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## The artists' text as work of art

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**Publication date**
2017
**Document Version**
Other version
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Link to publication

**Citation for published version (APA):**
van Rijn, I. A. M. J. (2017). *The artists' text as work of art*. [Thesis, externally prepared, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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# 2

# Formal Experiments in Dora García's *The Inadequate*

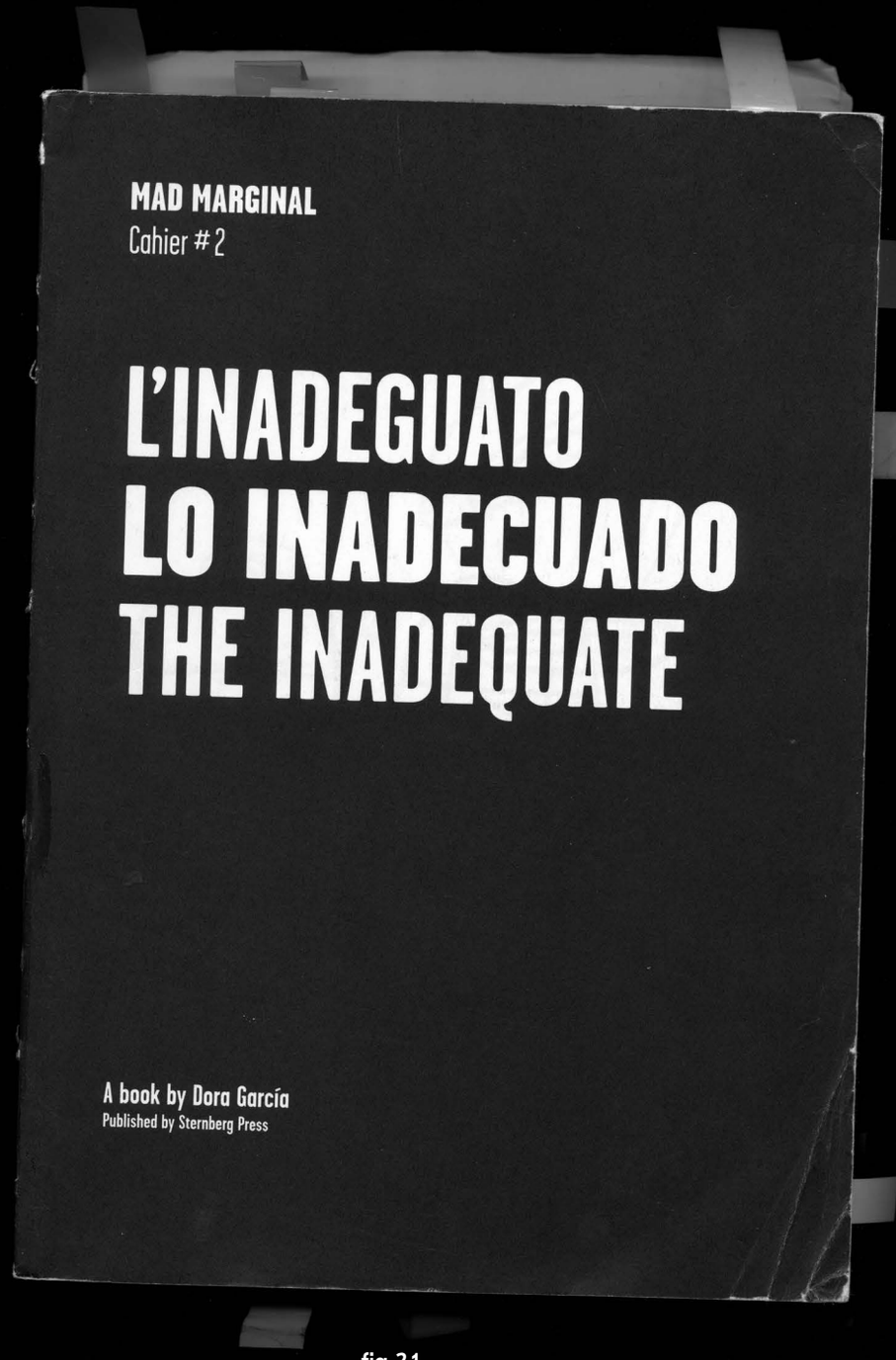



**fig 2.1**
Dora García, *The Inadequate*, 2011. Cover.

## Introduction

The design structures the wide-ranging and dense issue in my hands. *L'Inadeguato/Lo Inadecuado/ The Inadequate* consists of separate sections sewn and glued together. The binding remains exposed. The cover's color and material are similar to the black pages demarcating articles that make up the publication, the thin shield allowing easy transgression between what is inside and outside. Leafing through the artists' project, its amalgamation reminds you of the (theoretical) reader: that book that collects diverse views, and that has grown in collaboration with museums and smaller (contemporary) art institutions alike in recent years.

The artists' text is Dora García's. Its composition signals the fragmentation of the writing, and the tension between this and the bound volume as singular work, something common to contemporary artists' writings. Due to its atomized form the artists' text is hard to position. The collective aspect of the compilation invites questions about the attribution of the writing. In the following pages I delve into the textual situatedness of *The Inadequate* asking: how can the variegated and fragmented artists' text be comprehended and approached?

The premise of my research is that form is a threefold experience in the text: *of*, *in*, and as discussion *through*.[142] Stemming from provisional conclusions drawn in the first chapter suggesting that artists' writing creates a world instead of, following post-structuralism, a word, I consider how the visualized matter with which the artists' text confronts the reader results in a *thickness* in the writing that gives it weight. It isn't a post-structuralist density of textual references, but is rather born of adventure, wherein the referent (instead of the reference) plays an active part in the text. In Keren Cytter's text, Tibor Trier stopped being a postmodern cardboard cut-out and began having a life of his own: former (post-structuralist, postmodern) negative widths between word and world are filled with potential in the artists' text causing the protagonist Trier to grow, creating his singular realm. As consequence, the reader is invited to participate in the artists' text: Cytter responds to the potentiality of the writing, imagining what was *not* being said. She partakes in the literary-ontological situation. Reaching from a postmodern, post-structuralist secluded textual universe, Cytter's writing does not re-present in a "purely" textual manner but starts to *exist*.

Acknowledging the constructive role of chance in the artists' text (which is not identical to potentiality)[143] raises questions about the limits of artists' writing. How can "its" universe be hemmed in without frontiers turning into exclusive rules and normative restrictions? What form does



*The Inadequate*'s composite world *actually* take, taking into account its continuous expansion?[144] While the narrative thread of Cytter's writing holds the universe sketched in *The Seven Most Exciting Hours* together, this narrative grip is at first glance generally absent from contemporary artists' writings. Does this diminished role of narrative result in an overall lack of cohesion, replacing it with incompletion? The chaos depicted in Cytter's work occurs because it is difficult to disentangle "what comes *after* being read" from "what is *caused by*" for the narrator, characters, and readers alike.[145] The contract between the actors involved is based on an attempt to solve the narrative riddle, with its potential to fail to come up with a response: an abstention from reason and knowable *facts* are paramount.

Applied to García's amorphous artists' text, this narrative imbroglio is either nonexistent or pushed to the limit. How is a sense of cohesion provided for? How does *The Inadequate* communicate with the reader if not through a narrative pact? The question reveals its hypothetical answer: the endeavor that underpins the artists' text, García's *The Inadequate* specifically as case study for this chapter, relies on an interest in and quest for form that the writing simultaneously introduces and contests.

I chose this work not only due to the important place writing has in García's practice, but because in the project writing is explicitly reflected on and *in*. Witness the bare binding that unmasks not solely the book, but testifies to the writing's seeming collection of autonomous texts. It is the tension between the multiplicity of the artists' text and its composition, its radical fragmentation and the inevitable unity of the publication, that grounds my research.

Analyzing the disjointed form of *The Inadequate*, and the reflection on its formal construction, artists' writing can be said to inhere in metafictional procedures. Metafiction is that process "assimilating the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself", born out of self-consciousness fiction and structurally inserted into the fictional work since the nouveau roman.[146] It "imitates (that is, creates) … not only an empirical world, but a view of its own linguistic and literary production. The textual mirror is turned inward and activated".[147] Several authors have demonstrated that textual fragmentation and textual self-reflection are not unrelated; the connection between them is reformulated in the artists' writing. Analyzing artists' writing by juxtaposing it with metafictional strategies like this can offer insight into formal structures of the writing, thereby clarifying its position. Although the heterogeneous artists' text is all too often set apart as a quasi-random construction that borders on formlessness, hastily composed of bits and pieces and guided by deviations and detours, it is nevertheless manufactured and meticulously designed. Neglect of what I

perceive as the artists' writings' consciously applied formal strategies lies at the basis of their as yet obscured standing.

In the analytical distinction between the formal registers of the text, I exercise my hypothesis that the artists' text formally expresses what once constituted a friction between creation and criticism, between local anecdote and an all-encompassing historical frame. The concentration is twofold: the operative force of the fragment in the artists' writing; and the dissected form of the artists' writing wedded to a reflection on its textual realization. *The Inadequate* is read with metafiction to think through the techniques used to translate and transform the word into a work.

Through its form the fragmented artists' writing revisits historical moments at which points discontinuity had been bound up with a close scrutiny of its own disconnectedness. When a literature that became manifest to itself reflected on itself in and through a fragmentary fashion, as Maurice Blanchot observed writing in fragments on the fragmentary writing of German Romantics.[149] Blanchot was especially concerned with the writing of the *Frühromantik* or theoretical Romanticism, i.e., the Romanticism of Jena organized around the journal *Athenaeum*. Fragmentary writing is inherent in Nietzsche's aphoristic and wandering thoughts as well; the fragment participates in the subversive strategies of Surrealists (see André Breton's novel *Nadja* [1928]) and the Situationists (testified to by the aphoristic writing of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967]); the fragment is reworked in modernist practices such as Ezra Pound's ideogrammatic writing in the *Cantos*; and engages in the attempt to break discourse, restoring the lost intimacy of writing, as with Barthes's later work.[150]

The variegated provenance of these examples and techniques they apply sees the fragment *en soi* function differently, taking the form of poem, maxim, philosophical treatise, *pensée*, novel, aphorism, ruin, or diary entry. Read against the background of these pulverized appearances, the atomized form of the artists' text takes a paradoxical position. Discontinuous, like metafiction, it still articulates a configuration. Metafiction's concentration on the construction of the reflection on its own product(ion), its delight in design, shines light on the fragmentary form of the artists' writing, and its highly manufactured construction.

