

INTRODUCTION

A New Stereoscope

JON ROFFE

1. In 1958, Yves Klein staged an exhibition at the Galerie Iris Clert in Paris with the prolix title 'The Specialisation of Sensibility in the Prime State of Matter as Stabilised Pictorial Sensibility'. Visitors to the exhibition found themselves confronted with an empty room. Klein's earlier work, well known, consisted of monochrome paintings that solely used the famous Yves Klein blue. But in this new stage of his work, Klein aimed to pass beyond materiality itself: for him, the room was not empty at all, but full with the non-material being of the sensation of blue. He writes that he had 'left the visible, physical blue at the door, outside, in the street. The real blue was inside, the blue of the profundity of space [...] the coloured space that can not be seen but which we impregnate ourselves with'.¹ The trajectory of Klein's work is therefore one of rarefaction: the passage towards a presence that remains present despite being immaterial.

2. I invoke Klein here by way of contrast. What Gail Hastings proposes in this fascinating work superficially appears to resemble the movement of rarefaction towards immediacy pursued by Klein. But nothing could be further from the truth. Whereas Klein passes through materiality towards the immaterial, Hastings moves in the other direction, towards the substratum of all visibility—towards space and light as such. There is a shared move beyond the brute given of what Hastings, drawing on the famous analysis of sense perception in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, calls sense-certainty. But where Klein reaches to attain something beyond mundane perception, Hastings looks to the ground of this perception itself.

1. Yves Klein, *Yves Klein, 1928–1962: Selected Writings*, ed. Jacques Caumont and Jennifer Gough-Cooper, trans. Barbara Wright, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1974, 41.

What then does Hastings' work discover? The primacy of a space-in-general, and a light-in-general, which are subject to distribution.

That I see a particular object presupposes a differentiation of spatiality and visibility. *This* here because it is not there; I see this because it is brighter than blackness—nothing could be simpler. And yet, these ‘givens’ of quotidian perception rely upon a distribution of spatiality that precedes the object, provides the conditions for its being there. This is one way we can understand Hastings’ closing reference to time: this anteriority does not simply denote what was seen before, but that, before seeing something, there is a primary birth of visibility itself. In this way, Hastings seeks, as she says, to locate the ‘authority of “here”’.

3. There is no worth in asking for origins in general terms—why are the visible and the spatial differentiated and differentiable?—but it would be equally incorrect to ignore the fact that subjective experience is proceeded by the fact of birth. Being, subjective being, is first of all being born. Birth cannot simply be a strictly material phenomenon. We are patients of a material process, certainly—we are born as bodies—but we are equally patients that are called to be witnesses of space and light at the same time, space and light that are themselves ceaselessly differentiated. There is differentiated space and light, and therefore objects, but also subjective experience, split between our simple being–there and the fact of our not being where and what we see.
4. Now, the general conditions of space–as–such and light–as–such must not be thought to be abstract. They possess a visceral force, issuing a kind of command: *be*. ‘Being announces itself in the imperative’, writes Jean–François Lyotard.² This command is triple, and first concerns what might be called the auto–differentiating movement of apparition itself—a strange dynamic, a ‘movement [that] is alive in objective world determinations’, as Hastings writes. The command then addressed to the subject: *be*, as the being that stands apart from what it experiences.
5. Hastings’ analysis touches on both of these senses, but is ultimately oriented around a third register of the command. The artist that works with space and light turns back towards the conditions of experience themselves, towards the matrix of human being, but on the side of space and light themselves, siding with things and the condition of their apparition rather than their experience. The artist also issues the command: *be*. She aims to induce

2. Jean–François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, 88.

an artificial birth of an artificial being, a kind of existential stereoscope, in the viewer of the work. And in my view, this is the significance of Hastings' work: it is a genuine attempt to create anew the very encounter that gives the self to the self, to the absolutely primary instantiation of the difference that births visibility at birth. The negative process, Rimbaud's 'systematic deregulation of all of the senses', is exceeded in this production, the production of a secondary self that sees, however fleetingly, from the point of view of space and light, their endless divagations, themselves.

6. Thus Hastings' work only superficially seems to rely upon the method of rarefaction, proposing instead a direct investigation of the conditions of appearance as such—and the double bifurcation that these involve. In what initially appear to be simple material operations, what we discover is a radical fidelity to the substratum of experience, in its full intimacy and strangeness, and an attempt to create works that expose us to the force of its command: *be, otherwise. See, otherwise.*