

Morandi with Heidegger
by John Chilver

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By Lamberto Vitali's reckoning Giorgio Morandi made 1376 paintings between 1910 and 1964. Of these approximately 65% – just under 900 paintings – were still-lives, with the remainder shared between flower pictures, a handful of early portraits, and what he categorised as landscapes. As will become apparent, landscape or the title 'paesaggio' in Morandi's oeuvre does not have to imply the rustic or pastoral but rather signifies the outside of the domestic interior, the polar opposite of the contained and controllable domain of the still-lives. The disparity sustained in Morandi's paintings between within and without, between private and public spheres, will be a recurrent concern of this paper and the hinge on which its investigations turn.

For the researcher it soon becomes clear that there's something odd about Morandi studies: they do not exist. There is no discourse of sustained critical reception. That is perhaps not surprising given Morandi's problematic status for all developmental understandings of twentieth-century art; Morandi simply does not fall into line with any standardising periodicity of modernism, and this awkwardness for art historians has ill served his reception. Morandi commentary is generally content to celebrate his tonal subtleties and to invoke a poetics. The pre-eminent contemporary painter to owe a direct debt to Morandi is of course Luc Tuymans, yet his acknowledgement of that debt takes the form of hysterical disavowal when, in a rush to distance himself, Tuymans dismisses Morandi as "bullshit poetry." This paper indeed presumes that Tuymans is wrong, but his provocation remains arguably the highpoint of recent Morandi criticism. The remark fingers the vacuity of so much of the commentary. Tuymans, however, is wrong not so much about the bullshit, as about the poetry: Morandi's paintings are *not* poetry. They are precise modes of pictorial thought; they do not invoke a poetics, rather they are operative. The motivation for this essay, then, has been impatience with the versions of the eulogists as well as the nay-sayers. Both fail to think what the paintings *do*. The paper proposes theoretical resources through which a more adequate reception is made viable – in particular, an account of the paintings refracted through readings of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. These will offer clues for describing what is singular in the still-lives and accounting for the disparity between the still-lives and the landscapes. The claim for this disparity – an *explanandum* which passes without mention in existing commentary – is central to my discussion. I argue that the comprehensive separation – in all senses – of still-lives from landscapes demands explanation, but is not explicable in terms of real or experiential differences between landscapes and still-life set-ups. In addressing these questions I aim to return the paintings to living debates instead of a pantheon of sensibility, which would be bullshit. Accounting for the paintings as operations of thought will not be a work of gilded praise: it will entail dis- and un-covering vital faultlines and tensions in the oeuvre.

Before getting to Morandi and Heidegger, I propose a contrast. Chardin we might say modernises the still-life genre in the eighteenth century by ridding it of apologies for itself, the usual apology until then being the *vanitas*. In the painting that's said to be his last, *A Glass of Water and a Coffee Pot*, circa 1760, Chardin tries to hold in balance the tendency of the still-life towards a kind of monumentality through duration, on the one hand, with the sense of a temporal-spatial slice of life, on the other. The effect of the

painting depends on a cognitive punchline: the recognition that the glass and the coffee pot share a common topology, both being segmented cones with one as inversion of the other. This requirement of a recognition of comparative geometries tends to abstract away the embeddedness within a lifeworld that the image also wants to indicate. A remarkably similar cognitive game is played in Haim Steinbach's 1985 shelf-work *Related and Different*. Although the spirit of semiotic horseplay found here is worlds away from the bourgeois sobriety of Chardin, nonetheless Steinbach's comparison of the wedge form of the sneakers with the slope composed by a row of candlesticks is akin to *A Glass of Water and a Coffee Pot* in both its method of comparison and its syntagmatic left-to-right linearity that is, in both works, overdetermined by the horizontality of the shelf.

