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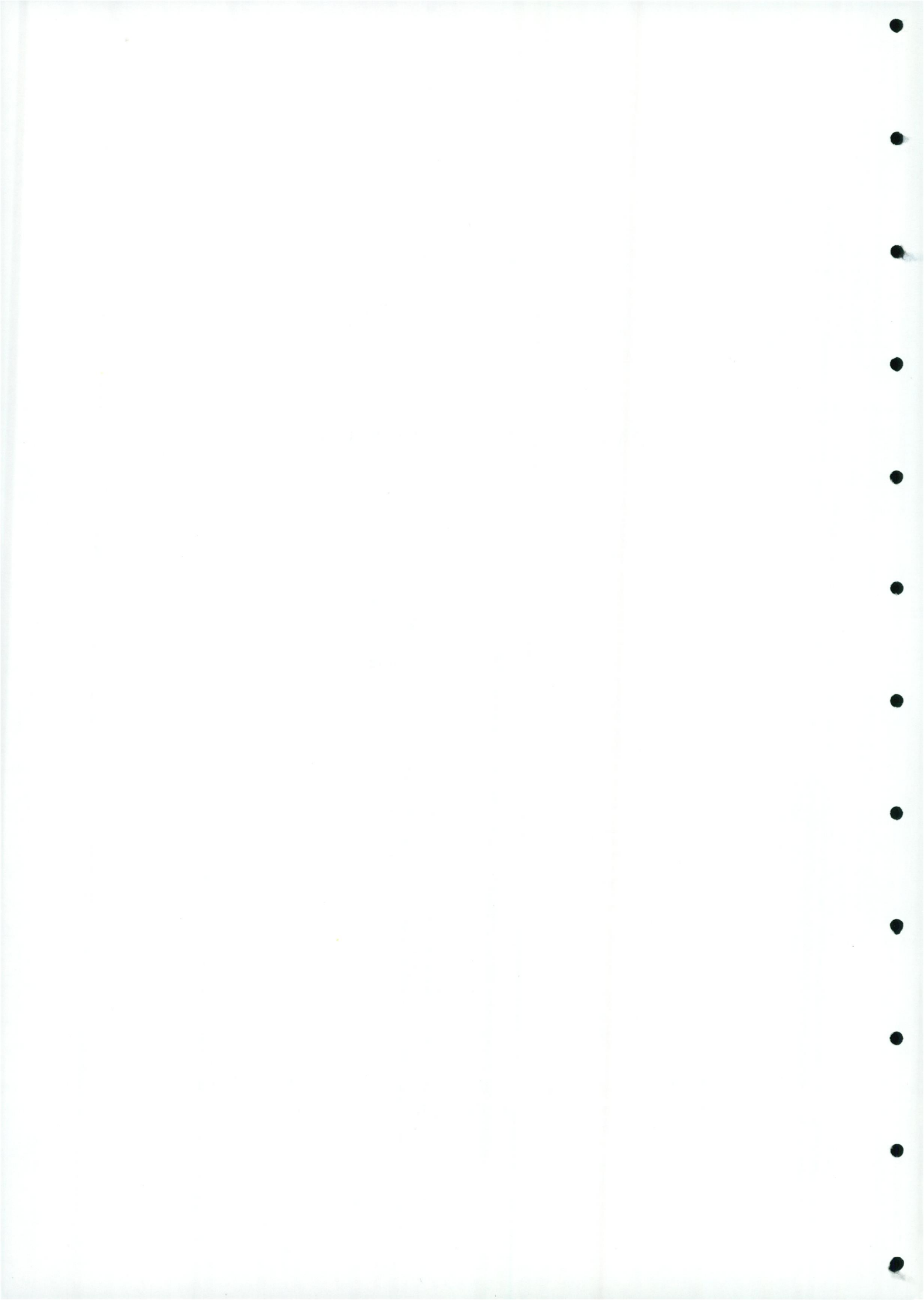
Fine Art Painting

THE PARADOXICAL IN TORSTEN ANDERSSON'S LANGUAGE

by

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Introduction

Torsten Andersson's art has been a life long struggle to create a new visual language. The fact that he calls it a language instead of a style would indicate that it is possible to derive some meaning from his paintings. At the same time several critics and writers have insisted on the impossibility of writing about Andersson's pictures or the difficulty in defining exactly what they mean. This thesis will take as given that applying linguistic theory of interpretation to an art practice such as painting could be problematic, and that perhaps the very notion of calling a visual style a language is connected with a change in the use of the word "reading". Possibly the idea of reading a painting stems from a desire to understand it in a linear, logical way. Or perhaps such a large amount of information is distributed through visual imagery that the eye is indeed becoming aware of a different way of reading. However, Andersson's claim of creating a new language, albeit in a wider interpretation of the word, could call for an assumption that there exists meaning, or perhaps several meanings in his art, sometimes even possibly unintentionally present. Five chapters discussing subjects that may or may not concern Andersson's art attempt to disclose some of these meanings.

First of all a historical background to Andersson's practice is given together with a definition of it as far as it is possible. The discussion then moves to describe the difficulty with meaning in general, not only in Andersson's art, which has been emphasised by post-structural and deconstructive theories. Given this difficulty and its possible relation to the "death of the subject", Andersson's fight for a language



and for the resurrection of painting may be connected with his desire to be recognised as a creative subject. The contradiction inherent in his struggle to combine the speechlessness of the individual with language's collective character is one of perhaps many such contradictions in his art. Following this section the idea of the subject is linked into its relation to the "other", first of all as a person and thereafter also as a text or an artwork, giving perhaps a wider concept of the problems surrounding interpretation. Finally there is a suggestion of a morality of (de-)construction as a possible way into Andersson's art.

One of the questions posed is whether Andersson as the author decides the meaning of his artworks or to what extent they are left open, deliberately or not, to interpretation. Even though it is perhaps impossible for an author to have complete authority in the process of making meaning, it may be fair to assume that he or she at least has a share in it. To get a clearer view of Andersson's own ideas about his art and what he is trying to communicate, I consulted him in a two-hour interview on September 23rd 1997 at his home in Hörby. He has not been extensively written about; two books on his art have been published. In order to gain information and critical views, research has had to be made into newspaper clippings dating back to 1954, from the artists' archive in Konstbiblioteket in Stockholm. Other articles in journals and exhibition catalogues have also been of use in throwing light on Andersson's development. Photographic material covering the full scope of his career is not readily available. A large number of the plates used in this thesis have been photographed from articles that could not be removed from Konstbiblioteket. Thus, a slight distortion may occur at times and dimensions are not always given.



The most recent paintings were photographed from the artist's studio at the time of the interview.

Born in 1926, Andersson finished his art studies in 1950 and became the youngest professor so far at the Art Academy in Stockholm in 1960. Six years later he withdrew from the Swedish art world after having represented Sweden in the São Paulo, Paris and Venice Biennales, in 1959, 1961 and 1964, respectively. Claiming the art world to be conservative and not to understand him, he did not paint again until 1972. With a retrospective exhibition at Moderna Muséet in Stockholm in 1986, he won the acclaim of most Swedish critics and in October 1997 he received the Rolf Schock prize for art, the most prestigious of its kind in Sweden, for "unusual artistic integrity and a strong poetic expression". (Nordin, 1997, p. 97).

Andersson has said that, "What is important to me is something very small. Almost everything that has been written about me somehow is not about me, and to the extent that it is about me it concerns such parts of me that could be any other artist." (Eriksson, 1997). I do not assume that this thesis will be very different. On the contrary. But I will take him up on his offer to viewers to put in meanings of their own as long as they work at doing this.



Timely Oppositions

Torsten Andersson claims that to understand his art it is necessary to put it into an art historical context. According to him artists of today only look at art history as a storage space for knowledge rather than as a process of creative change. (Interview). Some postmodern thought questions the idea of a “natural”, historical development within the arts, and we are seen to be residing in something called “the end of history”, where we have “forgotten to think historically” (Jameson, 1991, p. ix), and artistic styles are often taken out of their historical context and mixed at random. At the same time the importance of emphasising the particular historical context, in which for example an artist has been practising, has also been brought to attention. It may thus be beneficial to give some kind of an account of the situation in which Andersson began making art and also of his history within this.

In the mid to late 1940s, when Andersson was studying in Stockholm, there seemed to have been two main directions in Swedish painting, either a geometrically built concretism, or a more expressive “informal” painting. According to Olle Granath, concretism in Sweden in the late 1940s was not as pure as the “art concret” of the 1930s. It had a strong narrative quality, simultaneous with an interest in the Cubist sense of space and its play between depth and surface. As well as modernism in Sweden being a mixture between international ideas and a folk tradition, the relatively early exhibiting of Picasso’s *Guernica* in Stockholm in 1938 showed the possibility of using imagery derived from Cubism combined with a political or



narrative message. He writes that the main discovery made by young painters of that time was "...the surface's double characteristic of illusionist space and surface, allowing for uncertainty, change and movement to take concrete expression in painting." (Granath, 1986, p. 12). Andersson may have taken this discovery as a foundational idea for his own art and turned it around in ways that disrupt previous norms for illusion and flatness, in what he has called an "inverted Cubism". (Adlers, p. 12).

Critics and writers have had difficulty defining Andersson's art, implying that he has been working between or beside the main art movements that were contemporary to him. His art has, among other things, been called "...a cross fertilisation between international Concretism and Northern European nature romanticism, Celtic ornaments, construction drawings and emblematic [activity]." (Stam, 1986). There appears to be a definite influence of Minimalism in the simplicity of the forms, of Conceptualism, in the play with genres and use of text in the paintings, and also of Pop art in its objectivising. Andersson has written:

For the sake of clarity I divide contemporary painting into two parts. One part was abruptly broken off in the beginning of the sixties. Genuine painters began to make concepts, objects and installations. The other part's history ran on, delivering eclectic variations of realist traditions and thereafter, expressionistic variations of expressionistic traditions. (Adlers, pp. 9-10).

He regards himself as belonging to the former group. Yet there are elements that make him differ from those movements, one of them being his deeply rooted sense of the Swedish countryside and traditional culture.

According to Andersson, he realised in the late fifties that painting had come to an



end, it could go no further. High modernism inevitably led to the monochrome. To negate this value system Andersson, among many others, left painting for the sake of making objects. But this did not satisfy him. He says that,

...as painting was so important to me personally, ever since I was a small child I had liked painting such a hell of a lot... Painting lies behind Cubism and without Cubism modernism would not look the way it does. And that does not only mean painting, but sculpture and architecture, design... That painting should end... I experienced this with my body; I could no longer paint, not in a logical theoretical vacuum. And then one arrives in a zone, a language-less zone... (Interview).

He began what he sees as a fight for a new language that would “re-conquer” studio painting.

Lars O Eriksson has written of Andersson that he “...knows that Matisse is unusable. But he also knows that Duchamp’s once very narrow road has become a broad shopping street.” (Eriksson, 1994). Other critics have written about him as having found a “third way”, which is neither modernist, nor postmodernist, but somewhere in between the two. This third way should lead neither to the “undoubted realism” of object art nor to the traditional illusionism of realist art, which was weighed down by ideologies. (Nittve, 1986, p. 37). The concepts of modernism and postmodernism have been interpreted in several ways, and they stand in a complex relation to one another. Andersson claims that his language should be seen in the light of the date of its conception, in 1966. At the time Clement Greenberg would have had a fair amount of influence both in the way that the history of modernism was perceived as well as in the course it was taking. In his essay “Modernist Painting”, from 1965, he stressed the importance of painting’s autonomy, and especially its distinction from sculpture. As a result the specificity



and materiality of paint was further emphasised over the content of the painting (thus bringing the painting closer to being an object), and abstraction was favoured, as it would not suggest three-dimensional space as readily. This was a response to what he saw as a crisis where art was threatened by becoming absorbed by entertainment, and thus perhaps the market economy. (Greenberg, 1982, pp. 5-6). (This is assuming that art has ever been totally separate from the market economy). With artists questioning the autonomy of “high art,” and also the lack of meaning in the artwork other than the expressiveness of paint, in the late fifties and early sixties, canvases were built onto. This made the distinction between sculpture and painting even more blurred, drawing attention to the object-ness of painting. Perhaps Andersson went in the opposite direction by realising the materiality of the monochrome and then painting a portrait of it as a painting of a sculpture.¹

There is one painting of Andersson’s which visualises the attempt of a bridging between modernist abstraction and realist illusion: *Källan (The Well/Source*, plate 1) from 1962, where he placed a monochrome painted piece of wood, representing high modernism, underneath a supposedly realist painting on canvas of the vegetation above the well. “I did not think realism was sufficient to replace this high modernism that I liked so much. And therefore I took the two parts and put them side by side without mixing them...” (Interview).

¹ Cezanne has played with the notion of the inherent properties of painting and sculpture before in his painting *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, ca 1892-94. Here he has taken a solid object from “the world of representation” and brought it to the surface of the painting. Behind the Cupid is depicted an empty canvas, subverting the pictorial fictional space, so that the sculpture “becomes” the painting. (Shiff, 1991, p. 44).



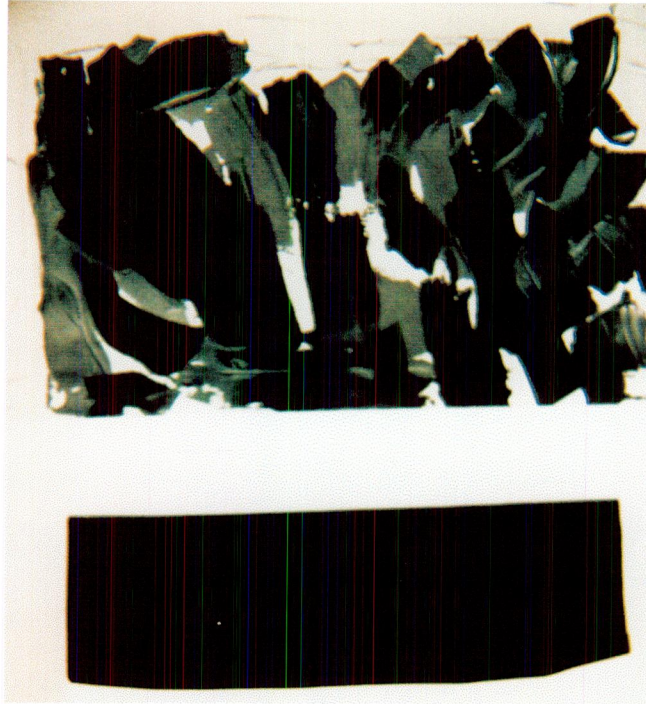


Plate 1 *Källan*, 1962

It could be argued that Andersson is simply refusing to let go of something dear to him, and is desperately grabbing after a justification to continue painting. Or perhaps there exists awareness on his part that to totally disown modernism could be reverting back to something that modernism had fought against. Cubist painting had introduced into art an element of spirituality, deriving from Iberian or African art, and possibly a superiority of thought over vision, which would be connected with the indefinite character of abstraction. Using realism in its traditional sense would perhaps be an assumption that things are exactly the way they look. Rosalind Krauss writes about modernism's refusal to use traditional perspective as a questioning of the assumption of meaning. Perspective would assume that things follow one another in space according to the rule. Modernism, according to her, was self-reflexive, in order to question itself, exchanging spatial perspective for that of history. In the end it forgot to reflect on the fact that even a historical perspective



must have a point from which it is seen, and thus the “objectivity” of history became the new self-evident. (Krauss, 1992, p. 956). As well as that it was this self-reflexivity that led to the flatter surface and perhaps lesser contents. Andersson has said that, “*Källan* is a symbol for modernism’s self-reflexivity and fall. It is also an expression of a decentralisation of art, a neo-provincialism, and for creativity. The artist drinks from his own well in his native place.” (Wall, 1986).

