

Body without image

Ernesto Neto's Anti-Leviathan

Éric Alliez

[T]he great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last.

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

The IMAGE-grip is dislocated and a more fundamental element emerges ... in short, IMAGE is not the work's supreme motive or unifying end.

Hélio Oiticica, *Block Experiments*

In the immense emptiness and sepulchral chill of the Pantheon, it seems to emerge, suddenly, like a ballooning, billowy suspension of innumerable artificial columns veiled in a delicate white material (stretchable Lycra), whose distended bases, which bulge with faintly perfumed ballast, descend randomly to many levels or reach as far as the ground. This forest of sorts is attached to the vaulting of the Pantheon like some monstrous parasite, in a sort of reverse shot to the strict alignment of the building's columns. High up, hanging liana-columns pass through holes in immense sheets of Lycra stretched out between the four branches of the Pantheon in an uneven sinuous network with long, undulating pockets that are constricted or bloated, and to which a number of shafts are also connected. Its capacities exceeded, the eye is led to *contain*, at a distance, this body that is radically heterogeneous both to the place that it invades and to any identifiable reality. It attempts to encompass it by means of an *aesthetic metaphor* – that of some giant, monstrously arborescent octopus-white whale whose entrails are distended and swollen from devouring the Pantheon.

Metaphorization confers the status of a half-figurative, half-abstract *image* – and therefore the character of a description (such as 'the innumerable suspensions of an inverted and parasitical forest') – on what is otherwise unidentifiable and whose radical alterity, in relation to image-effects, poses the question of knowing if it is *still* of an *aesthetic* order. It is therefore necessary here to recall briefly the two – in our eyes most significant – modalities according to which the aesthetic has recently seen its objects

and its stakes redeployed. In the first, aesthetic alterity is a disengagement from vision that engages the gaze in the genesis of visibility at the heart of the visible. It is to this phenomenological 'opening' that Georges Didi-Hubermann has lent a second, more dialectical life, between knowing and seeing, that is less 'unrepresentable' to the extent that the labour of the negative in the image substitutes the *visual of a figuring figure* (a superior phenomenology) for the 'invisible'.¹ In the second, the aesthetic is the de-figuring of every representative relationship between the sayable and the visible in the free play of *forms-signs* whose discourse defines forms of visibility as much as modes of intelligibility. It is to this dialectical play of textual excess with regard to the life of forms that Jacques Rancière has given the name 'aesthetic regime', in so far as it participates in a metaphoricity that is superior at every point (according to the Schillerian principle of a *logos* identical to a *pathos*, etc).² One will not fail to notice here that a certain highly contemporary aesthetic turn takes place, or displaces itself, beyond the letter of our two authors, in this *double articulation*. It is in relation to this latter that it is necessary for us, at the outset, to distance ourselves somewhat.

This said, it cannot be denied that our initial descriptive approach to Neto's installation – which seems intent on *metamorphosing* its inevitably optical, distant, static, monumental capturing in view – presents itself as a heterogeneous *chaining together*³ of metaphors (vegetable, architectural, landscapes, animal, biological...). But one could *imagine* other equally (in)adequate metaphors to whose descriptions the installation would lend itself (under such and such an *aspect*), whilst evading them globally. And perhaps it should be noted that in their own, 'theatrical' way, photographic images precipitate and aestheticize the putting into image of the installation, by fixing it in spectacularly distanced long or close-up shots. It remains that the multiplication of metaphors or images that are heterogeneous to one another, and

the possibility of interpreting them as the index of a mode of assemblage or of proliferating chains that is not of the order of the image, nonetheless poses the question of their (non-)relation to the image. Relation, non-relation, or relation of non-relation ... relaunched by *Leviathan Toth*, the title of the installation, at first an enigmatic linking of two names, in turn poses the question of its relation to statements (*énoncés*).

However, everything changes from the moment that the spectator becomes ambulant: he or she becomes a sensori-motor *component* of this body, which ingests him or her, and into which s/he is plugged. The spectator experiences this body – which is defined only by the set of tensions which animate it (tractions, suspension, stretching, inflation) – in a kinaesthetic and tensive manner. But make no mistake: kinaesthetic deambulation is not a way of experiencing the immediacy of the naked, sensible presence of a body suspended in space or the properties of a hybrid material that would carry us along in the special effects of a *materia informis*. Hence it is *not* the bearer of an aesthetic experience, at least in the primary sense of a pure sensible apprehension. It is, rather, the way in which we sense, *in the first place*, a mobilizing energetic potential that acts on us in the manner of a field of forces, independently of any sort of discursive mediation or imaginary transport. And it is through this potentiality which envelops us with the inkling of forces that pass into sensation, that what one must resolve to call *a powerful non-organic life* is given to us to perceive in our own movement. A powerful non-organic life that ‘overflows’ the immanent but limited, fleeting but ceaselessly relaunched experience that we have of it, or rather that traverses us.