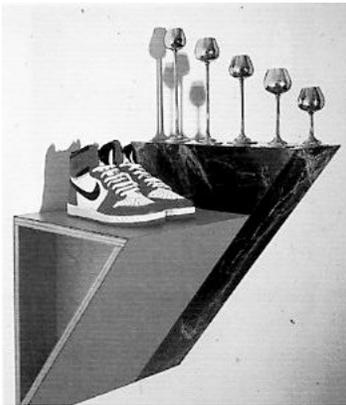


Fig.1 Haim Steinbach *Related and Different*, 1985

What matters for us is that these pieces function very differently to Morandi's still-life works. Certainly there are topological comparisons aplenty in the latter, usually in the mode of geometrical types and their variations: varieties of cylindrical forms, cones, rectilinear boxes and games of contrast between these types. But what is at stake in Morandi is not a linear, left-to-right movement of comparison, but a complex assertion of a dense volumetric multiplicity in which a cluster of objects are apprehended as 'standing together' upon a plane. And that 'standing together' entails the reciprocal address of one thing to another, as well as a sense that the cluster *en masse* addresses the viewer. Given the volumetric complexity of these clusters of things, and given Morandi's insistence on calibrating the height of the pictorial eye-level in the paintings in ways that partially reveal the top plane of the objects, it is impossible to privilege a horizontal and/or left-to-right scanning of the paintings: the eye is constantly made to loop around, move on diagonals, scan up and down and arrest its movements to pause at areas where spaces within clusters are obstructed from sight but can be inferred from what's visible. At such moments the eye in effect has to imagine a 'ground plan,' a point that we will revisit below.

Siri Hustvedt has observed that Morandi's pictures invite the vocabulary of relative location, words we call prepositions.¹ The relationships of things within the clusters chime with these words: beside, behind, between, beyond, below, in front, opposite, above, around. What's important then is that this multiplying relationality undercuts the independence of individual objects in the paintings, removing them further from the orbit of Chardin/Steinbach. In their works that I've cited although objects are presented in stark comparisons with other objects, and although they are phrased in left-to-right, frieze-like sequences or pairings, nonetheless, the sense is that each thing is autonomous and that its affective role is separate from and prior to its relation of comparison. These discriminations are worth pursuing because they allow for a more

nuanced description of Morandi's precise singularity. In Morandi's paintings the status of things does not precede or trump the status of relations among things. The paintings operate by reversing the hierarchy such that: [1] things only appear at all in, and by virtue of, relations, and [2] spatial volumes between and around things acquire a palpable resistance, as if posed as relations-becoming-things. *In these paintings relations (of placement and displacement) are prior to things*; that is what sets them apart and keeps them contemporary. And it is exactly this relational complexity that allows Morandi to create nearly a thousand still-life images in his career, the relational intensity being what permits infinite variety within narrow constraints. Given the number of paintings, the degree and quality of repetition in Morandi is remarkably circumscribed. The longest series of variations on one still-life set up occurs in 1952 over the course of a dozen or so paintings (Vitali's catalogue numbers 822-837). At the start of the sequence Morandi is pre-occupied with adjustments of viewing distance. After the first four paintings the viewing distance remains fairly constant. I propose to consider this sequence in relation to Heidegger's notion of de-severance. In a section of *Being and Time* titled 'The Spatiality of Being-in-the-World,' Heidegger writes:

Dasein is in the world in the sense that it deals with entities encountered within-the-world, and does so concernfully and with familiarity. So if spatiality belongs to it in any way, that is possible only because of this Being-in. But its spatiality shows the characters of *de-severance* and *directionality* [*Ent-fernung* und *Ausrichtung*].²

Already the resonances with Morandi's still-life pictures are hard to avoid here. Being-in suggests a condition of being always-already thrown into relationships with one's surroundings. Via concernful dealings and familiarities, these relationships entail anticipations. Heideggerian Being-in finds its parallel in the still-lives in the stress on heightened relationality that we've considered above. It is no less important in the still-lives that the things that compose the object-clusters are everyday domestic implements and receptacles: precisely objects of familiarity and 'concern' in Heidegger's sense of habitual purposeful undertakings. Following on from the above citation, Heidegger develops the key term *deseverance*:

"De-severing" amounts to making the farness vanish – that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bringing it close. Dasein is essentially *deseverant*: it lets any entity be encountered close-by as the entity which it is. *Deseverance* discovers remoteness.... Only to the extent that entities are revealed for Dasein in their *deseveredness* [*Entferntheit*], do 'remotenesses' [*Entfernungen*] and distances with regard to other things become accessible in entities within-the-world themselves. Two points are just as little *desevered* from one another as two Things, for neither of these types of entity has the kind of Being which would make it capable of *desevering*. They merely have a measurable distance between them, which we can come across in our *desevering*.³

In order to apprehend things at all we have to permit them to appear; we have to distinguish them from their background field, and we have to attend to the spaces that they occupy and displace, which by the same measure, individuates things and permits their separation from other things to appear. *Deseverance* is then a primordial spacing and individuating of things within a field of Being-in. Heidegger goes to some lengths to

reinforce the point that deseverance is not a matter of orientating oneself towards things as if pre-disposed in spatial grid or any other originary dimensionality:

As Dasein goes along its ways, it does not measure off a stretch of space as a corporeal Thing which is present-at-hand; it does not 'devour the kilometers'; bringing-close or deseverance is a kind of concerned Being towards what is brought close and desevered. A pathway which is long 'Objectively' can be much shorter than one which is 'Objectively' shorter still but which is perhaps 'hard going' and comes before us as interminably long.... The Objective distances of Things present-at-hand do not co-incide with the remoteness and closeness of what is ready-to-hand within-the-word.... Seeing and hearing are distance-senses not because they are far-reaching but because it is in them that Dasein as deseverant mainly dwells. When, for instance, a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distancially that they are 'sitting on his nose', they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall.⁴

Deseverance then is not simply a matter of bringing things up close – and is never only a matter of bringing things physically – i.e. quantitatively – close: it is significantly concerned equally with what we could call *spatial phrasing*. And, as Heidegger also underlines in the above passages ("Two points are just as little desevered from one another as two Things, for neither of these types of entity has the kind of Being which would make it capable of desevering"), spatial phrasing here does not imply the spacing of sets of objects that precede the spatiality within which they are encountered; instead, in *Being and Time* we are invited to think of modes of concerned engagement that encounter both spacings and the things that displace spacings equiprimordially: in other words, things and their spatiality emerge in the same genesis. Deseverance therefore is the experience of discovering lived and felt values in spatial undertakings. As the separating out and individuating of things in space, it is a condition of things appearing at all within a situation – in painting terms, of figures appearing on condition of being distinguishable from grounds. We should note here the powerful link with one recurrent motif in Morandi's paintings across five decades. Over and again Morandi comes back to an image of an object – usually a vase or other proximally cylindrical form – whose contours are darker to one side and brighter to the other. While the darker side shows a clear edge that establishes the division of figure and ground, on the lighter side there is a blurred fusion such that figure and ground merge. These anomalous still-lives – anomalous not only with respect to loosely 'realist' expectations, but also by comparison with the rest of the oeuvre – pass unremarked in commentary. What are we to make of them? – Especially when they are repeated and therefore deliberate, if rare, events in the body of work. The clue I believe is in the approximate cylindricality of these objects that partly merge with their background. Prolonged scrutiny of a surface that curves away laterally tends to draw attention to an effect of binocularity where one eye sees further around the surface than the other. For the painter, this heightens the awareness that the pictorial placement of the object's edge is arbitrary, and creates a visual anticipation that one is constantly about to see further around the curving surface. The anomalous pictures then indicate the stringency of Morandi's ethic of spatial encounter: where he does not apprehend a boundary of thing and background he refuses to mark such a boundary in the paint. In that very process the painting indicates the conscious encounter with the specific spacing of the human eyes that we call binocularity.