The juxtaposition of opposite tendencies apparent here is taken a step further in the painting *Molnen mellan oss* (*The clouds between us*, plate 2) from 1966, where one part of the painting is an abstract object and the other part is a painted representation of that object.

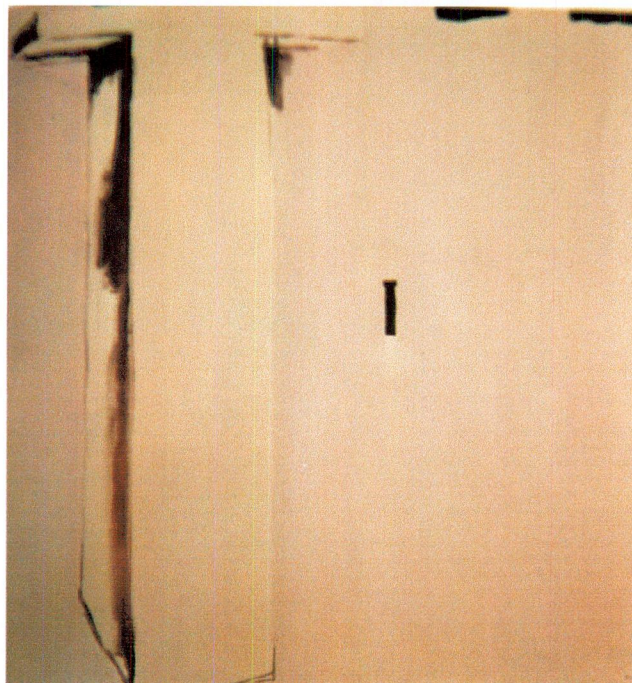


Plate 2 *Molnen mellan oss*, 1966

Then after a few years I started painting portraits of objects I was making... It is no longer a painting... the monochrome is an object. These objects were abstract. And then I suddenly realised that as I



was painting a portrait of such an object with the language of realism I was uniting the abstract with the language of realism in a natural way. I thus had the solution in my hand, the one that had worried me earlier when I placed the two languages side by side. (Interview).

This could be seen as the “grammar” of Andersson’s language. He has since then continued to paint portraits of abstract sculptures, but he no longer makes the sculpture before painting it. “...I stopped doing that because it was too much hard work and socially demanding to go to Rendala and buy materials. Then I only made them in my head after which I painted portraits of them.” (Interview). By bringing back depth and illusionist space, Andersson claims that he is negating modernism. He also says that the fact that he is painting intact objects goes against modernism’s tattered sense of space and its weightlessness. His insistence on letting the object stand alone, separate from its surroundings, may be a critique of the generalisation that could occur when an object and its surrounding space become part of one another, as would have been the case in Cubist painting. Abstract Expressionism would have brought this indefinite sense of space, and possibly also of meaning, to its peak, and perhaps Andersson had reason to assume that the step over to the monochrome was a short one. It is as if he is insisting on the integrity of the unknown object and also on the importance to critically examine it as it is. Bringing back perspective into the painted surface would indicate “...the seeing of something from somewhere, rather than the seeing of everything from nowhere.” (Melville, 1990, p.12). The fictional space surrounding the object is important. Even though it at times is simply a blank canvas, it represents space, where something may occur, a definite place perhaps, without conforming to any known definite space. Or it could be an indefinite space where something definite may be situated. The colours in Andersson’s paintings are translucent, and he chooses colour for that



reason especially, rather than for any symbolic inherent meaning in the colour itself. This translucency may be related to that of illusionism, where the painting can be looked through, onto something other than its materiality, contrasting with the opaque flatness of the modernist surface that drew attention to itself. They are translucent, abstract objects portrayed in a way that emphasises their material existence in their three-dimensionality. As well as that they can be looked through and beyond, into the possibly infinite space that recedes behind them.

Modernism and postmodernism are related in a complex way, and it has for example been questioned whether postmodernism necessarily follows modernism. Without getting too deeply drawn into the discussion of what is what² and what comes where and when, perhaps one could say that postmodernism is often seen as modernism's counterpart; modernism's other. Binary oppositions such as creation – decreation, presence – absence, reading – misreading, and so on, are at times set against each other, to give a more comprehensive view of the relationship between the two. In Andersson's paintings there occurs what may be seen as a collapsing of some of these into one another. The simultaneous “either/or” and “neither/nor” (Orton, 1996, p. 31) deferral may be at work in Andersson's painting as well. Such a phenomenon might point to a wider understanding of the concepts modernism and postmodernism as well as of the idea of opposites and also categorisations in general.

² For example there were many different movements within modernism and it could be (and has been) argued that there are as many postmodernisms as there were modernisms. The Greenbergian version is of course only one version but perhaps one that became fairly powerful at the beginning of Andersson's career.

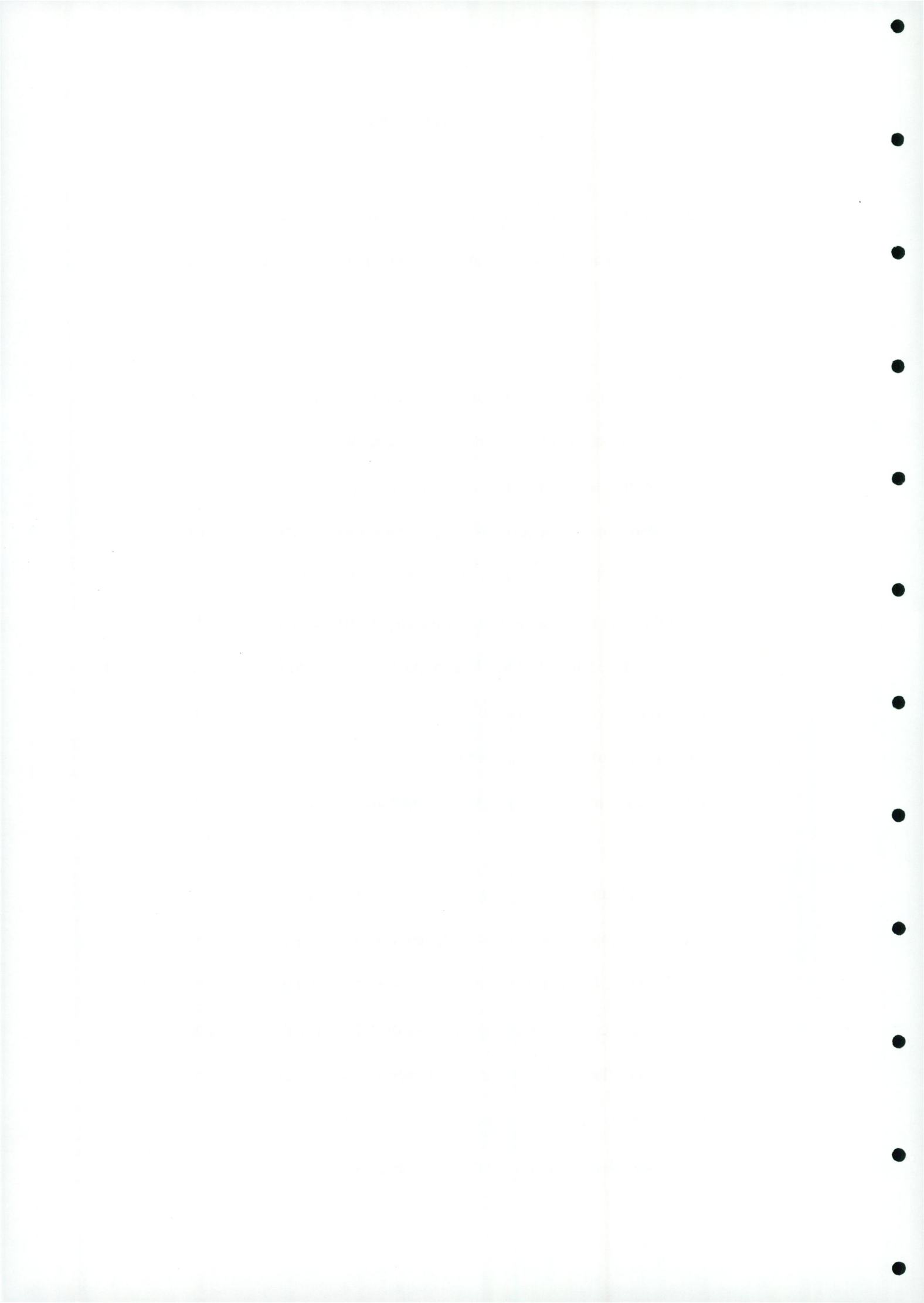


Peek-a-boo

“And at the same stroke [du même coup] leave it, it, the thing, to the nameless crypt of its mutism. It knows, and knows (how) to keep quiet.” (Derrida, 1987, p. 188).

Is the language of Torsten Andersson’s paintings so opaque despite their transparent colour, so incomprehensible, that Jan Håfström is right when he says that “Andersson fulfils... one of this century’s most fostered aesthetic myths: the one that the viewer makes the artwork. But he goes a step further than most: he deserts the viewer.”? (Håfström, 1995, p. 4). The forms portrayed are so simple and recognisable that they should be open for anyone to understand. Yet the simplicity may be deceptive and at a closer look perhaps there is nothing specifically familiar in them whatsoever. Although the paintings figure openings and doorways, these are not as easy to enter as one might wish. And his later paintings are so self-contained that it may be hard to find an opening for interpretation at all.

Andersson’s painting *Måsen* (*The Seagull*, plate 3) from 1961 consists of canvas in the shape of a seagull sown onto a rectangular canvas which has then been covered with white paint. It is a monochrome until looked at from an angle, when light hits the seam on the canvas, throwing shadows on different parts of the contour of the seagull. Where the line is visible, it represents an object in illusionary space, and when not, the canvas becomes a monochrome object where the surface predominates. Depending on the point of view, the way in which the light falls and



the awareness of the viewer³ the painting changes in its meaning. The duality of flatness and space exists within the same frame and may alternate at the blink of an eye.

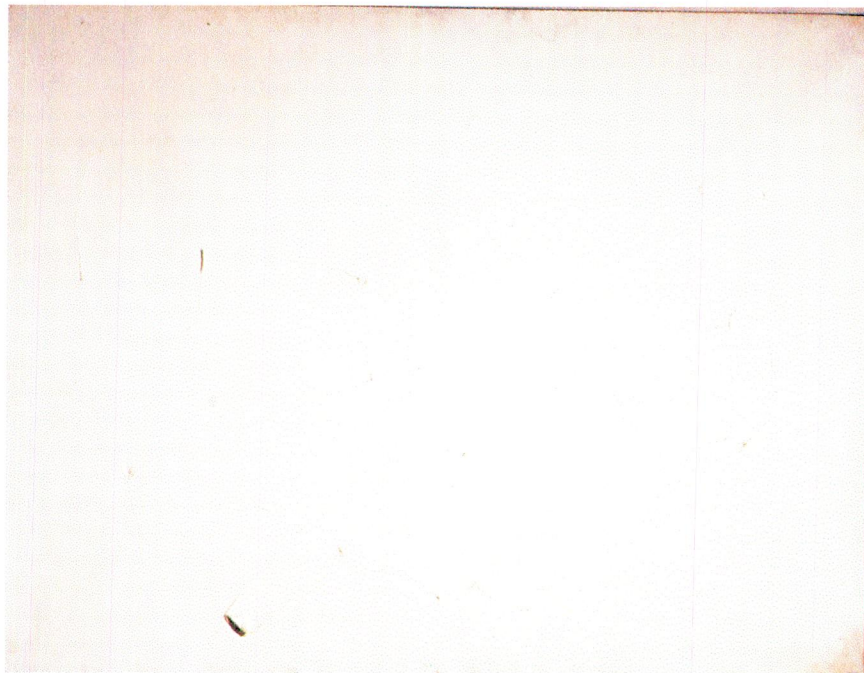


Plate 3 *Måsen*, 1961, 98x126 cm

Deconstructive thought has brought to attention such oppositions as the ones between form and content, nature and culture, thought and perception and so on. In these pairs the one has culturally been given privileged status over the other. But the subordinate part of the pair is equally if not more important as a “condition of possibility” for this system to work at all. (Norris, 1990, p. 71). Even so there has been a tendency by the predominant part of the opposition to ignore or even deny its opposite, its condition of being. When the traditional opposition between these binary oppositions is dissolved there is a possibility of exploring the gap between

³ Andersson claims that when this painting was first exhibited in 1962 nobody noticed the seagull in it. It was simply perceived as a monochrome. (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 12).



them.

Later paintings of Andersson's, also show concern with the duality between surface and illusionist space, but there is much wider ambiguity in their meaning. Structuralism's arbitrariness between signifier and signified comes to mind when Andersson says, "...it must be unpredictable... It must surprise... a few different contents have emerged during these years, that I actually do not like... [but] they were unpredictable, they emerged out of the form." (Interview). Relating the notion of form and content in painting to that of signifier and signified in linguistics, language in this context thus constructs reality rather than reflecting it. (Schneider, 1996, p. 135). Andersson has said that he has taken a small part from structuralism and reshaped it carefully. (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 40). In his paintings of sculptures there is a direct reference to something that only exists in his mind, which he then portrays, in a similar sense to Merleau-Ponty's pre-existing concepts. G. L. Hagberg, along with Wittgenstein, questions the idea of separating meaning from the form it takes in words. There is no "additional meaning" going on in someone's head at the same time as the words are said, or even thought, the meaning lies in the words that are used. Hagberg is highly sceptical of there being some "pre-meaning" model, and also of the use of linguistic theory on art when this implies a separation between meaning and the materials used. He argues that this separation between mind and matter is a Cartesian dualism that is now being questioned. Using the example of Picasso's *Guernica* he rather ridicules one way in which this dualistic way of interpreting can take shape. In this case the artist would be working both from reality (the scene depicted), giving the painting its



content, and from feeling (remembering the rage felt at the scene), deciding the form in which it is painted. (Hagberg, 1995, p. 123).

There may be more at stake in Andersson's paintings, though, than whether or not the artist creates from a preconceived picture. If he used to make these sculptures in reality, to paint them, and only started making them in his head for practical reasons, where does the first form exist, before he has made it in his head? And with what material does he make there? How can the viewer be sure that it looks exactly the same on the canvas as it did when he built it in the imagination? Perhaps the imaginary sculpture is only completed after its portrait is painted. Does the actual sculpture also have a pre-existing concept, or is the question becoming similar to that of Derrida, asking whether something is a "Presentation of the representation, presentation of the presentation, representation of the representation," or a "representation of the presentation"? (Derrida, 1987, p. 6). Andersson's language is that of realism, so he claims, but it is not certain whether he is referring to reality, or if he is making reality out of that which is unknown, "beyond" reality. He could be claiming that the unknown is real and must therefore be portrayed realistically, no matter how unrealistic this might seem. Or else perhaps the representation was the first to (re-)emerge and can only become real by being thus claimed through a very like portrait. Or possibly he is making the unknown, not knowable, but perceivable, and all the more expected, by confining it. When Andersson says that, "...realism as a language is neither representative nor non-representative but merely a way of seeing the surface as a fictitiously closed void..." (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 14), infinity of space becomes closed into the



specific body of a canvas.

Andersson's insistence on the unpredictability of his forms could be related to Derrida's refusal of fixing meaning. Like deconstructive theories, he deals with the area between determination and indeterminacy. Andersson has said that he is trying to "...find absolute certainty in the expression of a fruitful and searching uncertainty." (Forssell, 1963, p. 18). The play with presence and absence and its relation to ever changing circumstances evident in deconstruction can be related to *Måsen*. Absence of the line at times is dependent on presence of the line at other times otherwise there would be no question of line in the first place. The painting questions what exactly makes a line and how this in turn can influence perspective and space. Traditional perspective has been whitened out with paint, only to reemerge (perhaps in a new form) through light.

