



# René Fendt

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## E d i t e u r s

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Neuchâtel (*Walter Tschopp*)

Musée jurassien des arts, Moutier (*Patricia Nussbaum*)

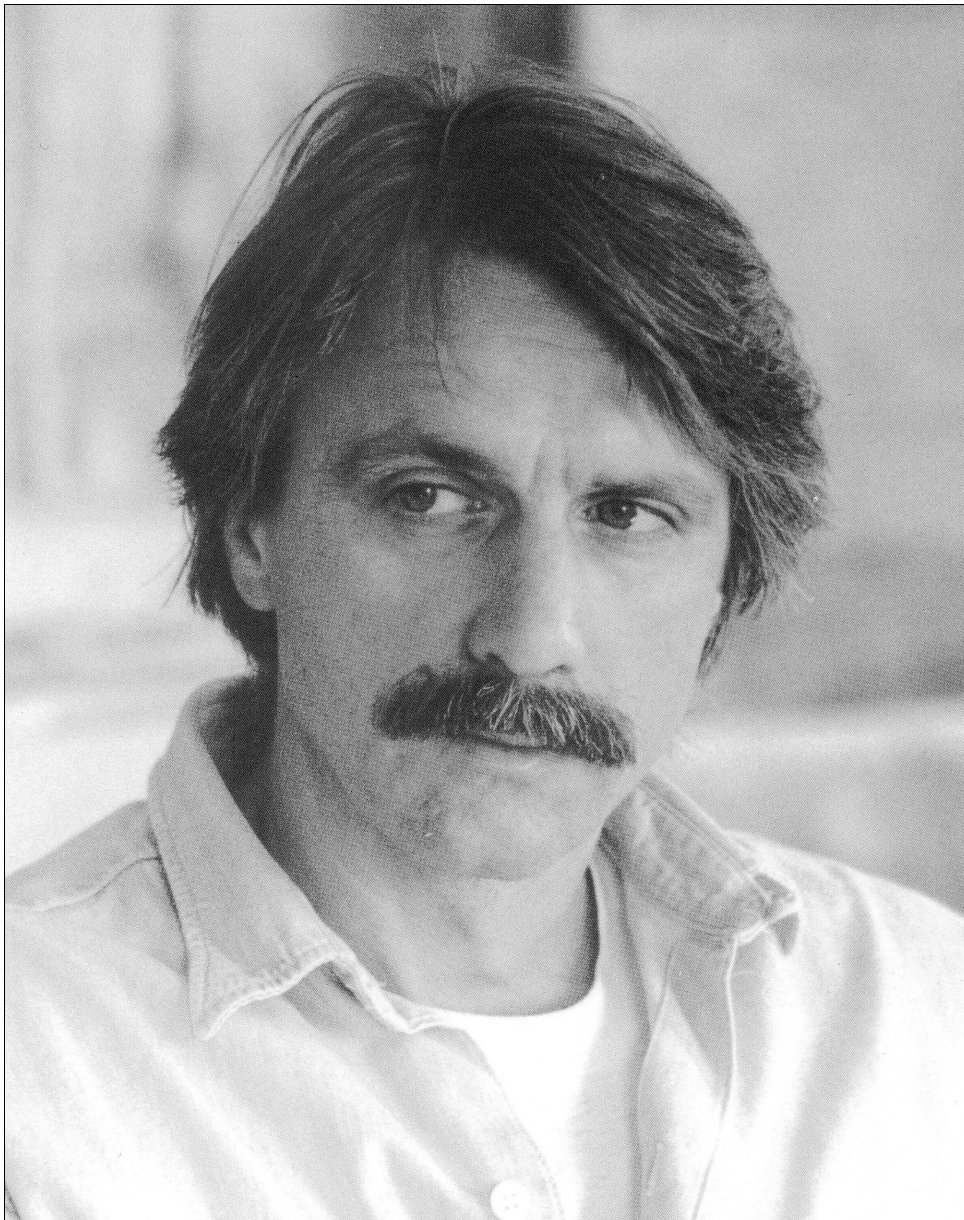
Musée d'art et d'histoire, Belfort (*Christophe Cousin*)