Fig. 2 Still-Life, 1952, 32 x 48 cm, private collection, Rome (Vitali #823)

The extended 1952 sequence is centred, both literally and conceptually, upon a gulf between a white cylindrical thing to the left and a white, roughly spherical thing to the right. These two anchor the sequence while, over the course of the paintings, things are shifted around them by substitutions, removals and additions. As always in Morandi, composition is everything and it means both the design of a canvas surface and the placement of objects across a table from front to back. A recurring device is alignment, which, of course, binds the first notion of composition to the second whilst indexing the relative placement of the viewer [Figs.2 & 5]. In Still-Life, 1952 (Vitali # 823) [Fig.2] alignment is used to make the cylinder merge with the profile of the bowl in front of it. If you force yourself to see the composite form as transparent, as if glass, then it has to be admitted that this is a conceivable object whose base is the base of the bowl and whose top – the top of the cylinder – stands well to the fore of the spherical-based bottle on the right. In other words, one effect of alignment here is to compel an awareness of how we estimate the relative position of the cylinder and in so doing mentally separate the bowl from the cylinder. There are then further alignments within the picture that establish three planes of dimensionality. The first alignment is the one already described: by joining a line running through the centre of the bases of the bowl and the cylinder we create a vector perpendicular to the picture plane that indicates the depth of the picture space and therefore the transversal plane identified with a movement from front to back across the table top. A second alignment conjoins the centre of the base of the cylinder with that of the bottle on the right, forming a line along the lateral plane identifiable with the frontal edge of the table. A third alignment is that of the centre axis of the bottle stem in parallel with the axis of the cylinder, marking the vertical plane. What is remarkable is the almost programmatic plotting of spatial co-ordinates by the relative placement of objects. Once the extraordinary grid-like logic becomes apparent it is then impossible to assume that the cylinder is placed anywhere other than precisely in alignment with the bottle. The cylinder is the keystone of the ensemble in that it is the point of intersection through which all three alignments travel. Although there is an intensely rational order in the pictorial logic of alignments, and though they do imply a Cartesian grid, what is no less vital is the construction of space from relations between things. This parallels a

Heideggerian discourse of spatiality where the lived traffic with things engenders the spatial domain as such: relations with and among things compose a dimensionality.

The picture's provocation is the hiding from view of the cylinder's base. This is so evidently a contrivance that it courts absurdity. The centre of that base, as we found, is the pivot of the whole ensemble, locus through which every alignment passes. Because this point is hidden we determine its relative position more by axiom than perceptual evidence. But there's something more to the aggressive frontal alignment of cylinder and bowl. I claimed above that we can imagine them as – in Wittgenstein's sense of 'seeing-as' - one composite transparent receptacle. A further role for the bowl then is to mediate between types, in particular between cylinder and sphere. The bowl is a schematic half-sphere, yet its base and rim are transverse slices of cylinders. Therefore unlike a completed sphere, whose centre is a point and not a line, the bowl does in effect possess an axial centre line. The bowl is therefore the mediation of sphere and cylinder. The aggressive obstruction of the cylinder by the bowl then is proposed – as in the fantasy of composite transparency – as a kind of virtual becoming, a moment where cylinder becomes sphere and vice versa. The bottle of course is a sphere with a slim cylinder attached as stem. What we arrive at is substitutability and left-right equalisation: on the right the bottle = cylinder + sphere, while on the left the cylinder and bowl = cylinder +/-becoming sphere. So not only are the objects here born into determinate relations, as we saw with alignment, but also within their own limits, or 'bodies,' each single thing is a kind of differential effect from a repertoire of virtual substitutions.

What about the centring of the composition around a gap mentioned at the start of this analysis? There is a strong affective disparity between things and gaps in this painting. The things are approximately white and approximately regular in geometry. The gaps are occupied by and importantly equated with objects without secure geometrical identity. There is another, strictly invisible gap between the bowl and the cylinder, which is impossible to gage. The central inscrutable object at the back stands for a region displaced by cylinder and bottle, hence it is a gap-become-thing, yet Morandi's accents of shadow to the right of the cylinder and to the left of the bottle's sphere and at the bottom of its stem all insist on some minimal intervals between the darker central thing and the ceramic objects to the left and right. The amorphous, darker things here that seem to be identified with the intervals between more solid objects are also things that can't support their own weight, and are pressed down and folded under gravity. There is the suggestion of affinity between the foreground bowl and the rear, central object via the vertical fluting or banding that appears on both. This reminds us that the bowl is also akin to a gap by virtue of its concavity: it is a form that encloses a gap. In the Heideggerian terms that we'll now examine, the bowl *is* that gap rendered ready-to-hand.

