— ISABELLE LORING WALLACE —

Suppositions: The Art *of* Wim Delvoye

I.

In 2012, in conjunction with his solo exhibition at the Musée du Louvre, Wim Delvoye installed a large work of art beneath I.M. Pei's iconic glass pyramid. Visible from the courtyard and, once again, upon entry to the museum, the sculpture marked the Louvre's main entrance, while granting visitors a preview of the work in Delvoye's show, much of which used gothic architecture as a subject and medium. If representative, the object in question is not easily described, and for all the immediate impact of its installation, digestion takes time. One notices first its shape and scale, also its reflective material, exaggerated at the Louvre by the light that poured down on all sides through Pei's diamond-shaped windows. Conical and tapered at both ends, the work is eleven meters tall and has the contours of a missile or un-husked ear of corn, though the light might initially obscure this fact, as well as the debt this form owes to gothic architecture. Once the details of Delvoye's work come into focus, they facilitate an economic, if perplexing, description: two twisted gothic spires, as if sutured together at their broad ends to form a menacing, if arrested, torpedo. Indeed, a threat is implicit here, and, if Delvoye's sculpture served to anticipate other gothic works in the show — secular stained glass windows, lacey metal dump trucks with beds in the shape of a nave, a gothic tower curved in on itself in the shape of a nautilus — this comparatively more abstract sculpture, made of stainless steel and perforated by glassless arched windows, also served as a worrisome foil for Pei's glass and steel pyramid, which was likewise perceived by some as a threatening intervention in its own right.

Commissioned to accommodate the Louvre's daily onslaught of visitors, the pyramid complex, which opened to the public 1989, appeared futuristic to traditionalists and, at the same time, Pharonic — an interloper from a distant, pre-classical past and, simultaneously, a suite of alien objects, recently landed from an encroaching, post-classical future. Of course, in time, Pei's pyramids would find acceptance and even admiration, and, for some, the

< *Suppo (scale model 1:2),* 2010, laser-cut stainless steel, ø 75 × 620 cm, MONA, HOBART, 2011

logic of their installation was always apparent. For although Pei's pyramids are both pre- and post-classical, their symmetry, triangularity, and transparency established unexpected affinities — not only between Classicism and other, pre-classical cultures, but also between high Modernism and the staid classicism of the Louvre. Hence, we might say of Pei's pyramids that they created alliances that Delvoye's gothic sculpture would then solidify and exploit.

For although "gothic" is an unruly term with diverse connotations in a variety of fields — a fact to which I'll return — it first emerged as a stylistic concept in conjunction with architecture and was used as a pejorative in an effort to mark something off and differentiate it from the classical art of the Renaissance, itself a revival of classical antiquity. Entangled with the idea of various gothic tribes who were perceived as barbaric, by the seventeenth-century "gothic" had come to connote crudity and excess in a stylistic sense, especially when seen in contrast to classical art and its renewals. [1] The groundwork for using the term in this way was laid by Giorgio Vasari, whom many take to be the first art historian, thanks to the 1550 publication of his famous tome, *The Lives of the Artists*. Therein, he lamented the gradual decline of the arts following their early perfection in ancient Greece and Rome. The uncivilized Goths, for whom gothic art is eventually, erroneously named do not receive full credit for this decline, but Vasari mentions them often as contributing factors in his book's first preface before suggesting that they ultimately deliver a decisive blow to the progressive trajectory of Western art. In fact, it is in the course of describing the many chapters of this protracted descent, egged on, he says, by the fervency of Christianity, that Vasari makes mention of Delvoye's heroes — the "new architects, [who] after the manner of their barbarous nations, erected buildings in that style which we now call Gothic."[2] Fortunately, for Vasari, the Renaissance would return Western civilization to the "to the purer style of the antique"[3] and put the style of the late medieval period in its place as a debased, graceless form of expression.

There's much to say about art history's investment in the ideas of antagonism and renewal, but in the context of this essay there are two major points worth underscoring. First, if key to art history, the opposition between the Classical and the Gothic is also key to Delvoye's installation at the Louvre, and key even to the sculpture when seen in isolation. Second, within art history, Gothic is not the only style charged with possessing an anti-classical aesthetic; in time, the Gothic will come to share this status with the Baroque, which was also (and through its very name) demonized as an unwelcome departure from the ostensibly normative tendencies of the classical tradition. As we shall see, the Baroque is also an important aspect of Delvoye's recent work, including his theatrical installation at the Louvre.