Galerie Carzaniga & Ueker, Bâle (*Arnaldo Carzaniga et Stephan Ueker*)

## C o n t r i b u t i o n s

Rose-Marie Comte, James Hugunin, Peter E. Schlageter,


Aurel Schmidt, Walter Tschopp



René Fendt (Swiss, 1948 - 95)

This essay was excerpted from a 1996 catalogue by Musée d'art et d'histoire, Neuchâtel and Galerie Carzaniga & Uker, Bâle for a traveling retrospective of Fendt's work. The show opened at the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Neuchâtel 23 June to 8 September 1995. I met Fendt while he was visiting Chicago in 1993 and when I was teaching photo history and theory at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I instantly was drawn to the man and his work. It was with great sorrow I learned of his fight with cancer and his eventual death. This essay is my homage to him.

James R. Hugunin



J A M E S H U G U N I N

**L'a.b.c. du faux cinématique  
de René Fendt**

When history is what it should be, it is an elaboration of cinema. It is not content to install itself in the successive facts... for this series of static images, each enclosed within itself, history substitutes the image of movement. <Vistas> which had been discontinuous appear to emerge one from another, each prolonging the other without interruption. Reality, which for one moment seemed an infinity of crystallized facts, frozen in position, liquifies, springs forth, and flows. The true historical reality is not the datum, the fact, the thing, but the evolution formed when these materials melt and fluidify. History moves;

José Ortega Y Gasset

René Fendt is an Englobant, an Encompasser, a «filmmaker» using ink, pigment, even cement who brings things together in a delimited pictorial arena pregnant with possibility. Michelangelo Antonioni's compositions, are according to Fendt, a decisive influence on his work.<sup>1</sup> John Russel Taylor's observation of Antonioni's films that, «... the whole scene [is] graphically indicated by compositions and camera-movements which appear perfectly uncalculated, even unthinking, and yet prove on closer examination to have as well a precise quasi-symbolic significance»,<sup>2</sup> is echoed in Fendt's own dictum that, «To be imprecise will lead to a more precise definition of things.»<sup>3</sup> The basic scenarios Fendt utilizes in his compositions – image-material already circulating as images – may be seen to follow a basic «Antonioni pattern»: «An<sup>x</sup> empty<sup>y</sup> lot<sup>z</sup>. She<sup>k</sup> walks away<sup>n</sup>» which can generate, by filling in the variables, a myriad of possible scenarios for Fendt:<sup>4</sup>

- x Two or three of. An enclosure of. A maze of.
- y Empty. As far as the eye can see.  
Blocked by a wire-mesh fence.
- z City. Parking lot. Landscape. Interior.
- k He. Both he and she.
- n Remains there. Starts to leave.<sup>5</sup>

But Fendt does more than appropriate such Antonionian scenarios; he transgresses the conventional filmic definition such scenes would be shot in. Like American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage's paean to independent cinema – «O transparent hallucination, super-imposition of image, mirage of movement... you obstruct the light, muddy the pure white-beaded screen... with your shuffling patterns»<sup>6</sup> – Fendt's painterly *faux cinématique* is formed by what he calls «kneading the footage», i.e., manipulating his image-material.<sup>7</sup> The phrase is a provocative oxymoronic juxtaposition bespeaking Fendt's blurring of media distinctions (normally one «kneads» paint and clay, but cuts film) and his cinema-like montaging of disparate visual fragments within and between individual frames.

Fendt's *physical kneading of footage* (most conspicuous in his sculpture) sensuously translates his conceptual need of *knowledge*. His artworks are models for working out an epistemological inquiry that seeks an elusive truth only found in wobbling on the razor's edge between the supposed *either/or* antinomies of Being/Becoming, Precision/Imprecision, Observed/Observer (embodied in the differences between Antonioni's and Brakhage's style of filmmaking). This zone of the in-between, the realm ruled by *both/and* logic, emerges in two ways: a) as a multi-layered «movement-image» through Fendt's hand-rendered simulations of «montage», «dissolves», and «wipes» within individual *photogrammes*; and, b) via the painterly suggestion of juxtaposed multiple frames that constitute of a *plan*. Although French for a cinematic «shot», *plan* may also be translated as «plane», a semantic ambiguity analogous to the ambiguity established between depth and flat surface as figured in Fendt's compositions.