I've emphasized relationality in the still-lives. This intensified relationality is I claim something peculiar to Morandi, as if the brief were to extract the highest concentration of relational complexity within the smallest square-footage. But the constituent objects in the still-life images are everyday domestic things that have a functional logic, and are doubtless objects of affection and identification for Morandi. We will need to return to the functional nature of these objects. The functionality constrains Morandi's choreographing of his objects; if objects are placed in ways that flagrantly contravene their functions they begin to look too ornamental, too much like pictorial props, or else too suggestively metaphorical. Morandi takes care not to risk such absurdities (of anti-functionality) in the quest for relational complexity. Here it's surprisingly instructive to look at Fischli and Weiss with their aimlessly playful assemblages of kitchenware

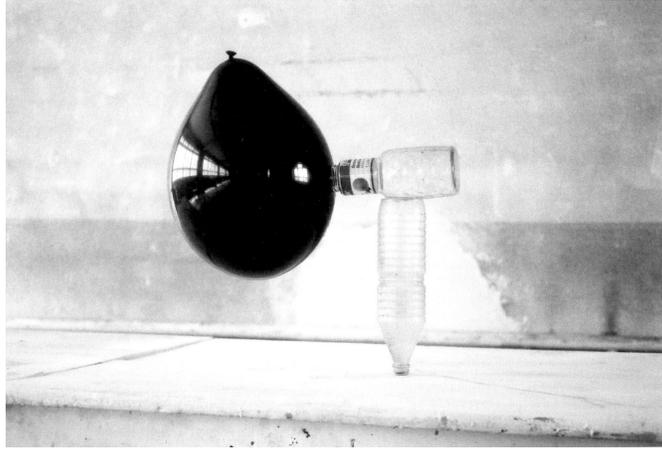


Fig.3 Fischli & Weiss *Artificial Intelligence*, from the series *Quiet Afternoon*, 1984-5, photograph, 30 x 40 cm, Kunsthaus Zürich

photographed to evoke nominally sculptural images. In Fischli and Weiss's photographs in the series *Quiet Afternoon*, 1984-5 [Fig.3], the domestic objects take a holiday from instrumental value. This kitchenware chaos is out of bounds for Morandi because it ignores the 'rightful place' of the objects in their original context, or what Heidegger calls their 'region.' Indeed, Heidegger in *Being and Time* precisely anticipates and rationalises the gulf separating Morandi from Fischli and Weiss:

Equipment has its *place*, or else it 'lies around'; this must be distinguished in principle from just occurring at random in some position. ⁵

In other words, equipmentality brings with it a certain logic of functional order in which space itself is articulated logistically, and where implements must displace space in precise ways in order to avail themselves. For Morandi and for Heidegger the pathos of the object has to do with instrumentality that engenders our familiarity with everyday equipment. The domestic interior is an intimate storehouse of our habitual identifications with – and by means of – that equipment. Heidegger creates his own jargon for equipment/ instrumentality in general: 'readiness-to-hand.' That which we find and make useful as equipment, tool or resource is said to be ready-to-hand. Heidegger contrasts this with presence-at-hand: the factual remainder not articulated by our chosen deployments. To a degree all still-life images are images of the ready-to-hand, as with Chardin's pots and glasses. But what's peculiar to Morandi is the way the paintings chart a movement from the ready-to-hand, in the form of habit-binding domestic implements, to the present-at-hand in the mode of indiscernibles, as we found especially with the edges of things that melt away. But it's not only there in those paintings I termed anomalous. In all the still-life pictures there's the opening up of a fraught and ultimately unrepresentable movement from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand. This realm of presence-at-hand is latent in the paintings' implicit dialectic of concealment/de-concealment, where vision strives for a limpid perspicuity but in the end sustains a screening off of presences-at-hand by integrating a web of colours. As Morandi put it in a 1958 interview:

Nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we actually see.⁶

Compare that with Heidegger's remark that "the bare space itself is still veiled over."⁷

