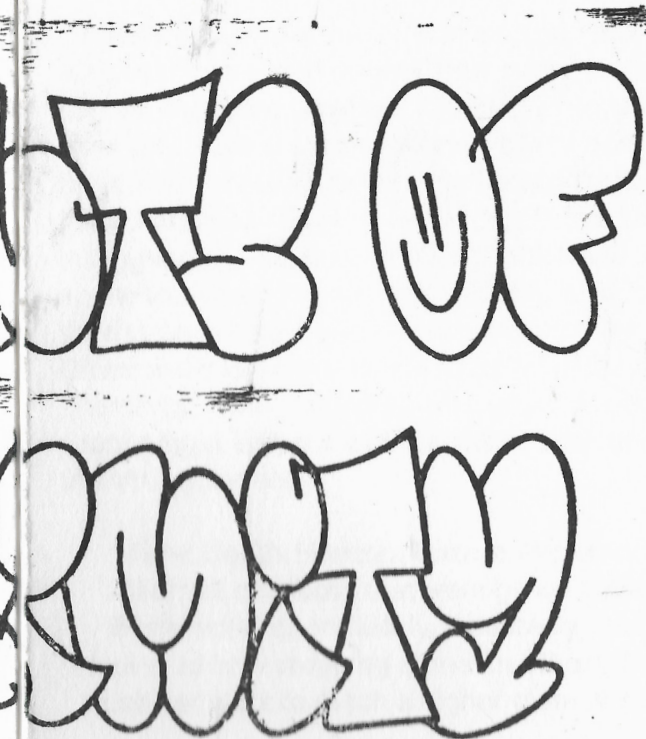
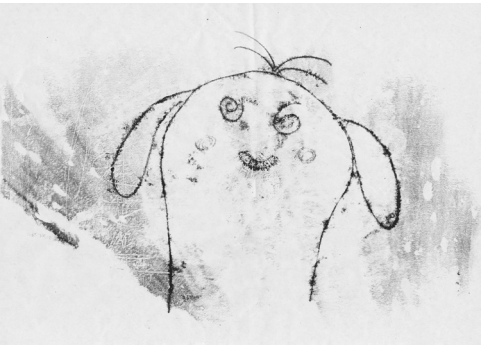


# Obsessing over matter

## Examinations on material art, space and self



Cătălina Bucos  
Salima Moisseron  
Theresa Widua



# ABOUT THE ROSE

by SALIMA MOISSERON

I.

What is it all about? Being stuck between the living and the analysis of her own life. The author is unknown, left behind. Death took her before she could acknowledge this fame. Is this really about being famous? Being exhibited in the Whitney Museum in New York is probably what any person would call it.

"I don't care about being famous and I will probably never be exhibited in the Whitney" are the thoughts that came to me this afternoon after visiting the named museum. Anyhow I couldn't yet grasp what had happened this day. Normally, I am a great observer of my own self, and I am able to understand myself quite well. But this time I couldn't unravel the threads from one another. I was emerged in a grey dense fog. It felt like having my feet stuck in the mud, struggling to progress forward. Up there, a dizzy feeling in my head, like having spent too much time in the smoking area of a bar. Strange. Anyway, I was too tired to keep thinking, so I kept walking down 8th avenue.

Often answers come to me later, when I don't ask for them. Thoughts are like chemistry, their evolution and good development are almost scientific, but seem magic. Leave it alone, it will flourish and come back to you. This is true for everything. Indeed.

Time. Death. Horizon. Texture. Performance. Presence & Absence. Framing. All of the concepts that were going round in circles in her head. All this time. While working, endlessly, repeatedly, adding heaviness to her own existence. Hoping to be a stepping stone for others. How great it would be if people could use her work to reach a higher state of consciousness and maybe brush any kind of truth with their fingertips.

"We are now in the modern world, nobody cares about the truth, darling. If you want to make it as an artist today and make a change, you should be a political artist. Do something about social justice, against capitalism or about gender.

"This was the bitter voice of my friend A\_\_\_. I disagreed but I didn't have the energy to go into this kind of discussion. I was still feeling nauseous.