This study follows two strands of metafiction of which Linda Hutcheon writes: one, "intent to unmask dead conventions"; and two, "the distinction between literary and critical texts begins to fade".[151] The so-called scattered artists' text is recast from these two metafictional perspectives, the first strives to unveil the obsolescence of (still) prevalent



literary notions, the second wears down the difference between creation and critique. Each perspective enables me to look at the extent to which the fragment in the artists' writing coincides with a critical textual awareness. Before elaborating on the role of what structures the artists' writing, I will give an initial outline of *The Inadequate*, my object of research.

*The Inadequate* is composed of two parts or *Cahiers*, one of which is titled *The Inadequate*, the other *From Basaglia to Brazil*. The two halves were initially published as separate parts of what later became the overarching project *Mad Marginal*.[152] The second Cahier forms the opening section of the complete volume, its title figuring prominently on the cover: *L'Inadeguato Lo Inadecuado The Inadequate*. The multiple languages in the title point to how we might approach the multiple languages in the volume. For the purposes of brevity I will refer to the book in full with the self-professed inadequate title, *The Inadequate*.[153] It includes essays, drawings, interviews, roundtable discussions, diagrams, and letters. Next to García's own essays and interviews are those by novelists and dramaturges, nurses and neurolinguists, psychiatrists, and art historians in Italian, Spanish, or English. A digital version circulates in which some translations can be found.[154] Each Cahier comprises a sequence of video stills titled *The Inadequate* (Cahier #2) and *The Deviant Majority* (Cahier #1). A cartoon-like drawing similar in line, tone, and theme opens and closes each volume, as if wrapping up the plurality of texts.

The two Cahiers share a theme, the second elaborating on the background of the research in the first. Cahier #1, is centered on madness, its social and political embeddedness, and "marginality as an artistic position" (MM1, 11; d11).[155] Cahier #2 discusses artistic production and its (mental) limits. The motivation of the *Mad Marginal* project relies on a good story, García explains, on an insight and a conviction. Concerning conviction she states that if "radical" means an expressed belief in "great or extreme social or political change," and if an "institution" is defined as "that which resists change" (Basaglia), then the two terms are mutually exclusive. Or: "Radical psychiatry, radical politics, radical art: rage against the institution. But also… an uncompromising idea of truth" (MM1, 14; d14). Whereas *Mad Marginal* has its roots in the "almost accidental discovery of the writings of [the Italian psychiatrist, neurologist, and professor] Franco Basaglia" (1924–1980), it is also defined by the story told by psychiatrist Erik Thys about a psychiatric patients' group working in the late 1960s whose therapeutic activities included urban guerrilla techniques. Thys intertwined this story, as related by García, with the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition in Munich, 1937 and German euthanasia program *Aktion T4* (October 1939–August 1941), wherein psychiatric

patients and people with Down syndrome were exterminated. Thys added, in the words of García, "that there is a movement in Germany right now … calling for the Prinzhorn collection [the famous collection of art created by mentally ill] to be moved from Heidelberg to Berlin … to be housed in Tiergarten 4, the very place where the decision was made to exterminate psychiatric patients." And García wonders: "Who was the man behind this contemporary movement? … a case of eternal, supernatural youth? Or a case of poetic justice?" (MM1, 11–13; d11–13) García posits the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition, where one of the slogans on the gallery walls read, "Madness becomes Method," as that instance "forever sealing the profound and complex connection between modern art and outsider art." She continues commenting on "outsider art" that "whatever meaning we give to outsider art, it says much more about *mainstream* art than about whatever is outside it." (MM1, 19; d19) Suggesting that it is a form of dissidence that avoids the center, *The Inadequate* nevertheless takes a stance vis-à-vis what "*the truth about art might sound like: radical artists profoundly mistrust the ideology of art*" [italics in original] (MM1, 19; d19).

Investigating historical source material, both stumbled upon and actively sought, *The Inadequate* researches the current status and limits of what is considered art. The writings of Basaglia are taken as an example to inquire into cultural, social, and political borders, along with the works and methods of James Joyce, Robert Walser, and Fernand Deligny. Through this particular source material and *The Inadequate*'s employment of it, artistic procedures are tested that "officially" are (or were) rejected, considered marginal and "mad." The artists' text puts forward and inhabits those practices that prevent art from being an exclusive and ideological tool.

## Fragment and the Fragmentary, or "Intent to Unmask Dead Conventions"

### "Open" work, a constellation

The fragment, then, is what returns in *The Inadequate*, wearing diverse and multiple hats. *The Inadequate* is differentiated through its various plurality of texts, from diverse perspectives, in Italian, Spanish, or English. As noted before the translations of (most of) the Italian and Spanish texts found in a digital edition of the *Mad Marginal* project that also includes some of the English articles extends and reformulates the work further. While *Mad Marginal* re-evaluates the notion of authorship in the artists' text by decentralizing it—addressed more in the third chapter—the reader is confronted with a disparate, apparently incoherent and chaotic work. This textual anarchy is hinted at by the inverted logical order of the Cahiers.

Each point of access into the artists' text offers a different experience. Due to the meticulously arranged constellation of heterogeneous material, each reading reshapes relations among the elements. *The Inadequate* thus seems to be what Umberto Eco called an "open work," characterized by a fundamental indeterminacy that introduces a "field" generating interpretative possibilities and reciprocal internal relations. Eco suggests a phenomenological approach for dealing with such work. He refers to Merleau-Ponty, quoting his statement: "It is therefore essential for the object and also for the world to present themselves to us as 'open'… and as always promising future perceptions": The constellation of the work and the part played by reader oscillate.[156] More than the reversed sequential ordering of the Cahiers, which rather affirms the order by and through the inversion, continuous reading is complicated, invalidated even, by the unavoidable to and fro between text and a reader who is forced to create her own cohesion from the multiple contributions. Systematic understanding is undermined thanks to the variety of articles, furthermore, written not only in different languages, and by linguists, art historians, novelists, visual artists, sociologist, psychiatrists, and dramatists alike, but also for taking on different forms. Or so it seems: interviews and essays coalesce, visual material, scientific articles, and letters alternate. A compilation, *The Inadequate* assembles and catalogues, while balancing on the "fragile line that separates construction from collapse" (MM1, 190), in García's words. Examining the position and functioning of what seem referents—instead of references—Basaglia, Tasso, and Walser, I seek to test how the artists' writing handles its heterogeneity. Read against metafiction, I proceed with a study of the fragment and the modes in which it appears.

### Basaglia, Tasso, and the Translation, the Encounter

*The Inadequate* is a work composed of what I'd call chance encounters and "random" rendezvous. Witness the "insight," "conviction," and "good story" inspiring *Mad Marginal*, but also the "almost accidental discovery of the writings of Franco Basaglia." These so-called encounters consist of restructured and manipulated fragments and appropriated found footage. "To encounter is to find, to capture, to steal" in the words of Deleuze, "but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation".[157] The lack of method that characterizes the encounter, according to Deleuze, is specific to the "actual" fragment, as leftover or remainder, that is. Or the absence of method is specific to the encounter *as* fragment (and vice

versa) producing a strained relation between the fragment as a remnant of the rendezvous and its integration in the architecture of the text. The structural encapsulation and acceptance of the fragment seems to contradict a "real" fragment as crumb, discarded matter, defined by chance.

This same situation, balancing out inclusion and exclusion, incidental find and constructive device, can be tracked in García's concepts of madness, the radical, and outsider art as fringe phenomena—and of *The Inadequate* for that matter. As García formulates, outsider art "is defined as art by *other people* (insiders) instead of its maker (an outsider)" (MM1, 19; d19). The process of insertion and expulsion, and the border between them, is relevant to the approach of the artists' text, its subject, starting point, means, and material; looking at *how* the fragment is integrated allows insight into how the text functions.

In *The Inadequate*, the encounter is initially directed by chance. As such it is translated in the treatment of the fragment, affecting its agency. The fragments and the encounters from which they (apparently) result are given varying levels of importance, lending the writing its rhythm and its structure, while reflecting on traditional narrative continuity. Textual self-reflexivity has been present all along in literature, ever since Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*. It defines "the status of *all* fiction". Via characterizing the textual impasse of paradoxical engagement in fiction, in which "*descriptions* of objects . . . are simultaneously *creations* of that object." Patricia Waugh, however, argues that metafiction is exceptional as it lays bare the literary conventions of simultaneously creating a context (the words on the page) and a text.[158] With respect to the artists' text, and considering the varied formal treatments of referents in quantitative terms, the encounter with Basaglia gets an entire volume, Cahier #1, while Tasso is alluded to just once. This decision could be justified by arguing that Basaglia's proposals to deinstitutionalize mental healthcare in Italy, countering (its) ideologies ("Basaglia worked against ideologies, not to create a new ideology" since "ideology is the falsification of reality" MM1, 140–141) served as a crucial steppingstone in the making of *Mad Marginal*. Torquato Tasso, by contrast, is referred to because his madness has an exemplary function within *The Inadequate*'s larger proposition on the curative properties of madness ("delirium is a remedy" MM2, d27) and living a peripatetic life, wandering along the perimeters of society at large. This does not mean that Tasso is of little importance to the text. In narratological terms Basaglia could be said to function as a *node* in the artists' writing, whereas Tasso is a *catalyst*, "reviving the semantic tension of the discourse," giving it "fresh impetus," delaying it perhaps, possibly leading it astray.[159]



Looking more closely at the forms in which the chance rendezvous are transcribed in the artists' text, the narratological view on *The Inadequate* gains nuance. The dichotomy of Basaglia and Tasso is difficult to uphold once we acknowledge that the exemplary function of the Tasso reference is a role also fulfilled by Basaglia. Each role cannot be justified by page space or semantic importance. Most referents in *The Inadequate*, Basaglia and Tasso among them, concern historical figures met with in an indirect manner: through their writings or writing about them: Jack Smith is hinted at and Aby Warburg is dedicated an entire article (MM2, d10–21). García might have happened upon Basaglia's publications and notes, but the reader never lays eyes on them. The information about the referents is channeled, in other words, communicated by mimicking the documentation as a secondary source García herself relies upon.