Early in the paper I claimed that Morandi's landscapes warranted critical attention and that their marked dissimilarity from the still-lives needed to be accounted for. This is the issue I'll address now. The landscapes are quite unlike the still-lives in several respects: the landscapes almost never show empty margins around centred groupings of forms as the still-lives always do; forms in the landscapes are often fragmented, often spliced by the canvas edge; figure/ground relationships in the landscapes are frequently undecidable, in the still-lives they are very rarely undecidable. The easiest explanation for the discrepancy between still-lives and landscapes would be an appeal to an experiential difference: looking into a landscape is an experience of environment, whereas looking at bottles on a table top is an experience of enclosure, framed-ness,



Fig.4 Landscape, 1963, 40 x 45 cm, private collection, Bologna (Vitali #1332)

and so on. But this move only works on condition that painting's own mediations are neutralised. Cézanne is a good example. What is striking in this regard is that Cézanne's oeuvre doesn't trace a strong disparity between still-life and landscape, as though for him there was no compelling phenomenological or affective divide between the two. Indeed, isn't it that lack of a felt difference that makes Cézanne's still-lives rather silly – implausible arrangements of fruit across over-generous folds of tablecloth? We the viewers are invited to see these compositions as metaphorical landscapes, as miniaturised pseudo-natural monuments which happen also to be slices of life, things that happen to be put on a kitchen table. The paintings cannot account for their own duality. Cézanne's landscapes, on the other hand, only need be natural monuments, a kind of volumetric sublime. Let's leave Cézanne to his problems. What matters for us is that the discrepancy in Morandi between landscapes and still-lives can't be explained away by appealing to a parallel experiential difference.

Instead an approach in terms of deseverance is more fruitful. Above I claimed that in the extended 1952 painting sequence the opening moves were concerned with adjustments of viewing distance. Morandi's great difficulty with the landscapes seems to be to do with viewing distances. It is widely documented that Morandi habitually carried binoculars and based paintings on compositions suggested by what they enframed. We are even told that he liked to look around the room with binoculars: what is this if not an obsession with deseverance – even a pathological consciousness of deseverance? Again, deseverance is not just about bringing things close or discovering remoteness, it is crucially about spacing things, discerning intervals and thereby individuating things in their spatial surroundings. The evidence of the landscapes is one of a failure on all these

counts: inability to determine a satisfactory viewing distance together with a failure to individuate things amidst a visual array [Fig.4]. The more he is able to find the edges of things – and as we saw above Morandi's attentiveness to edges was fastidious in the extreme – the more he can locate things and the intervals between them, you feel, the happier Morandi is in the landscapes, and the more stable the outcome. The marked discrepancy between still-lives and landscapes is then better understood in terms of a failed or incomplete deseverance. In the private domain of the still-life set-up Morandi consistently realizes deseverance. In the outdoors of the *paesaggio* – a public domain of sorts – he seldom attains it. I don't want to argue that lapses or successes of deseverance here count as failures or successes of paintings. In some respects the reverse is true: when in some landscapes there's a failure to marshal figure/ground relationships there is also a sense of Morandi outflanking his own habits and judgments. At such moments the tactical discipline required to sustain the interminable still-life project is loosened and surprising possibilities present themselves. Yet the price of that loosening is certainly an unevenness – in all senses – of results.

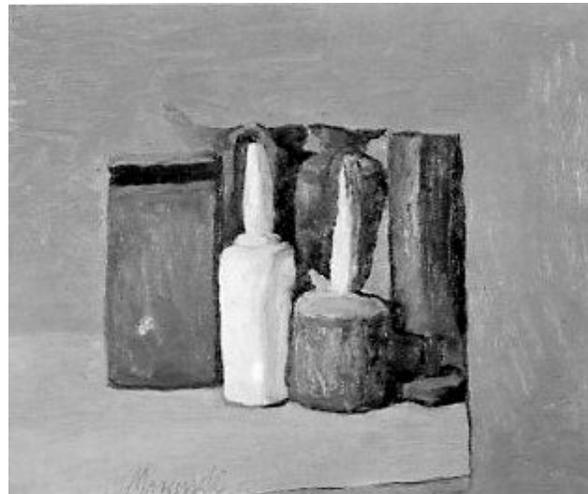


Fig.5 Still-Life, 1949, 36.5 x 45.5 cm, collection of Franz Armin Monat, Freiburg im Breisgau [as at 1977] (Vitali #683)