"Shut up", I said. "We both know the only truth can be found in some higher belief or in science." I knew this would leave me the time to breathe. A\_\_\_ was fascinated with the interconnection of science and christianity, so he started talking and kept going and going. I drank 2 pints of IPA and tried this milky dark beer I was offered. By 11 p.m., we were wasted. I didn't even have to look as if

I was listening to A\_\_, he stopped talking almost one hour ago. We were now tripping. Felt bored but better.

The truth is somewhere. It is surely not in Christianity or in Science. With this thought I went to bed.

She had to get it back. This feeling. That something had been reached. An understanding. It's always so thin. So fragile. Nothing is really stable. That was the reason of her suffering. It hurts so much, this feeling of being powerless. Having no influence on what is happening. Life flees as much as time does. But no comparison is possible between these two.

Life stops in a more abrupt manner. One person dies, another person dies. Then the counting stops. Why keep counting? Why keep track? It's easier to forget. Forgive yourself for all what has been forgotten and try to reach out to what matters. What will stay? The art you make. Make it bright. Make it last. As an Anchor. Forever? Impossible.

When I woke up I knew that what I was looking for was the missing key of my understanding. If only I could get to it. I would finally be whole. We are always a double entity. How you are perceived and how you feel yourself. The gap is huge. Always there. Two parallel lines that will never cross one another. I will always be a stranger to you. And you will never see me as I am. Sad little story. That's why I quit lovers. It never ended well anyway. My favorite lover is the one that I can never get, so there will never be any problem around understanding or misunderstanding. Only me wanting them so badly. The best art comes out of this yearning. A\_\_ and I talked about this one night. Similar to yesterday, but we were at his place. He wondered if being truly happy meant finding the balance, the perfect stillness of the presence, and not being obsessed with anything anymore...

It's likely no one is ever fully happy. Demons will always be hidden somewhere in the dark waiting for you to forget and to jump on your shoulder.

Echoing our words the rain started pouring down. Since we were high. We got undressed and danced under the rain. At this point, I wished A\_\_ was a girl and not my friend. Because the frame was utopian, I would have loved fucking them or her, but not him. But this is just an imaginative moment. The reality is that we were still at home, sitting on the couch drinking a ginger tea, recovering from yesterday. Not somewhere else in the countryside. And obviously we kept our clothes on. I was someone else when I was dreaming, but that was not someone I was proud of.

It's weird how some memories appear and disappear, without announcing themselves. Without us needing them.

A\_\_ was in a better mood. So we managed to catch up a bit. Had some small talk about the past week. A\_\_ was bored, as always. He couldn't get any further with his writing. I felt bad for him. But I shouldn't; he was always complaining. I started counting the galleries I went to, who I saw, what I ate. "I also went to the Whitney", I said. The next breath of air felt difficult. For a few seconds I couldn't grasp any anymore, it was as if trying to breath under water, a really thick water that couldn't even get into my mouth. Every memory that wouldn't cross the membrane of consciousness had finally made its way to me. Answers were blooming. Maybe truth isn't that far away, maybe we'll reach out to it very soon.

The soft feeling of petals. As gentle as a touch upon a face. Fingertips on a sharp cheekbone. The mark on my cheek is already fading. The bouquet of roses has dried. It's the death of the rose. This feeling has to be settled in matter. How can I reach it? A piece has to be created, which will be the marriage, a reunion of antithesis, as you touching my face was.

II.

Grey has always been my favorite color. You probably think it's a sad choice. This is only because you cannot sense the grey I am imagining. Neither the one I have in front of my eyes. Anything comparable would be the grey of the sky, when it's not raining and you cannot tell if it's a heavy fog or a gentle mist. Under this ceiling I wear sunglasses. My eyes, as my way to perceive the world, are fragile. One should always protect what one cherishes the most. A\_\_ was gone and I was relieved (which luckily, finally would even be appropriate), he wouldn't understand how I felt. I needed to take a shower, the stream and the heat are always a good help for a stuck mindset.

Dismantle, take it all away, one from another, split, cut, tore apart. Reassemble, create, draw a line, follow your instinct. Live counterclockwise, still in circles. Infinite yearning for the unknown and for what is as far as once upon a time.