Through this procedure the artists' writing implicitly reflects on the secondary nature of information, and the denial of its auxiliary and subordinate place in Conceptual Art. Think of Seth Siegelaub's famous statement from 1969. Asked which means are most suitable for communication in and of art, he responded: "Books and catalogues." Whereas art is often distorted and altered in books for art depending upon its physical presence, Siegelaub says this is not the case in art that has become an abstraction: Conceptual Art. Once "color, scale, material, and context" do not matter anymore, the representation in books and catalogues "becomes *primary* information, while the reproduction of conventional art in books or catalogues is necessarily *secondary* information" [emphasis in original].[160] Or listen to Sol LeWitt commenting upon the *Xerox Book* (1968), that book-as-exhibition in which seven artists were provided twenty-five pages each and asked to contribute one work around the concept of reproduction: "And to do the show as a catalogue is a terrific idea because it involves one very, very important aspect of the work, which you call the documentation. Which is, from my point of view, as important as whatever is done".[161]

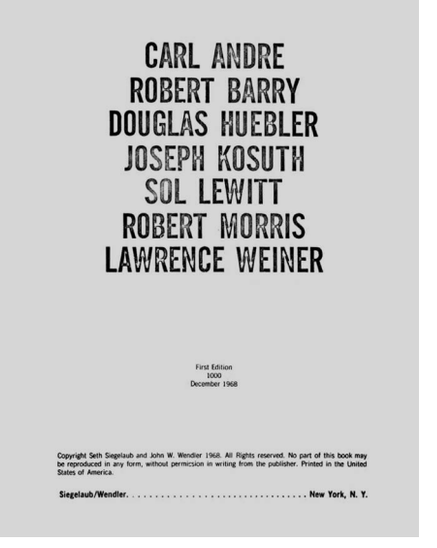


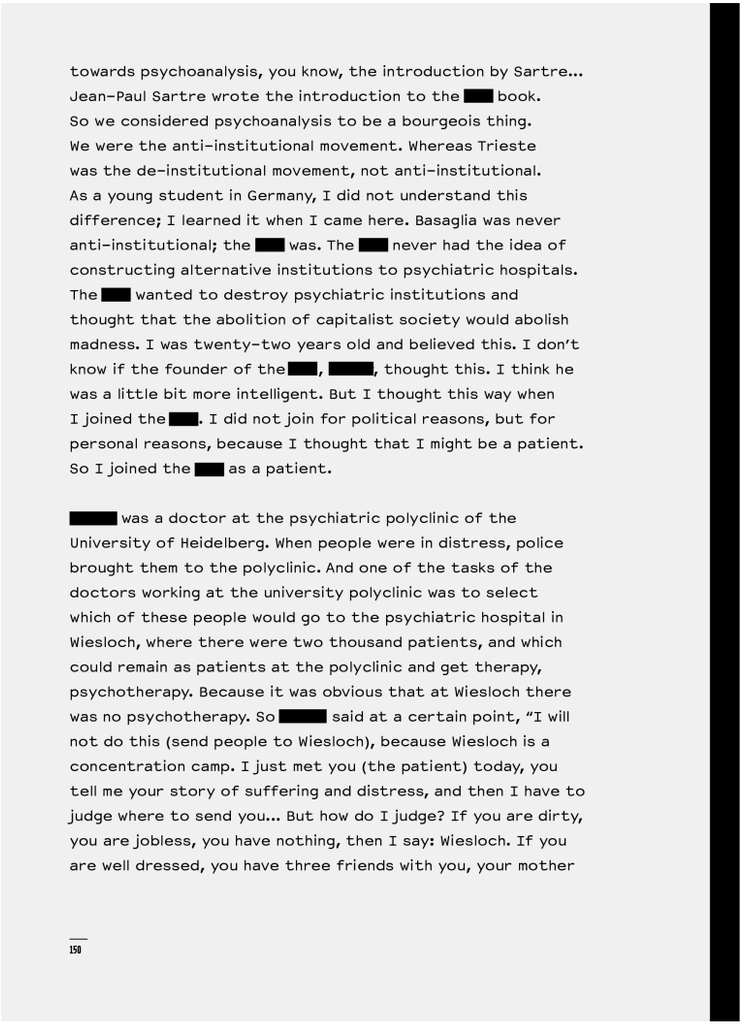

**fig 2.2**
Seth Siegelaub, ed., *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner* [Xerox Book]. New York: Seth Siegelaub and Jack Wendler, 1968.

*The Inadequate* and its treatment of information speak to an awareness of the 1960s place and function of documentation. As they profit from the possibility of information as primary matter, current artists' texts place this information on par with the historical person or situation concerned, as we will see in the case of Robert Walser in *The Inadequate*. This is why Walser and Warburg, Tasso, Basaglia, Deligny, and Smith are referents, instead of (textual) references. In the historical figures *mot* and *chose*, "word" and "thing" are combined, made one.

It is the plurality of interviews with students, followers, and collaborators of Basaglia that bear witness to *Mad Marginal*'s interest in the Italian psychiatrist—and psychiatry and politics in general. The (chance) encounters, and Basaglia's non-conventional therapies and political strategies that are discussed, not only provide the methodological blueprint for the artists' writing or offer 'mere' material. The conversations seem to *be* the work, the work *functioning as* conversation, as further research into the function of Basaglia and Tasso *The Inadequate* seeks to reveal. And yet, putting aside the quantitative, narratological, and semantic reading of the artists' text, studying the form of the reader's meeting with the psychiatrist in *The Inadequate*, the interviews with Basaglia's acquaintances render him more present than the lone mention of Tasso: the living speech of the interviews accounts for a presence the single meta-textual allusion lacks.

Within *The Inadequate* the difference between the two forms of textual appearance—the interview vis-à-vis lone reference in a more or less continuous piece of writing, the discursive vis-à-vis critical discourse on its appearance—is minimized through a reduction of the role of the interviewer in the interviews, for instance, the texts merely signed by García. The questions themselves are excluded from the writing, furthermore, thus mitigating the discursive character to the point almost of obliteration. Accordingly, the so-called natural language of the interviewees is only apparently maintained. In "An interview with Carmen Roll" (MM1, 146–159)—recounting Roll's work as a nurse with Basaglia—García's presence as interlocutor is presupposed by the allusion to art in the first lines of Roll's defensive report: "First of all, I am a person who doesn't understand anything about art. So I cannot talk about the relationship between art and madness. I have always been suspicious of this question, so I cannot talk about this. … I think that enjoying music, dancing, singing… it's right, you know. But for people who have been labelled mad, all these activities become therapy" (MM1, 147). The interviewer being largely exempt from the dialogue, mostly presupposed, results in a more or less uninterrupted text. There aren't even quotation marks.




towards psychoanalysis, you know, the introduction by Sartre...
Jean-Paul Sartre wrote the introduction to the [redacted] book.
So we considered psychoanalysis to be a bourgeois thing.
We were the anti-institutional movement. Whereas Trieste
was the de-institutional movement, not anti-institutional.
As a young student in Germany, I did not understand this
difference; I learned it when I came here. Basaglia was never
anti-institutional; the [redacted] was. The [redacted] never had the idea of
constructing alternative institutions to psychiatric hospitals.
The [redacted] wanted to destroy psychiatric institutions and
thought that the abolition of capitalist society would abolish
madness. I was twenty-two years old and believed this. I don't
know if the founder of the [redacted], [redacted], thought this. I think he
was a little bit more intelligent. But I thought this way when
I joined the [redacted]. I did not join for political reasons, but for
personal reasons, because I thought that I might be a patient.
So I joined the [redacted] as a patient.

[redacted] was a doctor at the psychiatric polyclinic of the
University of Heidelberg. When people were in distress, police
brought them to the polyclinic. And one of the tasks of the
doctors working at the university polyclinic was to select
which of these people would go to the psychiatric hospital in
Wiesloch, where there were two thousand patients, and which
could remain as patients at the polyclinic and get therapy,
psychotherapy. Because it was obvious that at Wiesloch there
was no psychotherapy. So [redacted] said at a certain point, "I will
not do this (send people to Wiesloch), because Wiesloch is a
concentration camp. I just met you (the patient) today, you
tell me your story of suffering and distress, and then I have to
judge where to send you... But how do I judge? If you are dirty,
you are jobless, you have nothing, then I say: Wiesloch. If you
are well dressed, you have three friends with you, your mother

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**fig 2.3**
Dora García, from "An interview with Carmen Roll", *The Inadequate*, 2011. Text.

It is the compartmentalization that reveals García's indirect yet determined presence in the text. While the unimpeded progress of and involvement with what was previously called an open work seemed to qualify *The Inadequate* as a leisurely stroll down various paths, indifference and arbitrariness are not what define the artists' text. A strict and stringent design determines the writing while it guides the reader, stimulating certain directions while closing off others. Even Siegelaub's observation that "books are a neutral source" has to be reconsidered when confronted with the contemporary artists' writing. The artists' text is reminiscent of the critique of Conceptual Art as dematerialized; likewise

García's writing dismantles its self-reflexivity in elaborating on text as material, not only handling writing as transparent vessel but also stressing that text can have visual meaning.

This determined and determining author's position, masked but formally unveiled, is underscored by censored parts of the dialogue: blackened or crossed-out names. This particular textual interference, suggesting both a provenance and active reflection, visually supports the textual rhythm. Emphasizing the visual surface, the artists' writing moves away from the encounter as accidental, performatively generating what in that encounter is understood as "mere" textual dialogue that suppresses exchange. The dialogue with Roll accounts for its social embeddedness, as it needs the reader to fill in the gaps and "complete" the work, which the blackened out and redacted parts also suggest. *The Inadequate* hovers between an eighteenth-century idea of and approach to the fragment as a deliberate refusal to finish a work—I will return to its implications shortly—as well as its more recent application in artistic practices that employ dialogue and participation to produce event- or process-based works.

As it is transcribed the Roll conversation could hardly be said to be a fragment in the sense of found footage. It is produced, as with the eighteenth-century *non finito* prevalent among writers and painters alike. Works were made "that have not become incomplete, but have been planned and executed as incomplete". Not composed of fragments in the proper sense—remnant, leftover, or discarded matter—the novel of the latter eighteenth-century coincides with the revival of the concept of art as a form of life, according to literary scholar Elizabeth W. Harries. Thus starting "*ab ovo* or even *ab semine*," Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760) reflects on the notion of beginning and end, both in life and in fiction, embodying a reflection on how living and writing about it enable one another, but are also always out of sync. "Ending—if it ends—with a remark about a cock-and-bull story" ("L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?--- A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick---- And one of the best of its kind, I ever heard."), the novel thinks through the finite status of its work.[163]

For Patricia Waugh, Sterne's *Shandy* is the metafictional novel par excellence. Metafictional parody, the novel's conversationalist mode discovers and criticizes what forms can express what content, its creative function releasing them to express contemporary concerns. Its "Dear reader" address disrupts literary conventions, acknowledging that the reader is a "fully active player in a new conception of literature as a *collective creation* rather than a monologic and authoritative version of history" [emphasis added].[164] Within the context of the artists' writing,



the conversation has been molded in such a manner that it can hardly be said to await the reader for completion given its assiduous design. And yet, its composition requires that the reader intervene in the writing, translating not so much the encounter but the ephemeral aspect and acuteness of the social situation, it requires the empathy of the reader to imagine socius and text. Or socius as text. Like its compilation (the two Cahiers and multiple contributions), *The Inadequate*'s Roll dialogue relies on and communicates a sense of collectivity by inserting open endings debunking the finished nature of the book.