Maarit Koskinen writes that in post-structuralism there exists a "...utopia of the sign, which is to be emptied of meaning, to avoid lending itself to higher meanings; to only radiate itself, only act as signifying and never be locked by dogmatically signifying, i.e. definitive, fixed meanings." (Koskinen, 1987, p. 15). Andersson's forms could seem to have this utopia. Even the colours he uses exist for their own sake. "...I preferably want to choose certain types of colour that in themselves have style, a feeling... Cobalt green..." (Interview). Geoff Bennington uses colour to show that deconstruction is not a case of linguistic relativism. "Colour is, in Deconstruction." (Bennington, 1990, p. 84). Stephen Melville argues that on the one hand we know how to both analyse and describe colour, and that colours'



relation to their names seems to fit with Saussure's arbitrary link between signified and signifier. Simultaneously colour resists nomination by being attached to its own specificity as well as changing depending on what colour is next to it. It also differs from one theory of art to another, where at one time it is supposedly as a substitute to a painting and at another it is perceived to constitute a painting. "Subjective and objective, physically fixed and culturally constructed, absolutely proper and endlessly displaced, color can appear as an unthinkable scandal." (Melville, 1994, p. 45). Andersson's paintings may be scandalous in a similar way. Refusing nomination at the same time as they are named "Sculptures" by Andersson, they place themselves somewhat awkwardly in the mind of the viewer, who can see clearly that they are made in paint.

Given that certainty in meaning and interpretation has been questioned over the last century, it appears almost hopeless to assume that any definite sense can either be put across from an artist to a viewer, or that an interpreter will make an "accurate" interpretation. Yet Andersson does not seem to be against interpretation as such. Where meaning is so elusive, where the author no longer is its authority, where the reader reads in whatever he or she prefers, perhaps not even knowing his or her own preference (perhaps for the unknown), it may seem impossible to convey or attain any meaning at all. If Wittgenstein claimed that we must remain silent about that which we cannot speak, Andersson appears to refuse this silence, and carries on with his language, albeit perhaps mute. It is as if the silence of his forms asks the viewer to look further and harder to be able not to crack them, but in some way come a bit closer to their meaning. Derrida has argued that a mute language in a



sense is the most authoritarian of all. (Wills and Brunette, 1994, p. 13). It is the other side of the coin of speech, to which at least there is a possibility of responding. There may be arrogance in Andersson's language, in that it does not lend itself easily to the viewer or interpreter. There certainly is elusiveness in what he is doing. However it could be argued that his is a more humble attempt to create something that will, if the viewer lets it, speak of indeterminacy in meaning and the certainty of strangeness.

Even if there is no transparent access to the world through language (Norris, 1990, p. 76), the transparency of colours invite an entry into or maybe onto the closed forms of Andersson's art. Perhaps all pictures refer to all other pictures and objects and perhaps Tom Sandqvist has a point when he writes that, "...there is no depth, only the pornographic surface's forever shining nothingness." (Sandqvist, 1991, p. 12). For whatever reason, Andersson keeps insisting on depth in his paintings, and that the viewer look beyond the surface or step in through one of the doorways to try and find out what may lie beyond. Where postmodern society is one of excess meaning, easily available and easily overlooked, perhaps the not so easy language of Andersson may arrest the viewer's attention for a while, giving a small piece of information to keep the viewer's interest, just to realise that what he or she thought he or she knew was not what he or she thought.



Objectivity in Spite of the Subject's Resurrection

“My pictures are marked by - when they are at their best – a spiteful objectivity, they are crying silently.” (Andersson in Rappe, 1986, p. 42).

In this sentence objectivity and subjectivity are sentenced to live together, perhaps not in total harmony, but at least it is not a question of wailing out loud with discomfort. On the one hand Andersson expects his art to be totally separated from himself, on the other he is creating an individual language and therefore he is: “I create therefore I am.” Or it is probably rather a case of “I create therefore I become”. He is subjecting the viewer (or in this case the reader) to a situation where there must be an attempt to grasp a simultaneous objecting to and affirmation of the close tie between a creative subject and the objective with his or her art. It is important to him that this creativity involves

...a linguistic initiative, that is an individual achievement... I do think that even if one has a particular content, it is important to say it in an independent, individual way. If you take *Guernica*, in that case Picasso had [a political message]... Even there one must conquer a new language that works as a language. And that might be conservative... (Interview).

Forssell has made a link between *Måsen* (plate 3) and (a slight paraphrase of) a poem by Karl Lindegren from 1947 repeating, as if it was a record stuck in its tracks: “må-, mås-, måsta hävda sin personlighet”. (Forssell, 1963, p.14). Translated into English this play on words and sounds could read as either “mu-, mus-, must assert one's personality” or “feel, seagull (må=seagull, måsen=the seagull), must assert one's personality”. The poem begins with the need for painters



to paint over all old masters.

There is reason to believe that in a sense Andersson's paintings are some kind of variation of the self-portrait. Looking at one of his earlier sketches (plate 4) it becomes apparent that one form that recurs through a major part of his art, originates in the features of a face.



Plate 4 *Untitled*

Eyebrows or forehead together with the nose shape his initial, T⁴. As well as this being an effect of the tendency of the viewer to, perhaps subconsciously, read in realistic features in abstract patterns, it would seem that Andersson, in creating his language, is very aware of the words and symbols he uses. The painting *Molnen mellan oss* (plate 2), consists of two T's, Torsten's identity in different shapes, one represented as an object and one as that object portrayed, if not objectively,

⁴ Serge Leclaire has argued that letters are imprinted by the mother onto different parts of a child's body. "Thereafter these affective sites become signifiers: for example the phallus is a 'part of the body ...and, at the same time, a letter, which can be the alpha and omega of the alphabet of desire [of the other]" Leclaire (Rajan, 1993, p. 224). These letters are culturally learned but imprinted in a way that they become biologically forceful.



certainly, according to him, realistically. In earlier paintings, there are scribbles that would look like anagrams of his name. For example in *Victoria* (plate 5) from 1983, the letters R and the N, possibly from Torsten, are placed on each side of a smaller version of the larger object that is portrayed.

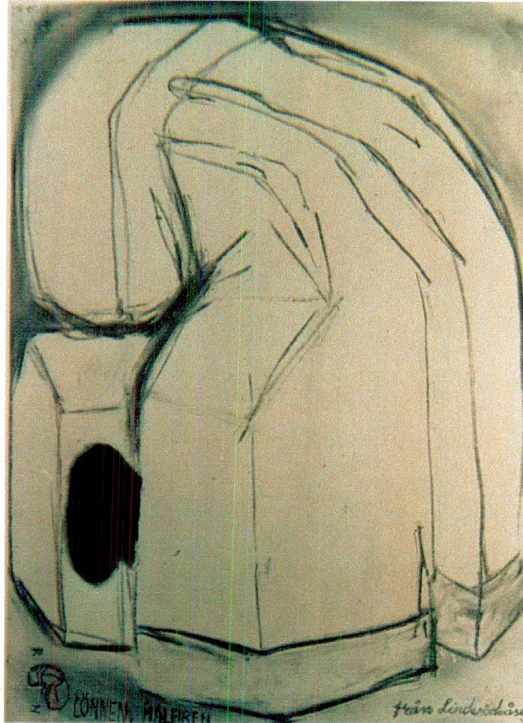


Plate 5 *Victoria*, 1983

Next to this is written “Lönnen, Målaren”, which could mean “the maple tree, the painter” or “the secret, the painter”. Perhaps one of T’s secrets is that these paintings are really about him, despite his ardent insistence that, “Language is an adventure, the great adventure, it is the only thing that is controllable... One can talk about a language, one cannot speak about the self, about being one self, because one does not know what that is.” (Interview).

An individual language would imply something that is separate from communal language and could therefore be inaccessible. At the same time language indicates



a desire to communicate something, which would incorporate others, making the experience communal, or at the least dialogical. An idea such as a “personal language” assumes that there is a possibility of bridging “the simple polarity between language’s collectivism and extreme individualism’s languageless-ness.” (Nittve, in *Moderna Muséet*, 1986, p. 40). It could be argued that language, in the most common use of the word, i.e. the language we speak and use to write with, is closely tied up with a person’s identity. Different languages of different countries have different words and ways of making meaning. (For example Eskimos have fifty different words for the English word snow). Perhaps there is a link between a person’s identity, at least the idea of having an identity, and the place from where that person comes and the language belonging to that place. The mother’s tongue, tripping out words, confirms an existence, lapping up the syllables that spill by the side in every attempted reply, until some kind of an (id-)entity is formed. Gertrud Sandqvist relates Andersson’s making of self-portraits to Lacan’s “mirror stage”, where the mirror offers an identity, but a distorted one. All you can ever see is the image of yourself. And the first to give you this reflection is the mother. (Sandqvist, 1995, p. 11). In her essay “Bulgaria My Suffering”, Julia Kristeva argues for the “matricide” in leaving one’s mother tongue for the attempt at creating something unique. But it is important that this is still based on precisely the person’s original language. It must not just be a grabbing of “odd foreign neologisms”, or it may simply become “...that surrender and submission of a nation ... to a new world order that would like to see the whole human race as a single person. What am I saying? As a single computer.” (Kristeva, 1996, pp. 126-127).



Celtic symbols and hand crafted Allmoge furniture have influenced Andersson's art. In drawings such as *Låda med balkong* (*Box with balcony*, plate 6) and *Låda med silverhandtag* (*Box with silver handle*, plate 7) a parallel can be drawn to baptismal fonts where old myths and symbols were kept alive in the new environment of Christianity.



Plate 6 *Låda med balkong*



Plate 7 *Låda med silverhandtag*

Other paintings and drawings such as *Skulptur* (*Sculpture*, plate 8) from 1980 almost bring the marriage of culture and nature seen in the animal-like shapes carved onto the legs of Allmoge tables or even vegetal forms on a drinking cup vessel, to an extreme. Here a house has been given antlers worthy only of the king of elks. In using ornament, according to Sandqvist, Andersson has found a way of combining "...language's distinctive and the body's or the species' communal [experience]...- for if anything seems to be almost genetic for humanity it is the way in which symmetrical, ornamental patterns are made." (Sandqvist, 1995, p. 13). Whether or not this has any truth in it there certainly would appear to exist, on Andersson's part, a will for something universal, something beyond himself. His



objective is trying to become in some way objective and yet knowing that not only does it have to stem from himself, it also reinforces him.

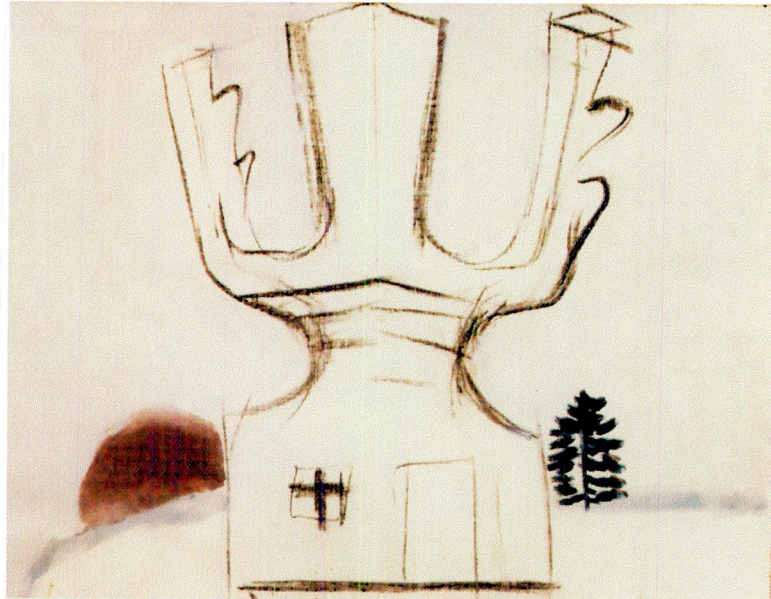
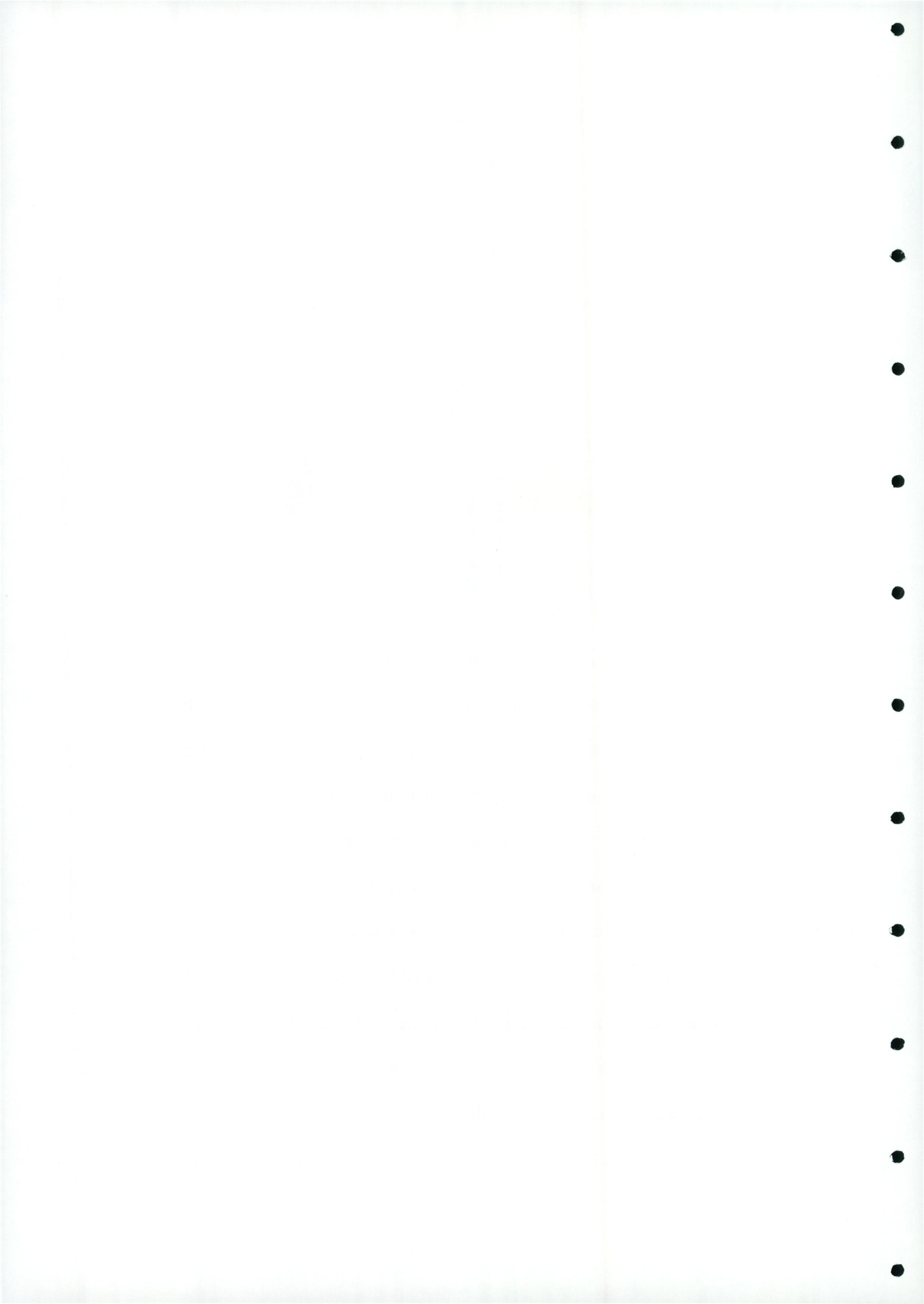


Plate 8 *Skulptur*, 1980, 85x107cm

The attempt at something simultaneously individual and collective, something particular and universal, may have grown out of the situation in the 1940s, when Andersson felt that everyone in Swedish art was borrowing and stealing from other countries. He has described Celtic culture (artist's word) as the only one in Northern Europe that has evolved naturally, and he seems to think that it could be a source for something communal. The word archetypal recurs in Andersson's descriptions of his forms, which might bring to mind psychoanalytic theory, which proposes that signs may have common significance for all humanity. Yet he continually insists on the individuality and difference of the forms. "One can call them archetypal, but at the same time I think they are quite free from other art, I think they are quite bare." (Interview). He has also said that he has not come to terms with the question of how important this Celtic and folk influence is on his art. "I have dreamt of it



periodically, but I have never remained there.” (Interview). And with those words he confirms a certain reliance on that which is seen as the unconscious and possibly the belief that it can show him something that is common for mankind. The forms he paints derive from “picture matter”, which would be his preliminary sketches (plate 9), that apparently has emerged somewhat unconsciously, partly from artistic creativity and partly by chance. (Interview).