I am so done with trying to be the center of everything. This is a reason things aren't falling into place as they should. I first thought that maybe the order of the world would be better if I wasn't in there trying to control my narcissistic and egoistic impulses. But this is a silly way of thinking. I belong on this planet as every other individual, no one should doubt that. Try not to doubt that, ever.

What is the center of things? What makes one the other of someone else? When are we all over the place? And when are we reducing ourselves to just a tiny slice of ourselves instead of being bright and light? You should center yourself in order to understand. Understanding is half of the way to the truth, isn't it? This is the very core of the problem, the centering. There, in the middle, every line crosses in the infinite in order to reach the horizon.

The shower had been a relief, but a short one. I went to my room and looked at the sculpture I was working on. It was heavy and aerial, both at once. My idea was to represent the weight of the world and of existence. In there, all duality of things resides. Weird that I see duality in work even if I spend my whole time trying to break the binary of things and its limiting beliefs. A\_\_ told me I was all and its contrary. I wish I could just be simple.

Closing eyes, shutting ears and keeping useless words for later. My hands could feel the different edges of things. The rough sides lead us to think of reinforced concrete and finally remind us of moist forest moss. Does touch have a developed imagination? That's a good question, ask yourself ...

The wholeness of things isn't stable. What resists the passing of time? Stability is an illusion, a well kept one. I always tend to believe my moods make me into who I am. When I am happy, I get euphoric. Like crawling up a mountain, nothing feels heavy anymore. Light as helium I reach some artificial paradise. If only it would last. It's only a matter of a blink of an eye, until I plummet again. Anchor of silliness and draining suffering. Each time I get caught, every time I forget how it went last. Life is a fucking rollercoaster.

That's why the drawing of a horizontal line is the ultimate aim.

III.

The death of the rose had become The Rose. The death of the piece preceded its birth. How did Jay Defeo know, could she have been aware? I went back to the Whitney to see the piece again. During this acknowledgment process, I couldn't put a finger on what had struck me so much. Actually I didn't even remember it, not how it really was. Thinking ways and consciousness are membranes, I had it as an image in my memory but hadn't taken it all in, through those porous surfaces. On my way to the museum I didn't even know this was what I was looking for.

After dragging my feet from floor to floor for a good hour, I felt slowness and calm finally getting to my soul. Art and stillness of museums had this effect

on me. Randomly, I came across of my ex with her wife who was pregnant. We exchanged small talk. Seeing them should have shaken me up, but all they had to say slipped across my body. The view of this big belly made me smile, I was happy it wasn't mine. B\_\_ (my ex) wanted to settle down so much and grow a big family, she suffocated me back then. Things are in a better place now. B\_\_ and C\_\_ will grow their family. In the meantime I'll keep observing the absurdity of life while trying to get A\_\_ to get his shit together even if I can barely take care of myself.

"Did you go to Jay Defeo's part of the exhibition?" said C\_\_. This brought me out of my dreaming from the curve of hers I had fallen into.

"No, I am on my way."

"Good, it's the next room on the left." They turned away, leaving. B\_\_ added with a hilarious smile "We'll send you an invitation for the baby shower". My eyes answered for me and said "I am happy for you but I won't come", her's said "Don't worry darling, take care."

It was there.  
Hanging on the wall.  
Grey and white.  
Centered.

Heavy but light at the same time. Complete and whole.

Jay Defeo had been working on this piece for 8 years, from 1958 to 1966. This made me think about the limited capacity of concentration nowadays. If only I could work that long on something. This piece had this breathtaking something that I hadn't found anywhere else yet. I had seen a lot but never had I been carried away like that. This sculpture was the perfect melting of sculpture and painting. It's mainly oil on canvas. The artist had to wait until the painting would dry and then she would sculpt it with a knife. The tireless repetitions of her gesture on the canvas was tangible to me.

The story of the piece was so absurd. It was exhibited in 1969 at the San Francisco Institute and it stayed there until the mid-nineties. The piece was too large, too heavy and too damaged to be moved from there. A wall had been built in front of it. This piece of art was buried alive in three- quarters. It became a rumor. Jay Defeo didn't have the money to get it out and she died before its revival. The Whitney rescued it for its exhibition 'Beat Culture and the New America' in 1995. The Rose was buried and resurrected.

In front of this piece I felt as if I would finally reach the truth.