Art historian and curator Nicolas Bourriaud writes of recent artistic practices that likewise "impose . . . a state of encounter on people," that they use human relations to generate meaning.[165] Works by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Sophie Calle, for instance, often rely on situations characteristic of societal relations like eating, drinking, or playing. Bourriaud captures those projects under the overarching term relational aesthetics. Explaining the difference of recent practices from earlier works that were very much dependent on social interrelations, he refers to Dan Graham's 1975 performance *Performance/Audience/Mirror* in which the artist is positioned in front of a museum audience facing a mirror. Like in the comparable *Mirror Performance/Audience Description* of 1977, the performance stressed the polarization of active performer (Graham himself) versus passive viewer who follows his movements, simultaneously drawing attention to the front of the performer's body vis-à-vis his back, which is habitually shielded from interactions. The exaggerated artist's activity was echoed by the onlooker's passive contemplation, thus raising consciousness of a still prevalent division of tasks. Contrary to performances like Graham's, relational works pivot around *collaborations* with their audience. Their construction requires the engagement of others.

**fig 2.4**
Dan Graham, *Mirror Performance/Audience Description*, 1977. De Appel arts centre, Amsterdam, 8th of June 1977. Photo: Thijs Schouten, Amsterdam.

Calle's early *Le carnet d'adresses* (1983) testifies to this collaborative endeavour. The artist contacts people in an address book found on the street, drawing their portraits; the more recent *Chambre avec vue* (2003) has passersby inviting to spend the night with the artist and to tell her stories, lying in a bed on the fourth floor of the Eiffel Tower.

**fig 2.5**
Sophie Calle, "Chambre avec vue" / "*Room with a view*", 2003.

**Some nights you can't put into words. I spent the night of October 5, 2002 in a room set up for me at the top of the Eiffel Tower. In bed. Between white sheets, listening to the strangers who took turns at my bedside. Tell me a story so I won't fall asleep. Maximum length: 5 minutes. Longer if thrilling. No story, no visit. If your story sends me to sleep, please leave quietly and ask the guard to wake me' Hundreds turned up. Some nights you can't describe. I came back down in the early morning. A message was flashing on each pillar: Sophie Calle, end of sleepless night, 7:00 a.m. As if to confirm that I hadn't dreamt it all. I asked for the moon and I got it: I SLEPT AT THE TOP OF THE EIFFEL TOWER. Since then, I keep an eye out for it, and if I glimpse it along some street, I say hello. Give it a fond look. Up there, 1,014 feet above ground, it's a bit like home.**



Bourriaud articulates the shift in focus from past performances like Graham's and more recent collaborative works from the 1990s on, as "yesterday, the stress was laid on relations inside the art world, within a modernist culture attaching great importance to the 'new' and calling for linguistic subversion; today, the emphasis is put on external relations as part of an eclectic culture where the artwork stands up to the mill of the 'Society of the Spectacle'".[166] The question is sometimes whether, and if so how, these relational, and socially engaged art practices can be distinguished from the "real" social situations they mirror. In relation to *The Inadequate* one could say with Bourriaud that the strategies seem predicated on imitation, mimicking a dialogic situation. But the relations between García and Roll are reworked. They are processed and transformed. The open-endedness of the works Bourriaud promotes is challenged by the "aesthetic resolution" of the artists' text, *also* accounting for a visual imagination and moving beyond a rhetoric of the encounter.[167]

On closer inspection, it must be underscored that the act of translation and reflection immanent in the artists' text intones the alternative bonds mentioned before: a one-to-one correspondence between writing and socius is averted in the artists' text. *The Inadequate* does not so much echo the social situation, which is, or seems, impossible due to the lived-through experience of the encounter and its material distinction from the nature of text. But it speculates on the possibility of translation, on the relative transience and temporariness of the social situation and its translation. This is done through the recursive structure of the artists' writing. In that sense, it is interesting to conceive García's role in the artists' writing as also building its textual architecture or frame, a function steeped in a consciousness that language materially writes. The notion of authorship is enlarged.

Keeping in mind *The Inadequate*'s transformation of the direct speech of the interview, translating its vivaciousness into the indirect speech of the artists' text, a similar textual strategy can be observed in the Tasso reference. Whereas the relative immediacy proper to the testimony as a form is diversified, heavily mediated through the writing, the text functions as a median once again restoring Tasso's presence: the poet is discussed in a conversation that is discussed in the first person: "In a conversation I recently had with theatre director and poet Giuliano Scabia, the initiator of the Marco Cavallo figure, he assured me that madness on a grand scale, magnificent madness, the extraordinary delirium of Torquato Tasso, had ceased to exist." After this the text expands not necessarily on Tasso, but on "madness on a grand scale," since "Delirium is a survival strategy. Delirium is a remedy" (MM2; d27).

Whereas Basaglia's presence modified the text partly by veiling his character and his writings through indirectly addressing them, Tasso's absence is enlivened through direct conversation about him; according to Waugh, the conversationalist mode is also frequent in metafiction, which assimilates non-literary languages and "helps to break both aesthetic and extra-aesthetic norms because both norms operate through very well-established conventions." Conversation as a form thus enables the reader "to proceed through the familiar to the new." Waugh's less introverted and less "narcissistic" understanding of metafiction comes closest to *The Inadequate*'s endeavour it seems, both embedded in societal forms. Whereas Hutcheon postulates that the imaginative process is called into action in both author and reader to create and articulate a literary world discussing the "*nature* of interpretation" [italics in original],[168] Waugh understands the self-conscious metafictional procedure as a reflection on literary creation and life: "Metafiction … does not abandon 'the real world' for the narcissistic pleasures of the imagination," Waugh stresses. And, "metafictional novels, have to engage with the question of the truth status of literary fiction, and, of necessity therefore with the 'truth' status of what is taken to be 'reality'".[169]

One of the modes the metafictional novel adopts is that of the conversationalist, which does not only rely on the reader for its identity and for sympathy, but demonstrates that the "apparent *impersonality* of *histoire* is always finally *personal*, finally *discours*" [emphasis in original].[170] Intertwining the *langue* with the *parole*, inserting the popular into the literary realm, the novelist as conversationalist uncovers the aesthetic elements appropriate to expressing the concerns of the age, Waugh explains, drawing on Russian formalism's concept of *literariness* and translating it "depending on the work's differential relation to the extra-literary system in which it operates".[171] It is precisely this distance vis-à-vis the "extra-literary" that is reshaped and formulated in more positive terms, activating "it" in the artists' writing, or rendering it primary material. This is done through variation on modes of absence and presence, fragmentation of the fragment, eluding speech and introducing it, inserting the I and removing the first person singular from where it was supposed to be (the interview). The immediacy of speech is tested through an alternation of modes, a surfeit of artifices, the artists' text puts to work in transforming them. Borrowing from Waugh the insistence on metafiction's relation to the extra-literary, the variety of the textual forms in *The Inadequate* taps into Hutcheon's demand for close and thorough examination of the nature of interpretation. Unlike Waugh's reading of metafiction, firmly rooted in a post-structuralist comprehension of the text, The Inadequate's extra-literary realm is not necessarily synchronous with the text, however, as I tried to show. Regarding *The Inadequate* also



implies that the artists' text is a compound of several eras in which diverse referents (instead of references) with different backgrounds meet.

One could protest that my perception of the artists' writing's variegated and often paradoxical mode and recursive structure is naive. After all, "language in its entirety is indirect discourse," as Deleuze and Guattari observe. Derrida too studying Rousseau's social struggles with speech vis-à-vis writing describes how Rousseau experiences presence, in the words of Derrida, to be "disappointed of itself in speech," concluding "to write is indeed the only way of keeping or recapturing speech since speech denies itself as it gives itself".[172] Writing, then, "must *be added* to the word urgently" [emphasis in original].[173] Self-sufficient, it supplements presence, the natural, speech, to the point of substituting it, without our being aware: we are blind: writing thus constitutes a dangerous supplement. "Languages [are] the regulated substitution of signs for things, the order of the supplement".[174] What Derrida called the metaphoricity of writing is responsible for the incessant deferral of presence that is always out of reach.[175] This delay is what he termed "différance," as we know: "Différance began by *broaching* alienation [from presence] and it ends by leaving appropriation [of presence] *breached*" [emphasis in original].[176] In relation to the artists' writing, however, the text is not centered on the strict separation of and opposition between presence and absence. In understanding their historical models as referents (in lieu of references), and through their recursive structure, relationships are modified, be they absent or present. Textual forms are sought out and reformulated, exemplifying the connections and the experience while nuancing them. The lived-through liaisons are both recounted and textually expanded. Witness the heightened visuality of the writing, understood as *also* matter. Rather than "merely" reflected upon, the referent is appropriated and inhabited in the rewriting of his work within the context of the artists' text, as we will come to see with Walser especially.

*The Inadequate* is a sensate form of thinking in other words. Comprehension of the text is sensate, relating to the senses, that is, a position significantly different from Derrida's wherein language is a metaphor that hides a sensory figure. Artists' writing does not elaborate on language as a fact, "always already," transporting the thing it represents and duplicates, thus allowing for its substitution. Text does not "merely" result from a cognitive process: it is a form. The sensate is intimately linked to cognition in the artists' writing. Its aesthetics are an *aisthesis*. The aesthetic of *The Inadequate* has to be apprehended not in its strict Kantian separation of thinking from sensibility, but based on its initial meaning introduced by philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in the 1750s instead: as *aisthetis*, or what has been termed a sensate thinking that reconsiders the cognitive

aspects of sensation and studies the sensitive and perceptive dimensions of cognition.[177] As such, I propose a look into artists' writing in terms of wor(l)ds, or onto-epistemological investigations. As physicist and philosopher Karen Barad formulates: "the study of practices of knowing in being," saying further that "we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are *of* the world.…"[178] Eco's phenomenological approach (via Merleau-Ponty) to the open work is thereby nuanced. Eco started from the visual field to explain the experience of, in this case, writing, the eye isolated and linked to a consciousness that cannot be reduced to vision alone in the artists' text. Delving into *The Inadequate*'s treatment of Walser, I seek to research the implications of an onto-epistemological approach.