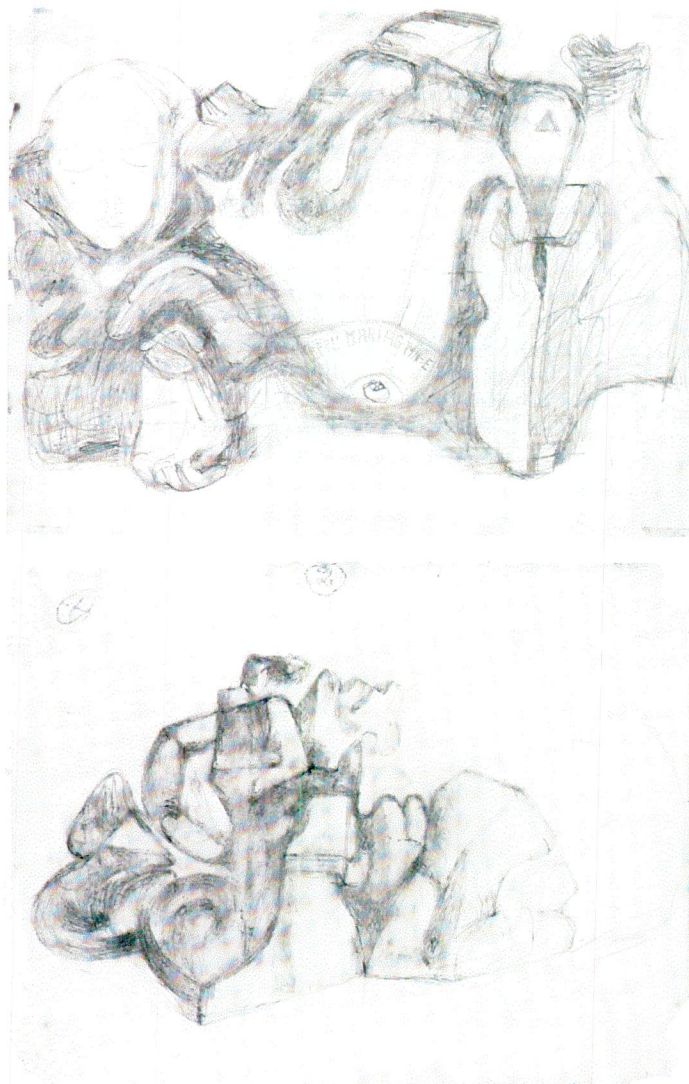


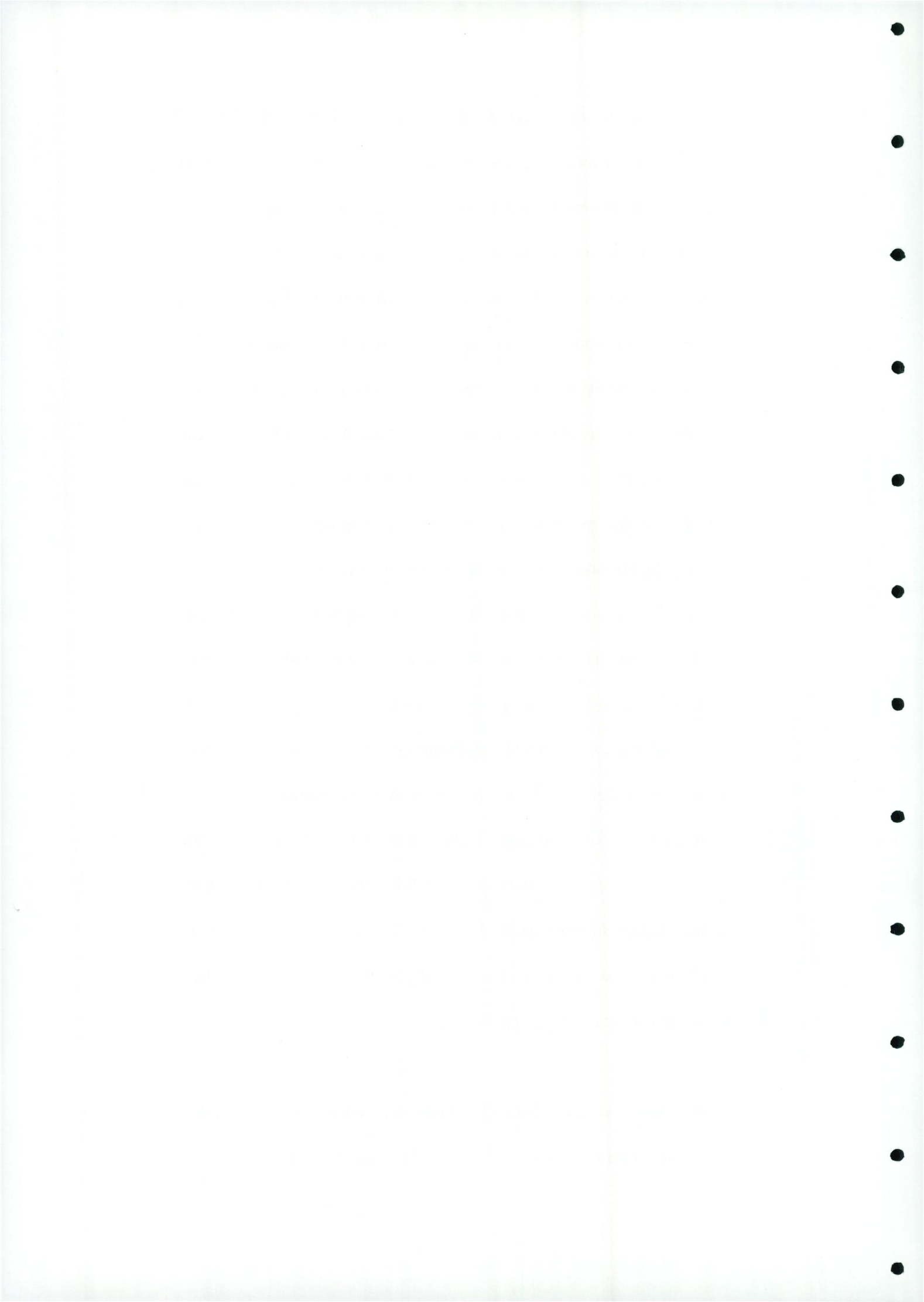
Plate 9 *Untitled*

According to Ernesto Laclau the notion of the “death of the subject” has led to a



re-emergence of the subject in “the death of the death of the Subject.” (Laclau, 1992, p. 84). There now exists a situation where new identities are emerging in areas where universal subjects were in power not so long ago. He questions whether the relationship between particularism and universalism is necessarily a mutually exclusive one. The idea that the particular corrupts the universal is based in ancient philosophy. Either the subject conforms to universality or else it is wrong. Christianity provides another form of universality, where totality only exists for God and is unavailable to human reason. Laclau argues that Eurocentrism stems from this and so does modernism, but that in both these cases God has been replaced by that reason to which totality was supposedly unattainable. A specific (often political) body is here given the post of universality. Is it not possible for a universal to be anything other than a dominant particular? Extreme particularism leads to a situation where everyone’s idea is equally valid, even ideas that do not believe this to be true. Segregation is another condition of this situation. There is an inevitable clash of interests, and some general principles are necessary, if only to keep peace. Perhaps the very tension between the particular and the universal is what will bring forth a decentralisation of the West. This would entail a possible retention of the notion of the universal while always questioning and widening its content. Laclau says that society fails to work as society and to recognise difference as difference and this is why the gap between the universal and particular cannot be bridged. (Laclau, 1992, pp. 84-90).

On the issue of identity, Cornel West has written that it is “...fundamentally about desire and death.” (West, 1992, p. 20). Andersson’s *Reproduktions triptyk*



(*Reproduction triptych*), consisting of the paintings *Jungfru Marias mage* (*Virgin Mary's stomach*, plate 10), *Grodans fallos* (*The frog's phallus*, plate 11) and *Reptilhonans spene* (*The female reptile's teat*, plate 12), from 1983-86 are about the desire to be more than you are.

The frog does not have a phallus, but it dreamt of becoming human and it did... It is something similar with humans, we dream of becoming something else, something better than human. Virgin Mary's digestion... She is ashamed of herself, the human being, because she dreams of being something else. (Interview).

There is sensuality in the use of colour and the application of paint in these three paintings. There is also a luminosity that is stronger than in many of his other paintings, celebrating the newly gained anatomical details in these first time lovers and providers of (spiritual?) welfare.

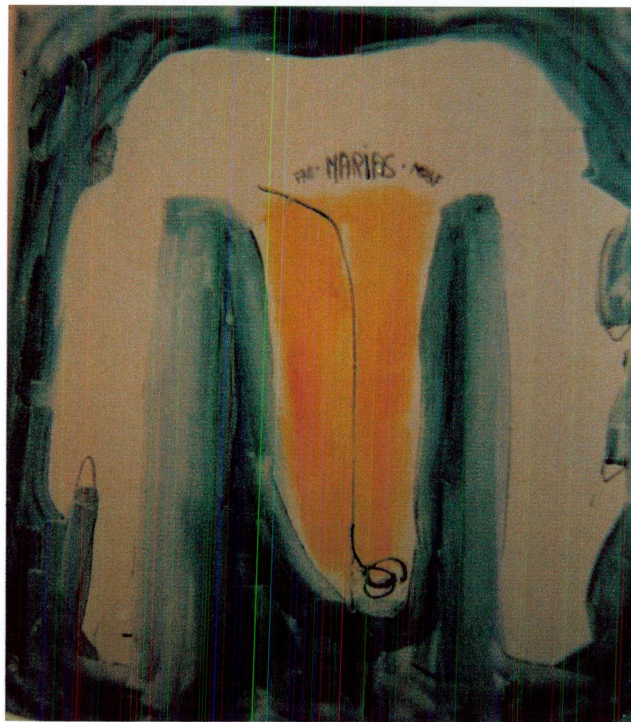


Plate 10 *Jungfru Marias mage*, 1983-86, 146.4x127.5 cm



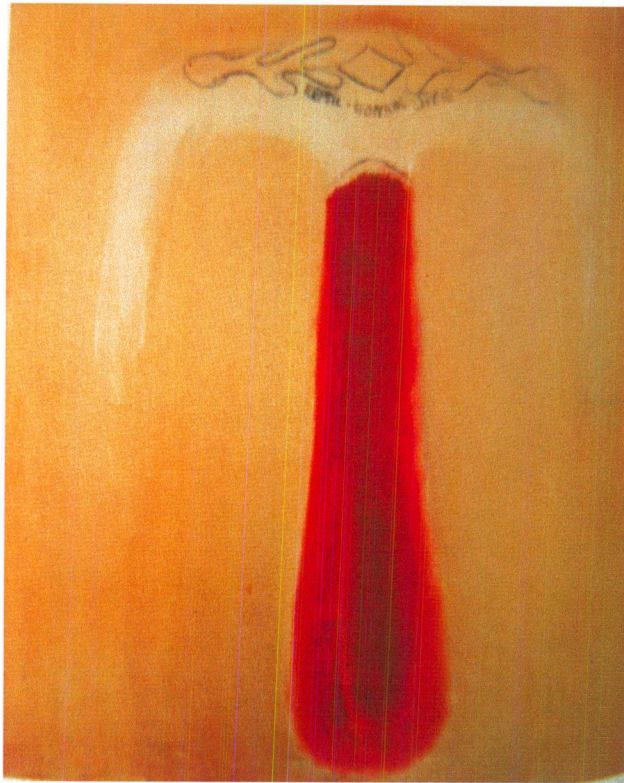


Plate 12 *Reptilhonans spene*, 1983-86, 145.5x126 cm

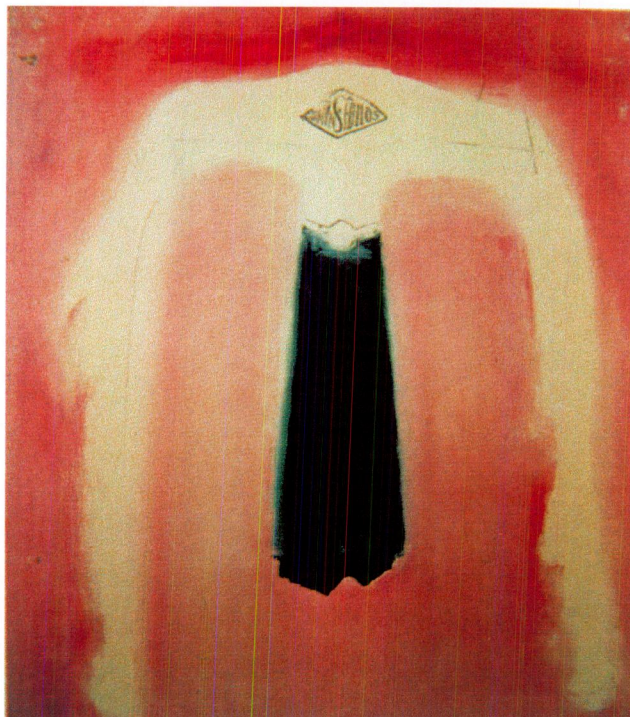


Plate 11 *Grodans fallos*, 1983-86, 146x127cm



While these winged T's look as if they are taking off into a higher sphere, this object they so much longed for is so weighed down by its contents of semen or milk (or blood?) that they have to retain some of the earth from where they came. Desire is connected with sexuality and some of the openings in Andersson's paintings may be bodily orifices painted as mechanical constructions. Possibly Andersson is painting to become something other than what he is. His art appears to contain some kind of an evolutionary belief that through desire something will develop, become constructed, hopefully for the better. As an example his drawing from 1984 (plate 13) sees his development toward a marriage of nature and culture, stating that "'50s + '60s = '80s". Three paintings have been sketched as examples, *Figur med grönt och violett hår* (*Figure with green and violet hair*) from 1958, *Låda* (*Box*) from 1966, and *Låda med hår* (*Box with hair*) from 1984.