II.

The history and etymology of the term "Baroque" is complex, but scholars agree that it derives from one or more words — the Portuguese word "barroco," the Spanish term "barrueco," and the Italian word "barocco" — that denote irregularity and excess, originally in the context of jewelry, as in the baroque or irregular pearl. Hence, when used subsequently, in conjunction with the visual arts, as it was by the Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin in his canonical text *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888), the point was to insist on its difference from the sober classicism of antiquity and its revivals. [4] Characterized by a sense of drama and energetic movement, the baroque style, which begins for Wölfflin with various late renaissance or mannerist tendencies, is associated with dynamism, fluidity, and exuberance. Accordingly, it replaced the circle with the oval, the vertical with the diagonal, and the cylinder with its more dramatic cousin, the spiral. With this in mind, let us return to Delvoye's installation at the Louvre.

At first, there is the simple fact of the opposition Delvoye's work stages between the Gothic and the Classical, and the pointed suggestion that the one serves as a threat to the other. Jagged-edged and possessed of a needle like nose at each end, Delvoye's work literalizes the notion not just of difference — an elongated, dramatic, and ornamental form in stark contrast to the Louvre 's classical structure and façade — but also the notion of risk and incipient violence, as if the Gothic's resurgence might again derail Western civilization, shattering its very structure into a pile of irrecuperable shards. And yet, Delvoye's sculpture isn't simply gothic, nor is its environment (the Louvre) simply classical. Indeed, even if we set aside the majority of the Louvre's history and concentrate on the mid seventeenth-century structure and façade one sees today, there is still the fact of Pei's pyramid, the glass canopy under which Delvoye's sculpture stands, poised like rocket before take-off.

Directly situated beneath the main pyramid's apex, Delvoye's sculpture was juxtaposed with Pei's modern addition as much as it was with the grounded classicism of the Louvre, ever-visible through Pei's glass canopy. As an effect of this juxtaposition, the Louvre's own internal differences began to recede in favor of various commonalities that bring Modernism and classicism together against an enemy deemed too emotional, ornamental, and excessive by contrast. Again, if the structure of the Louvre is rational and symmetrical with one side left open to signal its status as the structure's front, so is Pei's complementary installation, in which the view to the main pyramid is left open when considered from the west. Moreover, if the Louvre's exterior embodies a certain restraint and sobriety, with most of its details deriving from classical architecture and seeming to serve assorted architectural needs (pediments, columns, etc.), so do the forms and materials of Pei's pyramids, which lack superfluous details and seem as if an austere solution to a complex architectural problem.

Of course, the problem Pei faced was light — its capture and passage through architecture — and if he managed a technical solution to this problem late in the twentieth century following in the footsteps of other modern architects and their famous, stripped-down experiments with glass and load-bearing steel (Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson among others), it's also true that gothic architects engineered a solution of their own in the late medieval period, using vaulted ceilings and flying buttresses to open up the cathedral's walls and in that way maximize the effects of light via the power of glass. Thus, even as Delvoye's installation makes strange bedfellows of classicism and Modernism, uniting them against the perceived threat of the Gothic, it also undoes their opposition to the Gothic, establishing a series of unwelcome affinities between the Louvre and the primary style deployed in Delvoye's promiscuous object. After all, Delvoye's sculpture echoes the materials of Pei's pyramid and is a pyramid (or two) in its own right, albeit one that's distended and busy with detail. Made of steel and perforated by windows, Delvoye's sculpture is in many ways an uncanny reflection of Pei's central pyramid, which is also both sculpture and architecture *and* a steel armature perforated by windows. What's more, the form of Delvoye's symmetrical, self-mirroring object echoes the forms and overall structure of Pei's complex, not only because it includes an inverted pyramid that descends into the space of the Louvre but also because the reflecting pools on the main pyramid's three sides create a comparable illusion,

at times making this pyramid into a symmetrical diamond in its own right.