This piece was the materialization of the artist's truth  
and I could relate to it so badly.

I wanted to understand her, to be her, to be that piece, to forget myself in it.  
Tears shot out of my eyes, silently all my repressed feelings towards the world  
left me. They ran and I couldn't stop them as I usually would, so I let it be.

Time froze.

Was my life stopping at this moment? Or was I reborn?  
Maybe I would shift from the death of the self to the self only.

Epilogue:

Jay Defeo would be surprised if only she knew how this piece impacted my life.  
Maybe others' too?

I came back to my senses with the voice of the guard telling me that the museum was closing in half an hour. How long had I stayed in here? I couldn't tell.  
I ran out, out of time and tears. Lighting my cigarette and grabbing my phone I ignored A\_\_'s many calls and texted B\_\_ to ask if she and C\_\_ would like to get a drink later tonight. C\_\_ answered "Sure, come over!".





# UNTITLED 1

by CĂTĂLINA BUCOS

If art's only pleasure  
is the pleasure of freedom,  
is it art then,  
when you lay in the sun?

The sun  
warms up my body  
gets in my structure,  
and my brain  
while it appropriates  
stuff from the internet.

Internet defines  
gestures of my body,  
moving fingers,  
fantasies and their  
materialization in Déjà-vus.

Déjà-vus send dreams  
in an occult space:  
There are no artists  
who own the floating  
delusions orbiting  
in the gray hole of authorship.

One police officer confiscated  
the gestures I stole from the internet.  
They came back to my body later,  
reincarnated in a vision.

I was in the middle of a street full of water.  
There was something floating on the surface,  
a window glass,  
and over it some blueish,  
cracked pieces of glass.  
And over the blue ones,  
there were many pink acrylic diamonds

arranged in rows.

A beautiful art installation,

I tried to take it home,

but it slipped through my fingers.

I'm in my grandmother's garden,

and soldiers are hunting me.

I run, I hide,

I try to fight back,

and we continuously shoot each other

with guns without bullets.

A dog came to lick the wounds,

but it was too late to

sniff even one substantial pierce.

They mutated to the next form.



## (IM)MATERIAL BODIES IN VIRTUAL SPACE by THERESA WIDUA

Spending more of one's life in the same interior spaces causes them to be perceived less consciously, to be less noticeable, and thus to lose significance. Instead, one gets lost in the virtual spaces one inhabits as they seem to resemble real spaces more and more. Entering these spaces makes communication and proximity to fellow human beings possible in the first place, so that they increasingly gain importance.

The subject moves in these spaces as a user, as a virtual extension of the material self, which moves in this virtuality, interacts with other users and performs its own subjectivity there. Because these virtual spaces are accessible from any place, the concrete, material place no longer plays a significant role as a starting point - we are always and everywhere online. Though, in a state of virtual presence, the real body always remains fixed in real space, the body always suggests that it is in a material place, but it also leaves traces in virtual space. While the physical access to this generated space is still denied to the human being, the immaterial participation of consciousness is possible. Considering the technical development, however, it is only a question of time until this aspect will also be transferred to virtual space and one will also be present there with a sense of physicality.

In virtual space, alongside other users, one also encounters digital bodies, avatars like the influencer Miquela<sup>1</sup>, which never really existed but were created by means of computer technology. Her biography, character and social relationships were artificially created - she exists only in virtual space and is not bound to a material body in analog space. However, this does not matter, as the boundaries between virtuality and reality find themselves in a process of dissolution. At the same time, it can be observed how users also modify themselves through the use of face filters and apps in such a way that they are

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<sup>1</sup> @lilmiquela on Instagram.

increasingly indistinguishable from the avatars. This indicates a development in which the virtually created worlds are coming closer to reality, while once again the reality of life is taking place primarily in virtual space. Virtual spaces are increasingly replacing material ones. Both users and avatars perform authenticity in them.

In virtual space, there is always the moment of awareness that the body is stuck in material space, laying bare the dichotomy of material and virtual space. Is it possible to resolve this spatial discrepancy? What is the relationship between material and immaterial space and what happens to the virtual self in these spaces? How can the subject be located here, and are human individuals actually more real than entities such as Miquela in these environments?