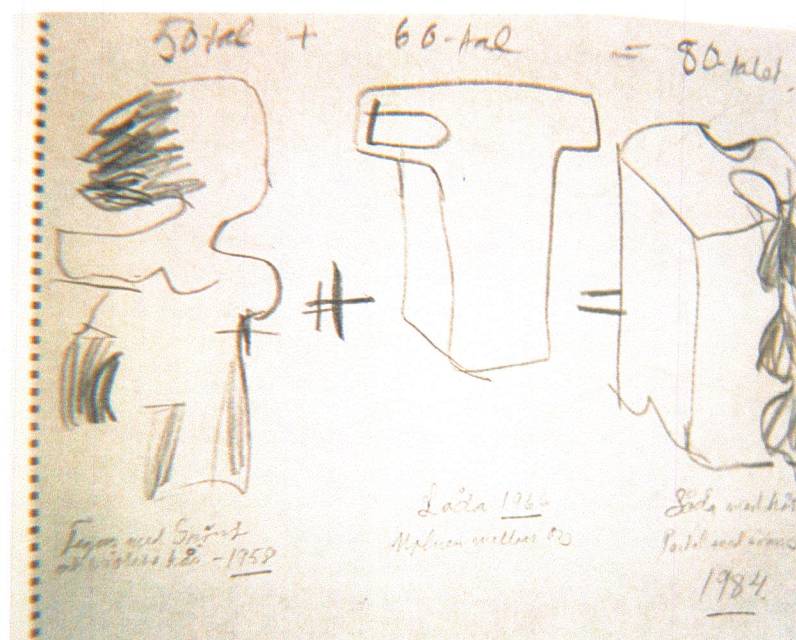


Plate 13 *Untitled*, 1984

Postmodern thought may have broken down the idea of possible objective truths.



It has also brought about a break down of the subject. The two concepts are, like oppositions often seem to be, totally interdependent. Without subjectivity there will be no objectivity, without objectivity there will be no subjectivity and without either of these concepts, how can one possibly speak of relativity? It is relative in relation to what? It certainly is not in relation to “that object” or “this subject”. Perhaps there is some truth, if it’s ever possible to speak of such a thing, in what Olle Granath has said, “The more of one’s unique position one states, the closer one comes to the heart of unity.” (Granath, 1977).



Alterity as an Alternative

...a work of sculpture is an object apart, isolated by its singularity, but still it is an object like any other, and its *difference* rests on a long succession of set ideas and cultural norms, some of them worn quite thin by the early twentieth century. (Hultén, 1987, p. 8).

Traditionally the majority of sculptures in Europe represented the human figure. The word "Staty" ("Statue") in Andersson's paintings would certainly imply a representation of a person. He has said: "The art object and the human being change places in my paintings. Each form can be replaced by a human being. It is as unique. Simultaneously the paintings are closely related like humans." (Wall, 1986). A strong emphasis is placed on uniqueness and unpredictability in Andersson's art.

I think it is about an individual... Even if they are abstract they are separated from one another. It would be terrible if they were series, where I merely changed something, but they are individuals. That then certain individuals turn to one another like siblings... Then a triptych appears, but I have never made a type. (Interview).

One such triptych would be three paintings picturing outcasts from Andersson's home region, made in 1983. *Pernilla Utegångspiga* (*Pernilla the Walking Maid*, plate 14) is the story about a maid walking round the roads, with a blanket that she would throw over herself to resemble a stone when she met someone. *Smeden* (*The Smith*, plate 15) was a young smith who one night went into the local church to give communion to a sick calf. He was executed for sacrilege. *Victoria* is about the writer Victoria Benedictsson who came to the area and married a postmaster but was never accepted by the community so she took her own life. (Rubin, 1986).



Making monuments for these outcasts, these others of society, shows not only an admittance of the existence of the outcast but a celebration of it in the elevated position usually kept for kings and successful warriors.

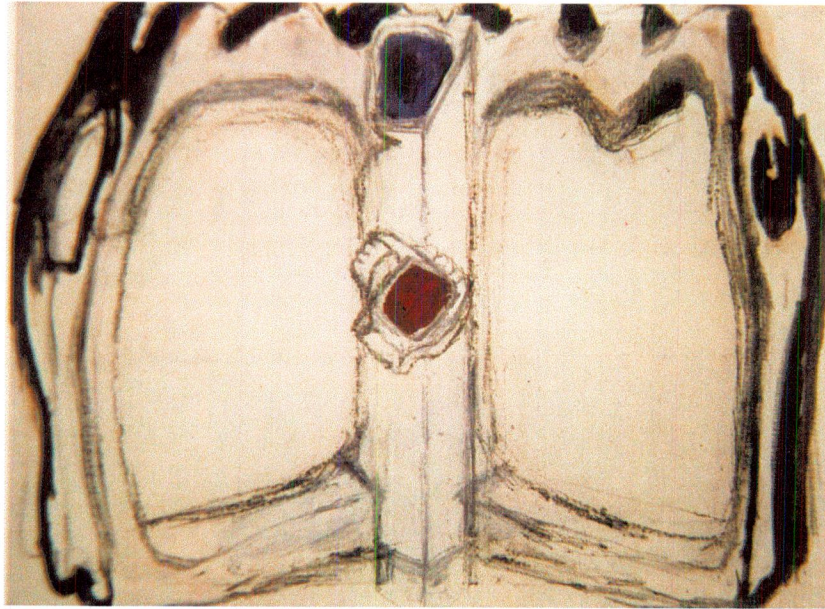


Plate 14 *Pernilla Utegångspiga*, 1983

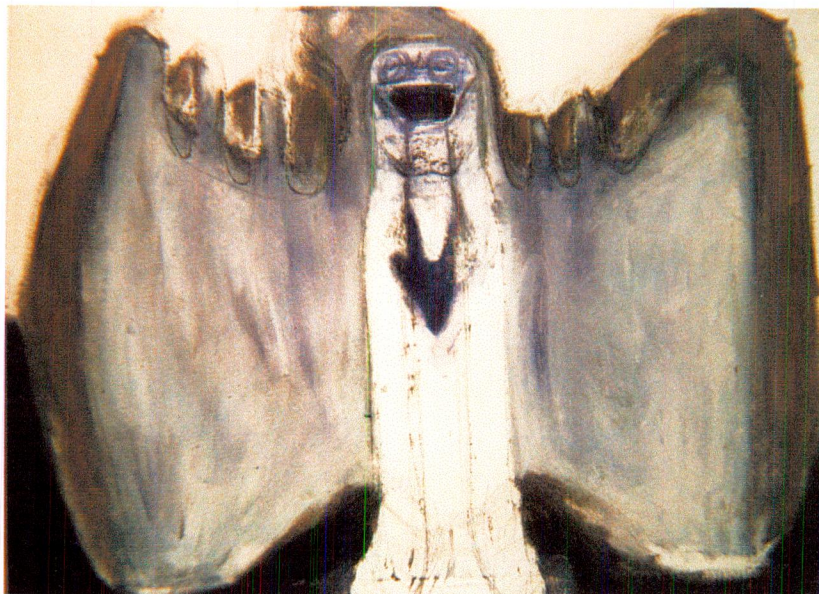
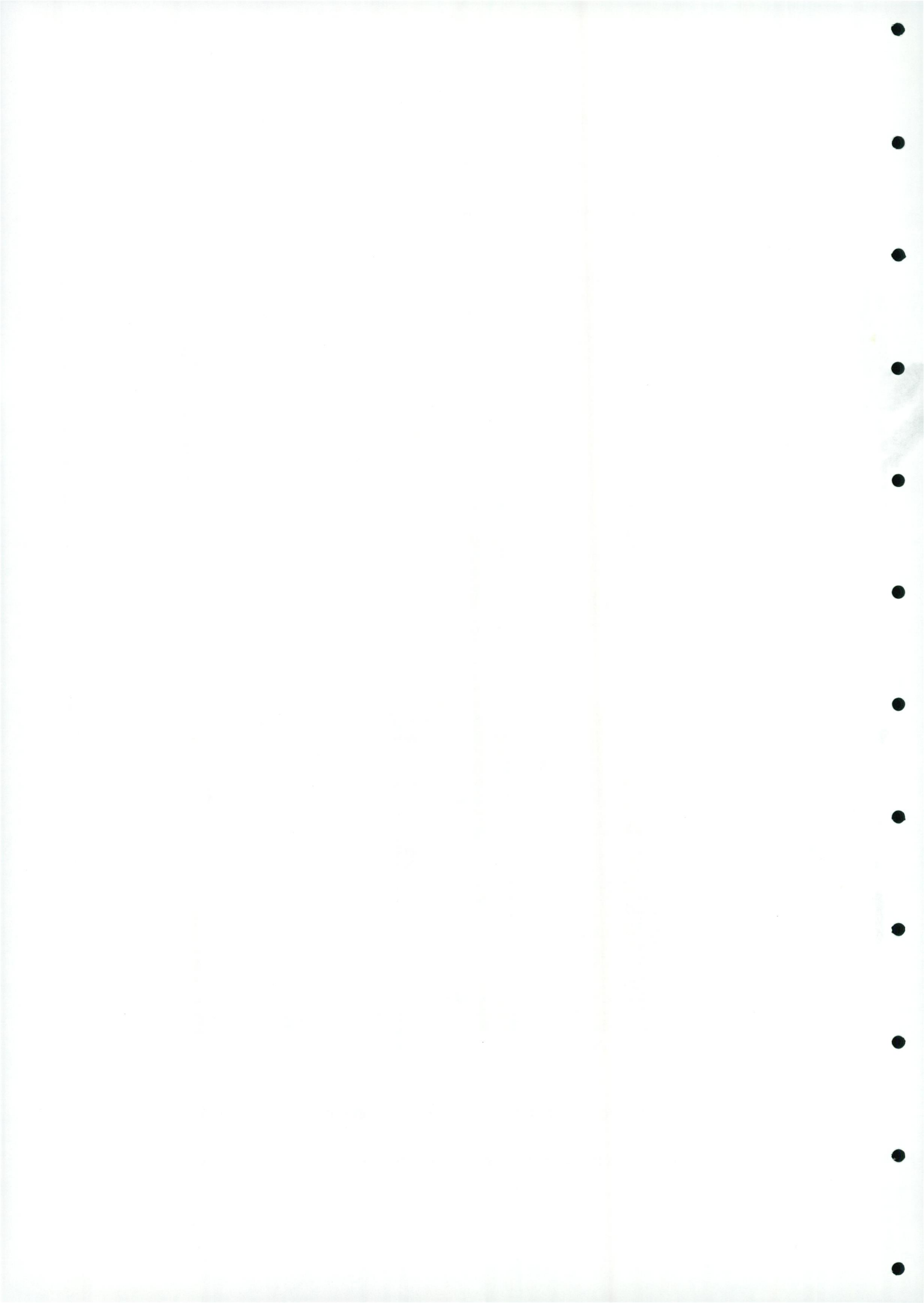


Plate 15 *Smeden*, 1983

According to Jacques Ranciere, an outcast is someone who is denied an identity, someone who is perhaps in between identities. He writes that, "...identity is first



and foremost about fear: the fear of the other, the fear of nothing, which finds on the body of the other its object.” (Ranciere, 1992, p. 64). In the writings of Julia Kristeva there is a simultaneous insistence of the need to assassinate the (m)other to gain one’s identity as an encouragement to learn to love the “other” in oneself and thus others in the general love of difference. Hers is an “outlaw ethics”, not enforcing the law but embracing the return of the other, the repressed, the foreigner, the outcast, the unconscious, and so forth. (Oliver, 1993, p. 19). Being between identities is not necessarily negative, instead this could be the place of discussion for identity politics. Zygmunt Bauman writes about the threat that the stranger imposes on us because of the possibility of faulty classification or perhaps the impossibility of classifying him or her at all. (Bauman, 1996, p. 186). According to Sartre the other confirms our own existence by seeing us, but then imposes a threat to our freedom by his or her freedom. Levinas⁵ offers a perhaps more compassionate way of looking at the other. When we see the face of the other, we instantly become responsible for that other. Identity according to him is not constituted by the look of the other, but comes entirely from within. The infringement on our freedom made by the other is of a different kind. In being for others, freedom is supposedly still possible, but married with, rather than marred by, responsibility. Levinas distinguishes between need and desire. The other is not

⁵According to Ewa Ziarek, Levinas, and ethical theory in general, fails to incorporate the feminine. The gendered other is not part of his idea of the encounter with the other. Also Kristeva’s matricide can be seen to have been replaced by suicide. She concludes that perhaps a crossing of the two theories can lead to a deeper understanding of our relation to the other, learning to respect the (m)other does not necessarily spell suicide, but a being toward death. (Ziarek, 1993, p. 75). This may or may not be relevant to the discussion. Andersson does not seem to have a feminine agenda. (Although one of his paintings, *Biologisk solfångare [Biological sun-catcher]* joins the male and the female in some kind of an organic “machine”). He has mentioned the strength of male hormones and that at this late stage of his life, they are not as strong and his desire to reinforce himself is no longer there. At this point in time he paints without the desire of becoming famous. (Interview).



there to fill a lack or need in us, but through desire we can attempt to get to know it. There is less attention paid to the appearance of things and more to what they are in themselves. (Levinas, 1991, pp. 15-18). He emphasises alterity as something exterior that should not be represented, or even “thought”, since in thinking its other the subject returns to him or herself. (Ziarek, 1993, p. 64). “The face” has been the place of discovery for Wittgenstein also. In seeing the face he does not compare different aspects of a face with one another, he absorbs its expression: “I don’t find a prototype of this expression in my mind; rather, I, as it were, cut a seal from the impression.” (Hagberg, 1996, p. 108).

Martin Buber’s⁶ theory of “I - Thou” relationships has influenced Levinas’ thought. According to Buber language has ontological power; it brings about existence. By speaking the word “I - It”, relating to something or someone as an object, the subject realises itself. By speaking the word “I - Thou”, the subject enters into a relation, affirming both the subject and the other. Inherent to the word “I - Thou” is the question “Who are you?” assuming that the other is precisely other and therefore not known to us by preconceived ideas. Both the theories of Kristeva and Levinas use this assumption of the other not as same, but precisely

⁶Both Levinas and Buber are Jewish and Kepnes has argued that in the Jewish tradition there exists a strong empathy with the outsider because that has been their own position for such a long time. (Kepnes, 1992, p. 119). It could also be noted that abstraction might fit better into these theories as well as to the second commandment (“You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth...”, Exodus 20:2-17, *Jerusalem Bible*). Juliet Steyn argues that Greenberg’s agenda was to reconcile the universal and the particular and thus America and the Jew. To attain this universal he had to suppress all conflict and sacrifice his work to an ideal. (Steyn, 1996, p. 47).



other, and certainly in Levinas' thought it is this that makes us responsible. Kristeva finds it necessary to begin with accepting the other inside oneself first of all, not to find sameness with other others through this, but to learn to like the very notion of otherness that way. Andersson does in one sense seem to want to leave his own subject and set out on a journey that does not return to itself. (Ziarek, 1993, p. 67). But he is also aware of his own desire, not only for the other but to become something better than he is.

Andersson's "sculptures" (plates 16-17) and "statues" (plates 18-19) and even the "plinths"⁷ (plates 20-21) that these would normally stand on may offer some of this strange other-ness.



Plate 16 *Skulptur*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm

⁷ "Socket", being the Swedish word for the base of a sculpture can also mean a low wall hanging. In his most recent exhibition in Louisiana in Denmark, Andersson intended to hang his paintings at foot level, so as they would not have any superiority in relation to the viewers. (Interview).