Via this kinetic entrance into the *œuvre*, a material introduction (*entrée en matière*), deambulation *starts up* what can only be ‘interpreted’ by beginning to experience the diagram of forces stretched out above our heads and around us – as we would experience ‘the intrusion of another world into the visual world of figuration’.⁴ Absolutely *disorganized* by the most direct connection between the body thus put in motion, the visible that it expresses (what it sees in the sensation without distance that put it in motion) and the virtual that it constructs in *realizing* the strange operation to which it is submitted. One might reproach us with extending the Deleuzian diagram well beyond its pictorial usage. But one will equally understand that Jacques Rancière can reproach Deleuze precisely for ‘short-circuit[ing] the work of metaphor’ whilst the diagram, following Rancière, ‘only makes visible if its labour is rendered equivalent to that of metaphor,

if words construct such equivalence’ in separating the presence in/side art of ‘any epiphany of the present’.⁵ But this is to postulate the possibility of an equivalence between the work of forms, even if it is dynamic (the dynamic work of the sayable, hence metaphorizable) and the (non-discursive) work of forces. Now, the dynamic/dialectic of forms–signs animating the ‘aesthetic regime’ cannot in any way be equivalent to an energetics of forces because this participates in a completely different regime – an *aesthetic regime* whose diagrammatic apparatus must be *invested* as such. It doesn’t aim at the negation of forms and the denegation of signs (participating, for example, in the symbolic montage of the Pantheon). Rather, it aims at fusing and deterritorializing them as *forces–signs* (which make the referential territorialization of significance and iconic territorialization of interpretation of the Pantheon take flight). Carried off in this *semiotics of intensities*, ‘information’ fissures and is dissociated from the discursiveness in which it was caught (its intelligibility is suspended, scrambled, put into crisis).⁶

The work of the diagram does not consist, then, in putting the chaotic genesis of a pure visibility of forms into presence, even if they are mobilized by a spectator who is equally mobile in an ‘environmental participation’. It *tends* to the ‘capture of forces’, to making insensible forces (anaesthetized in the symbolic semiology of the national monument) sensible (*forces insensibles/insensibilisés*). The *real* stake of this agency (*agencement*⁷) of forces, in itself a-signifying and non-discursive, is to engage a ‘diagnosis of our current becomings’ in a *politics of experimentation*, a politics of experimentation which *really* begins with the production of novel conjunctions in the tissue of fluxes of materials and of signs... It is not that metaphor must be ignored, but instead of having the agency of the ‘work’ fall back on a metaphorical displacement (an equivalence reductive of forces and idealizing of forms, appealing to an imaginary discursiveness), it must be relaunched on the body by investing the process of enunciation which animates the formation of statements, engaging metaphoricity itself and the matter-sense of statements in a semiotics of sensation. Signs here do not form signifying chains transported into the imaginary by ‘metaphor’, but half-coded, half-decoded chains. They form Markov chains, connecting elements of every kind (words, figures, fragments of the architecture or installation, a whole multi-sensoriality mixed with a world of analogons and schemas and affects) that are caught up directly in ‘physical’ effects in which every kind of real distinction between form



of expression and form of content is abolished. This is because an *intensive machine of deterritorialization bearing on fluxes of signs* belongs to the diagram, and, more precisely, to the diagrammatic regime of contemporary art when the latter yields to it and is invested as such. It confers on signs a new material power of decoding (deductions of fragments of heterogeneous codes, a-signifying and post-signifying connections in continuous variation, intensive local recoding of the global expressiveness—movement of traits of expression...) that destratifies the space (physical, symbolic, discursive, institutional) in which it is inscribed by rendering sensible the trans-semiotic presence of insensible/anaesthetized forces.

In Neto's installation it would therefore be a matter of something completely different to an 'image', in the sense of an aesthetic *mise-en-scène*. Such a *mise-en-scène* would be charged with 'unveiling' an invisibility in a dialectic of hiding and showing internal to the image, or between images, or between the visible and the sayable. This invisible would be at one and the same time both the truth and the guarantee of the aesthetic operations of the *mise-en-scène*, even if this were at the cost of a permanent putting back into play of its operations (as it is with the sublime, for example). Rather, it is instead a matter of an *optically impenetrable* work which would in truth be better defined using two Brazilian passwords of the 1960s.



It is a kinaesthetically 'penetrable' 'non-object' (*Nao-objeto*, *Penetravel*). Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica, in whose line of descent Neto's entire oeuvre is situated, effectively made use of these expressions to think the 'total incorporation (in-corporation) of what one previously saw as *environmental*', according to a formula Oiticica used in his Notes on what he ends up calling the Ready Constructible (1978). He presents this as the 'proposition of a meta-sculpture or a *new perception* going from the sculptural to a sort of art simultaneously situated on the ground and in the air'.⁸

Leviathan Toth, Autumn Festival of Paris, 2006. Ernesto Neto's installation can be *penetrated* and *re-constructed* from everywhere and from all directions as it has neither beginning nor end. Certainly there is a centre, but of decentring and axes which derive from it only to be twisted out of joint. *Leviathan Toth* is a 'counter-installation' or an 'environmental appropriation' (in Oiticica's words). It doesn't seek to profit from the space of the Pantheon in order to *exhibit itself* (environmental art), or to exhibit its *heterogeneity*, in a symbolic or dialectical relationship to its environment. Rather, it is *in situ* that *Leviathan Toth* acts or agitates but so as to take on the *site-specificity* of the Republic's temple and locus of national memory 'conceived ideally as the centre of the territory, the heart of the nation'.⁹ (Unlike the temple of the Republic which, if one needed reminding, was – the usual



sacred duty – *installed* comfortably and statically in St Genevieve de Soufflot following the much more visual than structural developments undertaken by Quatremere de Quincy on the orders of the constitutive Assembly in 1791.)