Fendt's self-confessed metaphysical «wobbling» indicates a *va-et-vient* (a to-and-fro) motion of thinking that seeks a profounder truth *within* relationships and between opposing metaphysical conceptions. This thinking is perceptually embodied in Fendt's paintings, drawings, and sculpture via a *faux cinématique* employing juxtaposition, reflection, overlay, transparency, and the suggestion of movement. These complex productions are embodied in two, mutually-interactive levels: a) concretely as a *real object* consisting of «indubitable» pigment on an «indubitable» surface existing within the firm, stub-your-toe Cartesian world where Descartes's clear and distinct ideas reign (a tangibility that becomes even more important in Fendt's sculptures); and, b) as an *image* hovering between the afore mentioned physicality signified by the «real» world scenes and a perceptual condition of undecidability and Bergsonian intuitive fluidity given to those objects by Fendt's *faux cinématique*.

Fendt's artwork asks us to adopt a «double-seeing» spectatorship in order to form an intermediate «movement-image»<sup>8</sup> out of the superimposition wrought upon his «footage». Fendt accomplishes this by taking fragments of our everyday image-glut (ubiquitous imagery we can identify even if only barely suggested by an economy of line and color) as a point of reference and situating them pictorially against another scene, producing a complex overlay that simultaneously establishes the emotional qualities of fluid, painterly gesture and the intellectual firmness of a structured pattern.

In spending time observing Fendt's *photogrammes* one becomes aware of a movement that is distinct from space covered; movement here is effected as an *act of covering*, resulting in a «movement-image», rather than as a linear sequence of immobile sections à la Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies. Discussing Fendt's work in «The Enigma of Movement», Basel critic, Tadeus Pfeifer, makes the point that, «Fendt's images *mirror* movement, the large format challenging one to complete the movement; they allow glimpses from one situation to another,

reveal possibilities, ... [and] make diverse proposals, which the viewer, who is a «reader» of the pictures, may use and complement.»<sup>9</sup>

Fendt's artworks, in pictorial terms, asks us to see beyond our propensity to rely upon an *either/or* form of logic. His remedy is homeopathic: aesthetically sustained (even increased) is the juxtaposition/overlaying of scenes. This creates, on the one hand, greater imprecision – due to this his work may, at first, seem visually confusing – but with sustained viewing definite patterns and «emergent properties» arise as the viewer, collapsing the absolute distinction between Beholder and Beheld, co-produces an image *in potentia* in the tension Fendt sets-up inside his photogrammes. Thus, to pictorially understand Fendt's imagery, one must practice a visual dynamic analogous to the intellectual dynamic of the «hermeneutic circle», a *va-et-vient* between wholes and parts that results in a complex – albeit visually unstable – «totalization» encompassing both «inner» and «outer» worlds. The result is a visual confirmation of Fendt's *both/and* thinking as the production of a *precise-indecision*, a «wobbling» conception of the truth-of-things that flickers between wholes and parts, between clear and indistinct ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> From a phone conversation with the artist, June 1993.

<sup>2</sup> John Russell Taylor, *Cinema Eye, Cinema Ear* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964): 66-67.

<sup>3</sup> Cited from a letter from Fendt to this writer, June 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Eco, «Make Your Own Movie», in *Misreadings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1993): 145. Umberto Eco here creates a humorous parody of Antonioni, but from the postmodernist perspective of pastiche, Eco's schemata takes on, as Eco predicts, an unblushing «impassive and assertive gravity» (*ibid.*, 5).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Stan Brakhage, «The Camera Eye – My Eye», in *The New American Cinema*, Gregory Battcock, ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1967): 213.

<sup>7</sup> Cited from a letter from Fendt to this writer, June 1993.

<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term from Gilles Deleuze who uses it in his book *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Tadeus Pfeifer, «The Enigma of Movement» in *René Fendt* (Basel: Editions Galerie Carzaniga & Ueker AG, 1991): 26.