And the Baroque? If Gothic was the first villain of the Classical, then the Baroque is its more modern antagonist, a point in no way lost on Delvoye. In fact, a significant portion of his recent sculptures, especially those based on 3D scans of academic bronzes, makes use of exaggerated spirals, often at the expense of their nominal subjects. That some of these subjects are classical in nature — *Daphnis and Chloé,* libidinous satyrs, etc. — seems important, since it again suggests Delvoye's interest in comingling ideas thought to oppose one another in principle. Literalizing the notion that the Baroque distorts the Classical — twisting it in ways that pervert its judicious aesthetics — Delvoye's spiraling sculptures also align them, exposing affinities where we are trained to see difference. After all, some of the objects from which Deloye works — *Daphnis and Chloé* as executed by Auguste Moreau (1834-1917) and *Le Baiser du Satyre* as executed by Claude Michel Clodion (1738-1814), to name two — highlight the legendary interest of the ancients in excess, the very crime of which the Baroque and Gothic are accused. Further undermining received notions of the Classical are the Rorschach works, two of which also rely on Moreau and Clodion as source matter. Mirrored along their vertical axis, as if three-dimensional versions of ink-blot images used by psychologists to assess an individual's emotional response, these sculptures use the classical penchant for symmetry against the very ideas for which it traditionally stands: rationality, objectivity, and order.

As we have already begun to see, a similarly deconstructive approach underwrites Delvoye's installation at the Louvre, within which the Baroque is further implicated. For, if the exhibition at the Louvre opened with a sculpture that returned viewers to the complex forms of gothic architecture, establishing unexpected connections between it and the cumulative aesthetics of the Louvre, that same work also led viewers to a reconsideration of Baroque sculpture, one hallmark of which is the illusion of movement as facilitated by serpentine lines that extend upward to form the dynamic shape of a spiral. Evident in Delvoye's sculpture but conjoined with the (doubled) forms of gothic architecture, the spiral is nevertheless arrested in Delvoye's missile, perfectly still yet seeming to bore its way through space, incongruously, counterproductively, as if in two directions as once. In this way, the spiral's association with animate ascent — ever, always up! — is neutralized, just as, in another sense, the aspirational element of the Gothic architecture — its churches ever higher, and thus ever closer to God — is cancelled by the object's classicizing symmetry, which extends the work up and down in equal proportion.

The implications are manifold. First, and most simply, Delvoye's conjunction of spiral and steeple dramatizes the notion that the Baroque and the Gothic are aligned in their perceived opposition to the Classical. As Western intellectuals have repeatedly affirmed: together they constitute the other side of Western civilization's coin, the nadirs that have set off its classical and classicizing peaks. And yet, in another sense, it is the very prospect of these oppositions that Delvoye's sculpture targets: first, because it is neither gothic nor baroque but, as noted, a neutralized form of them both, and second, because, the unruly hybridity of Delvoye's object — at once classical, gothic, and baroque — calls to our attention the stylistic hybridity of the Louvre and even Pei's subsequent addition. On either side of the plinth on which Delvoye's sculpture was installed, are two staircases: one is angular with contours that echo the shape of the modern pyramid above, while the other, a spiral, is its fluid and organic counterpart. Thus, with Delvoye's help, viewers to the Louvre took as Delvoye's first lesson that Modernism was never purely modern, that classicism was never purely classical, that neither can be seen in stark opposition to either the Gothic or the Baroque. But to what end these propositions? And, in what way might this historiographic argument align with tyres, feces, and DNA, all of which are also at issue in Delvoye's heterogeneous oeuvre? Answering this question is my next task before returning, in conclusion, to Delvoye's double spire and its recent installation at a venue that is as futuristic as the Louvre is classical.