Consequently, Operation Neto modulates into a critical and clinical operation. Critically, *Leviathan Toth* confronts the building and its sheer size and grapples with it by placing all its physical and metaphysical coordinates into and under tension. The operation thus engages with nothing less than the *image of power* related to the *power of the image* which animates it and gives it a discursive existence – because the *architectural denunciation* of the Pantheon produced by Neto doesn't occur without the (Hobbesian) *metaphysical enunciation* that is projected onto it. This enunciation is de-posed in the title of the 'contra' installation in the manner of a '*d/enunciation*' reinforced by the mysterious *Toth* appended to it, and the no less strange orthography adopted by Neto for the Egyptian god Thoth.¹⁰ Clinically, it sustains the claim to the affirmative disposition of the operation: to the extent that this putting into tension is itself subtended by the fundamentally energetic nature of the process of environmental appropriation whose non-discursive seizing of being (*prise d'être*) liberates its effect as a 'counter-image', from the labour of the negative within the image as much as with regard to a purely critical relation to its aesthetic



forms, so as to introduce the intensive fact of a ‘powerful non-organic life’.¹¹ Between the critical and the clinical, the pathology of the Body without Organs can thus awaken the anoptic quality of the Body without Image in a biopolitics of space which dismisses every metaphor of the invisible.

Political anatomy

The decentring of the site is set in motion throughout the vertical elevation of the axis of the cupola-covered transept. For the monument, it is a manner of falling from its summit to be brought back down (but not thrown) to earth. *On the ground*. The epicentre of a slow turbulent fall from which one begins (but which one could reverse). The part of Neto’s counter-installation occupying this space presents itself as a sort of tall, broad cylinder of fabric forming a vast, stretched-out and deformed reticulation, as if the reticular structure of the cupola was *torn apart*. It opens out towards the ground, where it is solidly anchored around the oscillations of Foucault’s Pendulum. Under the impact of other forces, the catastrophe extends by contamination to the domes and vaults that develop geometrically around the central cupola.

This cupola is covered with octagonal panelling that converges towards the summit, the design implying a hemispheric anamorphosis of the gridwork of the panels. This type of composition is repeated in the other cupola and on the circular floor tiling cor-

responding to them. As to the properly orthogonal grid, it is visible in the many criss-crossing patterns and tiles on the ground, and it provides a subjacent order to the whole plan of the work as the principle of its rationalization *more geometrico*.

One will notice straight away that the structure of the panelled cupola is not without analogy to the frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* as designed by Abraham Bosse, a major advocate of geometrically constructed perspective. The arrangement of the panelling in effect evokes that of the anonymous subjects presented from behind with their heads converging towards the sovereign, in an ‘egalitarian’ perspective, calculated in an egalitarian way. What is more, in the image, the sovereign associates the sword and the cross, in the same way as the Pantheon associates a secular temple with a church, one which is not consecrated but is still present symbolically, topped with a cross to sacralize the Republic. The analogy extends further since the eye of the cupola opens onto a second cupola occupied by a painting by Antoine Gros, *The Apotheosis of Saint Genevieve*, the base of which itself figures a corona of personae surrounding four sovereigns. The smallest eye of the cupola opens in turn onto a pure summit of light, which comes from the skylighting of the external dome, an ultimate supplementary dimension covering the system and the central void of Power to which all must equally submit.

It is *against* the ground and the aerial centre of this monument-image of power that Operation Neto works. The large and loose netting of the immense pseudo-cylindrical, spidery reticulation which descends from the central cupola is not the simple deployment in space of the patterning on the ground of large folded fabrics but the sensory diagram of forces which, by stretching, distend the grid and deform it, substituting for the geometric rigidity of a rigidly cellular world the perpetually changing dynamic of direct (immanent) relations between all the tensions. (One cannot but emphasize that here Operation Neto *naturally* incorporates, on the environmental plane, the dynamic-dynamiting operation produced by Clark and Oiticica with regard to the static, geometric and imagistic interpretation of the Mondrianesque reticulation of the plane of the tableau. Clark and Oiticica actualize the virtual energy of the tableau by beginning to *force* the tableau-form as much as the painting-form – before attacking, as their environmental explorations allow, the ‘art-form’ as such, according to Oiticica’s expression.) Concerning the part of *Leviathan* we have just dealt with, Neto has said that it is the monster’s head, ‘the seat of fear ... the seat of the purification of sentiments’ by the cold

and calculating rationality of modernity. At its feet, Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing and calculus whom the Greeks associated with astronomy and ‘politics’, watches over Foucault’s Pendulum, which hangs in the middle of this central piece. But this god is an ambivalent figure: the god of writing and of calculus, he is also the registrar of the dead; he counts down the days of the living and weighs up the heart–soul of death. He is thus qualified from every point of view to preside over the death of Leviathan, of which he is at the same time both the instrument of power and the first ‘bureaucrat of death’ (*un fonctionnaire de la mort*).