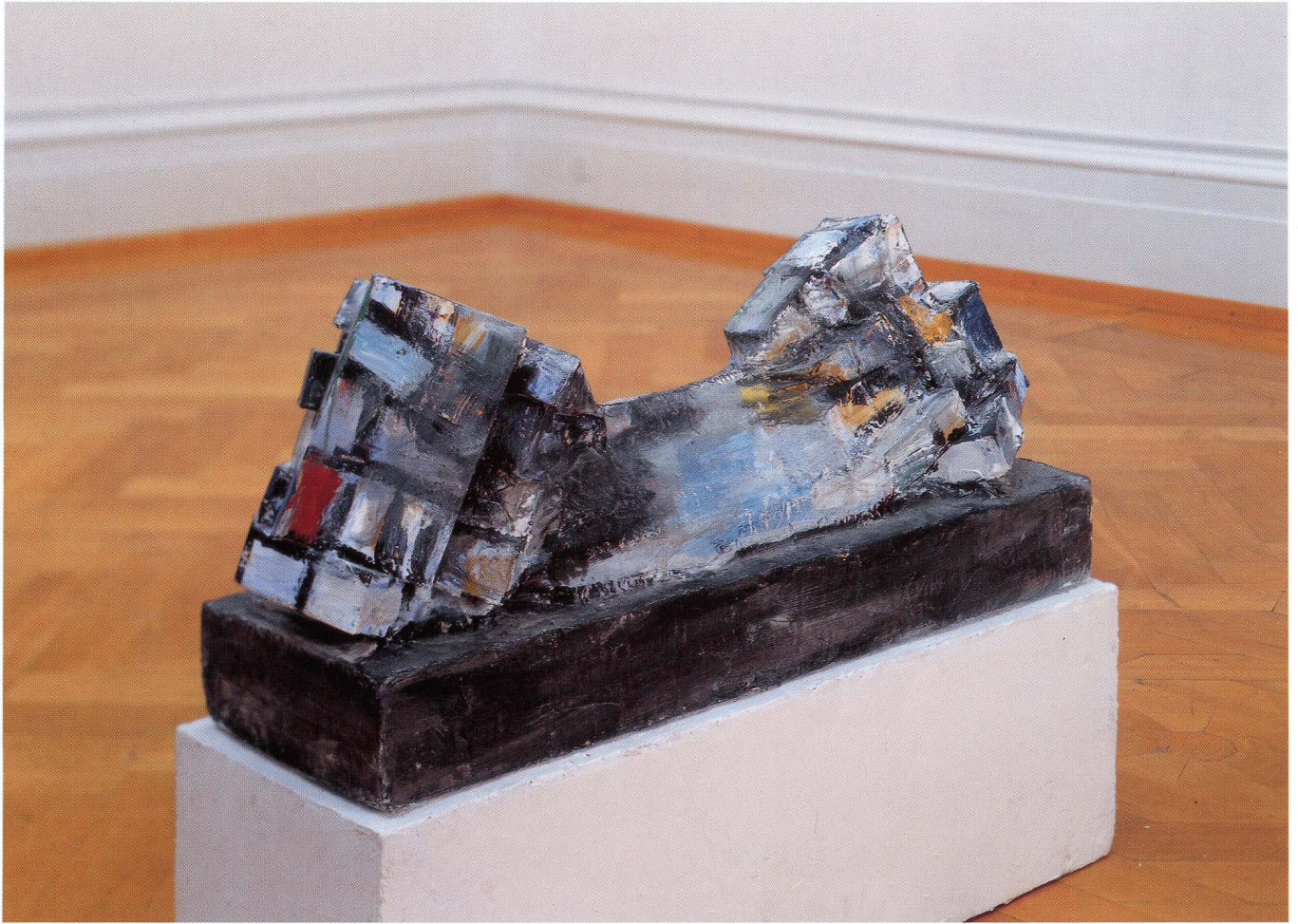


Image - Material, 1994; acrylique sur papier; 87 x 122 cm; Succession de l'artiste



Bildmaterial (Footage), 1991-92; acrylique sur carton et ciment synthétique; 49 x 48 x 40 cm; Collection Fendt







Bildmaterial No 3, 1992; acrylique sur papier, bois et ciment synthétique; 54 x 37 x 50 cm; Succession de l'artiste

