Tel Quel* and *Peinture*.[112] This juxtaposition reflected the intellectual ferment of the 1960s and 1970s as well as artists' elaborate engagements with many of the developments that would increasingly be grouped under the title "French Theory," eclipsing French art on the international stage.[113] While insisting on the richness of these exchanges, Pleynet's installation also effectively

[111] The show included former members of Supports/Surfaces, including Bioulès, Cane, Devade, Dezeuze, Grand, Pincemin, and Viallat, as well as satellites such as Christian Jaccard, Jean-Michel Meurice, and Pierre Buraglio. Other artists represented include: Olivier Mosset, Christian Bonnefoi, the young artists associated with the journal *Documents Sur* (Norbert Cassegrain, Jean-Yves Langlois, Pierre Nivollet, Christian Sorg, and Dominique Thiolat), and artists of an earlier generation such as Martin Barré, James Bishop, Jean Degottex, François Rouan, Pierre Soulages, Sam Francis, and Simon Hantaï. See: Pleynet, "Tendances de l'art en France 1968-1978: Un projet culturel," in *Tendances de l'art en France, 1968-1978/79, 1: Les parti-pris de Marcelin Pleynet* (Paris: ARC, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1979).

[112] Bann, "A Propos of Noel Forster," *Artscribe* 21 (January 1980), unpaginated.

[113] In 1978, for example, Annette Michelson observed that "the postwar decline of France's dominance of artistic practice has entailed the replacement of that practice by an almost overwhelmingly theoretical production." Annette Michelson, "The Agony of the French Left," *October* 6 (Autumn 1978), 21. See: Sarah Wilson, *The Visual World of French Theory: Figurations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

relegated them, and the political context that had animated them and given them meaning and urgency, to the past. In his posthumously published diaries, Roland Barthes—whose own foray into the waters of desire, *Le plaisir du texte,* appeared in 1973—records his attendance at the opening of this show of "Pleynet's painters": "I am surprised to find the pictures absolutely splendid, radiant, full of color," he writes; "the ones that bore me, are the ones I know, the theoreticians, the sad ones (Devade, Cane, Dezeuze)."[114] By the end of the 1970s, the danger posed by the chromatic, whatever its manifold and enticing pleasures, seems to have faded.

[114] Barthes, "Soirées de Paris" (unpublished, dated September 14, 1979), in *Incidents,* trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 70-71.