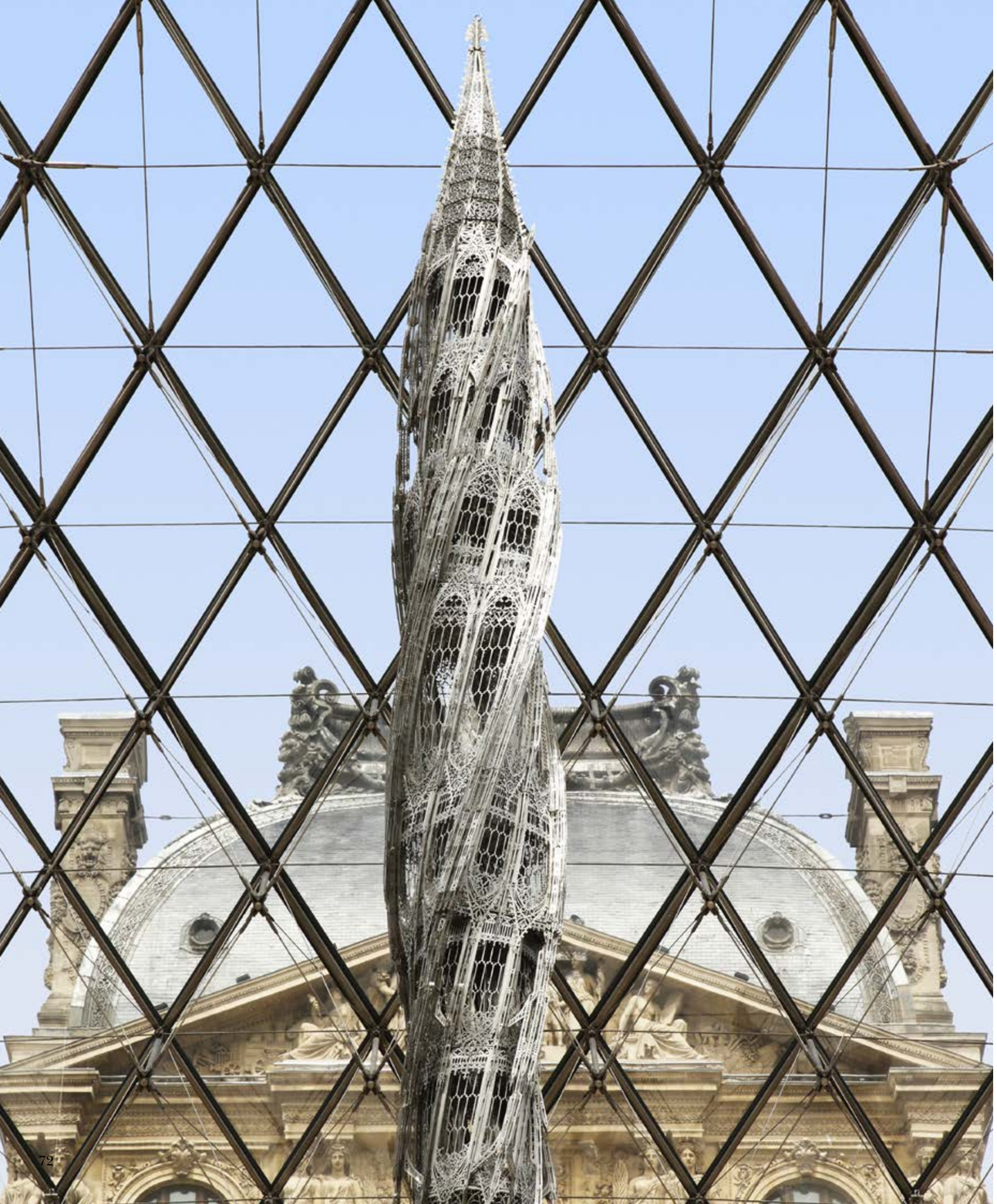
III.

There are few ideas as complex as "Gothic," which holds purchase within the fields of history, art history, and literature.[6] Much of the confusion derives from the fact that the term means different things and denotes different time-periods in literary and art-historical circles. Add to this the historical fact of the tribe known as "the Goths," and one has a real terminological mess. Let's first pry these facets of the Gothic apart before exploring how they combine to form a received notion of the term, now deployed, with authority, by Delvoye.

In the first instance, there are the Goths themselves, an ancient, East Germanic tribe, rumored to have come from modern-day Sweden. Migrating west and south, they made their way to modern-day Poland and East Germany over the course of the third and fourth centuries, eventually splitting into the Ostrogoths and the Visigoths, the latter of whom are famous for having achieved the sack of Rome in 410 AD. More than any other event, this invasion cemented the Goths' reputation as the enemy of Western civilization, making barbarism synonymous with their name. In addition, these historical events establish a context for many of the themes explored in gothic literature, which so often turns on the concepts of incivility, transgression, and invasion, all of which are also at issue in the art of Wim Delvoye. For, as we have already begun to see, Delvoye uses the forms of gothic architecture, but does so in the service of ideas that are more closely related to the concerns of gothic *literature*, which postdates gothic art by a good half century.