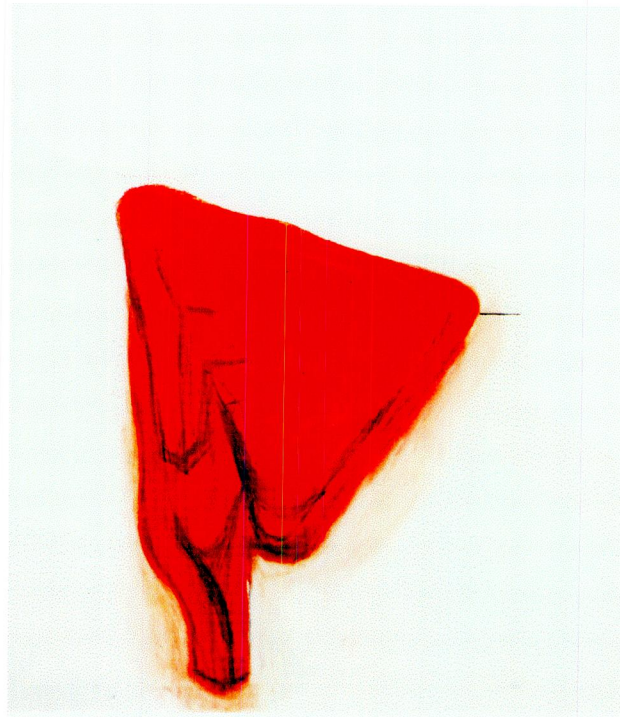
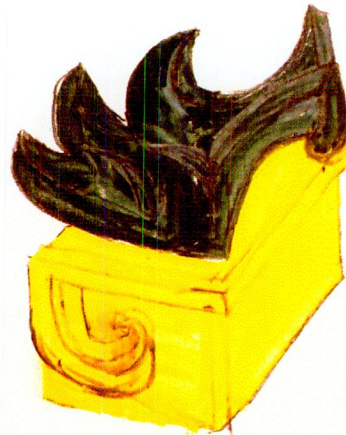
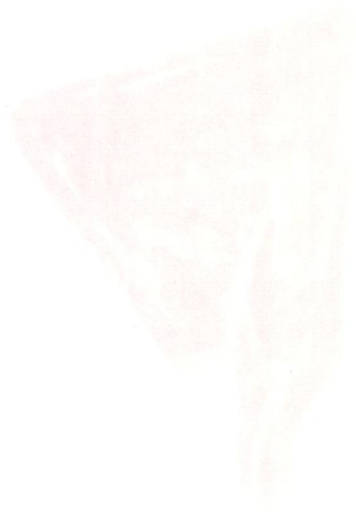


Plate 17 *Skulptur*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm



SKULPTUR

Plate 18 *Staty*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm





SKULPTUR

Plate 19 *Staty*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm



Plate 20 *Sockel*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm



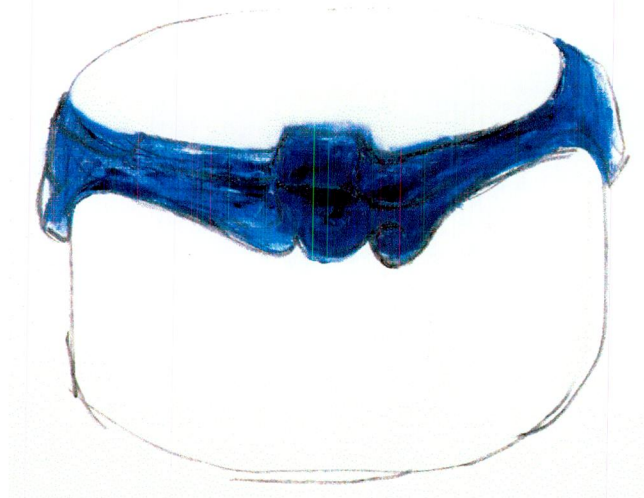


Plate 21 *Sockel*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm

Perhaps he wants to surprise the viewer, with almost recognisable forms, yet they are different from anything else. There is an insistence on the singularity of the form. The cultural norms and set ideas that the singularity of the sculpture rested on may have been in need of revision. If modernism's all-over paintings, where the whole surface was covered in paint, have proffered some kind of equality, Andersson's paintings are equal in their difference, yet not at the cost of becoming one with everything else. However this new individualism refuses to be pinned down into compartments, which perhaps like masses, can be controllable. Absolutely unique suggests absolutely unpredictable, and possibly the way to relate to them is with complete openness. At the same time Andersson claims that the viewer may put meaning into his artworks, but not simply however he or she wants. "One will have



to work at one's interpretations. Just as the artist has to work with the picture, so the viewer will also have to work." (Interview). At least one of the meanings with Andersson's works could be exactly this openness in looking at the concrete embodiment of something unknown.

In "The Text as Thou" Stephen Kepnes uses Buber's theories as a tool for interpretation. Here the emphasis is put on the "text" and not the author or interpreter. With too much emphasis on the reader there is a failure to recognise the strangeness of the text. According to Buber art occurs when a pre-existing form "calls" the artist to make it concrete. It is the response of the artist to something outside of him or her. The limitless "Thou" then becomes limited by its concrete form, but can regain its limitlessness if the viewer enters into an "I - Thou" relationship with the form. (Kepnes, 1992, p. 24). A certain awareness of the "I" that is asking the question "Who is this text?" is needed; a certain critical distance. Prejudices can lie deep in the subject and the "I - Thou" relationship requires that the subject try to shed those, and perhaps also be aware that other prejudices may exist that the subject is not even aware of. It is possible of course that the "I" never meet the "Thou", but meets only a reflection of itself. In the area of interpretation, it is a dialogue that is required. Buber claims that language is not solely self-referential but the "...I - Thou dialogue refers to that which is unique in each of the interlocutors." (Kepnes, 1992, p. 113). He rejects the idea of the singular self, but not the self in dialogue. The self does not disappear totally in language, but needs language to become, through dialogue with another. Dialogism is also seen as a way



of interpretation for Bakhtin, where the dialogue between people always brings out new meanings and even past meanings cannot be stable. Both Buber and Bakhtin regard speech as superior to writing because of its closer connection to the human subject, and thus it is perhaps an easier tool for dialogue. Kepnes argues that this view of the self is not as nihilistic as other postmodern views that destroy the subject altogether and with that any sense of responsibility. There is an insistence here that something outside of language exists, and that language in one way limits this other but is the means through which we can get closer to that other, unknown, but yet existing. Andersson claims that the unknown is any one abstract object. (Andersson, 1995, p. 53). This does not mean that he necessarily believes the forms he paints to exist somewhere else before he paints them (or constructs them in his head), but that there is something such as the unknown, whether this be the future, or if it has more spiritual overtones. Each of his sculptures represents or presents the idea or the possibility of the unknown and perhaps unknowable.

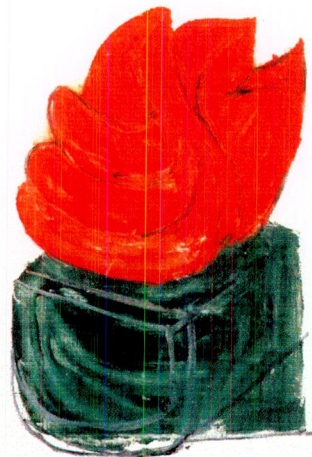
Derrida writes:

The entirely-other catches me with pleasure by depriving me of both concept and enjoyment. Without this entirely other, there would be no universality, no requirement of universality, but for the same reason, with respect to that entirely other, there is no enjoyment (singular, empirical, existent, interested) or determinant or knowledge concept. (Derrida, 1987, p. 47).

We simultaneously enjoy the fact that the other is different as we desire to find out who that other is. Relating to the other or to a piece of writing or a work of art, the defining of it may take away the interest it holds. Bauman argues that once we make

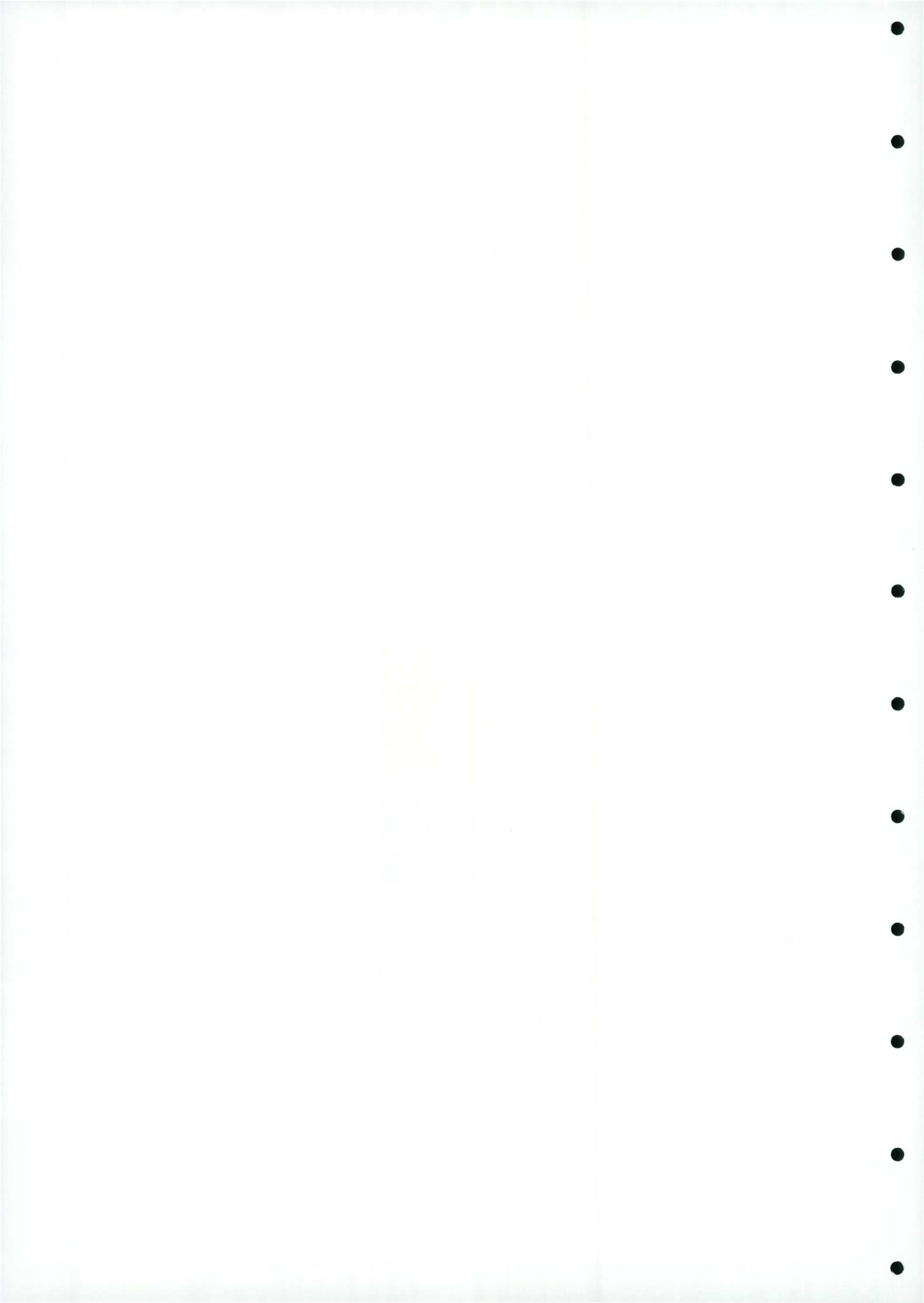


ourselves a definition of another we lose interest, disappointed that they were not what we believed them to be; a riddle. Every human being is, according to Bauman, always a riddle. Making a picture of them is “heartless treachery”. (Bauman, 1995, p. 120). He relates it to Derrida’s idea that once something reaches completeness it disappears and dies. Andersson’s *Staty* (*Statue*, plate 22) from 1993-94 could be a heart pulsating on top of a dark coffin, aware of its short life-span, disconnected from a body and yet rejoicing in the fact that it had a chance to exist at all.



SKULPTUR
Plate 22 *Staty*, 1993-94, 146x127 cm

Crucial to Andersson’s art is, “That every unique form... shall symbolise every human being’s high rank... Only an unpredictable object alludes directly and concretely to the human being’s exceptional uniqueness.” (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 41). Perhaps interpretation does not necessarily lead toward complete



understanding of something, to a goal or perhaps to death, but to an understanding that whatever it is that is being interpreted will always be otherwise than what we conclude.



Constructing a Morality of Deconstruction

“This intact object-in-itself occurs in a new epoch in time...We must learn to land. And as my eight-year-old son said, try to land without tearing up our cheeks.” (Interview).

Andersson’s “sculptures” all have centre stage in the canvas, albeit a placing toward the bottom of the painting, to make sure that they own a strange weight in a void of infinite possibilities. Some of his most recent paintings have writing at the bottom of the canvas reading “Staty på Jupiter [/Mars/Saturnus etc.] Ny Tyngdkraft Ny Epok” (“Statue on Jupiter [/Mars/Saturn etc.] New Gravity New epoch”, plates 23-25).



Plate 23 *Staty på Jupiter ny tyngdkraft ny epok*, 1997





Plate 24 *Staty på Mars ny tyngdkraft ny epok*, 1997

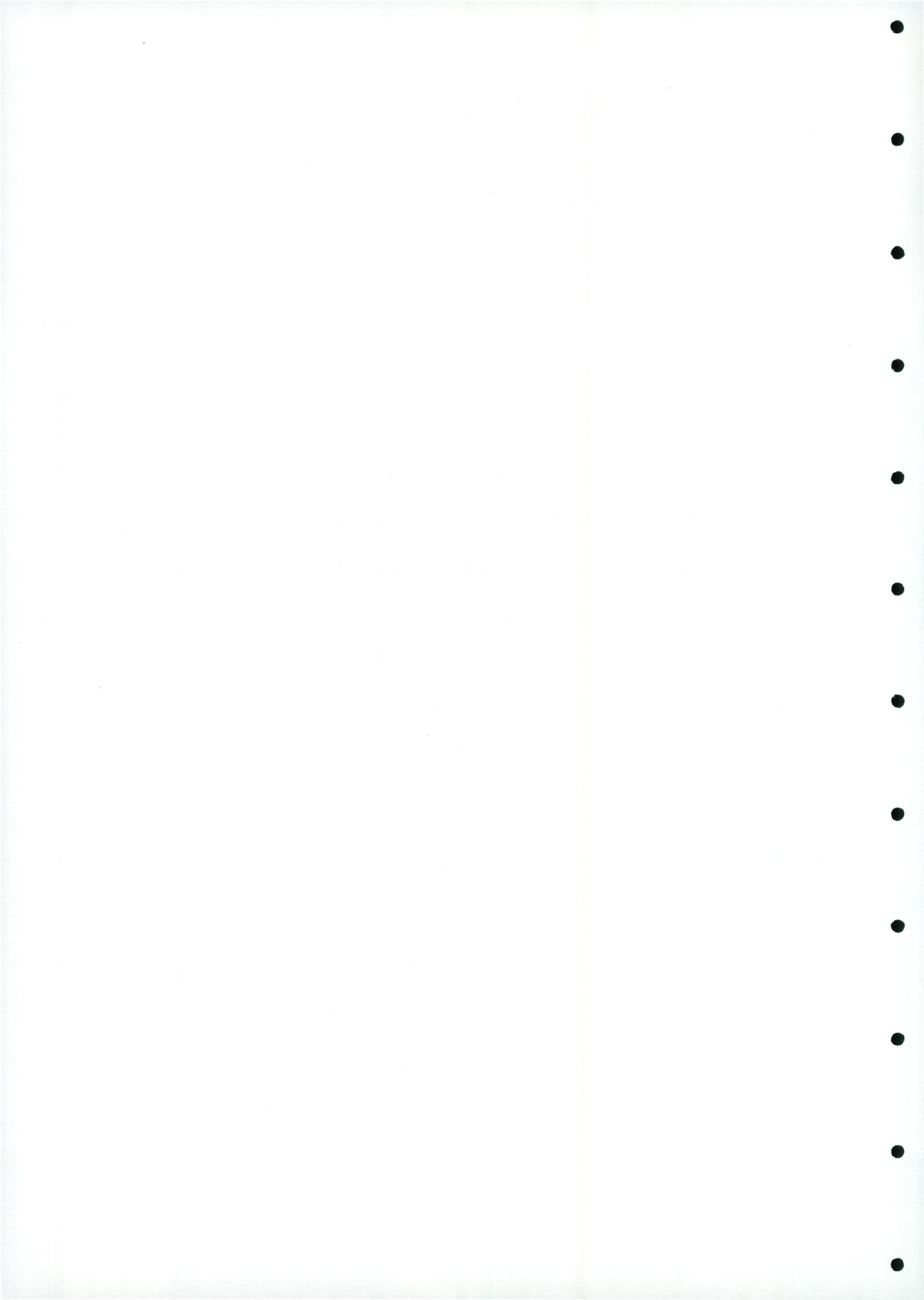


Plate 25 *Staty på Saturnus ny tyngdkraft ny epok*, 1997



It is gravity but perhaps not as it has been known before. These statues have landed on planets that supposedly have no gravity. It is as if their weight brings gravity about, or at least refuses to accept the weightless conditions that prevail. If Andersson sees modernism as an attempt at weightlessness, at going beyond the atmosphere, this intact, singular object negates that idea. He is bringing the shattered pieces of abstraction closer together, or taking one of these fragments, enlarging it and making it the point of emphasis. His sculptures are centred, yet contradictory in many ways. Andersson writes about decentring. It is a decentralisation perhaps of meaning, of the set ideas that belonged to a different era. Also it is proposing a more provincial art. In order to achieve this, instead of leaving painting he remains within the medium. He believes that, "A traditional art form, with its built-out references, exposes dead references and sharpens the demand for creativity and invention." (Nordström, 1992, p. 46). Even the placing of the forms suggests a decentring from within. Charles Altieri has written that, "Once centers yield to the play of oppositions, it is necessary to speak of inescapable indeterminacies." (Altieri, 1989, p. 184).