With regard to the teletechnologies that developed in the 1990s, the Czech-Brazilian media philosopher and communication scientist Vilém Flusser (1930-1991) almost prophetically outlined<sup>2</sup> the utopia of the telematic society, a society that connects through communication and enters into intersubjective relations. This network of communication structures covers the biosphere and enables communication even over great distances. This networking goes beyond purely functional aspects of information transfer in that it enables overarching intersubjective dialogue and thus also includes and strengthens social relationships.<sup>3</sup> Flusser is interested in the creation of proximity and the overcoming of distance and remoteness; he therefore understands technical developments as the ultimate sign of 'charity' [Nächstenliebe].<sup>4</sup> According to him, the dichotomy of analog and virtual worlds -of appearance and reality- does not exist, since the virtual space can only make visible what was already a priori existent in the analog space; what lies in the realm of the possible of the world. "[...]nothing is true or false there, but everything is more or less probable there."<sup>5</sup> In relation to this, for Flusser, "computers are apparatuses for realizing intra-human, inter-human, and extra-human possibilities thanks to the exact calculative thinking."<sup>6</sup> He determines the code as a turning point that led to a redefinition of reality. The subject, in virtual space, is conceived by Flusser as a "digital scattering", the realization of potential possibilities, which defines itself

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**2** cf. Bollmann, Stefan (Hrsg.): Flusser, Vilém: Medienkultur, 1997.

**3** cf. Bröckling; Guido: (Im)Materialität der Gedanken und der Körper: Ein Standpunkt zur körperlosen Gesellschaft in Anlehnung an Vilém Flusser: Körper als Fluchtpunkte medialer Biografisierungspraxen.

**4** cf. Flusser, Vilém: Nächstenliebe, in: Bianchi, Paolo (Hrsg.): Outside USA I, Kunstforum. International Bd. 112. [Translations: DeepL]

**5** Flusser, Vilém: Räume, in: Dünne, Jörg/ Günzel, Stephan (Hrsg.): Raumtheorie. Grundlagen texte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften, Frankfurt am Main, 2018, p. 277.

**6** Flusser, Vilém: Der digitale Schein, in: In: Florian Rötzer (Hrsg.): Digitaler Schein. Ästhetik der elektronischen Medien, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 47.

through interpersonal relations.<sup>7</sup> In virtual space the cartesian separation of mind and body, consciousness and body, materiality and immateriality is abolished, as both thought and action are equally relocated into this space. "The processes of thinking action and acting thought, resulting from the inescapable interrelation of body and mind, which come to light in the appropriation of the world, dissolve the dichotomy of body and mind, body and soul in the circular process."<sup>8</sup> At a certain point in this process, there is no longer any need for a material body, since the subject moves freely without it in virtual space. The premise for this is that technical devices are further developed in such a way that their operation is no longer perceived by the subjects. "But as long as we understand the apparatuses as means between our imagination and the world, because we perceive them as representational, we construct the subjects and objects in the distinction of the subjective from the objective world."<sup>9</sup>

As soon as the technical apparatus has become invisible and the virtual space is constructed deceptively real, it will be perceived as matter and will no longer allow a distinction between the material and immaterial world. "Henceforth, we cannot but regard truth as an unreachable limit of probability. Through which also our concrete habitat sucks something virtual into itself: we are no longer so convinced that the habitat is actually concrete."<sup>10</sup>

Thinking Vilém Flusser's utopian designs further opens up the possibility for imagining the potential possibilities in a digitalized, post-materialistic age. If virtual spaces and its creatures such as Miquela were to appear more and more real, the distinction between materiality and immateriality would eventually be abolished altogether and would be encountered as equal existences. Moreover, it would lead to a complete detachment from the body into virtual space, without the need for a material body or place. And ultimately to an expansion of the idea of space, materiality, space and time.

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**7** cf. Flusser: *Der digitale Schein*, p. 71 und Flusser: *Räume*, p. 282 ff.

**8** *ibid.*, p. 33.

**9** *ibid.*, p. 41.

**10** Flusser, Vilém: *Räume*, 2018, p. 277.



Illustrations: Finn Brauckmann

the manes that come to bite you,  
when you fall asleep between the gods and the earth #1, #2, #3

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