## Walser: Manufacture of the Referent

Tracing the way in which *The Inadequate* translates the encounter with Basaglia and Tasso, another aesthetic (*aisthetic*) apprehension of the meeting is brought about in the artists' text's treatment of the referent Robert Walser. The tension is increased between fragment and architectural encapsulation in the artist's approach to Walser, that is, between the incidental, accidental, or anecdotal, that "literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real" as well as the teleological narrative frame.[179] It is difficult to argue for a fragment resulting from a chance encounter when we look at the structure of *The Inadequate*. It seems *The Inadequate* foregrounds its self-reflexivity by using Walser performatively: Walser is construed as an extended *mise en abyme*, providing the narrative with a speculative tinge. The prolonged embedded structure in which Walser is caught refers to the construction of the sentence, but it increases expectations as to the figure of Walser as well, like the Russian Matryoshka doll, always anticipating the next doll could be the last.

Starting from the premise that a speculative tone pervades the artists' text due to its use of an extended *mise en abyme*, one can already observe that the artists' writing proceeds in the opposite direction of metafictional strategies. Through Walser the artists' text does not so much install what from a metafictional perspective is perceived as its relation to debunking dead conventions, mingling practice and criticism. It rather postulates that these conventions are (still) relevant and open up novel (textual) perspectives. This altered move vis-à-vis metafiction is caused by the artists' writing's changed relationship to previous textual etiquette. In and through the *The Inadequate*'s contributions, textuality is understood as comprising life. Writing cannot be reduced to a mental affair, it rather functioning "on the same level as the real, and the real materially writes". [180] In consequence,



*The Inadequate*'s universe cannot be regarded as an intertextual world, recurrent in metafictional novels: it is an intra-world.

*The Inadequate*'s approach to textuality that softens the boundaries with life is especially conspicuous in its treatment of Walser. This referent is an important part of the text, mainly in García's "Avoid the Centre. Language on the Margins. The Inadequate" (MM2 40–53; d24–37). This piece appropriates, intensifies, and unpacks the textual strategies of the short story writer. Whereas García puts Walser's technique to work in her writing, she also expands on the writing concept he developed, as explained in the essay that directly precedes her text. For Walser, as J. M. Coetzee describes, writing was intricately linked to his life. This is illustrated in reference to Walser's microscripts (*aus dem Bleistiftgebiet / From the Pencil Zone*), an infinitesimally small and "illegible" work of handwriting in pencil figuring on tiny, mostly discarded pieces of paper.

With the pencil method Walser resolved his state of mental paralysis. After the death of the storyteller in 1956 the scraps were revealed to comprise short stories and fragments. The movement of the hand, the friction of the pencil scribbling on paper, on which meandering lines emerged, the status of the shreds—these methods were crucial to the development of Walser's tales, offering a "unique bliss." "'It calms me down and cheers me up,'" Walser commented on the pencil method.

The entanglement of writing and life is suggested through the insertion of a photograph of Walser, the picture intercalated between Coetzee's contribution and García's subsequent essay. The photograph confronts the reader with the writer, wearing a dark suit and hat, his bent figure walking uphill, plodding through the snow. Like the pencil lines, the visible traces of the footsteps testify to the writer's presence

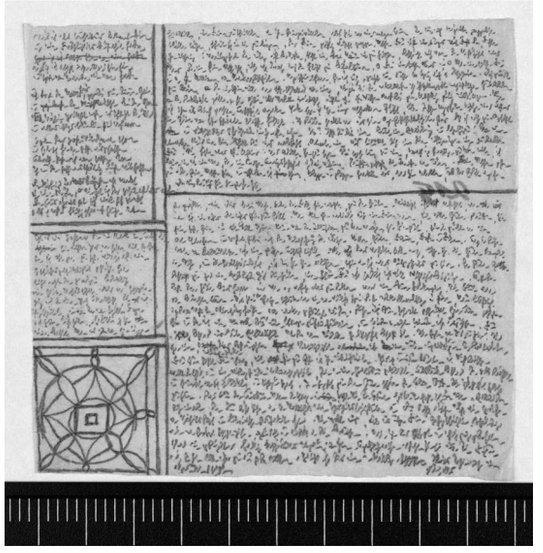

**fig 2.6**
Robert Walser, *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* ('From the Pencil Zone'), Microscript 215, recto, undated.

in an indexical manner. The photograph mimics the imprint in a recursive way. The image thus participates in the embedded structure of the artists' text it (the photograph) bears within itself. The same tripartite textual arrangement is repeated in García's aforementioned essay.

**fig 2.7**
Robert Walser. Photograph.

An important part of García's article "Avoid the Centre. Language on the Margins. The Inadequate" is dedicated to Walser's short story "Der heiße Brei" (1927/1928). Walser's work is quoted and translated in what García termed an amateur fashion: "(the text is my own amateur translation)" (MM2; d29). Bracketing her words challenges the sense of the sentence. It implies that "Der heiße Brei" is explicitly cited, and at the same time unofficially invested with changes. The artists' writing transforms what has been remodeled already (a translation), suppressing those changes. By the same token, the quote is removed from what it describes. It realizes an attempt to avoid the center similar to how one eats a bowl of hot porridge, as Walser describes in the story to which García's sentence refers: you start at the edges to avoid burning your tongue.

Walser's "Der heiße Brei" is a reflection on writing prose, a "Prosastückelchen," as his Swiss-German version learns. Writing is compared to both a dream and a house, or visiting either. His story is a musing, in which a man visits another man (Walser?), a writer by profession, although he hesitates to call his "Spielerei" actual work. Written in the first person singular, the guest is shown around the house and directed to its main area, the living room. The sanctuary can be watched from a distance but never entered.

In García's reworking of Walser's story quotation marks are absent, as in the previous citation of Carmen Roll's words. Besides quotation marks, a footnote is also lacking: the source of the text is unsure. Likewise the translation cannot be trusted. A comparison with Walser's text confirms



that you are confronted with "his" writing in the artists' text. García's appropriation of Walser's work has it challenged and changed.

The particular form of translating and bracketing, quoting and removing, imitating and changing Walser's writing is differentiated yet again through the form in which "Avoid the Centre" integrates "Der heiße Brei." Indented, the fragment extracted from Walser's story is clearly distinguished from García's uncited writing. A similar means of structuring is employed referring to the work of Fernand Deligny, at the end of "Avoid the Centre." The embedded sections closely follow the particular rhythm of "Avoid

Thus the autist becomes a *pilgrim*, a word that, in its Latin root *peregrinus*, meant 'foreigner' before it came to mean 'traveller'.[4]

Wandering, amateurism, pilgrimage, foreignness, travel. Avoid the centre. What do I want to talk about?

In 1926 Robert Walser wrote a short text entitled *Der heisse Brei* that explains everything.[5]

*Der heisse Brei*, literally 'hot porridge', alludes to the way we usually go about eating a bowl of porridge that is too hot: we start by loading our spoon at the edge. As we repeat this action, the rest of the porridge progressively becomes the edge, until finally we are able to eat the centre, having turned it into edge. Avoid the centre.

When I'm awake as an author, as a person, I go through life in a stupefied state, I sleep, I completely neglect the citizen within me.[6]

In *Der heisse Brei* someone comes to visit Walser, a writer 'by calling' no doubt, whom he shows around his home. The visitor does not appear to be surprised by anything he sees there. He also seems to be passing through. In the house, there is a central room, which Walser calls the 'real (*eigentliche*) room', in which some books can be seen in passing on a table. The two writers do not enter the room because it is inside another room, which looks 'lovely and cosy'.

4. Deligny, p. 186.

5. Robert Walser, *Der heisse Brei*, *Das Gesamtwerk XI*. Zurich and Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978, p. 90.

6. Robert Walser, *Minotauros*, *Das Gesamtwerk XI*. Zurich and Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978, p. 192. (Trans: Dora García)

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**fig 2.8**
Dora García, from "Avoid the centre, language on the margins, the inadequate", *The Inadequate*, 2011. Text.

the Centre." Its manipulation manifests itself in a textual fragment unlike Walser's "Der heiße Brei," and more like the shredded pieces of paper of his microscript: García's citation/translation is cut up, presented in blocks.

Whereas the layout of the text imposes a rhythm on García's writing, the fragmented format also allows for simultaneous conjunction/disjunction of the distinct pieces: embraced by García's writing and its paratextual interferences the Walser translation forms an assemblage, also due to the semantic consistency of the extract. Cut up in separate blocks the literal, visual widening enables non-linear connections, exposing the edges so they resemble islands; the external borders, new orders, and foreign connections can be imagined or dreamed. As in Keren Cytter's writing, the reader is activated, but here she is only seemingly invited to create her own textual patterns in response to the writing's broken connections. In "Avoid the Centre," both the semantic continuity of the Walser excerpt *en soi* and the textual makeup of its integration guide the reader through the text.

Linearity hasn't been eschewed entirely in the fragmented artists' text; it inserts a form of narrativity by reinventing it. The photograph appearing between García's and Coetzee's text already hinted at such halting continuity. The Walser picture both semantically and visually motivates a sense of continuity: the writer's elongated figure, black against the whiteness of the snow, drawing a diagonal line between the two neighboring essays. The degree to which linearity and coherence are set within the artists' writing becomes apparent once *The Inadequate* is juxtaposed with other assemblages that adhere to fragmentation, likewise compiled of image and text: from Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box* (1934) to André Malraux's *Le Musée Imaginaire* (1965) Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (1927–1940) to the *Mnemosyne Atlas* of "scholar and psychopath" Aby Warburg (1866–1929). The fragment operates differently in each example: disrupting art historical categorizations (Malraux); in

**fig 2.9**
Marcel Duchamp, *Green Box*, 1934. Photo: Salomé Roodenburg.



articulating the ruin of bygone ages (Benjamin); and endowing the sign with a *Nachleben*, understanding the image as an "organ of social memory and an 'engram' of a culture's spiritual tensions" (Warburg).[183] Yet all of them exhibit a severe vacancy within the overall textual system, gaping blanks that need the reader to construe connections in order for the information to be conveyed. This goes for Duchamp's *Green Box* especially: it consists of notes "thrown together, pell-mell, drawings and admirable photographs in a big rectangular cardboard box which is the cover of the book." The jottings are comments on *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–1923), also called the *Large Glass*. They are "torn or blotted scraps of paper, scribblings on all types of paper, in pencil, black, blue or red ink, unfinished notes, projects, plans, repetitions, etc., etc."[184]

The *Green Box*'s relative lack of connections is absent from *The Inadequate*, due to the artists' writing's textual design that maneuvers the reader in the cadence of García's reading (of Walser). The interference that manipulates one's reading materializes once you become conscious that parts of "Der heiße Brei" are left out; "Avoid the Centre" indicates them by dashes between brackets (fig. 2.8). It seems Walser's story became the material of a writer masked as reader, and vice versa. Or in García's adaptation, Walser's "wandering"[185] prose is alluded to, adopted, and realized at the same time.