Morality (like painting or objectivity or meaning, among other things) as a concept may constitute certain inherent problems, one of which would be whose morality that morality is. Possibly, and perhaps even probably, it would be the morality of the most powerful. Considering, however, that many concepts that have been questioned over the last fifty years or so may not be as one- (or two-) sided as they might have appeared, it could be argued that morality does not have to be

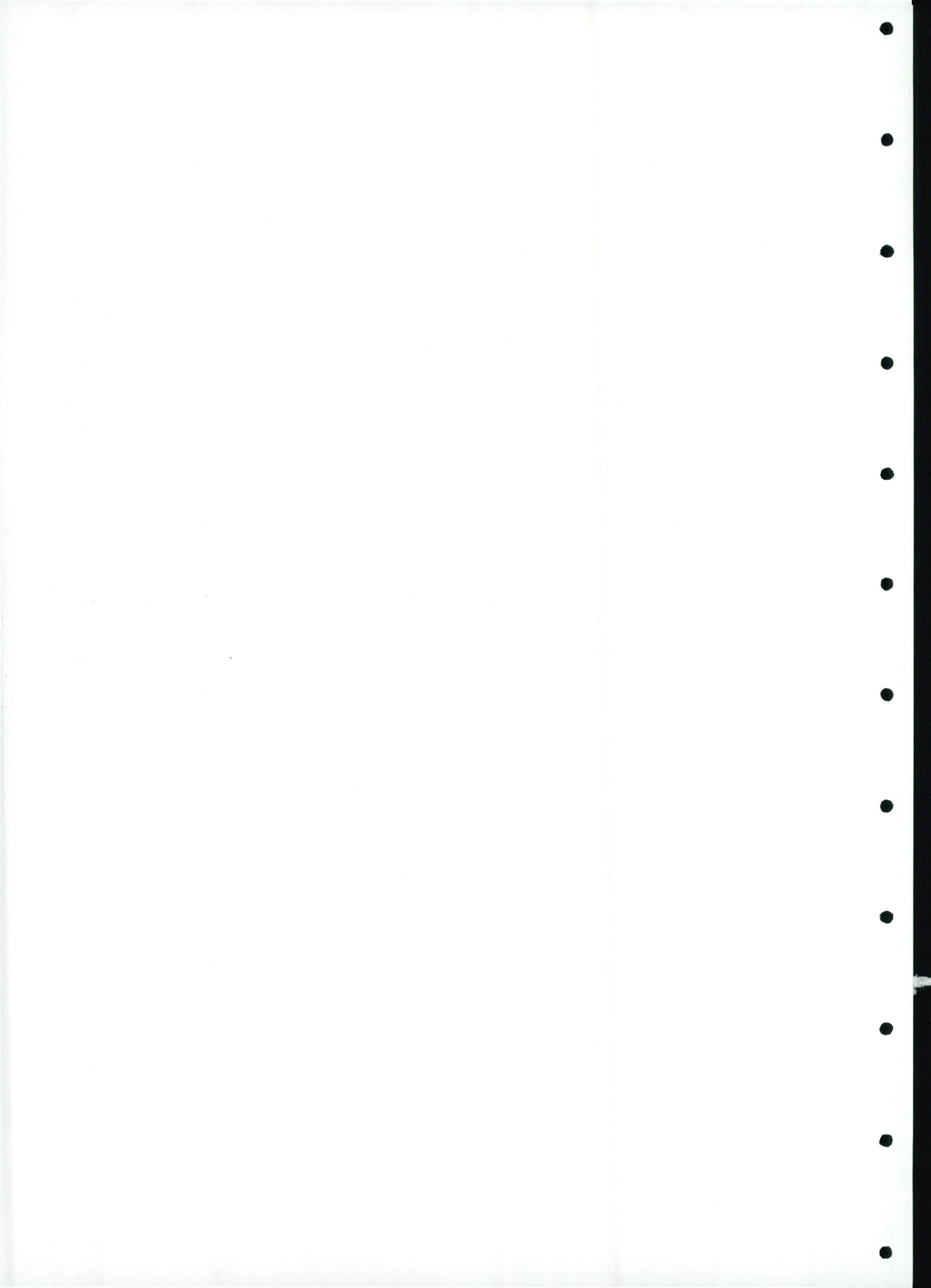


disregarded altogether. Zygmunt Bauman argues for the possibility of an extensive moral unit, not as a result of globalisation politics, but as a utopian aim for deconstruction. For this to be possible the moral subject must be emancipated to gain its inherently ambivalent moral responsibilities.⁸ (Bauman, 1996, p. 23). He is of the view that “abstract spaces” are constructed in order for people to relate to one another in different ways. Within these spaces there are three categories: social space, aesthetic space and moral space. Social space is related to structure, stability between categories, clear divisions and predictability among other things, while aesthetic space seeks the shock of the new, the different, lack of contours, movable divisions and so on. The former is afraid of the unknown, the latter is most entertained by the unknown. In either case people do not actually relate to one another. They either use others for their own pleasure or try to avoid them. Bauman prefers the playfulness of aesthetic space, but only combined with moral space. Relating to Levinas’ ideas of the face, he too says that it is precisely the uniqueness of the other that makes us responsible for them. This is a responsibility that lies in that for as long as the face of the other demands our attention we give it. At the same time the moral act is ambivalent, balancing between care and dominance, tolerance and indifference. (Ibid., pp. 222-225). He writes that it would be better perhaps if this non-rationalisable morality had some stable universalisable principles, but that this is not possible.

⁸ Politically this does not mean a situation where everyone has to fight for him or herself in a dismantled welfare state. On the contrary, Bauman argues that this leads power into the hands of the wealthy. (Bauman, 1996, p. 300). This could be related to Andersson’s claim that he wants to help “emancipate people not from the collective, but from the loneliness and powerlessness within the collective.” (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 40).



Perhaps Andersson's spaces are also moral and not purely aesthetic. The illusionist space around his objects is a space of possibilities. In Anderson's art there exists a will for change and possibly an offer of learning to live determinedly in indeterminacy. He has said that, "I give language a chance to break down conventions and expose the tendencies that prevail. The individual is becoming important again". (Wall, 1986). Andersson has a loyalty toward the forms perhaps, in that they become individual, or perhaps a morality of openness in meaning. His pictures have a certain restriction about them. The forms are very clean, the paint is thinly and quickly put on, suggesting not an abandonment of the artist into some expressionistic action, but a process that has been thought through and a decision made. It is as if each form, especially the later "sculptures" are pared down to their essentials. Nothing clutters the painting unnecessarily to confuse the subject matter. There is a certain almost bare sensuality in the handling of paint, casually yet decidedly scraped onto the canvas with a palette knife, as if it was of little and at the same time utmost importance. Simultaneously essentialist and almost non-aesthetic the forms do not recall a modernist purity of expression and form, but suggest a more clumsy insistence of strange personalities. Andersson has two studios, one smaller one, where he discovers new forms on smaller canvases or sketches, and a large studio, where the final paintings are made from the smaller ones that are worthwhile pursuing. The form does not change from the smaller painting to the large one and Andersson sees no need for new discovery in the execution of the final pieces. (Interview).



In his preliminary works, on the other hand, it is very important for Andersson to discover something new. He compares the role of the artist with that of the inventor and has said that if he was teaching young artists he would get them all to read a conversation between Bengt Feldrich and some Nobel Prize winners, discussing the conditions for creativity. He especially mentions one person who made his own tools for his research, being the closest to the problem he was trying to solve. "Then he entered into a state where the solution might suddenly appear - and these are the exact conditions of the artist." (Gelin, 1995, p. 52). He sees the sketchbooks of contemporary installation artists for example as "by-products" that could be revalued for "the new use of illusionism, construction and invention". (Nordström, 1992, p. 45). Perhaps the by-products Andersson is speaking about have something to do with Derrida's "parergon", that which happens on the side, by the way, the parenthesis of the actual work. This is possibly where invention can be seen, where discovery takes place.

Gregory L. Ulmer compares deconstruction with heuristics: "'-The art of logic that treats the art of discovery or invention', says the *Oxford English Dictionary*. 'Rare'. A rare usage, and even rarer in practice." (Ulmer, 1994, p. 80). This is the "other" that Derrida is suggesting, the alternative. Ulmer uses Acker's relationship to writing as reading to define heuristics. Here literary criticism may not be possible, but instead the response to a work of art may be simply to go on "'living, imagining, making, fucking and we fight this society of death'". (Ulmer, 1994, p. 82). Buber's dialogical theories seem to have a similar line, where the ultimate



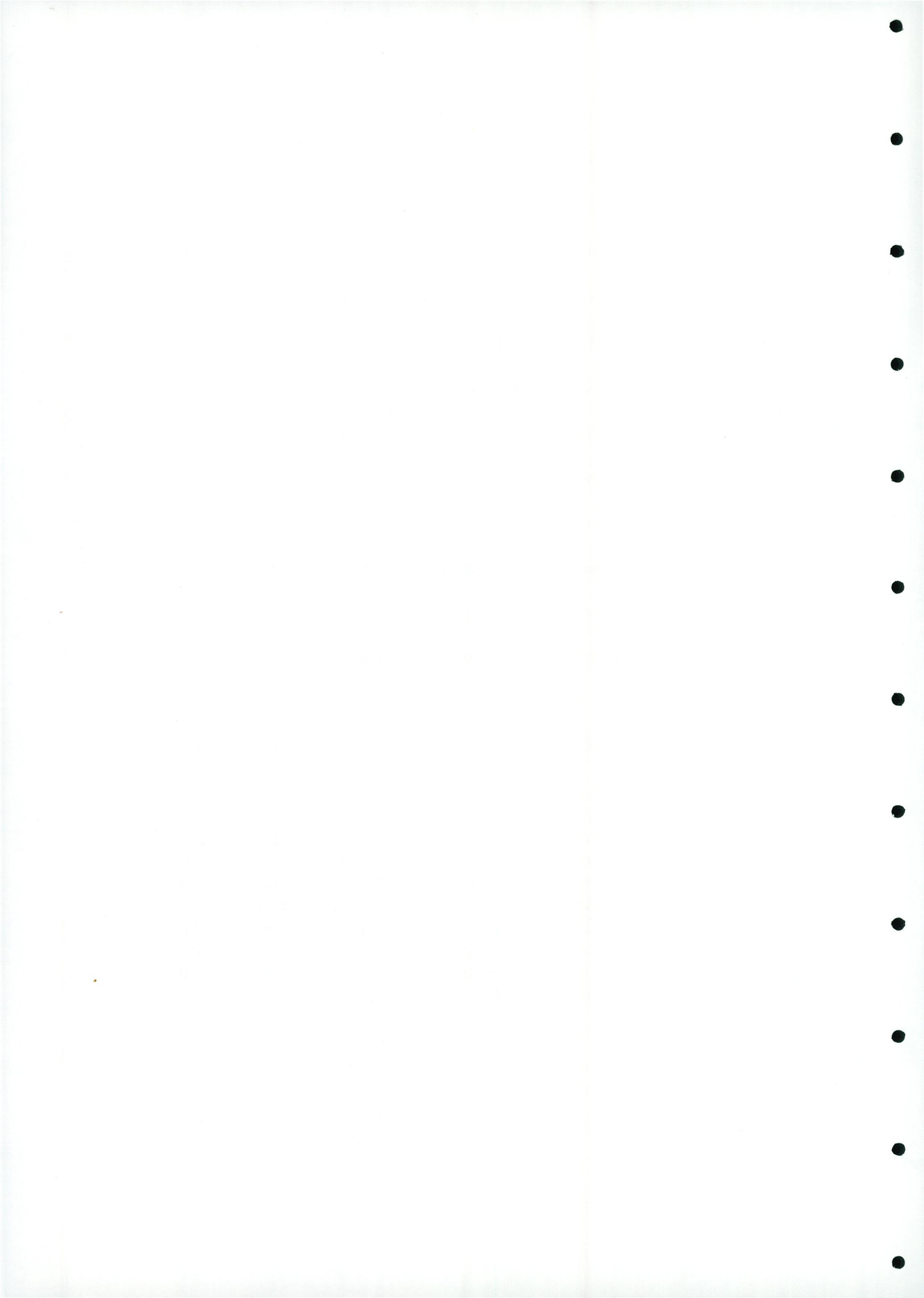
response to a work of art would be another work of art, and thus a dialogue is started (although his choice of expression and probably even his objective, take a somewhat different direction to that of Acker). Susan Sontag argues that interpretation can at times be illuminating and at other times stifling, and according to her the latter case is prevailing at the time of her writing. Interpretation is an impoverishing of the world by the intellect “in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings’”. (Sontag, 1964, p. 218). She argues that by reducing a work of art to something specific it is tamed of its potential. Abstract art would be one way in which to avoid this interpretation, because it has “no content”. She writes about Western culture as one of excess, resulting in a loss of sensory perceptiveness. The task is thus not to find as many meanings as possible in a work of art, but as few as possible so that the thing in itself becomes visible. (Ibid., p. 222). According to Derrida “Invention assumes an undecidability; it assumes that at a given moment there is nothing.” (Wills and Brunette, 1994, p. 27). He also says that deconstruction does not only dissociate or deconstruct but can be constructive and affirm “a certain being together” (ibid.) first after deconstruction has taken place. Perhaps invention and perception combined can bring closer some sense of meaning. Derrida argues that for a work [of art] to happen “the analysis of all the conditions served to... make room... in an absolutely undetermined place for something that is at once useless, supplementary and finally irreducible to those conditions.” (Ibid. p. 28). A practice should be recognised at the same time as it is not recognised. Once again opposites meet, bounce against each other, part, and meet again, to join in an awkward union beyond comprehension. Differences do not become the same



but enter into negotiation to become differently different.