The extendable fabric which (dis)incarnates the head of Leviathan

– a sort of stripped off epidermis – is nothing but a bare surface, where the grid, both sign and operator of rationality in the cupola, is submitted to the dynamicizing and dynamiting of its geometry. The whole of the central apparatus is suspended at eight points from the eye of the cupola (by analogy with the octagonal structures of the edifice). Like everywhere else, it results from a system of equilibrium between the weights and counterweights of suspended masses, between the gravity to which they are submitted and the elasticity of the tissue which contains them. The disfigured cylindrical net, which constitutes a sort of ‘dorsal fin’ for the ensemble, comprises at its base four terminal prolongations in the form of weighted pockets, sinking to the ground, where they anchor it, divided up around the pendulum. The counterweight is assured by the hanging of four large pendentives that Neto calls ‘drops’, which descend halfway to the ground and whose weight overhead the visitor senses; while eight slim ‘columns’, on the contrary, run all the way to the ground which they are held just above or joined with (without settling on it). The body moving around the counter-installation experiences in a kinaesthetic manner the work of muscles tautened by the tensions this skeletal Leviathan undergoes from both above and below. It *participates* in this politically informed sensation *in situ*.

The decisive political stake of this apparatus is nothing less than the subversion of the art that Hobbes explicitly declares, in the introduction of his work,

to ‘create this great LEVIATHAN that is called COMMONWEALTH or STATE (in Latine CIVITAS)’ (‘Commonwealth’, it will be recalled, is the English translation of *res publica*). In the optic of a constitutional reduction to the One, the art which stems from it bears the imperative of effectively producing a *public representation* of the body of the Republic, such that the multitude of subjects ‘see’ that they *constitute* its members, that the sovereign at its head is the bearer of the *most real*

image of Power, capable of unifying the body of the people by representing all its members in a consenting organism, at peace with itself, which is nothing other than the ‘State’, the constitutional state. Such a representation can only *link*

or *bind* its subjects together under the sovereign that they institute in a constitutive manner by defeating ‘this other multitude which has no order, which is like a many-headed hydra’ (*Leviathan*, VI, I).¹² Failing which, the Republican Contract which founds our democratic societies on Representation (nationally and in all the plasticity of the term) is unable to become effective. Magisterially analysed in all its visual strategies by Horst Bredekamp, this is what the frontispiece executed by Abraham Bosse for Leviathan teaches us.

The gaze that men from everywhere direct towards the head of the colossus is directed back by its eyes to the observer, who embraces the ground-level view of the figures with back to us and is at the same time, at the level of the gaze of the sovereign, directly interpellated by it. The contradictory character of the body politic as the product of men subjected by the sovereign is already manifest in the exchange of looks between citizens, Leviathan and the observer.¹³

The common orientation of everyone towards the head of the sovereign proclaims the moment of contractual engagement of all, including the observer, who also *participates* in the apparatus, in this way verifying that representation is *tutela praesens*. ‘It is only by its representative, that is to say, the sovereign, that the commonwealth is a person and has the capacity to do anything at all: the sovereign is the only legislator’ (*Leviathan* XXVI). But again, as Bredekamp explains



for conventions and laws to become controlled actions, words must be changed into bodies, and it is this mediating step that the image of Leviathan accomplishes ... It [thus] becomes a powerful machine for definitions, a 'sovereign definer'.¹⁴

One must understand that the contractual basis of the state *formally* founded on an egalitarian definition of citizens so as to suppress the state of nature (the perpetual war of the multitude maintained through a relative equality of forces) calls for the control of words as much as for the monopoly of violence. Relayed and represented by images which incorporate their sovereign majesty, the control of words is oriented towards 'the fact that we can command and understand commands'; it is the 'greatest benefit of speech' (*De Homine* X, 3), the exercise of which requires 'perspicuous words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity' (*Leviathan*, V).¹⁵ Hence the *representation* of Leviathan on the frontispiece of Hobbes's book is the centre of gravity of images because it is the exclusive sign of the *sovereignty* of the state related to the *right of representation*. We have seen one avatar of this sign in the structure of the cupola of the Pantheon that Neto literally tears up, by opposing to its 'regime of representation' something quite other than an aesthetic regime of the image, in Jacques Rancière's sense.

In this process, Neto also attacks the political body of Leviathan understood as an *Artificial Man*, in its modern constitution. In theory it is indiffer-

ent whether the representative is a monarch or a representative assembly – because it is the *representative* character of the sovereign, depositary of the 'personality of the republic', which founds absolute sovereignty on an egalitarian 'republican' contract of all with all (*inter pares*). Hence sovereignty is in truth the axiomatic corollary of representation (the *pact of representation*). Leviathan is thus the symbol of a *homo artificialis*, *automaton* or *machine*, whose power can only obey the principled rationality which created it in the name of the people (*Rex est populus*), whilst each individual recognizes him- or herself as the *author* of the acts and judgements of this *actor*, this sovereign representative that every individual institutes. In this way it is verified that the power of the legally represented 'subject' has no other condition of reality than the subjectivation of a power which finds here its first modern 'contractual' form, where right does not exist without *subjection* to a *possessive market society* (according to the expression proposed by Macpherson for the 'congruence of sovereignty and market society').¹⁶ The legal-contractual representation which founds its own absolute political validity is in effect constitutive of this new notion which has the name POWER. Hobbes is, in this sense, both the 'founder of liberalism' and the 'Marx of the bourgeoisie' (Strauss, for example, explains that Hobbes is the 'father of Modernity', whilst Tonnies reminds us of the importance of 'Hobbes's theorem', mediated by Rousseau, for the constitutional beginnings of the



French Revolution). To speak like Hegel, it is that in Hobbes, the ‘true idea is there’.