The tension underpinning this textual strategy that overshadows textual provenance and mingling voices in *The Inadequate* seems to emerge from the paradoxical need to communicate the desire for incomprehensibility, stress commitment to incoherence, discontinuity, and disjunction, regardless of the thematic cohesion among parts. The delight in the illegible, characterizing an "aversion to useful speech" (MM2; d30), is at the core of the artists' text. Or in García's words: "It's still not so long ago that I had an urge sometimes to roar." The quote is Walser's, inserted in "Avoid the Centre" and surrounded by blanks. The isolation causes it to stand out from the writing, simultaneously coloring the phrase in aphoristic hues. The utterance alludes to the contradiction between *what* one says and *how* one says it, between the énoncé and the enunciation: whereas Walser's sentence makes perfect sense, roaring does not. Not from an understanding of language as rational communication, that is.

Roaring, like fragmentation, shatters the coherence and unity generally needed for comprehension. Once connections between sentences within the text are disrupted by screams and wandering thoughts, the contract between writer and reader is broken, or destabilized at least. Howls and cries, much like the atomized text, prevent the reader from focusing on one single point (call it a plot), her following a unique red thread (say, a

narrative line). The artists' writing stands in sharp contrast to what Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois (relying on Bataille) termed the formless (*L'Informe*) as opposed to the form.[186] But the dichotomy between form and formlessness is only apparently introduced in the artists' text. Its position cannot be consolidated in García's writing. This is due to "Avoid the Centre" clearly reworking Walser's writing, embedding it in its text. Reading through the artists' text and viewing it in its full ensemble, the so-called detached, aphoristic phrase of Walser's must rather be said to participate in the constellation of the artists' text. The scrap can only apparently be regarded as crumb, since it has been transformed, changed, affected, manipulated. It hasn't been left behind, rendered waste (intellectual, social), as Krauss and Bois formulated the formless. The formless is nuanced and formulated anew in "Avoid the Centre." Distance between bits and pieces is differentiated and rearticulated, distinctions (re)made.

The artists' writing thus forms a cautious constellation being heavily designed. This doesn't entail it being closed in on itself, "like a porcupine," as Jena Romanticism wanted it. Some of the fragmentary forms inserted in "Avoid the Centre" suggest this nevertheless. The detached fragment consisting of Walser's sole sentence is a case in point. It recalls the aphorism, that moral genre of the fragment, but also the *Einfall*, the sudden idea as a synthesis of thoughts.[187] In "Avoid the Centre" isolated propositions are composed of García's "own" words ("Delirium is remedy"); they are juxtaposed with phrases explicitly built on the writings of others, like Deligny or Walser ("A homeland is foreign territory for a foreigner. Every language is always the language of another"). They are written in the first person singular ("With books as with people I consider complete understanding to be somewhat uninteresting"); and the disconnected sentences are explanatory and descriptive ("In 1926 Robert Walser wrote a short text entitled *Der heisse Brei* that explains everything"). Depending on how you read them, the detachment of the lines can be interpreted differently. The isolation presupposes the involuntary character of the sudden genial idea or induces a style of injunction proper to the aphorism (that "classical" form of the fragment subjectified by Friedrich Schlegel), insisting on a striving for truth. What the isolated phrases share, however, is the authoritative stance inherent in the quasi-secluded propositions. In both cases, the Witz and the aphorism, the subject expressing the words is emphasized, since he or she is "enlightened" by the idea (the genius individual of the Witz) and/or transfers his or her knowledge (the aphorism, a remainder of an oracular truth). The subject becomes an exemplary figure, the fragment being the work of the subject, in both senses of the term: it indicates the process of the equivocal subject incessantly searching for completion and consciousness, in absolute freedom—and its essence as individuation.



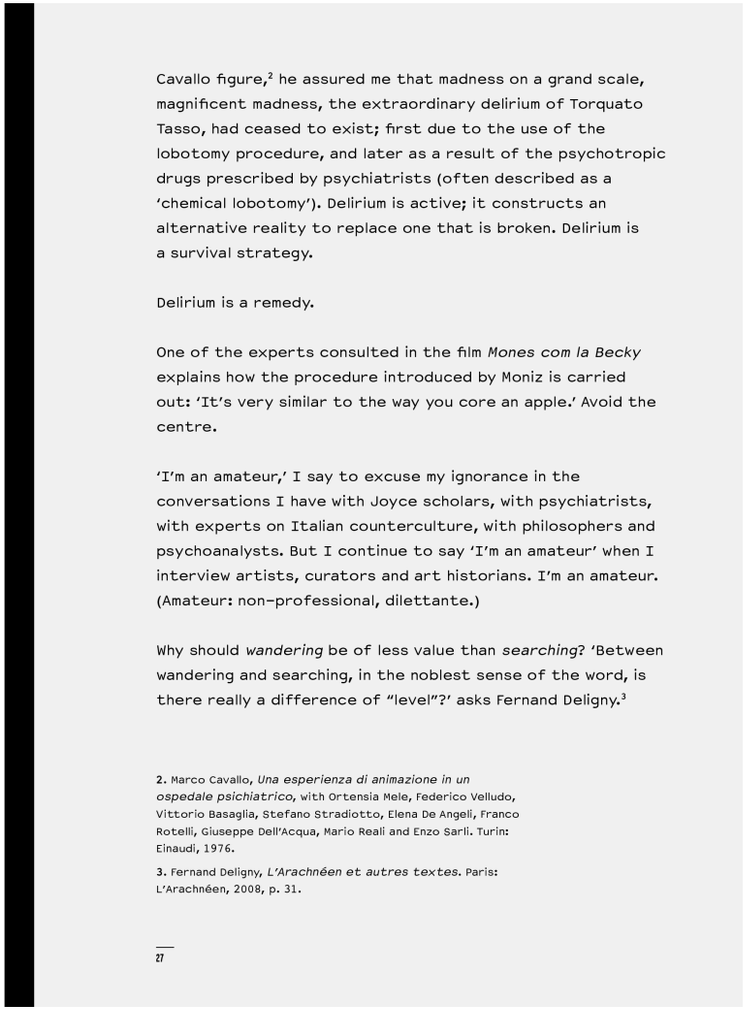
But this process is a work of the subject, the formative power posited as an aesthetical power by Jena Romanticism, the interpretation of which I use due to its closeness to both the world as organon and the work of art.

For the *Frühromantik* or theoretical Romanticism, the Romanticism of Jena organized around the journal *Athenaeum* (1798–1800), The fragment became the genre par excellence, incarnating theoretical Romanticism. Its dynamics relied on what was termed a fragmentary exigency: an auto-production or auto-formation, presupposing a fragmentary totality in its organicity.[188] Like its later modernist frère,[189] the Romantic fragment was composed of internal relationships. It was a finite fragment. The Romantic finite fragment paradoxically aspired to the whole that could never fully be attained, the detached fragment being conceived as a sign of this unfulfilled completion. Or as Schlegel wrote in *Athenaeum*'s fragment 206, "A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine".[190] The fragment implied a total closure. It was the remainder of individuality, as individuality, finding its realization in the exchange or dialogue, that "garland of fragments".[191] *Athenaeum* epitomized this. Its issues were not only composed mostly of fragments of aphoristic character, they were a place where several individuals from different backgrounds mixed and met. Accordingly, the fragment existed thanks to the dialogical nature it produced. The Romantic fragment was not only dialogical and dialectical, however, it was a work in process, a poiesis, incessantly poetical, grounded in auto-production. Its essence lies in individuation: "in the Self, all things are formed organically" (*Athenaeum* fragment 338), under the notion that "every man should be a poet" (*Athenaeum* fragment 430).

Returning to "Avoid the Centre," the question arises as to whether this description of the aphoristic fragment following Jena Romanticism applies to the artists' writing's isolated sentences. The answer is already alluded to: no. The affirmative phrase introducing Walser's story is necessarily exempt from the understanding of the fragment as detached and enclosed. For one thing, it presents "Der heiße Brei" thereby bridging the gap between the lone sentence and the text, regardless of the blank that separates the two, the latter being a constructive device announcing the fragment *en abyme*. Neither can the other three examples cited above be perceived as self-contained and "unsociable," affirmative, and bearing their own horizon, as the Nietzschean aphorism has it.[193] In "Avoid the Centre," the aphorism is not finite. It is composed of García's "own" words ("Delirium is remedy") and grounded in the sayings of others ("A homeland is foreign territory for a foreigner. Every language is always the language of another"). In García's work the aphorism is linked to the fragment preceding it by way of repetition, the repetition of the word

"delirium": in the case of the aphorism her "own": "Delirium is active; it constructs an alternative reality to replace the one that is broken. Delirium is a survival strategy. Delirium is remedy."

The repetition of delirium generates connections between what is visually dispersed. The fragment as aphorism is not so much serialized, as with the *Sentences on Conceptual Art* (1969) by Sol LeWitt, for instance, having in common with the Romantics an aphoristic character. It rather participates in a more open-ended conception of the fragment, as formulated by Blanchot and picked up by Deleuze and Guattari.



Cavallo figure,[2] he assured me that madness on a grand scale, magnificent madness, the extraordinary delirium of Torquato Tasso, had ceased to exist; first due to the use of the lobotomy procedure, and later as a result of the psychotropic drugs prescribed by psychiatrists (often described as a 'chemical lobotomy'). Delirium is active; it constructs an alternative reality to replace one that is broken. Delirium is a survival strategy.

Delirium is a remedy.

One of the experts consulted in the film *Mones com la Becky* explains how the procedure introduced by Moniz is carried out: 'It's very similar to the way you core an apple.' Avoid the centre.

'I'm an amateur,' I say to excuse my ignorance in the conversations I have with Joyce scholars, with psychiatrists, with experts on Italian counterculture, with philosophers and psychoanalysts. But I continue to say 'I'm an amateur' when I interview artists, curators and art historians. I'm an amateur. (Amateur: non-professional, dilettante.)

