

## LIVING IN THE FOLD (The Wall Works and Spatial Constructions of Dirk Rathke)

In the first instance the idea of the folding of space sounds something that might be derived from a science fiction movie. For living in the fold so to speak suggests the confines of determined if variable spatial configurations, that is to say immured within a fixed or allocated set of realities that forms a limited or given viewpoint. And in one sense this is in part true for whatever we perceive in the world is experienced from the viewpoint of the body that we inhabit and from the momentary location in space that we occupy at any given time. But from another viewpoint the fact that the body has the power of movement expands the potential into wider human perception, and it is this aspect that is abundantly evident in the wall works and constructed spatial reliefs of Dirk Rathke. These perceived potential viewpoints are what Deleuze may have alluded to when he wrote of "the pleats of matter" and of the nature of visual plastic inflections of cohesion that exist within the principle of the fold.<sup>i</sup> In putting aside for a moment the French writer's distinction between plastic materials, and the organic matter he also referred to, the painted steel wall reliefs of Rathke are nothing less than imaginative forms that represent creases and folds in space. The term fold is important since "to enfold" is to surround, encompass and envelop an autonomous within, and significance resides in the singularity of each metaphorical monad that is established by each pleat.<sup>ii</sup>

In the case of the experience of plastic material through the variable viewpoints of perception a doubling takes place, that which is a spatial outside is enfolded inside, which is to say the movement of the body elides the delimitation of the inside and outside. At the same time this eradicates what was formerly referred to in relation to sculpture as "negative space," which now due to the changing position of the perceiver becomes a dynamic optical and investigative experience. Hence the role of the body beyond mere entity, its variable viewpoints towards given disposed objects, becomes the necessary means to understanding the actual primacy of perception. As Merleau-Ponty makes clear "...not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement."<sup>iii</sup> Any consideration of Dirk Rathke's wall reliefs or objects has to be seen in this context, and they continue a visual investigation of the curvilinear that has been present in his work for the last twenty years.<sup>iv</sup> But whereas the earlier work placed its emphasis on the relations between wall, space, and object, this more recent work focuses on the inside and outside of the fold that incorporates the dynamic autonomy of the space within. It marks the unique singularity of each object by the individual characteristic that is attributed to each fold as enacted. Further the asymmetry of forms and their Tatlin-Malevich like installation in this instance, challenges the viewer to engage with the works from a variety of spatial-temporal viewpoints.<sup>v</sup>

The artist Rathke's wall reliefs raise further considerations specifically through their evident use of transitional edges/creases and assertive colours, since at the rim of each angular fold different tonal modulations subtly alter the perceiving experience. As we shift from one perceptual moment to another our sensory registration alters the visual relationship to the

spatial form in its state of folding, and theoretically at least, the optical “unfolding” as our eyes penetrate and review the shifting folds of mobile perceptual experience. It is in fact the fundamental grounds for sensory interaction, in that it generates the essence of phenomenological experience simultaneously as both an experiential effect and emotive affect, “...in that it is the perceptual experience which gives us the passage from one moment to the next and thus realizes the unity of time. In this sense all consciousness is perceptual, even the consciousness of ourselves.”<sup>vi</sup> The artist Rathke is well aware of this, and the use of bright colours to articulate outer appearance of his constructive forms further intimates the minimalist idea of a painted skin. A skin therefore that ties and heightens the perceptual experience to the embodied reality of the viewer perceiving. The artist’s use of intended asymmetry is distinct, and though some have cited sources like Elsworth Kelly and other asymmetrical practitioners, they have in other respects missed the point. The reason being, unlike Kelly this artist is less pursuant of shape (as distinct from form), and rather engaged with a personal synthesis of bringing together two conflicting traditions, constructivism (compositional) and minimalism (systemic objects). The works may be seen therefore as extended type of metaphorical folding (“faltung”), namely a new unity between the relational and the autonomous object. Small in scale these delightful wall objects/reliefs pose serious formal questions, exposing as they do a much larger pregnant idea from their modest presence...a literal embodiment perhaps of the idea that is *living in the fold*.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “The Pleats of Matter,” Chap. 1, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, London, Athlone Press, 1993, pp. 1-13 (Fr. *Le Pli: Leibniz et le Baroque*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1988) “...a flexible or an elastic body still has cohering parts that form a fold, such that they are not separated into parts of parts but rather divided to infinity in smaller and smaller folds that always retain a certain cohesion.” p. 6

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid.* p. 6-7

<sup>iii</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston and London, Northwestern University Press, 1964 (pp. 159-190) p. 162

<sup>iv</sup> Dirk Koppelberg, “Dirk Rathke’s Curved Canvases,” *Dirk Rathke*, ex. cat., Galerie Markus Richter, Berlin, 2001, pp. 21-30

<sup>v</sup> The allusion to Tatlin-Malevich and the first such asymmetrical installation, in the *0-10* Futurist exhibition held at the Dobychna Art Bureau at Marsavo Pole (19 December, 1915-17 January, 1916), Petrograd. The exhibition initiated a *Suprematism* of geometric forms, including the famous Malevich “Black Square.”

<sup>vi</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception”, *ibid* p.13