So we arrive at the claim that deseverance is accomplished in private in the still-life but not in 'public,' in the landscape space. However, there is a twist at this point. Commentators have often hinted at the way the still-lives function as architectural metaphors. Earlier I wrote that the still-lives invite the viewer to infer a 'ground plan' wherein the volumetric gaps between the things can be plotted and gauged, as in Figure 5. This invitation follows from the way the paintings both indicate gaps and obstruct direct views of them. In practice there is rarely enough information for these imagined plan views to be other than speculative, but what matters here is that viewer is made to speculate and in so doing embraces an architectural logic. Morandi appears to have had nothing to say about the resemblance of his clustered objects to arrangements of buildings. But once you've seen them as architectural images – however modest, however Sunday town-planner – it's hard to un-see them. The idea of architectural doodling on the breakfast table is not unfamiliar. In the 1980s the architect of Cascades on the Isle of Dogs in London was rumoured to have got the idea by cutting the corner off a cornflake box. In the mid to later 1960s a variety of people did architecture using domestic goods and packaging. Jean-Luc Godard ends his 1965 film '2 or 3 Things I

Know About Her' – of all his films the one most fascinated by architectures – with a particularly powerful image: the new housing project on the fringes of Paris which has been the locus of the film is re-presented by an arrangement of branded cartons [Fig.6]. When in 1969 Gerhard Richter paints a colourless, grisaille town-planning panorama, the blocks in the foreground as seen from above become alphabets, dwellings transmuted into signs. In a project also in 1969 students at Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina, worked with Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates to sketch an ensemble of university buildings using domestic staples such as Brillo pads, soap bars, batteries and sugarcubes.



Fig.6 Closing image in Jean-Luc Godard's film '2 or 3 Things I Know About Her' (1965)

Should we then regard Godard's city of detergent cartons as the metaphorical truth of Morandi's still-lives? Yes and no. In an important sense, Morandi in the still-lives is concerned with fantasizing something we can call – why not? – community. Organic, unplanned, contingent community indeed, but no less than ideal in that the clusters of things offer a metaphor of the ideally organic and ideally contingent. It's a community of address: a community that collectively addresses the onlooker, as well as being composed of multiplying relations of reciprocal address. Godard, we should note, can credibly depict housing blocks using branded cartons of detergent because cartons and (modernist) architecture share a common geometry: the measurable system of gridded space that can be readily priced by the square or cubic metre, and can be stacked and packed without waste of volume. This topology implies no manual or human scale, unlike the objects in Morandi's still-lives which are always scaled to the hand, meaning both the artisanal hands that made them and the domestic hands that put them to use. Thus although Morandi's gatherings of flasks and bowls and whatnot compose an architectural imagery, their manual scaling limits the scope of depiction. The larger claim at this point is, however, that in viewing the objects as quasi-architecture we are led to infer that Morandi can imagine (organic) community only upon the safe stage of his private, domestic theatre. In the quasi-public realm of the landscapes he cannot even consistently individuate things.

Let's recapitulate the argument so far. Heidegger was invoked in order to think Morandi's paintings in the light of the concepts of *deseverance*, *readiness-to-hand* and *presence-at-hand*. The claim was made that the pronounced disparity between landscapes and still-lives was powerfully accounted for via *deseverance*. It was claimed

too that the movement from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand is what defines the peculiar affective force of Morandi's still-life pictures. Finally an affirmation of an architectural register in the still-lives grounds the paradoxical observation that Morandi could imagine community in private, but not public domains.