Why should *wandering* be of less value than *searching*? 'Between wandering and searching, in the noblest sense of the word, is there really a difference of "level"?' asks Fernand Deligny.[3]

2. Marco Cavallo, *Una esperienza di animazione in un ospedale psichiatrico*, with Ortensia Mele, Federico Velludo, Vittorio Basaglia, Stefano Stradiotto, Elena De Angeli, Franco Rotelli, Giuseppe Dell'Acqua, Mario Reali and Enzo Sarli. Turin: Einaudi, 1976.

3. Fernand Deligny, *L'Arachnéen et autres textes*. Paris: L'Arachnéen, 2008, p. 31.

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**fig 2.10**
Dora García, from "Delirium is a remedy", *The Inadequate*, 2011. Text.



Although the Romantic era was a time when art, literature mainly, became manifest to itself by way of "discontinuity or difference as a question of form," the closure implicit in the aphoristic perfect sentence formulated by the *Athenaeum*, according to Blanchot, contained certain omissions. It had its center in itself, instead of in the field that other fragments constitute with it; the wait or pause separating the fragments was neglected, thus denying the rhythm of the structure. *Athenaeum* forgot that fragmentary writing makes possible new relations that exempt themselves from unity just as they exceed the whole.[194] For Blanchot, the fragment had to be positioned between two limits: the imagining of the integrity of substance and of a dialectical becoming. "His" fragment abstained from both, or as he wrote of the fragment word [*parole de fragment*]: "Whoever says fragment ought not say simply the fragmenting of an already existing reality or the moment of the whole still to come".[195] The fragment word implies the recognition of an always deferring and differing speech understood as plurality. A "*speech as archipelago*," "cut up into the diversity of its islands and thus causing a surging of the great open sea; its ancient immensity, the unknown always still to come, designated for us only by the emergence of the earth's infinitely divided depths".[196] This openness, Blanchot argues, does not dismiss that "all speech is a word of command, of terror, of seduction, of resentment, flattery, or aggression; all speech is violence—and to pretend to ignore this in claiming dialogue is to add liberal hypocrisy to the dialectical optimism according to which war is no more than another form of dialogue".[197] Fragmentary writing cannot be subordinated to the unified artwork, as modernism predicated, nor does it partake in the dialectic of realization and unrealization leading to it.[198] The fragment entails a rupture, an "arrangement . . . that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite center from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created." Relation is generated through fragments being *externally* connected. This is what Blanchot brings to light. Distance is indispensible for a relation to take place. Or in Blanchot's words again: "*Suppressing distance kills*."

What seems at stake is that the *between* is deployed in the artists' writing, or what Barad calls an intra-world is created. An understanding of sense that does not correspond to any fixed entities is operative in García's text. Fiction is a tool to link what cannot be thought in *The Inadequate*, forging connections where they cannot be detected by the rational eye alone. Suffice it to say for now, the *between* can be divulged in what is both a reiteration of Walser's phrases *and* not, "Avoid the Centre" recasting the sentence. As a consequence the artists' text can be marked as inhabiting the AND precisely. Due to this ambiguous position García's work is difficult to pin down. "Avoid the Centre" eludes affirmation of the work of the precursor, utilizing it, borrowing its movement but disregarding it

as an imperative. Transforming the earlier texts another order is installed, exemplified by the employment of the referents (in lieu of references) in a markedly novel design.

## Fragment and Fiction: The "Distance Between Practice and Criticism Begins to Fade"

### Fiction, Sense

The previous pages have tried to demonstrate that the fragment in "Avoid the Centre" behaves in what seems a capricious manner from a historical perspective as it wears several hats. Remainder or leftover, pieced together or torn apart, the variety of the fragment and its inherent function points also to itself: it becomes fragmentary. In the constellation of the fragmentary artists' text fiction plays a significant role. It is my thesis that fiction traverses the artists' writing as an operative force conditioning the fragmentary writing defined as an endless becoming. However, the question remains as to how fiction does this, that is, how it functions within the framework of the artists' text.

Historically the status of fiction has been disputed. While Aristotle's *Poetics* deemed fiction constitutive of a work, structuralist linguist Roman Jakobson gave what he termed *literariness* a more formal definition. For Aristotle "the poet or 'maker' should be the maker of plots rather than of verses; since he is a poet because he imitates, and what he imitates are actions." (1451b27) And "even when a treatise on medicine or natural science is brought out in verse, the name of the poet is by custom given to the author." This is a mistake, however, according to Aristotle, since "Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common but the metre, so that it would be right to call the one poet, the other physicist rather than poet." (1447b17) Jakobson by contrast continues to stress the "palpability of signs" as a constructive principle of literariness, literariness then being defined in 1973 as the transformation of the word (*parole*) into a poetical work, and the system of procedures that effectuates that transformation."[199] Earlier already answering the question: "What makes a verbal message a work of art?" Jakobson states that what is diminished in a word as work of art is its communicative function, poetics rather dealing with the verbal structure: "The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in other verbal activities it acts as subsidiary, accessory constituent".[200] Equating the poetic function with structural transformation, fiction is excluded from its once constitutive role of the literary domain. This is not to say that no attempts have been made to lessen the dichotomy between fictional content and poetic form since. Witness literary theorist and structuralist thinker Gérard Genette's introduction of a literature of diction, that literature "that imposes itself essentially through its formal characteristics . . . without excluding amalgams and blends".[201] Form should then be understood in its broad sense, including its capacities for exemplification, leading Genette to substitute the too restrictive adjective *formal* for *rhematic*. In Genette's formulation poetry is absorbed by fiction, the former being constitutive of literariness in diction. He also suggests making room for a conditionalist literariness, "a literariness that stems neither from fictional content nor from poetic form," but which is based on an "aesthetic recuperation" of works of language that escape and outlive their practical function (didactic, juridical, or polemical, for example). The next chapter will return to the normativity of Genette's claims exempting certain "works of verbal art" that define literariness nevertheless. Genette, like Aristotle, uses a definition of fiction as mimesis, that is, of language as a vehicle of "representation, or rather of the *simulation* of imaginary actions and events. . . . Language is creative when it places itself at the service of fiction" subsequently proposing "translating *mimesis* as *fiction*".[202]

Within the framework of my research into the status and operative force of the artists' text, and fiction's role in this, it is not only fiction as an explicitly verbal art that needs to be redefined, but also its position as a form of representation, or "*simulation* of imaginary actions and events." Whereas Aristotle contrasted the poet with the historian, Genette seems rather to rely on Plato's definition of the poet as an imitator, a maker of phantoms, who "understands nothing of what *is* but rather of what looks like it *is*" (601b). For Plato in Book X of *The Republic*, as for Genette, the work of verbal art is opposed to philosophical discourse, the former being twice removed from the real. It is precisely the polarity between knowledge and fiction, as between verbal and visual art, that is challenged in the artists' text.

In the artists' writing, García's *The Inadequate* in particular, fiction is utilized as a liaison between fragments that involve the visual. Thus the appendix of García's essay "Avoid the Centre" reads: "Joyce explained to me that the bread a child dreams of eating can't be the same as the bread he eats when he's awake; the child can't transfer all the qualities of the bread to the dream. Therefore, the bread in the dream wouldn't be made of everyday flour but rather of 'flower', a word that would take away certain qualities of the bread and give it others better suited to a dream. Italo Svevo, *Ulysse est né à Trieste*. Bordeaux, Finitude, 2003, p. 78" (MM2; d35).

Syntagmatically following the regulated and regulating order of language, the appendix seems far removed from the essay on a paradigmatic level. The references to Joyce and Svevo seem awkward. Joyce only returns in the essay following García's writing, "Thought disorder in normal individuals," by neurolinguists Peter McKenna and Tomasiona Oh. But the allusion is also testified to by the sequence of images, video stills, divided from García's writing by some fifty pages. The stills seem to disclose how fiction proceeds in the artists' text. Moving images transposed into stills reconfigure the flux of the source video. The still is a quotation. The sequence images do not correspond with the text, stressing the incompatibility of worlds: the stills feed off the video without being the video. Discordance between worlds is underlined by the disjunction of the consecutive stills, which, as a series need to be read paradigmatically. Or in the words of Barthes on reading, the still "scorns logical time (which is only an operational time)," by the instituting of "a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical".[203] Fascinated by Eisenstein's stills, Barthes formulates three levels of reading them: an informational level of communication; a symbolic level of signification; and what he calls a third meaning, "evident, erratic, obstinate," compelling an interrogative reading. Hesitant as to how to distinguish between the second and third meanings, Barthes terms the second as the obvious meaning, while "obtuse" characterizes the third—the latter applies specifically to *The Inadequate*:

> the obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason; it belongs to the family of pun, buffoon, useless expenditure. Indifferent to moral or aesthetic categories (the trivial, the futile, the false, the pastiche), it is on the side of the carnival.[204]

**fig 2.11**
Dora García, *The Deviant Majority. From Basaglia to Brazil*, 2010. HD Video, 34', video still.



Less than the gesturing and moving people and bodies in the first Cahier's stills—expressive, "distorted" faces, gaping and screaming mouths, limbs pointing to nowhere, questioning eyes, blinking eyes or eyes closed—the description signals what happens in the stills of the second Cahier. The first still of Cahier #2 pictures an open book on a table; it is followed by a portrayal of the book cover (the same?) reading "Svevo;" the third image confronts the reader with the gravestone of one Elio Schmitz. As a series the images suggest a curious overlap of worlds: actual and fictional, conscious and unconscious, present and absent, otherworldly realms. This overlap is emphasized, or rather worlds are falsified the moment one knows that the actual name of the Italian author Italo Svevo, writer of *The Confession's of Zeno* or *Zeno's Conscience* [*La Conscienza di Zeno*] (1923) is Aron Ettore Schmitz. The dates on the picture's tombstone do not correspond with those of the life of Schmitz, aka Svevo, however. Conscience is troubled, as is knowledge.[205]

*The Inadequate* realizes worlds exposing *significances* (as different from significations, Barthes's second meaning) terms cannot cover. The stills demystify illusions through images, turned inside out (the stills). Or, in the words of Barthes again: "The still offers us the *inside* of the fragment." He quotes Eisenstein envisaging the possibilities of audio-visual montage explaining his statement: "the basic centre of gravity … is transferred to inside the fragment, into the elements included in the image itself. *And the centre of gravity is no longer the element 'between shots'—the shock—but the element 'inside the shot'—the accentuation within the fragment* …" [emphasis in original].[206]

**fig 2.12**
Dora García, *The Inadequate*, 2011. HD video, 40', video still.

In relation to *The Inadequate* Barthes's third meaning could be called fiction. The artists' writing deploys an aversion to complete understanding, to impose meaning, insisting on the "inability [of filmmaker Jack Smith] to conform, the inability to *accept acceptance*" [emphasis in original] (MM1, 201–213). *The Inadequate* is "the determination, *in an extremely hostile environment*, to reveal the violent fragility of everything we regard as adequate" [emphasis in original] (MM2; d34). Fiction here is a performative and subversive act located in the *between*: between verbal and visual, between communication and signification *inside* the text. It defines its own arena using textual techniques without defining them as such in a prescriptive and normative way. Fiction as a strategy thus both utilizes and exudes the methodological field of the text Barthes articulated, distinguishing it from the work held in the hand,[207] since in *The Inadequate* matter *participates*.