The pertinent facts about the latter are as follows: gothic art and architecture are a late Medieval phenomenon that originates in the middle of the twelfth century in France and lasts until the middle of the fifteenth century, by which time a classical revival is well under way. Called "modern" by contemporaries, this new style of art and architecture eventually earned the description "gothic" for two reasons: first, because it originally flourished in the North before spreading across the rest of Europe and, second, because various humanists found this label a useful as a way of distinguishing these more exuberant, grandiose forms from those of classical art, with which they wanted to align. In other words, just as the Visigoths had invaded Rome, so gothic art (at times erroneously linked to these early gothic tribes) was seen as a threat to legacy of classical antiquity.

There is one more chapter in all of this, and, here, the art-historical and literary come together in opposition to the rational, humanist impulses of modernity and the Enlightenment. The first self-consciously gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Novel* (1764), was written by an English man of letters, who also played a major role in the late eighteenth-century vogue for reviving gothic architecture. His home, Strawberry Hill, located in Twickenham South West of London, dates from the seventeenth century, but shortly after its purchase in 1749, Walpole remodeled the estate adding various gothic elements to both interior and exterior. Likewise, his novel con-



jures the late medieval period, and deploys gothic architecture as a meaningful backdrop. Originally published anonymously, the novel has a complex conceit, which Walpole explains in his book's preface. Claiming that the tale was first published in Italian in 1529, he observes that the story was actually composed several centuries earlier within a properly gothic or medieval context. The plot of the novel centers on Manfred, the gloomy Prince of Otranto, who has fallen tragically in love with his son's intended, Isabella. Predictably, this romance is ill-fated, and, in the course of the novel, characters are subject to extreme emotional states as well as a number of other, inexplicable forces. Indeed, we are prepared for the role that the supernatural will play in this tale from the beginning, since the novel opens with the son's death at the hands of a statue of the previous Prince of Otranto; mysteriously, its helmet comes loose and crushes Manfred's son.

Many gothic novels are set in the middle ages, wherein gothic architecture is a recurring feature. But, as literary scholars repeatedly attest, the gothic genre is resilient and elastic, enduring endless adaptations in written and filmic form. Thus, although initially set against medieval backdrops populated by degenerate counts and virtuous maidens, the Gothic soon came to encompass scientists, vampires, and aliens in urban, suburban, and extra-terrestrial locations. Taken together, they evidence the impressive adaptability of the genre and, by virtue of what does not change, its essence.

Originally serving as an antidote to the optimism of the Enlightenment, gothic literature is always a matter of doubt and anxiety, as well as the oppositions from which they stem. Reason versus emotion; man versus both monster and machine; the clear light of reason versus the ambiguities and depravities of emotion; the superstitions of the East versus the West's secularity; the uncivilized past versus the progressive, acculturated present: within the gothic novel these dichotomies are rendered temporarily uncertain, as is the society they undergird and maintain. Equally important to gothic fiction are the concepts of invasion and transgression, which typically inspire this uncertainty, as when Count Dracula the immortal, feudal figure from the East, arrives in London with the aim of feeding on and infecting his modern, mortal counterparts via a barbaric, blood-thirsty practice that confuses a number of additional distinctions: insemination and infection, life and death, heterosexuality and homosexuality, man and beast, self and other. Indeed, although the particulars vary, the gothic tale is often the tale of the Goths, at least as the West has preferred to tell it: an ill-intentioned invasion of an ancient, even primordial thing that hails from somewhere else (often the North or the East, but sometimes the protagonist's own unconscious or past), the effect of which is the contamination of one thing with its demonized opposite. How this relates to Delvoye may already be clear.

IV.

Suppo is the name of the sculpture Delvoye installed in the Louvre — a fact I have deliberately withheld in favor of more formal and historical concerns. *Suppo* is short for suppository, and, with that, we find ourselves in well-trod territory, at least for this particular artist. From small scale prints made by the impress of a lipsticked anus on hotel stationary to ceramic tiles installed on the floor decorated with arabesque turds, Delvoye's fascination with feces, defecation, and anality is well established and finds its most elaborate expression in his well known *Cloaca* series, a body of ten high-tech machines that eat and defecate on cue within the public space of the museum or gallery. There's a good deal to say about all these works and especially the latter, logo-bearing machines. Yet, in this context,

< p. 66-67, 70: *Suppo,* 2010, laser-cut stainless steel, ø 130 × 1100 cm, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, PARIS, 2012

the simplest point might be most apt: when considered in isolation and together as a larger body of work, these images and objects recall our strange fascination with shit and the processes by which it appears.