Something demands to be said about Fascism, and this may be the right moment. Without quite broaching the massive topic of Heidegger's encounter with Nazism, let's note that one official rationale for endorsing Nazism in Heidegger's writing relies on an argument about technology.⁸ Whether one takes it at face value is questionable,⁹ but the rationale is roughly that Nazism, unlike (American) capitalism or (Soviet) communism, has the capacity to accommodate and harness the violence of technological change within the continuous historicity of an organic community or 'folk.' We should bear in mind that the approaches to Morandi in the above paragraphs presumed Heidegger's linking of spatiality to equipmentality, for instance, in the account of deseverance. Equipmentality for a Heideggerian discourse is an alternative term for technology. Hence, if the account of equipment/technology entails a rendezvous with Nazism, then arguably the account of spatiality will also at some juncture eventuate in the same encounter. Both Heidegger and Morandi ultimately came to prosper in the post-war climate in spite of their Fascist/ Nazi credentials, though both were economical with their truths. Retrospectively, in interviews Morandi gave the impression of indifference and aloof detachment from Fascist institutions and ideology,¹⁰ but in fact his intertwinings with the Party were convoluted and necessary for his professional advancements in the 1930s.¹¹

It would be easy to overplay these connections and claim to unearth them at the heart of the paintings themselves. I don't claim any such immediacy of connectedness. A return to Luc Tuymans may be suggestive here. What Tuymans took from Morandi's painting was the tonal register and the pace of the brushmarks. Like Morandi, Tuymans' always does his paintings in a day.¹² The speed of the final visible layer of paint forces a unity of mark and surface, as well as a highly abbreviated depiction. The restriction of tonal range in Tuymans indicates a loss of difference and of immediacy, as if the images were already long mediated by memory or forgetting. For Tuymans, this bleaching away of immediacy is supposedly an analogue of traumatic sediment, a kind of return of the repressed, which is here identified as roughly an intersubjective Belgian memory of war/Nazism. Somewhat distinctly from Tuymans, Morandi frequently exploits the restriction of tone as an opportunity to open up colour dissonance. This permits him to retain intensities of internal difference even when light is equalized across an ensemble of objects and shadows are all but banished. Of course there are shadows in the still-lives, but they are never the opaque black shadows cast by the sun out in the piazza. The light that reaches the bottles, pots and flasks on the table is always deflected off some other wall beforehand, its solar force already dissipated. Inside the house, in the quiet and in private, Morandi can depict community in its idealized organic state, but only on condition that he forget the direct sunlight and pronounced shadows of the public square.

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¹ Siri Hustvedt *Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005, p128.

² Martin Heidegger *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1967, p138. There is insufficient space in this essay to arrive at the intriguing topic of 'directionality' mentioned here. This has to do with left-or-right-sidedness as a primordial given in spatiality.

³ *Ibid.*, p139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p140-141.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p136.

⁶ Edouard Roditi *Dialogues: Conversations with European Artists at Mid-Century*, London: Lund Humphries, 1990, p107.

⁷ Heidegger, *ibid.*, p138.

⁸ The infamous statement from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* identifies "the inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism with "the encounter between global technology and modern man"; Heidegger *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Ralph Manheim, London and New Haven: Yale, 1959, p199.

⁹ See Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London and New York: Verso, 1995, p170-175, for an account of the relevant unthematized pre-philosophical concepts at work in *Being and Time*.

¹⁰ See Roditi, *op. cit.*: "I was...left in peace, perhaps because I demanded so little recognition. My privacy was thus my protection and, in the eyes of the Grand Inquisitors of Italian art, I remained but a provincial professor of etching....".

¹¹ For example, as the beneficiary of a Fascist initiative for 'new blood' in academia, he gained tenure as professor of etching at Bologna; he also had to be a Party member to be allowed to exhibit officially as an artist; his early champions included a critic who happened to be Mussolini's mistress, and Mussolini himself attended Morandi's openings on occasion and bought works by Morandi. On top of that, it seems the young Morandi was sympathetic to Fascist doctrine, even if by the 1940s he had disabused himself of the enthusiasm. The historical source is Janet Abramowicz *Giorgio Morandi: The Art of Silence*, New Haven and London: Yale, 2004.

¹² Meaning the final paint layer, and the only one that is visible in the finished work, is begun and finished within a day. In Morandi's case, there were almost always many previous days with previous paint applications that were scraped back and removed. Hence the paintings took a long time but were still 'done in a day.'