In *We Have Never Been Modern* – whose influence on his installation *Neto* acknowledged – Bruno Latour summarizes the situation:

Hobbes invents the naked calculating citizen, whose rights are limited to possessing and to being represented by the artificial construction of the Sovereign. He also creates the language according to which Power equals Knowledge, an equation which is at the root of the entire modern Realpolitik.¹⁷

This is announced by the first phrases of *Leviathan*, grounding in the theory of art the mechanical creation of a political, or artistico-technological, android – which presides over the birth of modern political philosophy as a *science of submission* rationally founded on a calculus of interests (*philosophia civilis*).¹⁸ It is the Order that is so defined, by the universalization of the calculus, and not Justice – if not the *market concept of justice*¹⁹ – which makes the multitude a single body submitted to the will of one alone. The sovereign governs with unlimited power in the name of all those he represents, who in return *equally* authorize the ‘public person’ to decide and to act in its place. Failing this, there would only be an aggregate totality, a *multitudo dissoluta*, because it is via the head of the sovereign, who personifies the *common-will* thus represented, that the political Body lives and moves. In this way the civil ‘unity’ of the people, the people ‘united in one person ... called a COMMONWEALTH’ (*Leviathan* XVII), strictly correlated with the existence of the state, is substituted for the ‘dissolute’ multiplicity of the multitude, a sort of *Moby Dick* avant la lettre.²⁰ (It follows that: ‘that men distinguish not enough between a People and a Multitude... lead[s] to the dissolution of Government’ *De Cive* XII 8.) Via this short circuit (which is also the shortest circuit) between aesthetics and politics, Operation *Neto* stages a sort of critical and clinical diagnosis of representation, in every sense of the term, aiming at an *expansive disorganization* of the multitude living under the republican regime of contractual representation, a regime for which the Pantheon is the temple as much *ex nostro abritrio* as *more geometrico*.

The disorganization that affects the centre of *Leviathan* extends out to the other members of its body so as to invest the *multitudo dissoluta* with a radical vital recomposition. If this is the more properly affirmative component of Operation *Neto* taking place alongside the critical moment that was necessitated by the political take on the Pantheon, both are part of the same lesson in political anatomy.

Hand–brain

It starts up again from the top of the reticulated cylindrical shape. The fabric of this volume, in a tension that runs counter to its vertical fall, is stretched towards the exterior in four long forking branches. At their extremities, these four forks are then fixed on to the two ‘arms’ forming extensions towards the centre of the members of *Leviathan* occupying the four lateral axes of the Pantheon. The ends of these forking branches fix these arms across the fabric which is stretched under the weight of their endings. They form a sort of suture between the heterogeneous parts of the body of *Leviathan*. Although there are similarities between them, and internal symmetries, each one of these developed branches of the ‘installation’ is different from the others and is assembled in a fashion that is both ‘vital’ and inorganic. *Neto*



calls this heterogeneous body a ‘humanoid monster’ and adds that ‘in this highly masculine building it is a work of highly feminine contrast’. Rather than this contrast – the polarities of which could be inverted or associated within the terms of the opposition – a new ambivalence may be pointed out, related to the figure of Thoth. The statue which is on guard at the foot of Foucault’s Pendulum isn’t really Thoth (figured with the head of an ibis or a dog or a cynocephalus) – and in any case, the identity of the gods of the Egyptians is no less variable than their names. Rather, it is a copy of Bastet (or Bast or Ubasti), the cat-goddess, the peaceful avatar of a lion-goddess. Bastet has been

considered most notably as the protector of the home and of motherhood, and associated with the joy of music and dancing, those arts which Neto associates with the Brazilian life experience, the *vivência brasileira* of his work.

Nothing is positively figured outside of the ‘representation’ aimed at by the deflection whose object it is and which is also that of the image whose aesthetic form is as if devoured by the omnipresent apparatus *which is the whole of what one perceives*. It is experienced corporeally, in a kinaesthetic fashion, as a sensational bloc of forces put into continuous variation. Thus, in the watering of the fabric filtering the light, it is not the optical effect which matters for itself, but the degree of tension of the elastic tissue-skin that results from the reciprocal, quantitative-energetic play of all forces, linking up step by step. If something akin to ‘organs’ appears – Neto talks of a head, stomach, arms, fingers and even alludes to sexual organs – they only function as pure intensities which accumulate in pockets or flow

in a ‘jet of energy’ playing on the ‘fluid aspect of matter’.²¹ Forms here don’t assume any function: they are the contingent result of a static energy (i.e. one that is frozen, *suspended*). This static energy itself results from the technically highly complex process by which the fabric, cut out in inert forms on