Andersson's infinite spaces surrounding his objects invite the viewer to use a hallucinatory ability to experience the object even stronger than before. Ernst Billgren has written that he is more interested in what is not in Andersson's paintings than in what is actually there. (Billgren, 1995, p. 9). Perhaps he is talking about the parenthesis of Andersson's sculptures. It is the ability to "hallucinate", combined with chance, that brings us forward, according to Andersson. In *Poesins triptyk (Poetry's triptych)* from 1983-1986 the objects are again combinations of cultural constructions and nature. *Portik med röda vingar (Porch with red wings, plate 26)*, *Portal med svans (Portal with tail, plate 27)* and *Månen med hästhoven (The moon with the horse's hoof, plate 28)* are maybe doorways into a world of difference and unpredictability. They could also almost be receivers or some sort of antennas, with one foot solidly earthen so as to avoid any major shock. The moon on top of the horse's hoof has not been taken down from the sky, but its light is captured in the absorbing darkness of the receiver on top. Andersson has written:

I place a mirror in my flat hand. Just before the edge of the mirror unites with the upside-down horizon, I catch the rising moon. The objects in my paintings have such a streak of a surface, a surface facing the sky like the mirror in my hand... To see the sky in the mirror I watch the mirror from above. In this way I contemplate my paintings. Carefully I tramp on the backs of the fictional objects, stroll along the edges and look out over the precipices. I watch the world from the roof of the tail's root. (Adlers, p. 14).



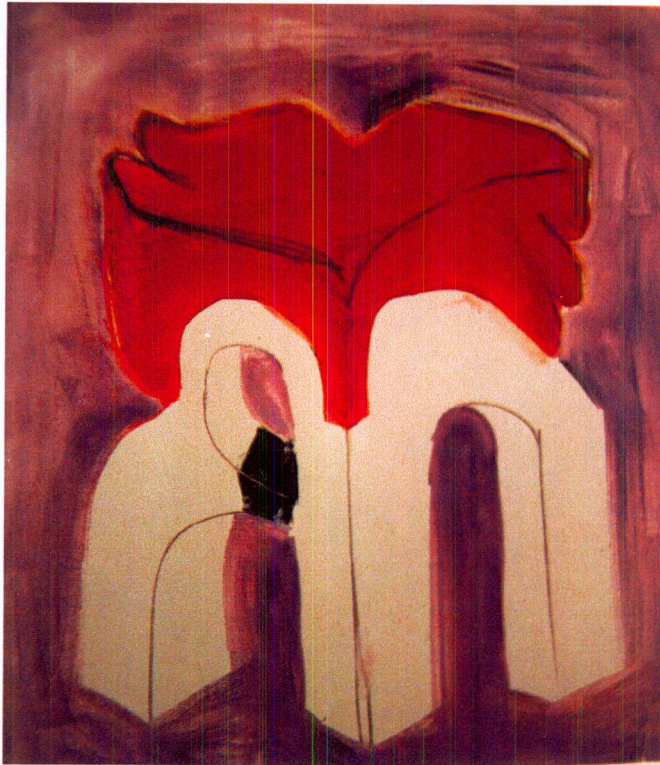


Plate 26 *Portik med röda vingar*, 1983-86, 146.5x127.5 cm

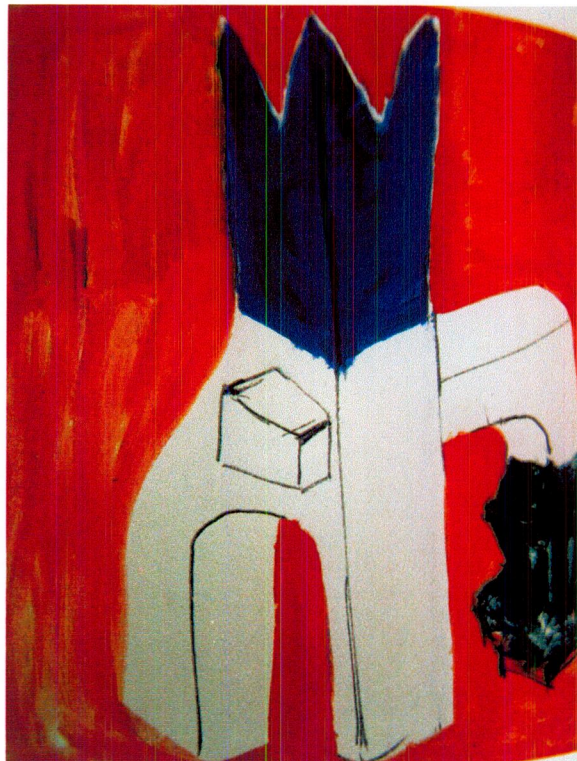


Plate 27 *Portal med svans*, 1983-86

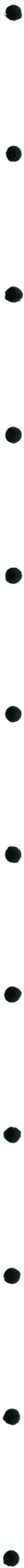
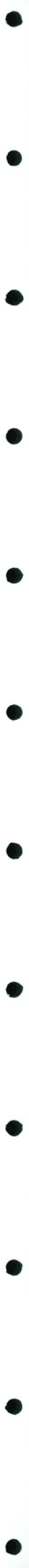




Plate 28 *Månen med hästhoven*, 1983-86, 147x126.5 cm

Perhaps this is the fourth dimension Andersson speaks of. A reverse fourth dimension to the Cubist one of time passing. A dimension of that which is not in the painting, but can be imagined. Or that which is not yet made, the unpredictable, that which we cannot know.

Olle Granath draws a parallel between artistic practice and the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary, as a place of an “...ever present possibility of rebirth, salvation, reconciliation, crucifixion, death, rebirth...” (Moderna Muséet, 1986, p. 8). He writes that making art is a wish to create something so pure that it is untouchable by evil. Evil being habit, “...not seeing because one thinks one has already seen.” (Ibid.). Perhaps a moral of deconstruction would be this negotiation of differences,

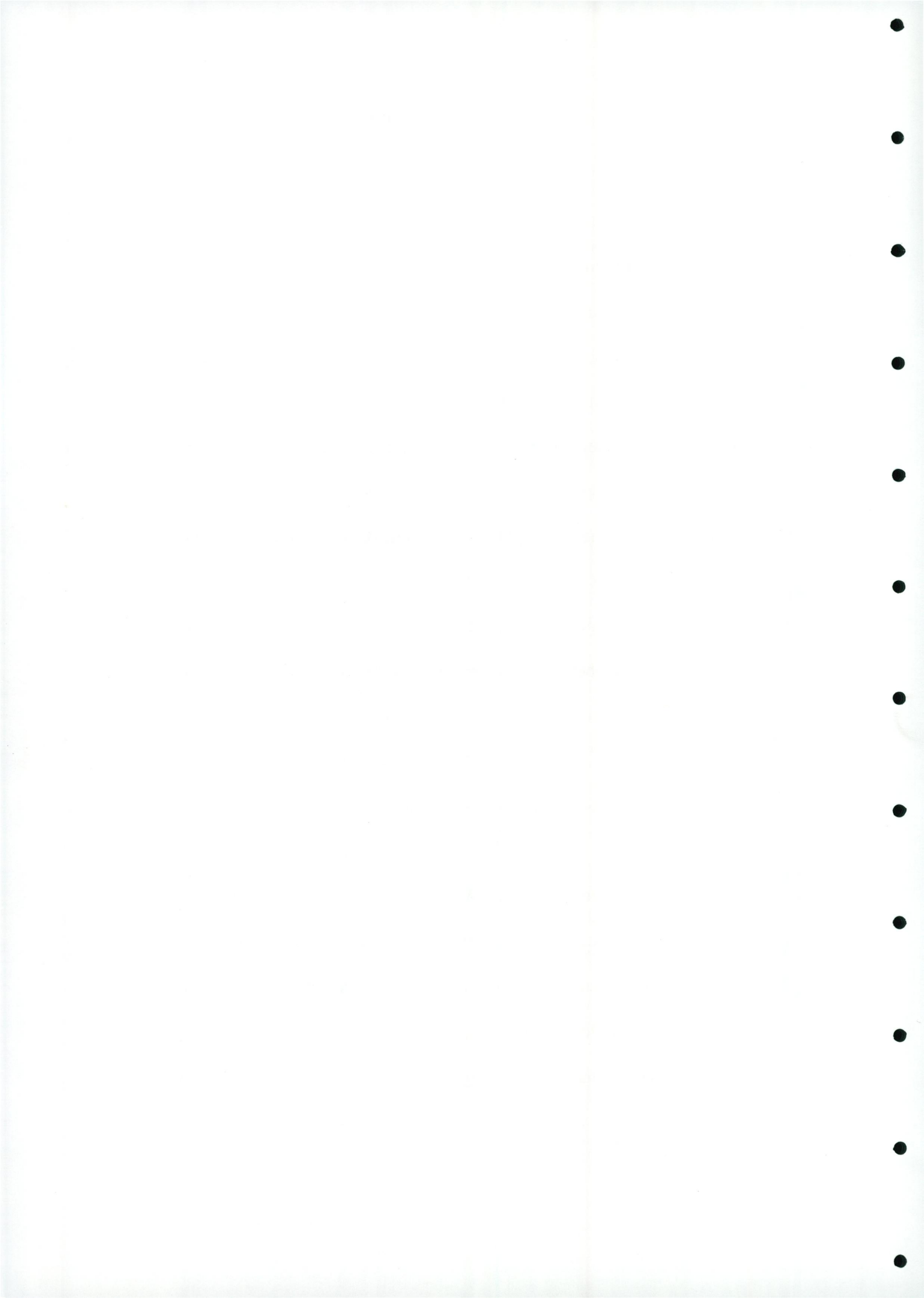


and acceptance of its conditions as always unpredictable, undefinable and unknowable. "If there is to be a future," according to Derrida, "...it is on the condition that it be not "that", that it be elsewhere" (Wills and Brunette, 1994, p. 29). Or indeed, as Levinas has written: "The future is not buried in the kernels of pre-existent eternity, where we would come to lay hold of it. It is absolutely other and new." (Hand, 1996, p. 46).



Conclusion

Due to the combination of opposites in Andersson's painted sculptures, there is a slippage in definition, things are no longer what they have been perceived to be, and it becomes increasingly hard to pin down exactly what it is they have become instead (or always actually were). Binary oppositions, and the relationship between them, have been brought to awareness by deconstructive theorists in different ways. According to Rajan, for example, Kristeva constructs differences while Derrida takes apart oppositions. It could be argued that the notion of oppositions, depending on each other, reduces multiplicity to binaries. But perhaps the condition of a given thing is not only its opposite, but also everything that it is not. Certainly the act of dividing and separating things into opposites does not take into account nuances and what may lie in between. Andersson may be constructing differences in his inherently contradictory language; difficult differences, strangely proud of their obscurity, yet with a strong desire, if not to be understood, at least to be desired. They know the problem with universal communication. In their sensual particularity they both portray and defy this difficulty, demanding analysis without ever promising to give anything away. As subjects they expect the subjective viewer to be part of the process of making meaning, at the same time as they hope that perhaps somehow that meaning will actually be as accurate as possible. Maybe they are receivers or reflectors, of the viewer's thoughts perhaps or of moonlight or, as original objects, simultaneously suggesting anything else that is not portrayed in the paintings. They are very much objects in themselves, emphasising their singularity



and otherness. The more unique something is, the more must be rejected in order to attain that uniqueness, and perhaps this is where the multiplicity lies, and what calls for dialogue or negotiation.

What has been argued here may or may not be relevant to Andersson's art. I have attempted to give some idea of the inherent paradox in his painting and the implications of this. Andersson's "sculptures" are perhaps not beyond opinion, but they certainly attempt to break down the viewer's suppositions. Whether the arguments that have been given are true or false, it appears, that the "small thing" Andersson is concerned with in painting three-dimensional abstract objects on flat surfaces is perhaps a pointer or portal to a dimension, as yet untouched by the commerce of critical analysis, but no less real in its metaphysical solidity.

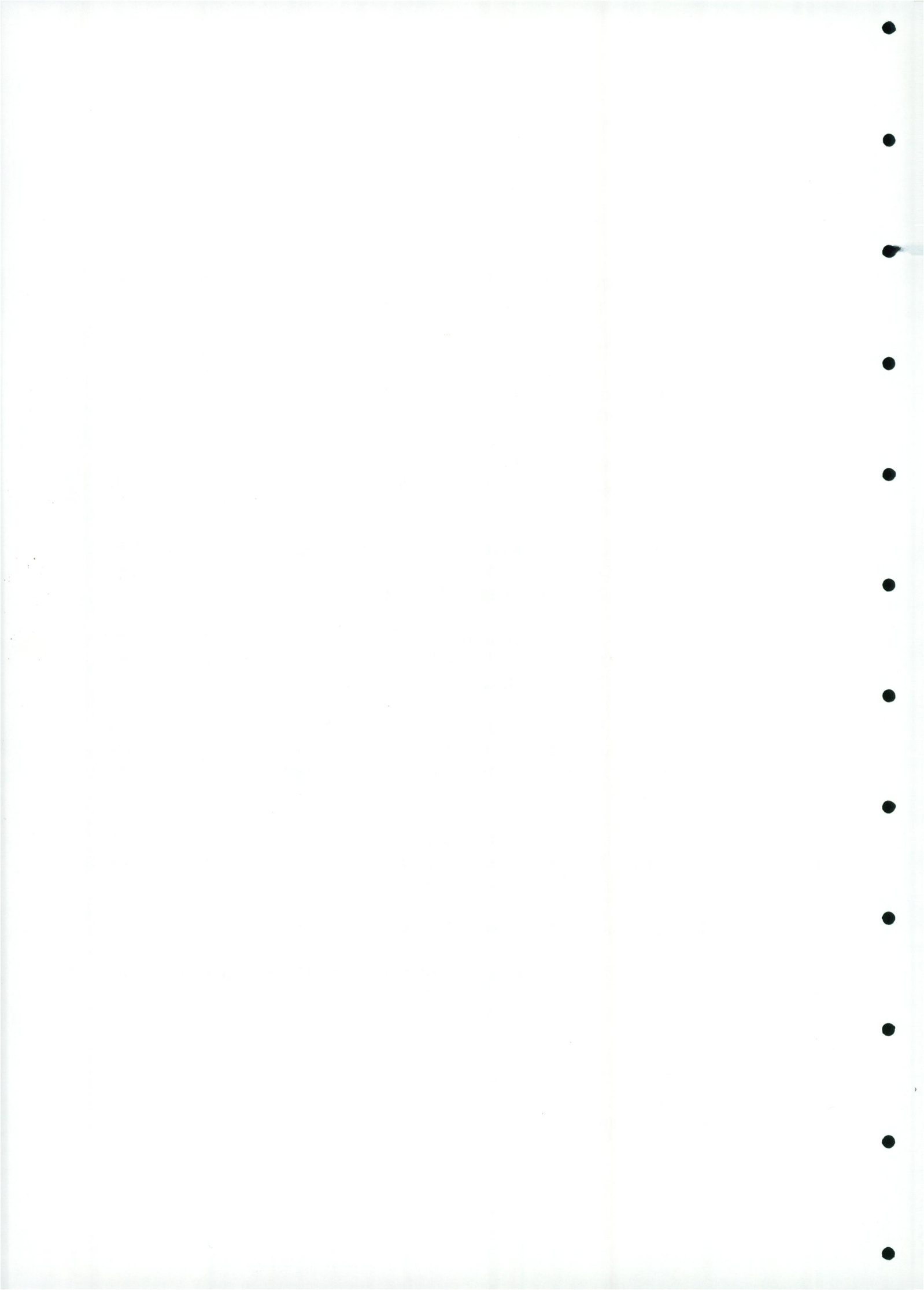


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Interview conducted by the author with Torsten Andersson at his home in Hörby on September 23rd 1997 between 4pm and 6pm.