Shit and suppositories are clearly linked, but they are also fundamentally different. The question for us is this: how are they relevant to *Suppo* and all that's been said of this sculpture already? Let's start with shit and then move to its medicinal counterpart, the suppository. That shit is transgressive goes with out saying. That it inspires nervousness and anxiety is also beyond debate. That it comes from the past and makes an unwelcome incursion into the present is also apparent. Moreover, like the Goths and the protagonists of so many gothic novels, shit crosses borders, temporarily confusing inside and outside, self and other, subject and object. Hence the highly regulated business of shitting (which the *Cloaca* series takes to an absurd extreme) and the speedy elimination of feces, immediately disavowed on appearance. Admittedly, hygiene is an important factor in waste management, and there are plenty of practical reasons for separating man from an object of his own making, even if it was once housed inside him, within the confines of his own intestines. Even so, the agreed upon benefits of such practices do not suffice to explain our attitudes toward our bodies' own waste products, making this rich territory for numerous intellectuals, psychoanalysts, and artists, including, of course, Wim Delvoye, who has found the notion of border crossing of interest across a wide range of media and subject matter.

By virtue of its shape and title, *Suppo* is implicated in an anal discourse, but in ways that are notably different from shit. As is well known, a suppository is a delivery system for medicine, inserted into the rectum, unlike feces, which is routinely expelled from its confines. Hence, the border crossings of a suppository and the desired dissolution of its contents into the bloodstream are done in the name of good health and with the blessing of the individual whose borders it crosses. With this in mind, let's consider the significance of *Suppo's* title. Already described as hybrid, transgressive, and an agent of dissolution with respect to various stylistic categories, *Suppo*, by virtue of its title, *reframes the very ideas of transgression and dissolution*, transforming these concepts — and thus its own operations — into a positive force, at once desirable and beneficial. Accordingly, we must rethink the notion of threat in relation to Delvoye's sculpture, conceding that its title makes Pei's pyramid into an ass (as Delvoye has observed) that is apparently in need of relief. As we've already seen, the styles of Western art history and the many ideas for which they stand are provocatively commingled in *Suppo*, something that was especially highlighted during the course of its installation at the Louvre. What's driven home by the work's title is the fact that these perversions are conceived as a beneficent form of aid, administered toward positive ends.

There are important precedents for the idea of a healing and beneficent hybrid. Take the merciful figure of Christ, for example, who has also appeared in Delvoye's work with increasing frequency since 2006. At once mortal and immortal, man and God, the inhuman, hybrid figure of Christ is the archetypal border-crosser, violating lines that are both real (for believers) and conceptual. Moving between the sacred and secular realms, assuming both human and divine form, Christ is by his own account both alpha and omega, a point Delvoye conceptualizes well in several of his Holy Family works, all of which can be described as a crucifix bent into the shape of a circle without end. Thus, while the hybridity of Dracula makes him monstrous (like Christ, the Vampire also drops out of time), the inhuman hybridity of Christ — the fact that he is, simultaneously, two irreconcilable things — is nothing less than the miraculous sign of God's love, whose blood Christians ingest in the ritualistic form of the Eucharist. In this way, Christ aligns not only with the gothic figure of Dracula (Christ's perverse reiteration) but also with Delvoye, who also believes in the redemptive, healing power of impurity, variously conceived.

Indeed, in the end, one must concede that there is a religious dimension to Delvoye's work — a fact the artist seems prepared to admit. Among his recent gothic works, many of which get their charge from combining the ornate aesthetic of gothic cathedrals with the modern forms of assorted utility vehicles (here, yet another kind of unexpected, impure hybrid), there are also a few small-scale gothic churches, as well as a stand-alone series of seven stained glass windows, one for each day of the week. Their imagery derives from x-rays of the body (ours and those of animals), with special attention paid to sex, shit, and the parts of the body they implicate. Certainly, from a Christian point of view, such imagery is irreverent and deliberately at odds with an implied religious context. But if one considers such topics from a secular perspective, it is possible to see among them a shared interest in the idea of transgression and contamination. After all, sex is an activity in which the body is invaded and transgressed, often to ecstatic effect. Likewise, defecation, is the activity that reminds us daily of the body's permeability, confusing, in the process, the distinction between inside and out.