the ground, is raised and stretched in such a way as to distribute both matter and the tensions of which it is susceptible so as to balance out the weights. Things only move now by a gentle, accidental oscillation incorporating the gradient of freedom belonging to the system. This is not without producing a rhizome-effect in the intensive–extensive continuum thus projected.²² Tensions here function directly in an unformed matter, a matter-flux only presenting degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity and stretching which condition its extension in space and which the ambulant relauches kinaesthetically on his or her own body. Extension itself becomes the result of a fusional multiplicity whose ‘quality’ is the contraction, the *intension* of the quantity liberated by the *dissolution* of constant form as a *state function*, to the profit of dynamic differences which bring into relation the most diverse latitudes and long-

itudes, the most varied of speeds and slownesses. The organizing form of matter is in this way *suspended* by the putting into tension of the materials-forces, whose local results mobilize the ensemble of ‘trajects’. *To suspend* is to struggle *with* the universal gravity which *striates* homogeneous space through ‘the verticals of gravity, the distribution of matter into parallel layers, the lamellar and laminar movement of flows’ summarized by Deleuze and Guattari as ‘the space of *pillars*’.²³ But to suspend is equally to stop the regulated exercise of the organs (as forms subjected by the head) of the Leviathan-Body, and the relation that every human organism is supposed to maintain, using its head, with metric space in general. The organism’s machinic enslavement to the abstract form of space-measure is part of the domain of Thoth. In this way Operation Neto is as much the putting to work as it is the result of a confrontation between two types of science or two modes of scientific operation. On the one hand, a science of the state, originally founded on the hylo-

morphic articulation matter/form and Euclidian geometry (the Pantheon, in which Foucault’s Pendulum was located, is an avatar of the generalized rationalization of the world which stemmed from it). On the other hand, a nomad science, originally founded on Archimedean

geometry and the physics of the ancient Greek atomists. It is the latter’s turbulent and hydraulic models which are in a way revived by the materials-forces in heterogenesis resulting from the accidents which affect the members of *Leviathan Toth* submitted to gravity. For his part, Neto opposes Euclidian geometry to Riemannian geometry, the kind ‘that addresses curves on minimal surfaces’.

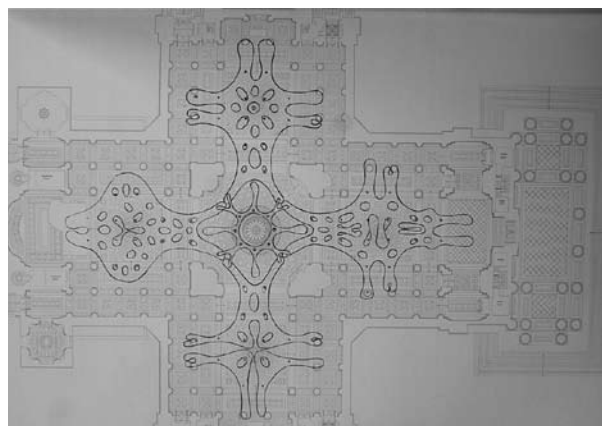
But in the first place it will have been necessary to *skin* the Leviathan-Body *because organs stick to the skin before depending on ‘this organic organization of organs that is called the organism’*, from which the system of judgement of the Leviathan-God extracts a work that is useful ‘to the *prosperity* and the *wealth* of all particular members’ on which the whole ‘force’ of Leviathan rests (*Leviathan*, Introduction). The ‘skin’ here, which Neto specifies is neither the envelope

nor the outgrowing of any ‘flesh’, is this *rising to the surface* of the organs liberated by the emptying out of the Corpus-Socius. This emptying out will have made a ‘body without organs’ surge up from and in the disaffected space of the Pantheon-Leviathan (the expression ‘body without organs’ may be found in Neto²⁴), bearing with it an entirely different social physics to that of ‘work’. The body of the spectator is forced to displace itself incessantly, to wander around so as to see and take in the excess of what it sees. The body is forced to *perceive* the space of the experiment within which it is caught and against which collision incessantly menaces, at the very moment that the ‘hybrid element’ is stretched out overhead like a skeletal star of skin. In this way, the spectator is subjected to the experience of the Body without Organs of Space itself, the intensive *Spatium* rather than *Extensio*, in the haptic destruction of the optic of power, resulting from the fluidification of space by mass. This itinerant geography, which decentres every point of view in the continuous variation of orientations of a generalized elasticity, puts us in movement, in ‘becoming’. We ambulate in the smooth space of a *Nonument* (in the words of Gordon Matta-Clark) that only exists in the critical and clinical confrontation with the ‘historical’ striated space of the Monument, whose *sensible matter* has thus been awoken. This sensible matter propagates here like a counter-image liberating itself energetically from the task of *imaging* because it projects a new type of reality. An infra- and supra-organic reality, which draws its ‘energy’ as much from the space of virtualities liberated by the concrete physics of the power that acts with the forces internal to gravity as from the forces of the *multitudo dissoluta* caught up in and liberated from the monumental history of the Leviathan that it *invaginates*. It is by means of this body without organs, which is *in itself* a ‘body without image’,²⁵ that Neto can give body *for us*, in a certain *Delirium Ambulatorium*, to the (rhizomatic and bioenergetic) subversion of the image of the state-machine, the *state-form* such as it is inscribed on the pediment of the Pantheon sculpted by David d’Angers, where Nation appears between Liberty and History.