The artists' text is a process of demonstration that speaks according to certain rules. But those "rules" are not the strictly textual Barthesian ones. Breaking and generating boundaries within the sign (flour/flower), be they onorous, or "silent" (the blanks as distances separating the fragments composing the text) fiction rather defines the amalgamation *The Inadequate*. Fiction opens up the possibility of alternative situations to define the rhythm of the text, transforming its very constitution. Writing matter, the visual partakes in this onto-epistemological realm, like the life of Walser sharing in his (its) writing. Endlessly divided from within and extended, amplified through exterior connections, the artists' text causes sense to be dispersed: as a referent *Joyce* is worked *with*. Coming to terms with *Joyce* in the process of reading the *The Inadequate*, the referent transgresses the borders of the particular text "Avoid the Centre."

**fig 2.13**
Ugo Guarino, "Lobotomia", *The Inadequate*, 2011. Illustration.



Although some features, like the cartoonlike drawings opening and closing the two Cahiers, point in this direction, the dispersal of sense in *The Inadequate* does not induce a reassembling of it. The formless isn't contained (and constrained) by form, as Bois and Krauss assert. Like the still, dissociated from filmic or literary technical constraints, thus engendering the "indescribable" in, of, and through the fragment, *The Inadequate* pertains to the diffracted and heterogeneous by its very decomposition. Let's look into what nevertheless presents itself as the artists' text's metafictional design, or the so-called frame that nests a representation: the line drawings encapsulating the Cahiers that constitute the artists' text. How is their relationship with the fragmentary composed? Drawn in swift black lines on a white surface, the images are comic and popular in tone. A comment in title case is inserted in each of them. Visual markers, they seem to stand off from the writings. Framing the assemblage of texts and controlling them. Drawings such as *Lobotomia*, showing a surgeon's big nose grubbing for mental illnesses in a cleft head, seem to illustrate the articles.

Seen the other way around, the drawings indicate the senses in which the plurality of artists' writings can be read. Against the background of the above citation ("Joyce explained to me"), the drawings articulating a clear beginning and end of the artists' text recall the cyclical structure of *Finnegans Wake*: a restriction is imposed on *The Inadequate*'s eclectic and open work, a design circumscribing the chaos. *Finnegans Wake*'s structure does not impart sense, promulgating triumph. Decomposing words, leveling registers, suppressing reference points, it decries sense and the ability of language to catch "it." It is this understanding of sense *The Inadequate* underscores.

Fiction paradoxically formulates, speculatively strives for what cannot be named, or for the impossibility to name; it constitutes a problem for a metafictional comprehension. Since in order for metafiction to "work" a clear separation is needed between representation and frame. This clear demarcation is frustrated in *The Inadequate*. The controlling mechanism of the frame enables the distinction between one tale and another, between frame and the breaking of it, from a metafictional point of view. It ensures the oppositional tension central to metafiction.[208] This division unobserved, makes the text "unreadable," according to Robert Scholes, reaching the limits of metafiction.[209]

One of the works Scholes judges unreadable is Andy Warhol's *a: a novel* (1968). And Scholes is not the only one to denounce it as illegible. A transcription of a 24-hour taped conversation, its 415 unedited pages include every "uhm" and "oh," resulting in a stream of language that is

spoken and explicitly not written in the form of a conversation. Taken from ordinary small talk, *a: a novel* is a fragment of life, including accidental happenings and boring repetitions. This fragment is not a part designating a whole, but a fractured shard, which refuses to dissimulate its edges and shows its cuts. Says Liz Kotz discussing Warhol's work, the novel is fully legible within the "field we still call visual art" due to its procedures, like the selection of ready-made material or the use of indexical procedures of inscription. Kotz clearly upholds the distinction between the literary field and the field of visual art, underlining that "such procedures [Warhol's in *a: a novel*] remain almost completely unintelligible and unreadable within the field of literature or writing".[210] She continues to describe the latter as "conservative" and "routinely recycling aesthetic interventions, even the clichés of twentieth-century literary modernism." Kotz, however, does not take into account the experimental artists' magazines assembling art named conceptual including poetry of the period, such as *0 to 9* (1967–1969)—a point to which the final chapter returns. Her remark makes clear that the dual relation to language at the time as both matter and not matter continues to argue from a disciplinary rigorous understanding of Conceptual Art: what happens in Warhol's writing is understood against the background of *either* literature *or* prevalent practices and conceptions of art in a visual field. Unlike contemporary writing, visual artists' work, the texts of the 1960s seem to have been developed in secluded and untainted realms.

In relation to García's *The Inadequate* it is important to note that its aim is not necessarily illegibility. It underscores the possible unreadability or lack of unified sense. Fragmentation is used as a strategy for the effect to assert itself. Pointing at itself, fragmentation connotes unreadability. Unreadability does not mean fiction, however. Returning to the question of how fiction functions in the artists' text, it can be noted that it is not predicated on a Barthesian conception of textuality severed from the real. Fiction takes on form in the artists' writing generating unexpected connections: between image and text, between writings that are dispersed inside the artists' text. Fiction is materialized in *The Inadequate* taking the consequences of its employment of Joyce, Walser, Basaglia, and Tasso as referents, instead of references: that is, it utilizes them as referents in a non-hierarchical manner so that the text is written "with" them, acknowledging that language *materially writes*. Simultaneously demonstrating that relationships can be dreamed (flour/flower), imagined (Walser's house and its visitor), falsely relied upon and believed (Schmitz/Svevo), the artists' text brackets its materialization, if paradoxically. Fiction is made operative in the often abrupt and surprising, unpredictable connections inaugurated in *The Inadequate*, *trait d'unions* challenged time and again not only through the coalescence of articles



defining the artists' writing, but also due to the reader handling the book. The artists' text's understanding of fiction as concerning and concerned with matter, as initiated by the author and at the same time by cultural, social, and technical situations, clearly opposes Genette's (and Plato's) definition of fiction as simulation. Or rather, *The Inadequate* takes the consequences of fiction as simulation treating the referents as *revenants*, as Bourriaud formulates not fiction, but the fictional. The past is a collection of specters, ghosts returning in a plurality of often delirious forms, according to Bourriaud. Dealing with them, art reshapes what it encounters, he explains. The argument seems to follow Warburg's conception of the image unveiling a culture's spiritual tensions. For Bourriaud the procedure of integrating the real defines the fictional, as opposed to the fictive, the latter then being contrasted with reality. However, while Warburg saw the image as a trace and an organ of social memory, it being intricately linked with the human subject who defines herself in the face of the image (an the interval it hides), Bourriaud continues to take his distance from life understanding fiction precisely as "the current form of the modernist claim of autonomy." And, he adds, fiction represents "the will to not depend on a social context and, as a consequence, the power (among other things) to generate forms in a constructed space and time".[211]

In *The Inadequate* fiction is grounded in and actively reflects (on) the social, conversely. The avalanche of voices in which the liaisons through fiction results is traversed not only by the material (the book, the referents) and the technical (textual strategies, the binding), but by the social. This is where the agency of fiction can be found. Unable to reduce the artists' text to a single instance or individual, due to what I termed the encounters, the social construction is redefined in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari called an assemblage of enunciation, it not speaking "of" things, but speaking "*on the same level as* states of things and states of content" [emphasis in original].[212] The fragment is fractured from within in this manner. Or as Deleuze and Guattari once again formulated it studying Kafka's work as a form of minor literature: "The most individual enunciation is a particular case of collective enunciation."[213]

"To be a sort of stranger within his [Kafka's] own language"—the description suits the artists' text as well, and García's *The Inadequate* especially.[214] I am not the first to approach artists' writing inferring fiction as a minor form of writing.[215] The Inadequate invents and addresses a community within the given discourse of art taking a radical stance with respect to the institution of art. Or as García notes: "Radical psychiatry, radical politics, radical art: rage against the institution. But also… an uncompromising idea of truth" (MM1, 14; d14); and "the truth

about art might sound like: *radical artists profoundly mistrust the ideology of art*" [emphasis in original] (MM1, 19; d19). The multiplicity of voices of which this community is composed is its quasi-evident outcome, the conspicuous condition for its radicality.

## Radicality, by Way of Conclusion

A recurring issue pertains to the radicality of the artists' writing: what does it enhance? This is a question lingering in the background of current research. Radical, but in relation to what? Voiced within this same institution of art it denounces, one could argue the radicality of García's writing is attenuated. From a metafictional perspective, a radical move means a break with existing forms and traditions. A veritable *radical* artists' writing would turn a blind eye to every response and contribution to existing (literary) forms.[216] Or, to abstract the proposition, "true" metafiction responds to the continuance of literary forms that are no longer adequate vehicles for the mediation of (social) experience. Too extreme or radical experiments in fiction would not only be unable to meet a present (literary) situation, thus taking the chance of reaching the "limits of metafiction" and to remain misunderstood.[217] Radical as the artists' writing claims to be, if it really were that radical it would also all but "convert … the negative values of outworn literary conventions into the basis of a potentially constructive social criticism". It would effectuate a "rupture aiming at existential change" that possibly is "a-signifying" instead of constructive, in other words. If it is believed that it aims toward constructive changes, García's *The Inadequate* can rather be characterized as gentle.[219] Its agency grounded in fiction, the artists' writing seems to oppose such a reading; fiction read as inhering the real as the world *with which* it writes counters a comprehension of the artists' text as gentle. If one wants to understand *The Inadequate* as radical, this is divulged in its dynamics, its oscillation between different entities (art, politics, psychiatry) with no determinate relation that is constructive of the text.[220]

In *The Inadequate* fiction has one foot in the real, while it forges liaisons using systems that already exist, be they art historical or social, literary, political, or psychiatric. Traversing these different domains and analyzing them as an ensemble, what Guattari called a meta-modelization, is formed and formulated. An instrument is generated—never rigid, varying according to a given problem or case—enabling the decoding of systems from a diversity of domains of which the collective is composed.[221] This is what fiction is, negotiates, and thus enables. If fiction is in good health, as García suggests, it is because it reorganizes systems apparently experienced as constraints.