V.

Included among Delvoye's recent works are several metal sculptures, painted so as to look like tyres that have been spliced, manipulated, and sutured back together again: *Dunlop Geomax 100/90-19 57M 540° 2X, Dunlop Geomax 100/90-19 57M 360° 3X,* among them. Like *Suppo's* stagnant double spiral, they are suggestive of movement and stasis simultaneously; for one could no sooner use these motorcycle tyres than one could locate the inside or outside of their interlocking loops. Like assorted works in the Holy Family series — *Möbius Corpus Outside, Möbius Corpus Inside, Möbius Dual Corpus Direct Current* — the Tyre works can all be described as Möbius strips, notable for having only one side, even as they appear to have two. In theory, a Möbius strip can be complex or fairly simple, as the variety of Delvoye's sculptures begins to demonstrate; what is consistent among them is the impossibility of conclusively distinguishing between their two sides, as the famous anecdote about the ant makes clear: if an ant were to crawl along the length of a Möbius strip, it would eventually return to its starting point having traversed its entire length on both "sides" but without ever crossing an edge. Thus, while other works by Delvoye revel in the theatrical crossing of boundaries, or call attention to the liminal zones that serve as boundaries (as with Delvoye's tattooed pig skins and anal prints on hotel stationary), the Tyre and Holy Family works use the concept of the Möbius to bear out the idea of the boundary as illusory — something we cling to despite the difficulty and, in these works, impossibility of maintaining these kinds of distinctions. That objects in the Tyre series also conjure the double helix — their spokes as if the rungs of its ladder — seems important, especially since the idea of the double helix is overtly referenced by the artist in two works that turn on the conventional image of the crucifixion. Made of patinated bronze, *Double Helix Crucifix* of 2006 and 2009 are, at 985 and 470 cm respectively, imposing works, populated by several representations of Jesus along its twisting, helical form. Neither religious nor indifferent to religious ideas, the *Double Helix Crucifix* sculptures may allow us clarify the role religious references play in Delvoye's work, be they the ecclesiastical forms of Gothic architecture, crucifixions in

the form of Möbius strips, or stained glass windows that make reference to shitting and sex.

Discovered in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick, the double-helix structure of DNA has numerous implications beyond the scope of this essay. As deployed by Delvoye in both versions of *Double Helix Crucifix*, it is, at the very least, a secular counterpoint to the image of Christ and attendant Christian beliefs about the origins of human life. Yet, it seems to me that the sculpture's juxtaposition of science and religion actually reveals a deeper commonality between these spheres that in turn suggests the relevance of the double helix motif to Delvoye's concerns more generally. We've said already that Delvoye is interested in border crossings and that Christ is emblematic of this idea within Christianity. We've also noted that in Delvoye's series of stand-alone stained glass windows, the artist turns away from religion to embrace secular, even profane activities that also entail the crossing of borders. Taken together, the basic idea seems to be this: Delvoye is sketching out the basis for a secular religion, one dedicated to impurity, hybridity, and fluidity. As his stained glass windows seem to suggest, affirming one's faith in the healing power of these ideas requires participation in acts that recall the body's porousness, while shamelessly calling attention to facets of our anatomy that open out onto the space of another. Needless to say, gothic architecture is an appropriate style for Delvoye's new-fangled church, both because the effect of light on porous walls confuses distinctions between inside and outside, and because subsequent critics saw in its excesses the kind of invasive "barbarism" that Delvoye seems to enjoy.

With this in mind, what seems most compelling about the double helix, aside from the fact that it carries weight as the locus of human identity, is the very fact of its structure, the irreducible doubleness it identifies as the essence of man. Indeed, if one takes the structure of DNA seriously — and after all, it is its structure that allows for the replication of genetic information — one comes to a startling realization: at his genetic essence, man is not thing or another, but the effect of two things that ceaselessly come together and fall apart, but without ever dissolving into discrete, autonomous entities. Thus, in Delvoye's materialist religion, Christ is neither irrelevant nor exalted, since the ideas for which he stands (non-identity, hybridity, irreducibility) are likewise central to man, and not only in the exceptional contexts of sexuality and digestion. For as the lateral expanse of both versions of the *Double Helix Crucifix* seems to suggest, the ideas of man and Christ are entangled, not merely in the Christian sense that Christ is God incarnate, but also through the fact of their shared irreducibility: neither this nor that, but always the dynamic play of two things at once.