Although Neto could not have conceived as complex a work as this without the support of an overall plan superposed on the ground and elevation plan of the Pantheon, the very course of the operation made this plan itself undergo a heterogenesis such that the result doesn’t correspond to any prior image. Guided by this plan, together with a rough sketch and the help of a thread of red velour, Neto sized up and marked out the openings and multiple sections of fabric on the folded

layers of material destined to become the diverse members of this inorganic body. The fabric was then cut out following this thread and sewn together before being filled with various substances (polystyrene, sand, lavender). *Cut out/sew in*. Confronted with the work, the plan appears as a graphical formalization, an optical blueprint of an operation which escapes it because it is of an entirely different nature. This supple line was drawn/weighed up/posed by what Neto magnificently calls a ‘hand-brain’; it slipped between the fingers, was ‘worked’ by the displacement of the body, applied by gravity – all operations that transform an inert trace on paper into a living, fluid line, fluctuating according to the artist’s intimate dance with all the parameters – both present and virtual. Because there is a ‘pressure of virtuality which disquiets the image that is already available to make space for a new dimension’ opened up by a gesture which ‘is not a simple spatial displacement: it decides, liberates and proposes a new modality of “moving”’ (as affirmed by Gilles Châtelet to explain how the *virtual requires the gesture*).²⁶ And the artist could only evaluate kinaesthetically the degree of elasticity of the Lycra at the moment he laid down his visually static but virtually dynamic line. In this regard, nothing is more striking than the distance between the sketched plan on the ground – right and proper, with the ‘fine’ curves and symmetries of its biomorphic and pseudo-organic regularity – and the body which takes on a life of its own in suspension in space. It is a life which is elastic as much as rhizomatic, so much does the plasticity of mass affirm here its irreducible difference from extension (*Extensio*), in suspension in space submitted to resistance – that is to say, to speak like Leibniz, *action and passion*. No direct deduction from the plan to the body can be made at all.

In the erection of the diverse members of the body (‘the experience begins’, says Neto),²⁷ gravity henceforth becomes the fundamental agent to which all the virtualities of both space and the volume of the cut and sewn material forms are subjected *by force*, giving





rise to continuous processes of transformation. In the course of this operation, which is carried out slowly, the relationship between the different tensions and the equilibrium between weights and counterweights become the object of multiple adjustments, engendering highly sensible singularities that animate the energetic materiality thus put in motion. The *modulation* of fluid matter into ‘pockets’, ‘tubes’ or ‘pipes’ in and by this immense living abstract machine clearly marks here the rupture with a hylomorphic scheme. Simondon has shown that this hylomorphic scheme was in the first place and above all informed by a social representation of work where

form corresponds to what the man in charge has himself thought and which he must express in a positive manner when he gives his orders ... to those who will manipulate matter; it is the very content of this order, that by which he governs ...; it is in the content of the order that the indication of matter is indeterminate whilst form is logical and expressible determination.

He concludes that it is through the same social conditioning that ‘the mind is distinguished from the body in the same way as the citizen from the living human being’.²⁸ From the point of view of whoever accomplishes the material operation, the idea according to which ‘modulating is moulding’ a flowing matter that can only be *followed* ‘in a continuous and perpetually variable manner’ expresses a total de-conditioning which is as much physical as it is social. It is a *temporal modulation* at the heart of which what is produced becomes an *event*,

the event of an active force which affects matter with a *baroque* expression (Deleuze’s definition of mannerism is rediscovered in Simondon’s modulation).²⁹ Or rather a matter of expression that is *neo-baroque* in its manner of raising its deformations to the state of tense fluxes which make classical-modern reason³⁰ radically diverge and whose operational machination appeals to an intuition in act as much as to an extension of its act, which redefines the artist as an *artisan* and the artisan as *the itinerant, the ambulant*.³¹

One may recall that the operation began well before the setting up of the installation, when Neto bundled up the Lycra in his workshop in Rio (the workshop of a couturier rather than the studio of an artist) before laying it out in the Pantheon, as he says, like ‘a travelling salesman, a street vendor’, a *camelot* carioca. These *camelots* are the ‘natural’ inhabitants of the favelas and champions of the ‘informal’ economy which informs and deforms the landscape of Rio, deployed in an ‘unplanned order’. They are, Franck Leibovici summarizes, ‘the social equivalent of the favelas, which are themselves the urban equivalent of *bromelias* growing all the way down the trunks of palm trees’.³² It is also this ‘tropical forest’ that in a sort of environmental mutualism Neto makes grow (processually, not iconically) right in the middle of the Pantheon, as it grows all over Rio, with the favelas whose physical and human geography clings to hillsides. If *natural* or, more broadly – Foucault’s Pendulum obliges – *cosmic* mutualism (as Brazilians also say, à la Deleuze) has some paradigmatic (or *cosmopolitical*) relevance here, Operation Neto evidently shows that it is on condition of understanding environmental mutualism in a strictly constructivist sense – in the words of Oiticica, ‘anti-naturalist’ and ‘multi-transformable’. As Latour puts it definitively, between ‘nature’ and ‘society’, ‘if we are constructivist in one instance, then we have to be constructivist for both’.³³

As to the whiteness of the material Neto unpacks in the Pantheon before he cuts it up, this ready-made



colour immanent to an industrial-synthetic material, which confronts us strangely with the ‘white without form’ denounced by Hegel in the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, is directly incorporated into the environmental value of the installation. It works away haptically in the light under the effect of the tensions which the Lycra undergoes, but in the manner of a *bodily restraint (une contrainte par corps)* which violates and blinds the optical reception of light in the ‘total activity of the eye’.³⁴ (Im-penetrable, *white without form* is a *tangible white* forbidding any ‘division of retinal activity’, *gathered, crushed, forbidden, deranged* in the ready-made white.) It is worth recalling here that Oiticica conceived, even hallucinated, Malevich’s *White on White* as ‘a necessary step in which the ‘plastic arts’ shed their privileges BY WHITENING THEMSELVES SO AS TO BECOME SKIN/BODY/AIR’. It is exactly the ‘nonumental’ components that Neto utilizes which he comes back to in the text presenting *Leviathan Toth*, specifying their tensive or intensive values so as to define the mutualism of his apparatus – giving a meaning to what he calls the ‘ethic of action’ (*a ética da ação*).³⁵ There comes a moment when, as he writes,

the touching, the intimate relation, the spatial limit between skin and matter, solid in its essence but liquid in its spherical envelope, which adjusts to every movement like the sand which flows through the neck of an hourglass, whose fluid mass defines the body of the work, are intensified in ascension ... Like mutualism ... in a tropical forest ..., everything is reorganized in this space of passage, of tensions, volume adapts and forms itself again here and there in a dance of calculations and chance.³⁶

Translated by Andrew Goffey

Notes

1. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, Penn State University Press, University Park PA, 2004.
2. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, Verso, London, 2007.
3. The French *chaînage* has been variously rendered here as ‘chaining together’, ‘chain’ or ‘linking’ [*trans.*].
4. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Continuum, London, 2003, p. 100.
5. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, p. 82.
6. Félix Guattari, ‘Echaffaudages Sémiotiques’, *Révolution Moléculaire*, Encres, Paris, 1977.
7. The author prefers to render *agencement* by ‘agency’ wherever possible, in contrast to its standard rendering as ‘assemblage’ [*trans.*].
8. Helio Oiticica, ‘Notes sur le READY CONSTRUCTIBLE’ 1978, *Helio Oiticica* catalogue, Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, 1992, p. 200.
9. Mona Ozouf, ‘Le Panthéon: L’École normale des morts’, in *Les lieux de la mémoire*, ed. P. Nora, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 155.
10. Neto told me that he had wanted to introduce a principle of variation that accorded with his own ‘operation’ on *Leviathan*. I therefore respect the spelling *Toth* where it is a question of the title of the work and use the normal spelling for the figure of the Egyptian God.
11. On the ‘powerful non-organic life’ in its relation to the body without organs, see Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, pp. 46–7.
12. The citation is from the Sorbières translation of Hobbes, *De Cive*.
13. Horst Bredekamp, *Stratégies visuelles de Thomas Hobbes*, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, Paris, 2003, p. 9.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 128–9.
15. From which it can be verified that an analytic definition of philosophy cannot work without its a priori being conditioned by political information. Hobbes appears here as the proto-founder of linguistically defined analytic philosophy.
16. C.B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, p. 95.
17. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2006, p. 26.
18. *Philosophia civilis*, which, if we are to believe Hobbes in the epistle dedicatory of *De Corpore*, ‘[is] no older than [his] book *De Cive*’. Its modernity is thus inscribed in the wake of the scientific revolution of Copernicus and Galileo (to which Hobbes adds the name of Harvey, the principal physician to King James and King Charles).
19. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p. 86.
20. Which one must take literally: Mob = the dangerous mass and Dick = the devil.
21. According to the declarations made by Neto in the video accompanying his installation.
22. ‘the final global result [is] synchronized without a central agency’, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minnesota University Press, Minnesota, 1987, p. 19.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 408; emphasis added.
24. In the catalogue, Ernesto Neto, *Leviathan Toth, Festival d’Automne*, Éditions du Regard, Paris, 2006, p. 35.
25. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley et al., Athlone, London, 1984, p. 9.
26. Gilles Châtelet *Les enjeux du mobile*, Seuil, Paris, 1993, pp. 32–3.
27. Neto, *Leviathan Toth*, p. 35.
28. Gilbert Simondon, *L’individu et sa genèse physico-biologique*, PUF, Paris, 1995, p. 49.
29. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Athlone, London, 1993, p. 19.
30. Because the Baroque is ‘the ultimate attempt to reconstitute a classical reason’, *ibid.*, p. 81.
31. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 409.
32. Franck Leibovici in Neto, *Leviathan Toth*, pp. 29–30.
33. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 95.
34. ‘The sensation of white or of light, that is to say the total activity of the eye’, writes Schopenhauer in his letter to Goethe, 11 November 1815, when he tries to push his master’s anti-Newtonism to its final physiological limit. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Textes sur la vue et sur les couleurs*, Vrin, Paris, 1986, p. 125.
35. In an interview given in the review *Artes & Ensaïos*, 16 July 2008, UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2008, p. 16.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 53.