VI.

Just three years after its exhibition at the Louvre, *Suppo* is again introducing audiences to the art of Wim Delvoye, and once again the experience of this work is enhanced by an extraordinary venue. The Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku opened to the public in 2012 and is the materialized vision of Zaha Hadid, a world-renown architect famous for buildings that are both visionary and controversial. Glamorous and extravagant, the building is comprised of sweeping organic forms and is wholly devoid of seams or right angles, and because the building is itself a kind of flower or exotic landscape, it lacks ornamentation of any kind. Instead, the smooth white roof curves to form a wall; the wall gradually extends to becomes the ground; the ground expands and becomes architecture in turn, as the building seeps into the earth and extends covertly beneath the green expanse of the lawn under one's feet. Inside, the building gleams like a jewel, white upon white, with thin strips of embedded electric light that read like airplane trails or comets, as if the whole building is in motion above, around, and beneath its visitors, who cannot help but feel plodding and Euclidian by contrast.

At the Louvre, *Suppo* served as a deconstructive element, highlighting various oppositions for the purpose of pointing to their instability. It established ideas to undermine them and drew lines of demarcation only to retrace them with the pencil's other end. The Heydar Aliyev Center is a different kind of building, and therein *Suppo* operates by other means, mirroring the elusiveness its context and the sense of movement it everywhere implies. For when housed within a structure that obscures doorways with walls shaped like a nautilus or breaking wave, *Suppo* ebbs too, only to return to one's contemplation altered in ways that are almost imperceptible: the spire becomes a minaret, the twisting spiral a form of vegetal abstraction and, simultaneously, a vortex in which its styles and many contradictory ideas are emulsified and, by the power of the building's dynamic design, suspended in a state of temporary resolution. Deeper within the Center's confines, the experience continues, past tyres and dump trucks, stained-glass windows and torqued crucifixions, and we, like ants, proceed, covering it all without ever encountering an edge.

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NOTES:

1. See, for example, François Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture* (Paris: De l'imprimerie de Lambert Roulland, 1675-8), preface.

2. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,* trans. Mrs. Jonathan Foster (London: George Bell & Sons, 1900), 24. It is important to note that although Vasari lays the groundwork for using "gothic" in a disparaging way, in this sentence he uses the term "tedeschi" (German) rather than "gothic": "Onde ne vennero a risorgere nuovi architetti, che delle loro barbare nazioni fecero il modo di quella maniera di edifizii, ch'oggi da noi son chiamati tedeschi."
See *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (Rome: Grandi Tascabili Economici, 1991), 105. However, in some English translations, the word "gothic" is seen as an appropriate translation, presumably because throughout the first preface Vasari mistakenly attributes the twelfth-century phenomenon of gothic art with assorted gothic tribes, all decried for their barbarism. Hence, it is a commonplace within art history to say that Vasari was the first to attach the idea of the "Goths" (i Gotti, p. 101) to this new, anti-classical style, thereby laying the groundwork for the use of "gothic" as a discrete style disparaged by classicists. On Vasari and the idea of the gothic, see Erwin Panofsky, "The First Page of Vasari's 'Libro': A Study on the Gothic Style in the Judgement of the Italian Renaissance" in *Meaning and the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 169-225.

3. Foster, 24.

4. See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque,* trans. Kathrin Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).

5. A key figure in this regard is Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who publishes an influential diatribe against Baroque art in 1755, but without ever using this term. See *Reflections on the Imitation of the Painting and Sculpture of the Ancient Greeks,* trans. Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987).

6. For a useful overview of this term with particular attention paid to its meaning in a literary context see, Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) and Richard Davenport-Hines, *Gothic: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* (New York: North Point Press, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 1-11.

7. On these topics and their relevance to Wim Delvoye's Cloaca series, see my own "Deep Shit: Thoughts on Wim Delvoye's Cloaca Project" in *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth*, Isabelle Loring Wallace and Jennie Hirsh, eds. (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011): 217-241.

Suppo & Holy Family, 2010
laser-cut stainless steel and nickeled bronze, variable dimensions
CHIESA SAN CRISTOFORO, LUCCA, 2013